CRITICAL PSYCHOLOGY:
FOUR THESES AND SEVEN MISCONCEPTIONS

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Abstract: Psychologists tell us that they are bit by bit discovering more and more about human behaviour and the mind. The problem is that as quickly as we find out things about human beings, those things seem to vanish before our eyes. We find that people in one or another group or culture do not behave or think as the psychological model would predict, and, more importantly, we find that our awareness, our reflection upon a process as described by a psychologist, *changes* that process. It is in the nature of human nature to change, to change as different linguistic resources, social practices, and representations of the self become available, and for human nature to change itself as people reflect on who they are and who they may become. This means that any attempt to fix us in place must fail. But it will only fail in such a way that something productive emerges from it if we do some- thing different, and one place to do something different is in psychology instead. We need to step back and look at the images of the self, mind and behaviour that psychologists have produced, the types of practices they engage in, and the power those practices, those 'tech- nologies of the self', have to set *limits* on change. We can then look at what psychologists might do instead.

Key words: Critical psychology, Cyberpsychology, Feminist psychology, Queer psychology.

This article offers ways of framing qualitative research through debates in critical psychology. We review how qualitative approaches to research have arisen in response to critiques of the limitations of prevailing models of psychological research and practice. As we clarify below, not all critical psychology is qualitative, and correlatively not all qualitative research is

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critical of psychology. Nevertheless it was a critical impulse that generated the wide range of qualitative methodological approaches that are now flourishing in psychology. We present our view of the broad project of critical psychology, and then review seven misconceptions that hamper its work—in psychology, but also in relation to other disciplines and practices.

For purposes of clarity and also provocation, we deliberately adopt a programmatic tone. Some readers may find our characterisation of "traditional psychology" rather too sweeping, and our claims of what "should be done" rather too prescriptive. Others may find the generality of our claims (and lack of specific references) frustrating—but since we are characterising a set of disciplinary dynamics it would be both invidious and unduly personalising to attach some dynamics to specific names. Yet we hope that (even if it is too simplistic, yet precisely by virtue of this) such clear analysis and proposals may prompt equivalent critical engagement. We remain acutely aware of the partiality and privileges of our own positions (including the differences within this 'we') and clearly different resources function as critical intervention in different geographical contexts and historical moments. Nevertheless, rather than submitting to a pluralist apologist apathy, we seek to presume that we have something to talk about and can do something. Indeed given the globalization that psychology is a part of, and contributes to, it is increasingly urgent that we take action.

FOUR THESES

First we set out what critical psychology should be in four theses (Burman, 2003; Parker, 1999), before turning to some accusations that are levelled against it by old-style psychologists—taking these notions of 'old' and 'new' less as chronological categories than as descriptors for adherents to traditional psychology vs. those who seek to question and change it.

1. Critical psychology is the systematic examination of how some varieties of psychological action and experience are privileged over others, how dominant accounts of 'psychology' operate ideologically and in the service of power.

We turn the gaze of the psychologist back upon the discipline. Psychologists usually study people outside who they treat as the non-psychologists. We now study the psychologists. How does evolutionary psy-

chology confirm differences between men and women and make them seem biologically unchangeable? How does psychoanalytic psychology pathologise lesbians and gay men in the name of normal stages of development? How does intelligence testing reinforce supposed ideas of the essential underlying difference between ethnic groups? How does the study of organizations make them run more smoothly and better able to crush or smother dissent?

2. Critical psychology is the study of the ways in which all varieties of psychology are culturally-historically constructed, and of how alternative varieties of psychology may confirm or resist ideological assumptions in mainstream models.

We assume that where there is power there is resistance, and that in every dominant practice there are contradictions and spaces for us to work to challenge and change the existing state of affairs. Mainstream psychology is incoherent, and that incoherence is one of the sources of our strength. For example, a psychological test that is used to stigmatise failing children may also be used to rescue a child from a "special" school (see Billington, 1996, 2003). Similarly, an attention to the structure of the nuclear family may also be a lever against biological psychiatric diagnosis. Humanist images of the person that may often individualise explanations may also be used to contradict experimental studies. But while we look for resistance in these ideas we should not believe any of them. What is most important in this dialectical activity is to look for political tactics, not underlying truth.

3. Critical psychology is the study of forms of surveillance and self-regulation in everyday life and of the ways in which psychological culture operates beyond the boundaries of academic and professional practice.

Psychology is not only at work in the universities and the clinics. It is not only the body of men and women armed with instruments for testing and enforcement in the training institutions and the hospitals. Of course we do need to study the way in which psychology has recruited thousands upon thousands of academics and professionals who use its ideas and appeal to its theories to back up their own programmes of normalisation and pathologisation. But we also need to study the way in which psychology recruits all of the people who read and believe its theories of individual personality

differences and happy healthy behaviour. And we 'read' psychology not only via textbooks and conference press releases, nor only from the privatised realms of therapy and child guidance clinics, but also in magazines and self-help manuals offering advice on diet, parenting and relationships. That is, we need to study the way psychology recruits all of us into psychological culture.

4. Critical psychology is the exploration of the way everyday 'ordinary psychology' structures academic and professional work in psychology and of how everyday activities might provide the basis for resistance to contemporary disciplinary practices.

The discipline of psychology pretends that it is a science, but it draws its images of the human being from culture and from everyday life to construct its object. And part of the de-construction of psychology is the study of the way ideology in society is the "condition of possibility" for psychology to exist. Psychological theories do not come out of nowhere. They do not fall from the sky. So we can draw upon the variety of different theories about our own different psychologies to interrupt and subvert the dominant stories that are told by the academics and the professional psychologists.

These very bluntly-stated theses will not do much to persuade psychologists who have been trained in the old reductionist and positivist programmes, and the old-style psychologists react to critical psychology in a number of different ways that we need to tackle. Different accusations that are commonly made against critical psychologists by mainstream positivist psychologists reveal serious misconceptions about what we are doing. These misconceptions then circulate and make it difficult to do our work. So, we want to deal with seven of these misconceptions here, so that we have some answers to defend ourselves.

SEVEN MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT CRITICAL PSYCHOLOGY

1. "Critical psychology aims to become a coherent alternative tradition"

No. Still less do critical psychologists look forward to a time when they will determine policy in professional psychological societies or edit *American*

Psychologist. The problem is that traditional psychology really 'works', and is becoming increasingly popular because it fits so neatly into existing structures of power and tells people things about themselves that they have already been taught to be true. This means that the most that critical psychologists can hope for is that they might disrupt the way the discipline locks people into certain ways of behaving and instead open up a variety of alternative ways of being. Instead of aiming to develop one coherent alternative, our watchwords are "fragmentation" and "subversion". We will mention two emerging lines of critical psychological research to illustrate these two key motifs of the fragmentation and subversion of psychology.

The first, which picks up the themes of scientific technological change and social constructionism, is *cyberpsychology*. Cyberpsychology focuses on the fragmented kind of experience with others that is created in electronic environments, such as when we communicate through Email, surf the World Wide Web, or participate in Internet Relay Chat (IRC) and Multi User Domains (MUDs). These different sectors of cyberspace, which are strikingly portrayed in science fiction films about virtual reality, become spaces for new kinds of "cyborg" to come into being (Gray, Figueroa-Sarriera, & Mentor, 1995). We make sense of relationships in quite different ways in cyberspace, and cognition and memory are collective and distributed in a way that traditional psychology is unable to comprehend. Cyberpsychology uses these kinds of phenomena to challenge the claims that the discipline makes about thinking and remembering, and it explores questions of freedom and control in these new electronic environments (Gordo-López & Parker, 1999).

We know, of course, that psychologists will move fast to seize the initiative and to make it seem that they have something to say, to recuperate *cyberpsychology* as a new domain of expertise and, in the process, to crush the critical subversive life out of this emerging collective activity and experience. The lesson is that no particular approach or domain of work will be able to emerge fully-formed as a radical alternative psychology.

The second line of research, which picks up critiques of gender and sexuality in the discipline and turns them in some very strange directions is *queer psychology*. "Queer" is a radical political movement that refuses sexual identity. It brings together 'homosexuals' and 'heterosexuals' to challenge the dichotomy between the sexes and between sexualities. Queer psychology takes feminist arguments and radicalises them even further. Critical work drawing on feminism has argued for many years that there is

a key analytical distinction to be made between sex differences on the one hand (as the anatomical biological difference between males and females), and gender differences on the other (those qualities of masculinity and femininity that you usually see men or women display). Biological males can be stereotypically feminine, and biological females can show strong masculine traits. Writings in queer theory argue, though, that we 'perform' our sex differences as much as we do our gender (Butler, 1990). Sexual preference, for example, need not at all be from one sex to another 'opposite' sex. Not only do many people have same-sex relationships, but the boundary between the 'same sex' and the 'other sex' is starting to break down. An increasing number of people are changing sex or 'performing' their sex in different ways with different partners; and their partners, whether 'same' or 'other', also learn to 'perform' different kinds of sex in return. The implications for psychology are far-reaching, for 'sex difference' has been presupposed in psychological research, and most psychological phenomena have revolved around what separates and defines men and women (see Watson, 2005).

Subversion and multiplication in both of these approaches disrupt one of the central preoccupations of modern psychology, namely the preoccupation with notions of a stable, simple self or identity. But they also respect one of the most powerful and enduring qualities of any adequate and useful psychology, that human beings are too complex to be captured by one theoretical or methodological system in the discipline and that we are always changing and spinning out of the control of 'scientific' psychologists. So, critical psychology is not a positive programme for improving or substituting new ideas for old in the discipline, and it does not draw on existing political programmes to build an alternative psychology.

There is a lesson here from feminist engagements with psychology. Feminist interventions can be seen to have shifted from *critiques* of psychology (cf. Burman, 1990) to becoming a subdiscipline *of* psychology: *feminist psychology*. This move has certainly brought some, but only some, feminist work into psychology–cf. Lubek's (1993) analysis of changing trends in psychology textbooks–but this has been at a cost. For while indicative of the permeation and uptake of feminist critiques, this also institutes another problem. Given psychology's structure and focus around *generalisation*, it is a short move from 'feminist intervention' to 'feminist psychology', and from there but a small shift into formulating not a critique but a 'psychology of women'. But this development of recapitulating

black, lesbian and working class critiques of second wave feminism and privileging white, working class and heterosexual women's experiences threatens to substitute a model of the psychology of women that is just as normalizing and pathologising in its elaboration of the psychology of 'everywoman' as was the (default) psychology of men (Burman, 1998).

So we do not want to help psychologists reflect on what they do so that they may do it more effectively. We do not want to develop new sub-disciplines of psychology that will allow psychologists to regulate people in new ways. And we are not a 'we' in the sense of an organised, consensual group or institution, which makes critical psychologists and their work more resistant to recuperation or legibility into mainstream psychological institutions. There are many critical psychologists and many critical psychologies, as befits psychology's diverse moments and contexts of emergence and application.

2. *"Critical psychology makes everything into a political issue"*

No. We are not responsible for this political aspect of psychology. The problem is, rather, that mainstream psychology works on the mistaken assumption that it has not been political. But everything psychologists study is *already* political, because politics is not only about voting in elections; the way we form relationships and live our lives at the most intimate level is also already political. An attention to *personal politics*, then, needs to include critical work on gender, sexuality, psychology and power. Research on sexuality reveals in a condensed form the way psychological science operates as rhetoric, selectively drawing on cultural prejudices and designed to bring about certain effects. For example, research on lesbianism from a critical social constructionist perspective has been able to counter this rhetoric by exposing its bogus claims about objectivity and the political purposes it actually serves (Kitzinger, 1987). The history of lesbian and gay psychology also makes it clear how alternative forms of rhetoric which value varieties of sexual orientation had to be accompanied by action to change things (Brown, 1989).

Rather, the question is now on *whose terms* lesbians and gay men now speak about themselves in psychology. The liberal humanist psychological rhetoric of 'identity' and 'self-esteem', for example, makes it seem as if any problems lesbians and gay men have should be dealt with at an individual psychological level, and when they have done that successfully they will be

healthy and happy, just like heterosexuals. Critical researchers working in this field have argued that one strategy is to turn the tables and ask in what ways 'heterosexuality' may be a 'problem' (Kitzinger, Wilkinson, & Perkins, 1992), and this strategy challenges at a deep 'personal' level the assumptions we all make about ourselves. We are also reminded that it is politically important to defend the specific work lesbian and gay psychologists do in terms of the pragmatics of working in a hostile discipline (Kitzinger, 1999).

The general lesson we draw from this is that we have no faith in the ability of political programmes to tell us what human psychology should be like because we have learnt that every specification of human psychology is a constraint on the capacity of human beings to change their own psychology as they change society. And we do not want to develop alternative psychologies that promise to tell us the truth because we know that every claim to truth about human psychology is a political programme, which is rooted in the limited political horizons of the present day.

3. "Critical psychology is just disciplinary naval-gazing"

No. Critical psychologists also want to understand the social conditions which make psychology the way it is, and this is why some critical researchers have been interested in ideas from deconstruction and 'postmodernism'. A postmodern way of questioning the project of psychology, for example, is to see that project as part and parcel of a 'modern' approach to science and society that developed barely two centuries ago and which may be now drawing to a close. This is the line taken by some 'social constructionist' writers in different academic disciplines, including in critical psychology.

We could develop an analysis that shows how the modern age, or 'modernity', was characterized by 'grand narratives' of scientific understanding, individual improvement and social progress. These over-arching stories about what society and individuals were like, and how they could be made better, informed the work of early psychologists, and most of psychology is still stuck with an idea of research which is governed by these stories. Postmodernist writers argue that this vision is problematic.

Those modern grand narratives were not only stories, for they were constructed within a powerful apparatus for observing and regulating people. This apparatus, the "psy-complex", was the means by which the

activities of people really are predicted and controlled (Ingleby, 1985; Rose, 1985). The psy-complex was modelled on a kind of prison architecture, which grew in importance from the beginning of the nineteenth century, and in that kind of regime each individual inmate could be monitored. One effect was that each individual felt responsible for real or imaginary guilt and was incited to confess. There are two complementary aspects of modernity we can see in studies of the psy-complex. There is an apparatus of power to monitor people and an apparatus of confession in which people open themselves up willingly to discipline, and self-discipline (Foucault, 1977, 1981).

Counselling and psychotherapy can therefore be seen as part of the same disciplinary apparatus, for they encourage people to talk to the experts and see themselves –their activities, desires and relationships– as material to work on and improve. Science is only one of the discourses of the psy-complex, and it reinforces the power of professionals to persuade individuals to speak and reflect upon themselves and to believe that this is part of progress. Foucault's (1981) description of psychoanalysis as a discursive practice which condenses all that feels dangerous into sexuality and then makes the patient speak about it to 'release' it, as if it were inside them, is another powerful metaphor for the way in which we now think about the interior of our selves. This is a historical process of individualisation of distress and confession that has intensified.

Forty years ago, for example, agony advice columns in Britain would contain prescriptions like 'If that is your emotion stamp on it hard' (Evelyn Home in Woman magazine). Now we are invited, even incited, to talk about emotions that lie hidden inside as a prerequisite for helping our selves. This is the therapeutic side of the psy-complex that often appears to be a progressive humanist alternative to positivist approaches in the discipline. It is certainly true that humanist quasi-therapeutic perspectives get little hearing in the discipline, but they are always there as the underside of so-called 'scientific' psychology. It is tempting to turn to them, but they are really of a piece with the overall architecture of the psy-complex.

Some critical researchers in psychology use postmodern ideas to argue that the modern age is now finished, and finished with it, of course, is modern psychology (e.g., Parker, 1989). The 'postmodern condition' of culture is then seen as one in which scientific talk is just another language game (Gergen, 1991). Postmodernity is seen as a kind of culture where everything is a 'social construction' and discourse is the only game in town.

Postmodern psychologists would want to see many stories about psychology flourish without any particular stories being privileged over the others, and they argue that postmodern culture encourages us to enjoy the multiplicity of experience that these many stories are about (Kvale, 1992). These ideas have been helpful sometimes, but they can also lead to a hopelessly idealist view of the possibilities for change at an individual level, making it seem as if people can become different if only they speak differently about themselves (Parker, 2002). The general lesson is that we do need to draw upon accounts of cultural change, but we need to actively participate in those debates instead of just borrowing ideas from sociology and importing them to try and solve problems inside the secure boundaries of our own discipline.

4. *"Critical psychology is only concerned with social psychology"*

No. Some of the most innovative critical work has been in social psychology, but there are now equally important developments in cognitive psychology. Research on discourse, for example, has been useful to show how reasoning and remembering are 'storied' and how they are carried out collectively (Edwards & Potter, 1992). Activity theory has connected this cognition talk with forms of practice. While cognitive psychologists have been producing diagrams and flow charts showing short-term memory, long-term memory and elaborate pictures of the inside of the head as like a filing cabinet or a computer, discourse analysts have been able to give even more persuasive accounts of what we do when we think. Thinking happens between people, in the ways they use language. Mainstream psychology assumes that there must be a hidden cognitive mechanism doing the work and so it searches for what is inside. Critical psychology, in contrast, encourages us to reflect on underlying assumptions in the discipline, and would point out in this case that we need to reframe the problem. The question is not "what is inside the mind?" but "what is the mind inside?" Our 'cognitive' activity takes place in the network of relationships, discourses and practices we learn, narrate and reconstruct as human beings, and this network enables us to think the way we do (Lave, 1988).

One problem for critical work is that in academic psychology the discourse we use to speak, write and learn about thinking is part of a certain powerful practice of learning. When you study psychology you will always be led to think of thinking as isolated separate activity, and when you are

assessed you will often be physically separated; in examinations, for example, you are made to spill out what you have crammed inside your head and your ability will be judged from measures of what you have been able to write. But, like laboratory-experiments, this is surely quite unlike thinking in the real world. Thinking and remembering are to do with how you piece together solutions and memories with others and how you negotiate these, how you rehearse what you might say to an imaginary audience, and how you replay what you said before (Middleton & Edwards, 1990). Cognition is as much to do with relational things as with what is whizzing around in private.

This does not mean that critical psychologists necessarily reject the study of cognition (Wilson, 1999), but they do emphasise that when you think, someone else is always involved. You can only think because of your place in networks of relationships with other people and because of patterns of discourse that give shape to your image of the world and of yourself.

5. *"Critical psychology is only concerned with theory and has nothing to say about methodology"*

No. It takes methodology very seriously, and it does that because 'method' is often the only thing that holds psychology together (Rose, 1985). Raising questions about 'method' is a way of raising questions about psychology (Burman, 2000; Parker, 2005). This is one reason why some of us have been interested in discourse analysis, because it is a quite different methodology. One way of tackling the problem of the role of psychology is to treat psychological jargon as just one more powerful discourse that circulates in Western culture. Discourse research can enable us to step back from psychology and treat the accounts given by psychologists *as discourses*. Once we take this step into discourse we can gain a critical perspective on psychology's claims to provide facts about behaviour and experience — facts that are used to normalise those things that are acceptable and pathologise people who do not fit in (Burman et al., 1996). Discourse analysis may then be turned into a form of action research when it encourages people to make links between language, power and resistance. However, we need to engage in methodological reflection on the problems with this approach, noticing, for example, how the focus on language may sidetrack people from the more pressing material aspects of oppression and political action (Parker, 2003).

Among other methodological options, narrative approaches make a more direct connection between language and experience than many discourse-analytic studies have done, and there is already a political movement inspired by theoretical discussions of the performance of identity in narrative. Queer theory and queer politics have shown how the narratives we tell about ourselves can be turned into action.

Even then, we do not take the claims made for this methodology for granted, and the claim that identity is simply an effect of a narrative may make it more difficult for those who want to insist that they really have discovered their real identity as a member of a particular community. We could turn to ethnography as a good corrective to this, for it has the potential to enable members of a community to question the ways in which they are coerced into adopting a certain identity and saying that they really like it. Ethnographic research that focuses on processes of inclusion, exclusion and power can then become a form of action research. But then again, an ethnography that does not directly involve people in the work as co-researchers still gives the point of view of an 'outsider' who observes and comments upon others. So, some critical psychologists turn to interviewing as a methodology, and this has been a way of gathering accounts and connecting more directly with experience.

But then what is 'experience'? Or what claims can we make to represent 'experience'? What power relations are involved in 'giving voice' to the dispossessed? While they are, of course, committed to emancipatory projects, critical and feminist psychologists have come to be suspicious of the ways that attempting to 'empower' others paradoxically confirms the very positions of powerful (researcher) and powerless (researched) that their work aims to transform or redress (Cooke & Kothari, 2001; Wilkinson & Kitzinger, 1996).

Moreover, once again this approach, like the other methodologies, is still framed by the imperative to produce an academic product, and only a political critique of the discipline of psychology as part of an apparatus of control and individualisation under capitalism will enable us to step back, to step outside the frame of academic work and to do something more effective. Above all, many of us are interested in action research, but we do not treat action research as a 'method'. All research is action that works for or against power. The problem with most mainstream psychology is that it either deliberately leaves things as they are–it explicitly reproduces existing power relations–or it pretends that scientific inquiry or interpre-

tation is neutral, and so it gives tacit support to those in power. In critical psychological research we aim to open the possibility for working 'prefiguratively' — anticipating a better form of society in the very process of struggling for it (Fals Borda & Rahman, 1991; Freire, 1972). An emphasis on the prefigurative aspect of research draws attention to the way that all aspects of our everyday interaction and internal life world are embedded in social structures, and what happens in the 'personal' sphere is intimately connected with wider patterns of power and resistance.

6. *"Critical psychology is only interested in qualitative research"*

No. It is true that critical work in the discipline in the last few years has tended to be very suspicious about any reduction of research to numerical form, and quantification as such has sometimes been seen as a problem that can only be overcome by avoiding statistics, anything that looks like 'hard science'. Qualitative research which gathers accounts from people or draws together themes from interviews about experience or interprets actions in everyday settings has, understandably, been preferred as a methodological strategy by many critical psychologists. However, we will always need to know how widespread a certain kind of pattern of behaviour is in order to arrive at a picture of the overall structure of action and experience, and we may well need to represent that with the help of statistics. Work by the Radical Statistics Group, for example, develops ways of using quantitative analysis which do not turn people into things (something which psychology all too often does do) and, instead, to help us interpret statistics so that we can connect these strange things with real men and women (Dorling & Simpson, 1999).

If we are interested in experiences of inequalities in the classroom for girls being taught science, for example, we will also need to know how many boys and girls actually 'succeed' in science subjects and how many men and women actually become scientists. There have been some very complex analyses within critical psychology of the way girls are taught in class that they cannot learn mathematics, and this analysis of teachers' discourse makes sense because we also really know something about how few women mathematicians there are in the world (Walkerdine & the Girls and Mathematics Unit, 1989).

Quantification is important to critical work then, and this kind of analysis can be used to reveal things about the world that critical psy-

chologists make use of in their research. What we must keep in mind, though, is that numbers are themselves interpretations of the world, and that they are elements in explanations we give about action and experience.

7. *"Critical psychology has nothing to offer to people in distress"*

No. One striking example of effective action research in relation to psychiatry in Italy in the 1970s poses important questions for how we sometimes need to do something with knowledge other than research. In Trieste the old mental hospital San Giovanni was closed and replaced with community mental health centres as part of the mass movement *Psichiatria Democratica*. These events inspired the publication of the "magazine for democratic psychiatry" *Asylum* in Britain (www.asylumonline.net) and the emergence of a new wave of mental health resistance movements during the 1990s around the "Hearing Voices Network" (HVN), groups of people who experience what psychiatrists call "auditory hallucinations" (Romme & Escher, 1993).

This network was not based in an academic institution, and the HVN newsletter and *Asylum* magazine always include fiction and poetry, but the links with universities did become a resource for developing new methodologies and new ways of thinking about what 'theory' was. A conference held at Manchester Metropolitan University in 1995, for example, brought together users of psychiatric services, psychiatrists, clinical psychologists, shamans and spiritualists to present and discuss theories about the phenomenon of hearing voices (Parker, Georgaca, Harper, McLaughlin, & Stowell-Smith, 1995). Such an event demanded rethinking of what the role of research should be and how psychological ideas could be adapted and utilised as a form of therapeutic action research. It is in this process that people engage in activities that bring about 'psychological' change. It showed how there are better things psychologists could be doing. In Trieste, for example, the psychologists became the workers in the café and gardens. One development in the UK since has been the formation of a "paranoia network" in 2003. Two disciplines, psychology and psychiatry, have tried to keep a tight grip on knowledge over the last century, and together with their colleagues these disciplines have kept control at the centre of that dense web of theories and practices that comprise the 'psy-complex'.

The paradox is that while those in the psy-complex observe and regulate thinking and behaviour –they are part of the very enterprise that

makes it so that people do feel they are being watched– at the same time the professionals feel fearful and suspicious about what people who are 'abnormally' paranoid might do next. In July 2004 the experiment of an academic conference was reworked, and researchers and practitioners organised together to open up the space of the university for the Paranoia Network to enable challenges to the authority of 'experts' on other people's lives.

One of the lessons of this movement, which is doing research as part of its political action against the abusive and demeaning practice of psychiatry and psychology, is that old-paradigm psychological notions of 'testable hypotheses' and 'control groups' will not work in the real world. The movement is mutating so fast, learning from its own experience, so that only some of the newer critical approaches are in any way relevant.

CONCLUSIONS

The key lesson that we learn from this activity is also applicable to all of our work in critical psychology. Radical accounts that challenge mainstream psychology can only be elaborated in new networks with new forms of institutional support. Traditional psychologists all too often tell us that this is the way the world is, this is the way people are, this is what can and cannot be done, as if they knew. But they don't. And many of the people they do things to know they don't know. Rather than try to solve this problem as if it were merely an internal matter, surely psychologists should do something to rearrange the boundaries between the inside and the outside of the discipline.

Psychology is constructed within the horizons of capitalist society to enable that society to run more efficiently, and it constructs within that society its own images of pathology. Part of the political activity of challenging the construction of psychology is the unravelling of what we have created. The process of critique is also a process of deconstruction. It must include a practical political alliance with all those who suffer psychology and who are starting to refuse the way they have been constructed as pathological. It is a political question that calls for practical deconstruction of the theories and apparatus of the discipline of psychology.

We said at the beginning that it is in the nature of human nature to change. Old psychology studied human beings in such a way as to try and

fix it. When they interpreted what people did, and sometimes the world they did it in, they fixed it in such a way as to block change. Critical psychology is a way of connecting with the process of change, and so being part of changing the world.

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