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The Development Community and its Activist Psychology

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I don't have much use for labels, categories or academic disciplines, except as entities to disrupt by playing and creating with them. So, by way of introducing myself, let me use a big label: I'm a radically humanistic, practical-critical, postmodern Marxist developmentalist. I'm a community organizer working to involve the masses in a global conceptual revolution, a researcher and scholar located outside the university. I work/play to bring together people and things and ideas—often ones (such as those with which I just described myself) that have been kept apart by ideology, politics, or societal and cultural norms and traditions. That's when it's the most difficult, most fun and most gratifying. Great thinkers, great ideas and great movements need to be brought together and played with, in my experience, to be useful to people. In the following pages, I will share some of what my colleagues and I have brought together in creating *a psychology of becoming* and what I see as its role in the emergence of an international progressive movement for the re-initiation of human development through performance and play. This new psychology and performance activism movement will be located within the changing dynamics within both the humanistic and the critical psychology arenas in the US, of which they have been a part.

The psychology of becoming and performance activism have their roots in the upheavals of the 1960s. Among the millions who were radicalized then was Fred Newman, a New York City working class man who got his education when public universities in New York were free. He received a PhD in philosophy of science and the foundations of mathematics from Stanford University in 1965 and for a few years taught

philosophy at several colleges and universities. Newman resonated with the ways that the cultural movements of the time were challenging the Western glorification of individual self-interest and was excited by the grassroots communal experiments to transform daily life going on at the time. He felt the need to confront America's failure to honestly deal with its legacy of slavery and racism, as its African American population remained poor and shut out of America's prosperity.

Believing that profound social change would not come from the university campus, Newman stopped teaching philosophy and left academia. With a handful of student followers, he set up community organizing collectives in working class neighborhoods of New York City. Soon after, they became involved in welfare rights organizing. During the late 1970s two main organizing thrusts were developed: organizing in the poorest, mostly African-American, communities of New York City to activate and empower people politically; and engaging the subjectivity of community organizing and the mass psychology of contemporary capitalism. Over four decades the number and variety of projects led by Newman grew exponentially to encompass culture, health, mental health, education and politics.

Two guiding principles were there at the start and remain to this day. First, to be independently funded and supported, and not take money or be constrained by government or other traditional funding sources. This involved reaching out to ordinary Americans for financial support and participation, initially by stopping them on street corners and knocking on the doors of their homes. What has evolved is a new kind of partnership between wealthy Americans and the poor. Second, to create new kinds of institutions that in their very design and activity challenge the foundations of their traditional "counterparts." Some examples: a labor union for welfare recipients who did not labor and, therefore, were at no point of production, a school for children that denied the individuated, knowledge-seeking model of learning that is the bedrock of schooling East and West, therapy centers with an approach to emotional help that denies the individualism and medical model of mainstream psychotherapy, a "university" that is free, open to everyone who wants to participate and has no grades or degrees, a national network of talent shows for youth that denies the conception of talent, electoral political campaigns that are not concerned with winning and political parties that exist to

transform political culture—including the possibility of doing away with political parties as the mode of citizen participation.

Today, the organizations that comprise what is now called the “development community” are the All Stars Project and its youth development programs, university-style development school (UX) and political theatre (Castillo Theatre); the East Side Institute for Group and Short Term Psychotherapy; the Social Therapy Group in NYC and social therapy affiliates in other cities; independentvoting.org; and the bi-annual Performing the World conferences. These organizations have national and international reach, with the direct participation of tens of thousands who impact on hundreds of thousands. Along with their varied foci is a shared methodology that involves people of all ages in the ongoing collective activity of creating new kinds of environments where they can be active performers of their lives. This methodology “practically-critically” engages the institution of psychology and its impact on people’s daily lives (Holzman, 2009; Newman and Holzman, 2006/1996).

From the beginning it was clear to us that mainstream psychology—with its individualistic focus, claim to objectivity, emulation and imitation of the physical and natural sciences, and, overall, dualistically divided worldview—was a powerful impediment to ongoing social development and social activism. Along with many, many others at the time, we believed the personal and political were intimately connected and put this belief into practice in a new and radical therapy, social therapy. Created by Newman, social therapeutic methodology initially stemmed not from the tradition of humanistic psychology but rather from two other sources: analytic philosophy, philosophy of science and the foundations of mathematics, the area of Newman’s doctoral studies; and Marxism, the area Newman began to study seriously when he left university teaching to become a community and political activist. What I added to this was a critical psychology perspective, initially stemming from socio-cultural, cultural-historical activity theory (CHAT) and Vygotskian theory. Before I was aware that there existed a critical psychology critique of humanistic psychology as based in and fostering individualism, I considered humanistic approaches to be a form of critical psychology in that they were designed as alternatives to both behaviorism and psychoanalysis (and, to varying degrees, the “inside-outside” dichotomy psychology embraces and perpetuates).

Decades later, having been a player in the postmodern turn that a sizable portion of the Humanistic Psychology division of the American Psychological Association took in the 1990s, I still think so. I hope the following brief history of critical psychology in the US helps illustrate the humanism of Newman's and my work.

### Critical Psychologies

In the US critical psychology, officially designated, is almost non-existent. There are no university departments and only a handful of courses devoted to critical psychology.

Dennis Fox and Isaac Prilleltensky, authors of the first American college text on critical psychology (*Critical Psychology: An Introduction*, which first appeared in 1997 and was revised in 2009 by the two original authors and Stephanie Austin), characterize the field as an alternative to mainstream psychology, especially its practices toward the oppressed and vulnerable, and advocate for fundamental changes to existing social structures with the goal of materializing greater social justice and human well being (Fox, Prilleltensky and Austin, 2009, pp. 3-5).

In addition to what is formally termed critical psychology, however, there are dozens of approaches that critique and challenge, in theory and/or practice, the foundations of mainstream psychology. What follows is a summary of these approaches as identity-based, ideology-based, and epistemology-based.

#### Identity-based Critical Psychology.

Here we find psychologies that are critical of how mainstream psychological theory and/or method exclude, ignore or misrepresent vast groupings of people by virtue of psychology's unquestioned allegiance to white, European males as normative. In the US these psychologies stem from the political movements of the 1960s, including the Black power movement, La Raza (Latino power), women's liberation and gay liberation. Black, feminist and gay psychologies were developed (primarily by African American, women, and lesbians and gay men, respectively) with psychological conceptions, practices and research agendas specific to what were thought to be the unique characteristics, needs and societal restrictions of each grouping. Black psychologists and feminist psychologist

successfully organized themselves and formed professional associations in 1968; for lesbian and gay psychologists, the road was a longer one.

The Association of Black Psychologists was founded “to have a positive impact upon the mental health of the national Black community by means of planning, programs, services, training, and advocacy” (<http://www.abpsi.org/index.php/about-abpsi>). Still in existence today, the organization has chosen African identity as their mission and the heart of their alternative psychology (termed African psychology) (<http://www.abpsi.org/index.php/about-abpsi>). Most Black psychologists working on issues of race, class and ethnicity, however, work within the mainstream, and many are part of the American Psychological Association’s (APA) Society for the Psychological Study of Ethnic Minority Issues, established in 1986.

Feminist psychology arguably stems from Horney’s work in the 1920-30s critiquing Freud, but contemporary American feminist psychology began with Weisstein’s essay, “Psychology Constructs the Female”—again, in 1968—and the founding a year later of the Association for Women in Psychology (AWP) during the annual APA convention. In response to the continuing challenges of feminist psychologists within its ranks, a Psychology of Women division within the APA was established in 1973. Since then, most psychology of women issues have been subsumed within the division. The AWP continues with a more activist agenda that links identity politics and identity psychology ([http://www.awpsych.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=51&Itemid=65&limitstart=1](http://www.awpsych.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=51&Itemid=65&limitstart=1)).

In the 1960s gay activists in the US directly confronted governmental and institutional discrimination and police violence targeting homosexuals. The famed 1969 Stonewall riots in NYC’s Greenwich Village marked the spark of the gay liberation movement in the US. For gay activists and their allies, challenging the ways that psychiatry and psychology institutionally oppressed gay people was next on the agenda. The American Psychiatric Association included homosexuality as a mental disorder in its first *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, published in 1952. From the late 1960s gay activists, as well as gay psychiatrists within the professional association, aggressively pressured the establishment, and the diagnosis was removed from the

manual in 1973. The APA established the Society for the Psychological Study of Lesbian and Gay issues in 1985, now called the Society for the Psychological Study of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Issues (<http://www.apadivision44.org/about/>). In the ensuing decades, the depathologizing of homosexuality has yet to be completed, and there is still struggle within the professions of psychiatry, psychology and mental health concerning support for specific legal issues such as gay marriage and gay parenting.

#### Ideology-based Critical Psychology.

While fully supporting the empowerment and liberation of the above-mentioned identity groups, the critique of the ideology-based psychologies is from a political-ideological position rather than from a particular identity position. All anti-capitalist ideologies fall into this category. While Marxism is the most prominent, others of note, although little discussed in the US, are Marxist-feminist critique, postcolonial critique and liberation psychology. The anti-capitalist ideological critique of psychology that has arisen in the US is centered on how psychology supports the status quo by socializing its citizens to a capitalist ideology through dichotomizing the individual and society, with the result being that individuals become asocial and ahistorical entities. The resulting practices can be devastating, because “Following this ideological reasoning, solutions for human predicaments are to be found almost exclusively with the self, leaving the social order conveniently unaffected” (Prilleltensky, 1994, pp. 34-5).

My bookshelves are filled with critiques of psychology, nearly all of which make the same point as Prilleltensky does. It is worth noting the nearly complete absence of Marx in these writings. Aside from British psychologist Ian Parker, perhaps the most prolific Marxist ideologically-based critical psychologist, we find little reference to (let alone discussion of) Marxism in the works of other well-known ideologically-based critics, such as Cushman (1996), Richardson, Fowers and Guignon (1999), Sampson (1993), and Sloan (2000).

#### Epistemology-based Critical Psychology.

To the extent that the approaches already described include a critique of psychology’s methodology, they do so in the service of their identity or ideology critique. In contrast,

epistemology-based critiques take mainstream psychology's methodology straight on and offer alternative methodologies for how to understand, study and support human life.

At the core of epistemology-based critiques is mainstream scientific psychology's exclusion of the (inter) subjectivity of human life—a mistake stemming from when psychology adopted and adapted the scientific mindset of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and promoted itself as an endeavor no different in kind from the natural and physical sciences. Psychology devised ways to relate to human beings as if we were no different from the fish in the sea and stars in the sky, and continues to do so with increasing technological sophistication (Danziger, 1990, 1997; Newman and Holzman, 2006/1996). Because, however, human beings have access to our subjectivity, are self-reflecting and self-reflexive, use language, make meaning and sense of our world, a psychology whose knowledge-seeking excludes both the study of these characteristics and the incorporation of these characteristics into its methodology is not a human science at all.

There are many alternative methodologies that are inherently critical of mainstream psychology's epistemology. Some, such as phenomenological and hermeneutic psychology, study human experience interpretively. Devised from the works of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century German philosophers Heidegger and Husserl, the two approaches in psychology are best known through the works of Gadamer (1976), Levinas (1998), Merleau-Ponty (1962) and Ricoeur (1996). As developed in the US, humanistic psychology has incorporated the seminal ideas from these European scholars in its theoretical and empirical research.

More recent epistemology-based critical psychology includes approaches that fall under the headings of social constructionism and postmodern psychology. It is noteworthy that in the US the group that was open to social constructionist and postmodern theory and practice and helped to place them on a broad stage during the 1990s was the Humanistic Psychology division of the APA, primarily through the efforts of Ken Gergen (1994, 2001, 2006).

What is common to these approaches is the exploration of the very nature of knowledge and how it is generated. There is a focus on language as the meaning-making tool through which human beings construct knowledge and understanding. Meaning making is understood as a relational or social process that occurs between people, rather

than within or by an individual. As Lock and Strong state in their recent volume tracing the historical roots of social constructionism, “[Social constructionism] provides a more adequate framework than the dominant tradition for conceptualizing and then exploring the meaning-saturated reality of being human. Our meaningful reality is much ‘messier’ than the Cartesian heritage has had us believe, and much more mysterious” (Lock and Strong, 2010, p. 353).

Another target of these epistemological critiques is psychology’s presumption of objectivity and Truth. Alternative subjectivist accountings of truth are put forth. For example, social constructionists search for forms of dialogue alternative to objectivist-based debate and criticism (McNamee and Gergen, 1992, 1999), narrativists work to expose the “storiness” of our lives and help people create their own (and, most often, better) stories (McLeod, 1997; Monk, Winslade, Crocket and Epston, 1997; Rosen and Kuehlwein, 1996; White and Epston, 1990), and collaborative therapists emphasize the dynamic and co-constructed nature of meaning (e.g., Anderson, 1997; Paré and Lerner, 2005; Strong and Paré, 2004).

Another group of psychologists critical of the epistemology of mainstream psychology are those within the socio-cultural and cultural-historical activity theory (CHAT) traditions, who draw their inspiration from Soviet activity theory and the writings of Vygotsky (1978, 1987, 1993, 1994, 1997) and Bakhtin (1981, 1986). The critique of mainstream psychology is that it relates to human beings not only as isolated from each other, but as isolated from culture and human history. For developers of socio-cultural and CHAT approaches, what it means to develop, learn and live is to engage in human activity so as to become a member of a culture. Similar to the social constructionists and postmodernists, human life is understood as a social-cultural-historical phenomenon, with language (conversation, dialogue) playing a key role in how human beings come to understand and act upon the world.

Where these two epistemological critical psychologies diverge is in their view of the human language making and using ability. For most socio-cultural and CHAT psychologists, language is understood and empirically studied as a cultural mediator, and so the emphasis in their work is not so much on how meaning is made, but rather on how meaning is appropriated from the culture and the role that language plays as a

“psychological tool” in acculturation (e.g., Cole, 1996; John-Steiner, 1997; Kozulin, 2001; Rogoff, 2003; Wertsch, 1991). As will be discussed next, the psychology of becoming/social therapeutics is another direction that has emerged as a CHAT perspective that focuses not so much on the use of tools for cultural appropriation but on the making of tools for the transforming of culture.

### Activating Postmodernism and Postmodernizing Activity Theory

As a player in the CHAT and postmodern psychology arenas, I see both of them as simultaneously critical and humanistic. Each is rooted in deep concerns and unhappiness with the current state of the world’s people and the seemingly intractable poverty, inequality and the failure of the dominant institutions to promote the general welfare. Each implicates the institution of psychology in the mess we are in. Each has evolved a critique of mainstream psychology’s core conceptions and put forth alternative conceptions and practices, which have at their core the understanding of human beings as social and cultural (and, to a lesser extent, as historical). Both, it seems to me, are potentially psychologies of becoming. Newman’s and my work and the activities of the development community are, methodologically, a synthesis of CHAT and postmodern psychology, fusing postmodern psychology’s philosophical critique of psychology with Vygotsky’s dialectical method and his understanding of development, learning and play to yield a performatory process ontology (Holzman, 2006).

Our synthesis begins with Marx. His early philosophical writings speak to the fundamentality of human beings as social and active in creating themselves and the world simultaneously (his dialectical methodology): 1) “As society itself produces man as man, so it is produced by him. Activity and mind are social in their content as well as in their origin: they are social activity and social mind” (Marx, 1967, p. 129); 2) “The coincidence of the changing of circumstances and of human activity or self-changing can be conceived and rationally understood only as revolutionary practice” (Marx, 1974, p. 121). Revolutionary practice is not so much the organizing toward a specific goal, as it is a new conception of method that involves a unity of human beings and the world we’ve created/are re-creating.

Bringing this Marxist conception into psychology, Vygotsky posited a new conception of method, one that prefigured postmodernism in capturing the always emergent, or “becoming-ness,” of human beings: “The search for method becomes one of the most important problems of the entire enterprise of understanding the uniquely human forms of psychological activity. In this case, the method is simultaneously prerequisite and product, the tool and the result of the study” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 65). Tool-and-result points the way out of the objective-subjective and theory-practice dichotomies that permeate psychology and social movements. Tool use is a main focus of CHAT researchers who are primarily concerned with the relation between culture and cognition and how children appropriate the culture they are part of. But Vygotsky’s tool-and-result suggests that we human beings are not only tool users, but that we are also collective creators of new tool-and-results (we create culture). To the extent that contemporary human beings can become world historic or revolutionary, they must exercise this power (Newman and Holzman, 1993; Newman and Holzman, 2003).

Vygotsky showed how little children learn and develop through tool-and-result activity. Describing play, he said; “It is as though a child is a head taller than he is. Play is a leading factor in development” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 102). He is telling us that in play, we are who we are *and* who we are becoming *at the same time*. He noted that children learn by playing with the adults and older children around them, creating performances of learning. Looking at the organizing work we and our colleagues were doing in therapeutics, youth organizing, theatre building, and independent politics, Newman and I came to realize that human development happens, not just with children, but with people of all ages, when we relate to people as “a head taller,” that is, as who they are becoming. Just as a baby and mother perform conversation before the baby speaks correctly, school age children can perform reading or math or science before they know how, and adults can learn how to run their world by performing power (Holzman, 1997; 2009; Newman and Holzman, 1993).

We all have the capacity to play as children do, to do what we do not yet know how to do, to be who we are and other than who we are at the same time. The babbling baby, the actor on the stage, the student in a school play, the researcher singing her data, and all of us—are capable of creating new performances of ourselves continuously if we

choose to. In this way performance is a new ontology, a new understanding of how development happens—through the social-cultural activity of people together creating new possibilities and new options for how to be in, relate to, understand and change the world, which, of course, includes ourselves.

Mainstream psychology is designed as the study of product—the isolated individual at different points in time. It is incapable of seeing, let alone understanding, process. In this way, mainstream psychology contributes mightily to alienation, i.e., relating to the products of production severed from their producers and from the process of their production, that is, as commodities. This way of relating is not limited to cars, loaves of bread and computers. It is, rather, the normal way of seeing and relating to everything in contemporary Western culture. People relate to their lives, their relationships, their feelings, their culture, and so on, as things, torn away from the process of their creation and from their creators. While such “thingification” is a major factor in people’s emotional and learning problems, therapists and educators vary widely in the extent to which they engage alienation in practice, and almost none speak about it theoretically or methodologically.

### Performing Sociality

If we are commodified and alienated individuals, then transformative social change needs to entail the de-commodification and de-alienation of “human products” through a positive and constructive process of *producing sociality*. The synthesis of Vygotsky’s cultural-historical contributions with postmodern psychology’s challenge to the philosophical-psychological conceptions of self, truth, reality and identity yields a method to de-commodify and de-alienate, through a deconstruction-reconstruction of the ontology of modernist psychology in which human beings are understood to be only who we are. The performatory process ontology relates to human beings as both who we are and who we are becoming. And who we are becoming are creators of tools (-and-results) that can continuously transform mundane specific life practices (including those that produce alienation) into new forms of life. Creating these new kinds of tools is the *becoming activity* of creating/giving expression to our sociality.

For Newman, me and the development community, the human capacity to perform, that is, to be both "who we are" and "who we are becoming/who we are not" at the very same time, is the source of development (Newman, 1996; Newman and Holzman, 1997). Performance is the activity by which human beings transform and continuously reshape the unity that is *us-and-our environment*. The potential of this activity perspective on performance has been noted by Neimeyer: "The ironic but liberating insight that the basic "reality" of human beings is that they are "pretenders" lies at the heart of [the] performative approach to social therapy... This non-essentializing stance undermines the totalizing identification of self with any given role, and gives impetus to activity-based initiatives that prompt communities of persons to transcend the limiting scripts they are offered by dominant social institutions (Neimeyer, 2000, p. 195)

This non-essentializing activity calls into question the subjectivist accountings of truth (many truths, all with a small "t") offered by some postmodernists. The social therapeutic methodology rejects truth (in both its upper and lower case forms) *in favor of activity*. The ontological shift to activity transforms discourse (in particular, therapeutic discourse) from an epistemological appeal to either an objective, outer Truth/Reality or subjective, inner truths and realities—to an atavistic, self-reflexive engagement of the creating of the discourse itself (what is/is becoming). The shift involves relating to therapeutic discourse as performance, and to clients as an ensemble of performers who are, with the therapists' help, staging a new therapeutic conversation (a therapy play) each session. Performing therapy exposes the fictional nature of "the truth" of our everyday language, our everyday psychology and our everyday stories and allows people to experience themselves as the collective creators of their emotional growth (Holzman and Mendez, 2003; Newman, 1999).

In the current economic, political and cultural climate, human beings are socialized as commodified and alienated individuals. Mainstream psychology relates to them as such, that is, as *who we are*, not as simultaneously *who we are and who we are becoming*. Transforming the current economic, political and cultural climate involves de-commodifying and de-alienating its human "products." Neither negative nor destructive, it is the positive and constructive process of producing sociality by the continuous transformation of mundane specific life practices into new forms of life.

This postmodern understanding of activity dissolves the dualist gap between self and world, between thought and language, between who we are and who we are becoming, between theory and practice, in such a way that we can approach human beings as activists and activity-ists, as tool makers, meaning makers and culture makers, rather than as knowers and perceivers. Further, it actualizes the postmodern critique of modernist psychology's isolated individual through a new ontology—group activity. As a process ontology, a social-relational ontology, group activity raises a new set of questions and challenges for postmodernists, activity theorists, critical psychologists and humanists. For the unit of study and transformation becomes the social unit creating itself.

This shift in focus from the individual to the relationship or group exposes a problematic assumption of psychology, namely, if it is individuals that perceive, read, problem solve, experience emotional distress or disorder, and so on, then the instruction, learning, teaching, treatment or therapy must be individuated. While group work in general and group therapy in particular might at first appear to be challenges and counter examples, typically the group is understood to be a context for individuals to learn and/or get help. In contrast, the process ontology of group activity suggests that individuals need to be organized as social units in order to carry out the tasks of learning and developing, not unlike countless other human endeavors in which people become organized as social units to get a specific job done (Holzman and Newman, 2004).

We are faced with the question, “What does all this look like in practice?” Some years ago, a group of scholars (Danish critical psychologists) published a review of three of Newman's and my books in which they commented that it might well be that one has to experience our work in order to understand it (Nissen, Axel and Jensen, 1999). I suspect they meant that critically (i.e., negatively) and, yet, I think they make a critical (i.e., methodological) point—descriptions and maps are not identical to what they describe or map, but all too often the two are confused. Technology has freed us, to some extent, of having to use words to describe what happens in a given situation or environment. I say, “to some extent” because it is even more seductive to mistake video images for “what *actually* happened,” despite the fact that the camera also represents and has a point of view. With that caveat, I invite you to view some videos of the ways the

performance process ontology is manifest differently in the various projects of the development community.<sup>1</sup> I also now provide a few words of description (ditto, caveat).

Social therapy groups conducted in centers for social therapy in the US are comprised of 10-25 people, a mix of women and men of varying ages, ethnicities, sexual orientations, class backgrounds and economic status, professions and “presenting problems.” Such heterogeneous groups are designed to challenge people’s notion of a fixed identity (e.g., based on gender, ethnicity, diagnostic label, or “That’s the kind of person I am”). By virtue of this diversity, such groups have more varied “material” with which the group can work. Those from other countries who have trained in social therapy have created practices in a structure and manner that is coherent with their specific cultural environments, different in varying ways from those in the US.

Clients who come together to form a social therapy group are given the task to create their group as an environment in which they can get help. This *group activity* is a collective, practical challenge to the assumption that the way people get therapeutic help is to relate to themselves and be related to by others as individuals, complete with problems and with inner selves. This is not to say that people don’t come to social therapy individuated and wanting help to feel better or to change. They come to social therapy as they might to any therapy relating to feelings as individuated and private, something that contributes to people feeling isolated and alone with the “possession” of their feelings. They look to the therapist for some advice, solution, interpretation, or explanation. The social therapist works with the group (rather than the individuated selves that comprise the group) to organize itself to discover a method of relating to emotional talk relationally rather than individualistically, and as activist rather than as representational (Newman and Gergen, 1999; Newman and Holzman, 1999). The focus of the social therapeutic group process is, “How can we talk so that our talking helps build the group?” Speaking as truth telling, reality representing, inner thought and feeling revealing are challenged as people attempt to converse in new ways and to create something new out of their initial individuated, problem-oriented presentations of self. In this process people come to appreciate what (and that) they can create, and simultaneously to realize the limitations of trying to learn and grow individually. Group members, at different moments, realize that *growth comes from participating in the*

*process of building the groups in which one functions.* (Holzman and Mendez, 2003; Holzman and Newman, 2012; Holzman and Newman, 2004).

In the programs of the All Stars Project, performing and pretending activities, both on and off the theatrical stage, engage youth (and, more recently, adults) who are typically from low-income, Black, Latino, and immigrant families with two priority developmental issues: 1) to help them become more worldly and cosmopolitan, i.e., to perform their way from the margins into the mainstream of American society; and 2) to have them experience, over and over, their capacity to grow, i.e., to create an active understanding *that* they can create endless performances for navigating life's complex mix of scripted (institutional) and unscripted (non-institutional) situations. All Stars programs are voluntary. Participants are reached through multiple methods of grassroots outreach—door knocking in housing projects, posting and handing out flyers in neighborhoods, subways and outside of schools, and making presentations at schools and churches. There is also significant neighborhood word of mouth.

When young people come to an All Stars Project program, they participate in creating ensemble performances in which they are taken seriously and given the chance to perform as community citizens (Newman & Fulani, 2011). They are helped to do so by the staff and middle class and affluent adults, often business professionals and performing artists who are also volunteers, who perform “a head taller” along with them. All Stars Project programs intervene on the impact that these young people's life circumstances have on their capacity to see possibilities and to act on them. Growing up in poverty more often than not creates hopelessness, a narrow choice of identities and, not infrequently, anger—ways of being that in turn have negative consequences on so many aspects of people's lives. The work to re-initiate development as the capacity to see possibilities and to act on them is a new form of social activism based in a psychology of becoming.

Whether rich or poor or in between, all people need to have the opportunity to participate in qualitatively transforming themselves-and the world. In my experience, performing—with and as “other”—is the humanistic imperative of our day.

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<sup>i</sup> Dozens of videos can be found at East Side Institute on Vimeo <http://vimeo.com/esinstitutevimeo/> and All Stars Project on You Tube <http://www.youtube.com/user/AllStarsProject>, as well as on the organizations' websites (eastsideinstitute.org and allstars.org).