LIBERATION PSYCHOLOGY

A Trainee Workbook

Consciousness · Liberation · Community · Values

For use in graduate training, clinical supervision, and self-directed learning
Grounded in the work of Ignacio Martín-Baró, Paulo Freire, and their descendants

Name:	Date / Cohort:

How to Use This Workbook

This workbook is designed for students and trainees encountering liberation psychology for the first time or returning to it with fresh eyes. It moves across four interconnected modules, each pairing conceptual grounding with experiential reflection and practical skill-building.

Liberation psychology asks us to examine not just individual distress, but the social, historical, and political conditions that produce it. As a trainee, this means turning that lens on yourself, your community, your clinical training, and the institutions you are entering.

Workbook Structure

- **Module 1 —** Consciousness-Raising & Critical Awareness
- **Module 2 —** Internalized Oppression & the Path to Liberation
- **Module 3 —** Community, Collective Healing & Solidarity
- **Module 4 —** Values, Identity & Resilient Becoming

> ✦ **Reflection Prompt**
>
> *Before you begin: What brought you to this field? What stories personal, familial, communal shaped the clinician or helper you are becoming?*

MODULE 1

Consciousness-Raising& Critical Awareness

Seeing the world clearly — including the forces that shape suffering

> *We do not see things as they are. We see things as we are.*
> **— Adapted from Anaïs Nin**

Conceptual Foundation

Ignacio Martín-Baró, the Salvadoran social psychologist and Jesuit priest, argued that psychology had historically served the powerful diagnosing and treating individuals while leaving oppressive structures untouched. He called on psychologists to work from 'below,' beginning with the lived experience of marginalized communities rather than with mainstream theoretical frameworks.

Paulo Freire's concept of conscientização (critical consciousness) offers us the foundational method: a process of perceiving the social, political, and economic contradictions of reality and taking action to transform it. Freire insisted this process must be dialogical never done to people, always with them.

Key Concepts

Liberation Psychology Concepts	Mechanisms of Oppression
• Conscientização: critical consciousness • Praxis: reflection + action in cycle • Banking education vs. dialogical education • Naming reality as an act of power	• Fatalism as a learned survival strategy • Ideological hegemony and normalization • False consciousness vs. ideological clarity • The role of psychology in social control

Reflection: Your Social Location

Social location refers to the combination of identities, histories, and positions you occupy in social systems of power. Our social location shapes what we notice, what we take for granted, and what remains invisible to us.

✦ Reflection Prompt

Describe your social location in 3–5 dimensions (e.g., race, class, gender, ability, nationality, sexuality, religion). Which of these feel most salient in your clinical training? Which do you rarely think about and why might that be?

Your response:

✦ Reflection Prompt

Think of a moment when you became aware of a system or structure that had previously felt 'natural' or 'neutral' to you. What shifted your perception? What did it cost you or free you to see it?

Your response:

Skill Practice: The Lens Shift

⚙ Skill Practice: The Lens Shift

- Choose a presenting problem you commonly encounter in clinical work (e.g., depression, anxiety, substance use).
- Describe it first through a traditional, individual-deficit lens (diagnosis, symptom clusters, personal history).
- Now re-describe the same presentation through a liberation psychology lens: What structural, historical, and social forces contribute to this suffering?
- Notice what changes in your conceptualization and what changes in your felt sense of the client.

Individual-deficit lens:

Liberation psychology lens:

What shifted for you?

MODULE 2

Internalized Oppression& the Path to Liberation

Reclaiming the self from systems that diminish it

> *The oppressed, instead of striving for liberation, tend themselves to become oppressors.*
> **— Paulo Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed**

Conceptual Foundation

Internalized oppression describes the process by which members of targeted groups come to accept and act on the dominant group's negative beliefs about them. It is not a character flaw or individual failing it is the predictable result of sustained exposure to dehumanizing systems. It shows up in self-doubt, self-policing, distrust among group members, and the adoption of oppressive standards as one's own.

Liberation from internalized oppression is not a single event but an ongoing, non-linear process. Psychologists drawing on Freire, Fanon, and the Black liberation movement have described this movement as one from submission → identification → liberation, or through stages of encounter, immersion, internalization, and commitment.

Understanding the Process

Manifestations of Internalized Oppression	Pathways Toward Liberation
• Self-silencing and shrinking • Adopting dominant group values • Policing others in your own group • Shame about cultural identity • Doubting your own perceptions (epistemic oppression)	• Critical naming of the process • Community consciousness-raising • Recovering cultural wisdom & history • Solidarity and cross-community alliance • Praxis: action + reflection in cycle

Reflection: Inherited Messages

✦ Reflection Prompt

What messages did you receive from family, community, media, or institutions — about which people are 'worthy' of care, help, or success? Which of these messages did you absorb without question? Which have you begun to examine?

Your response:

✦ **Reflection Prompt**

In your training or clinical work, have you ever noticed yourself policing or minimizing — either yourself or a client in ways that served the dominant norm rather than genuine wellbeing? What was that experience like?

Your response:

Skill Practice: Decolonizing the Case Conceptualization

⚙ **Skill Practice: Decolonizing the Case Conceptualization**

- Select a client or clinical vignette. Write a brief standard case conceptualization.

- Audit it: Where does the language pathologize the person rather than the context? Whose knowledge is centered?
- Identify any 'survival strategies' that are being labeled as symptoms or deficits.
- Rewrite the conceptualization centering the client's strengths, resistance, and socio-political context.
- Share with a peer or supervisor. Discuss what felt uncomfortable in the rewrite and why.

Standard conceptualization (brief):

What did your audit reveal?

Liberation-centered rewrite:

MODULE 3

Community & Collective Healing

The clinic does not begin or end in the consulting room

> *I am because we are.*
> **— Ubuntu philosophy, Southern Africa**

Conceptual Foundation

Western psychology tends to locate both the problem and the solution in the individual. Liberation psychology insists on a fundamentally different ontology: the self is relational, embedded in community, and shaped by history. Healing, therefore, is also relational and communal, not just personal.

This module explores the concept of popular education, mutual aid, and community organizing as healing practices. It asks trainees to interrogate professional boundaries not as natural or neutral, but as historically constructed sometimes protective, sometimes a means of gatekeeping care.

Key Concepts

Community Healing Frameworks	Critical Professional Questions
• Collective trauma and community grief • Mutual aid vs. charity models of care • Popular education and community empowerment • Historical memory and truth-telling	• Professional boundaries as cultural constructs • Community as co-healer and co-therapist • Solidarity vs. saviorism • Accompaniment as therapeutic stance

Reflection: Your Communities

✦ Reflection Prompt

Name two or three communities you belong to (by identity, geography, practice, or belief). How has belonging to these communities shaped your understanding of healing? What forms of collective care formal or informal exist within them?

Your response:

✦ **Reflection Prompt**

Martín-Baró spoke of accompaniment being with communities in their struggle, not managing or fixing from above. How does the training you are receiving prepare you for accompaniment? Where does it fall short?

Your response:

Skill Practice: Community Resource Mapping

⚙ **Skill Practice: Community Asset & Healing Resource Map**

- Choose a community you work with or live in.
- Map existing resources but begin with informal, community-generated supports (mutual aid networks, cultural practices, spiritual communities, elder knowledge, peer support).

- Then map formal/clinical resources. Notice what is missing, what is inaccessible, and what assumptions shape 'professional' definitions of 'resource.'
- Identify one way you could build a bridge or referral pathway between informal community support and clinical care.
- Reflect: Whose expertise is centered in your current referral network?

Informal community supports I identified:

Gaps or access barriers I noticed:

One bridge I could build:

MODULE 4

Values, Identity &Resilient Becoming

Who you are becoming matters as much as what you know

> *Caring for myself is not self-indulgence. It is self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare.*
>
> **— Audre Lorde, A Burst of Light**

Conceptual Foundation

Liberation psychology is not only a theory of suffering, it is a theory of flourishing. It holds that human beings have a fundamental orientation toward life, growth, and dignity. This module invites you to explore your own values, your professional identity, and your commitments as a future clinician, not as fixed traits, but as ongoing, relational, and political acts.

This final module also takes seriously the cost of this work. Working toward liberation in yourself, in your clinical relationships, in your institutions is meaningful, necessary, and exhausting. Sustainable praxis requires tending to yourself with the same care you extend to others.

Core Values Exploration

Below are values drawn from liberation psychology, Indigenous healing frameworks, and community-centered care. Rate each on a scale of 1–5 (1 = not central to me right now; 5 = deeply central):

Value	Rating (1–5)	Notes
Solidarity — being with, not above		
Praxis — reflection linked to action		
Dignity — inherent worth of every person		
Justice — active commitment to equity		
Accompaniment — staying present in struggle		
Humility — holding expertise lightly		
Courage — acting against the grain		
Community — the relational self		

Liberation — freedom as ongoing process		
Care — for self, others, and the world		

Reflection: Your Clinician Identity

> ✦ **Reflection Prompt**
>
> *How do your identities all of them show up in the room with clients? Not just the ones you disclose, but the ones that shape how you listen, what you notice, who you feel immediately at ease with, and who you find harder to hold.*

Your response:

> ✦ **Reflection Prompt**
>
> *What does a liberation-oriented clinical practice look like for you concretely, in the work you want to do? What would you need to change about the settings, models, or structures you currently work within?*

Your response:

Skill Practice: The Sustainable Praxis Plan

⚙ Skill Practice: The Sustainable Praxis Plan

- Identify one systemic issue affecting clients in your current or intended practice context.
- Name one thing you can do individually (in the room, in your documentation, in your language).
- Name one thing you can do collectively (with colleagues, in supervision, in your professional community).
- Name one structural advocacy action however small you could take in the next 6 months.
- Finally: What do you need in order to sustain this work? Name at least two forms of nourishment community, practice, rest, joy, beauty.

Systemic issue:

Individual action:

Collective action:

Structural advocacy:

What sustains me:

Closing: A Letter to Your Future Self

One of the most powerful practices in liberation psychology is to write across time to the selves we were, and to the selves we are becoming. Use the space below to write a brief letter to the clinician you are becoming: the values you want to hold, the kind of presence you want to bring, and the communities you want to serve.

> ✦ **Reflection Prompt**
> *Write freely. There is no correct answer here. This letter belongs to you.*

Dear Future Me,

Signed:

Date:

Key Thinkers in Liberation Psychology

- Ignacio Martín-Baró — Writings for a Liberation Psychology (1994)
- Paulo Freire — Pedagogy of the Oppressed (1968)
- Frantz Fanon — The Wretched of the Earth (1961)
- María Lugones — Pilgrimages/Peregrinajes (2003)
- Lillian Comas-Díaz — Liberation Psychology (2019)
- Audre Lorde — A Burst of Light and Other Essays (1988)
- Adrienne Maree Brown — Emergent Strategy (2017)