England's Dreaming?
UK critical psychology, 2011

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Abstract

We report and analyse a survey of UK critical psychologists conducted early in 2011. Our analysis constructed four themes from the data: positivity/optimism, negativity/pessimism, academic practice and institutional matters. First we sketch the current state of critical psychology in the UK. The themes are then described, and their meanings situated and interpreted with respect to a series of tensions related to method, theory, incoherence and marginalisation, and affects.

Keywords: neoliberalism, thematic analysis, affect

Introduction

In this paper we try to assess the current state of critical psychology in the United Kingdom (UK). Before we do so, we must first address two issues of conceptualisation and framing.

First, there is no general agreement as to what constitutes critical psychology, whether in the UK or more generally (e.g. Dafermos & Marvakis, 2006; Parker, 2006; Prilletensky & Fox, 1997). The term incorporates approaches ranging from feminist to Marxist, from poststructuralist to community-psychological, from the systematic rigour of German Critical Psychology to the heterogeneities of the 'turns' to discourse and affect. For some it simply means being critical of the psychological mainstream – with respect to its dualistic conceptualisations, its problematic methodologies and its implicit normalising tendencies. For others it also means developing a coherent or systematic alternative to the mainstream, a way of thinking and researching psychologically that does not rely upon inadequate concepts and methods and does not unthinkingly reproduce reactionary values. And, for others still, it means that these activities of rejection and reconstruction are tied to an explicitly political critique - of mainstream psychology itself, and of the social and material circumstances with which it is co-dependent.

Second, the notion of a 'United Kingdom' is itself contested. In recent decades these contestations have been particularly visible with regard to the north-eastern portion of the island of Ireland, which is currently administered by a government subordinate to the London parliament (which, in turn, contains members elected from constituencies there). However, the countries of Wales and (particularly) Scotland are also host to vociferous nationalist

parties and movements. Indeed, even in England – which, as the dominant country, typically dreams of an isomorphism between its own interests and those of the UK as a whole – there has recently been a resurgence of nationalism. Politically, we see this in the dangerous clowning of the racist English Defence League; culturally, this tendency is manifest in attempts to 'reclaim' an English identity for progressive or liberal causes (Bragg, 2010).

Moreover, many critical psychologists will be wary of framing an analysis of a progressive tendency in accord with the putative boundaries of a nation-state – *any* nation-state. Movements that challenge national borders and contest the exploitation, precarity and ill-treatment of migrants, for example, show how notions of nationhood are founded upon the forcible physical, social and economic exclusion of others (e.g. Andrijasevic & Anderson, 2009). Within any critical analysis there is something paradoxical about reproducing – and so conferring apparent legitimacy upon – a dream of nationhood founded upon an aggressive history of colonialism and imperialism, a history still being played out in Libya, Afghanistan, Iraq and elsewhere.

In what follows we address the first difficulty by focusing our analysis upon the reports of people who self-identify as critical psychologists. Whilst this procedure is imperfect and open to criticism, it does at least yield a pragmatic solution to an otherwise seemingly intractable difficulty.

We address the second difficulty by observing that the scholars whose activities we consider and work we reflect upon are frequently bound together in ways that are only contingently dependent upon a nation-state. Their practices vivify multiple geographical and cultural links that derive from sharing closely-related symbolic and material histories, settings, tools, resources and practices. They also share more proximal economic and institutional imperatives: their scholarship is subject both to broadly equivalent bureaucratic and financial incentives and constraints, and to comparable regimes of assessment. Further, their work is informed by, and positioned with respect to, similar local trends within psychology and other cognate disciplines (sociology, social theory, cultural studies, etc.).

These shared elements might be said to co-constitute an imagined community (Anderson, 1991) of UK critical psychology (hereafter, UKCP), a community that gets enacted through the elective affinities forged between individuals and groups, the working practices and the relations of trust, friendship, support and solidarity that these practices presuppose, affirm and reproduce. Consequently, whilst the (UK) state might well be within each of us, in contingently enacting these lived relations and heterogeneous practices we each become something more than the mere sum total of its precepts and constraints (Stephenson & Papadopoulos, 2007; The Free Association, 2011).

Any attempt by us to comprehensively describe UKCP at this point would pre-empt or undermine the subsequent voices of our participants. This is especially germane since UKCP, like critical psychology generally, is clearly a somewhat amorphous entity. Nevertheless, a very brief sketch of UKCP *as we see it* will help readers – especially those from other countries – to orient themselves. Writing in this journal, Parker (2006) described how UKCP was closely associated with social psychology, in part because of its historical precursors in the ethogenic and 'new paradigm' psychologies of the 1970's. This association continued into the 1990s and beyond, with close links between social constructionist and discursive psychologies and critical psychological work. Parker also noted the significance for UKCP of psychoanalysis, tracing its influence from the groundbreaking work associated with

'Changing the Subject' (Henriques, Hollway, Urwin, Venn, & Walkerdine, 1984) through to its more recent critical psychological manifestations, which are more frequently Lacanian. Parker's analysis drew out the significance for UKCP of movements such as the Hearing Voices Network and the Paranoia Network, and publications such as Asylum magazine; he also documented how UKCP was associated most closely with a small number of sites, including Stirling, Manchester Metropolitan, Loughborough, Bolton and Cardiff universities.

In the five years since 2006 there have been some changes to this picture. Critical psychology is less in evidence now at Stirling and Bolton universities; conversely, small groups of scholars historically associated with UKCP are now located at the Open University, University of East London and Leicester University, whilst critical traditions remain intact (albeit precariously for some) at Cardiff, Loughborough and Manchester Metropolitan universities. But simultaneously, and as in 2006, UKCP is also associated with many individuals who are geographically dispersed. Links with social psychology persist, as do links with clinical concerns - evidenced, for example, by the activity of the UK Community Psychology discussion list and the interventions of the Midlands Psychology Group (www.midpsy.org). Intellectually, scholarship associated with UKCP seems to have undergone something of a transformation in recent years. The concern with language that permeated earlier UKCP work continues, but is now frequently supplemented by related concerns with affect, emotion and feeling, and this work is sometimes now branded as psychosocial studies. Strands of influence associated with feminism, queer theory, disability studies, Marxism and poststructuralism can all still be discerned. Psychoanalysis continues to be very important, and is increasingly complemented by process philosophy and the 'anti-oedipal' perspectives of Deleuze and Guattari. In recent years some aspects of the work associated with UKCP have been (re-)institutionalised: the UK Community Psychology list has spawned a section of the British Psychological Society; degree courses in psychosocial studies have been established at Brighton University, Birkbeck College and the University of East London; and the UK based 'International Journal of Critical Psychology' has changed its name to 'Subjectivity' and broadened its remit to address the social sciences generally. It remains to be seen whether these institutional moves will also engender degrees of domestication, just as for the moment it is unclear what new potentials for UKCP will come from the turns to affect and the psychosocial.

It may be that 2011 turns out to have been an especially interesting time to assess UKCP. The coalition government elected in 2010 is implementing privatisation initiatives and spending cuts to health, education, welfare and benefits that are, in the words of Environment Minister Greg Barker, "on a scale that Margaret Thatcher in the 1980's could only have dreamt of" (Peev, 2011). Many UK critical psychologists work in higher education, where a trebling of student fees means that graduates from English universities will in future have average debts of over £50,000 (the Welsh and Scottish parliaments have retained less inequitable arrangements). This increased fee will (partially) compensate for a reduction of around 85% in core government funding, effectively creating a distinctly unfree (because very highly regulated) market in higher education. This is already leading to job losses and deteriorating pay and conditions, and predictions circulating amongst the 'Russell Group' of elite universities suggest that up to 20 English universities could merge or close. Early indications are that university applications for the Autumn 2012 intake are down by 9% (BBC, 2011), and that poorer students have been disproportionately dissuaded from applying. Simultaneously, there has been an assault on pension provision that will leave most academic staff poorer in later life. Meanwhile, similar cuts and privatisation initiatives in health, welfare and social care are impacting negatively on critical psychologists working in clinical

practice. These policies impact adversely on all psychologists, and, in academia, it should be acknowledged that psychologists are on average less affected than many of their colleagues in the classics and humanities. Nevertheless, within psychology the impact of the cuts is likely to be disproportionately felt by critical scholars, whose contributions are often already seen as less valuable: consequently, the coming years are likely to herald changes for UKCP.

Despite the possible timeliness of our efforts we make no claims to authority or comprehensiveness, and recognise that there is necessarily something arbitrary and contested about this endeavour. We assessed the current state of UKCP by surveying psychologists working in England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland who self-defined as 'critical psychologists': we now describe our method, present our analysis, and discuss our findings.

Method

In January and February 2011, multiple Google searches were conducted using relevant terms ('critical psychology UK', 'English critical psychologist' etc.). A list of names was compiled, and duplicates eliminated. Further Google searching then identified institutional locations and email addresses. This procedure generated a list of 240 putative UK critical psychologists. All of these people were contacted by email in March 2011 with a list of open-ended questions to which they were asked to respond (see Appendix); the initial email was followed up with a reminder just over a week later. In total this generated 69 usable replies. The text of these replies was collated into a single file, and a thematic content analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was conducted.

Results

The responses were collated and organised with respect to four researcher-defined themes, constructed through repeated close readings of the comments provided:
(1) positivity/optimism towards UKCP
(2) negativity/pessimism towards UKCP
(3) academic practice
(4) institutional matters

The first theme 'positivity/optimism' was by far the smallest; each of the remaining three themes was of more equal size and was constructed from numerous smaller sub-themes. Similar tensions and concerns recurred throughout all four, including discussions of theory, its character and effects; discussions of the character of UKCP and its manifestations; and discussions of how UKCP might develop in the future. Participants also highlighted the role of institutions such as the British Psychological Society (BPS), the import of recent government initiatives such as the 'Improving Access to Psychological Therapies' (IAPT) programme, and the continuing relevance of the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE: now the Research Excellence Framework or REF), the mechanism by which indices of research quality are used to differentially allocate limited central government research funding. Each of these themes and sub-themes will now be presented in turn

1.   Positivity/optimism towards UKCP

There was a sense among some participants that UKCP is in the ascendency and is thriving. However, most of these positive responses were also accompanied by caveats and some felt that the thriving of UKCP is limited to a number of 'pockets' throughout the UK:

> Robust and vibrant in some places, non-existent or on the defensive in others. (P43; Q2)

This is echoed by other participants stating that pockets of interesting work appear isolated and closed, for example:

> In many ways, the dislodging of critical and social psychologists from mainstream psychology is creating a fragmented community of researchers who are now working outside psychology, and are perhaps struggling to consolidate a viable group identity (P16; Q2)

Perhaps because of its scattered, marginalised character there was sometimes a perception that UKCP does not make enough impact, but despite this some participants strongly felt that excellent work has been done, with UKCP becoming more established and visible in recent years.

> I get the impression it is becoming a more established and accepted term, even if what this term denotes is not always clear. (P1; Q2)

Some also expressed optimistic views of the future of UKCP, suggesting that it will continue to flourish as a result of being particularly needed in the current political and economic climate. In this, there were some suggestions that UKCP might work to link current affairs to psychological issues. For example, P15 suggested forging an explicit link between personal distress and the banking 'crisis' in order to help people connect their personal experiences to the wider political context:

> We should directly link social distress to the actions of bankers. The unemployed teacher or educational psychologist in Yorkshire to an individual banker in the square mile. We have to personalise issues and help people connect their experiences to the political situation. (P15; Q6)

So current political circumstances might invigorate UKCP, and in any case require a critical response that could be provided by UKCP: as indeed does the continuing influence of mainstream psychology. Nevertheless, these strands of optimism were significantly outnumbered by more negative or pessimistic comments.

## 2.	Negativity/pessimism toward UKCP

This theme is composed of four smaller themes expressing concerns related to invisibility, diminished momentum, incoherence, and UKCP's lack of infrastructure or organisation.

2.1. Invisibility

UKCP's invisibility was manifested in various ways. Several participants stated that they do not describe themselves as a critical psychologist because, in general, people do not know what critical psychology is. Other participants talked about UKCP being marginalised and lacking impact. A minority attributed this to self-marginalisation, suggesting that if critical psychologists did not continually place themselves on the margins (or outside) of psychology it might be possible to increase the influence of UKCP within the discipline as a whole:

> [A] kind of victim discourse/ narrative that academics have adopted which suggests that critical psychologists are marginalised by the mainstream academic evaluation and reward system. Academics always witter on about how pressures such as the REF prevent them from doing anything useful or activist, but this has not been my experience. I have always published, scored high in evaluation

activities etc. Its actually not that hard to do high level critically engaged work - to locate ones work in critical activist organisations, to see activism as an academic activity. (P56; Q4)

Although critical psychologists do sometimes strategically position themselves on the margins of their discipline, it is inaccurate to suggest that the marginalisation of UKCP is purely self-inflicted. A recent *International Benchmarking Review of UK Psychology* (jointly commissioned by the BPS, Association of Heads of Psychology Departments, Experimental Psychology Society and ESRC) only mentions critical approaches in the section on social psychology (ignoring critical developmental, clinical, and health psychologies, for example). Moreover, the report explicitly minimises the significance of "qualitative/critical/discourse analysis research", stating that "UK social psychology's international impact is almost exclusively attributable to its mainstream experimental/quantitative work" (ESRC, 2011, p. 15): a clear example of critical psychology being 'othered' and marginalised by institutions favouring mainstream psychology.

2.2. Diminished Momentum

Some participants talked about UKCP as being weaker than it was, and so as diminishing or losing momentum:

> Despite the emergence of critical voices in the discipline quite some time ago, it's notable that the wider discipline doesn't really appear to be changing to any noticeable extent. I'm at a stage now where I'm realising that the promise of radical change which appealed so much to me 10 years ago when I first came across critical work is set against a massive edifice of vested interests and established practice, which shows no sign of disappearing. (P55; Q2)

As the ESRC document quoted above suggests, these vested interests and established practices are both real and powerful. They strive to perpetuate mainstream psychology by limiting the potentials of critical psychology and policing the identity boundaries of the discipline.

At the same time, personal and professional vested interests were also blamed for the limitations of UKCP, by stopping people from considering deeper philosophical and political assumptions and issues bound up with the discipline of psychology. There is perhaps an implicit criticism here that academics are more concerned with themselves and their careers than with serious critical work, a criticism that negates the actuality of a capitalist economy within which critical scholars – like everyone else – must make compromises in order to remain secure. Such criticisms might be more accurately directed at the infrastructure of incentives within which critical psychologists work, which inevitably has an impact on the research decisions they make.

Several participants also expressed concerns about UKCP losing its political edge, as in this example:

> It's not as visible as it used to be. As critical psychology entered the mainstream it has gained respectability, yet it has lost some of its impetus for wider social critique and critical edge. (P30; Q2)

As this quote suggests, some feel that UKCP is not as politically motivated as it used to be; that there is too much emphasis on critiquing psychology, at the expense of wider social issues; that UKCP is overly dominated by white, middle class, able-bodied academics, with a distinct lack of minority group representation; and that as a result, UKCP largely fails to

address many of the UK's structural inequalities and does not strive toward social change. As P56 said:

> [The current state of UKCP is r]eally dire, [it has] completely lost its way. I trained [under an oppressive regime in another country where we assisted with many practical initiatives to foster social change]. My experience of critical psychologists in the UK is that they mainly do discourse analysis and similarly academic-with-no-possible-social-change-implication projects, in a static way that makes no contribution to any kind of concrete social change project.
>
> [...] Discourse analysis is not critical in any sense of the word. I want to weep when I see it being touted as an exemplar of critical psychology. Show me one discourse analyst whose work ever helped a marginalised group to effectively resist their oppression! (P56; Q2)

In this attack on one of UKCP's dominant methodologies, P56 contends that discourse analysis should not be described as critical psychology because it lacks the ability to promote action or deliver social change: instead, P56 proposes UKCP should look to the work of eminent theorists of critical pedagogy, and to postcolonial writers.

Other participants suggested that there have been no significant recent developments in UKCP, and that theoretical work has become disconnected from 'real world' application and makes no important contribution to practice. For example, P35 states:

> There's been far too much 'botany' and not enough application. Researchers need to be able to answer the 'so what?' question much better. How is what they're doing of real-world benefit?

Here, the term 'botany' implies that UKCP has been overly concerned with analysing and classifying phenomena, at the expense of considering the utility and applicability of its analyses and showing how they can be applied to current socio-political problems.

2.3. Incoherence

Some participants consider UKCP to be incoherent, lacking focus and fragmented, and that there is a problem of obscurantism in theory:

> Obscurantism [...] and an overweening confidence that critical psychologists occupy the moral high ground and have all of the answers. (P2; Q4)
>
> [There is] a distinct and unnecessary tendency to write in language that is impenetrable to many academics (never mind the public). (P28; Q4)

Some participants were particularly disparaging of current theoretical turns in UKCP, with one participant indicating that fashions change too quickly and this makes it difficult to keep up with the latest complex theory:

> I think there is a huge problem of fashionable theory. For anyone who is not completely located within critical psychology (e.g. someone like me who bridges across to other areas) it is almost impossible to keep up with the latest thinker who everyone is drawing on. Which means that we can simply drift out of important debates because we don't have the time and resources to get our head around Deleuze, Lacan, Bordieu, La Tour, Thrift, Whitehead, etc. etc. etc. (P45; Q4)

Relatedly, there was a definite sense from some participants that critical psychology needs to be more accessible. In the words of P2:

> [Critical psychology n]eeds to be more accessible to non-psychologists. Although there is certainly a place for complex theory, many of the ideas are relatively simple, and this understanding needs to be put across more effectively, in my opinion. (P2; Q7)

Running through these comments is a concern that theory should have a practical or political use, that it should be applied to 'solving' problems or improving practice. These participants felt that much of the theory of UKCP is both too dense and disconnected from everyday life, that it perhaps has "an overly reflexive, indulgent and sometimes auto-suppositorial character" (Blackman, Cromby, Hook, Papadopoulos, & Walkerdine 2008, p. 19).

2.4. Lack of Infrastructure

Many participants themselves explicitly recognised the disparate, heterogeneous character of UKCP, and some linked this to a deficient infrastructure. These people called for more critically focused workshops and conferences; a formal network of critical psychologists, perhaps on a national or international scale; maybe even a BPS (British Psychological Society) section or division. Others, conversely, bemoaned the lack of collaboration between critical and other psychologists:

> Lack of collaboration among researchers under a systematic critical agenda in psychology. We sometimes forget the 'psychology' in critical psychology. (P30; Q4)

When asked how to overcome obstacles to the development of UKCP, several participants suggested better networking, both nationally and internationally. This could involve the formation of formal groups or networks, and indicates a desire for improved contact, communication, and collaboration between those working with critical approaches to psychology, both with each other and with other psychologists:

> Better networks- more open to a broader array of CP approaches. More organisation amongst CP. Perhaps target particular journals to have a special issue on cp (eg JCASP). (P11; Q5)

> [S]ome more networking, conferences etc- for me it's knowing what other people are doing/working on/engaging in. (P36; Q5)

3.   Academic Practice

The location of UKCP with respect to contemporary academic practice received much attention from participants; these comments will be considered with respect to theoretical and methodological issues, and power and ideology.

3.1. Theoretical & Methodological Issues

Theory was much discussed, and as the analysis in 2.3 might suggest there was a divide between those who portrayed UKCP theories in a good light and those who took a dimmer view. Relatedly, whilst some participants saw mainstream psychological theory as an adversary or obstacle, others argued that UKCP should try to work with mainstream psychologists to break down barriers and enable open, constructive dialogue. In this, some participants saw disagreements between critical psychologists who favour different theoretical and methodological perspectives as especially problematic:

> More dialogue between the various groups (and fewer cliques) could help this [towards a more cohesive UKCP]. (P44; Q5)

> Stop wasting time on above debates [disputes between different branches of non-mainstream psych, eg. discursive vs. critical psych] - there are too few of us to bother with territorial disputes. Focus on what we do well and do it better. (P47; Q5)

Clearly, however, such debates are more than just petty squabbles or territorial disputes. On the one hand, different theoretical perspectives and methodologies are associated with specific ontological and epistemological positions, and frequently attached to particular political beliefs: consequently, they can become incompatible metaphysically, ethically and practically. In this regard, some participants emphasised the philosophical distinction between human kinds (aggression, ADHD, joy, addiction attention, etc.) and natural kinds (gold, water, gravity, electrons, etc.), and differences between critical realist, social materialist and process philosophies. On the other hand, 'winning' such debates can have concrete consequences in the form of publication, prestige, promotion, influence and income: in such ways, too, academic disagreements are far from trivial (and this notwithstanding Henry Kissinger's view that academic disputes are so vicious precisely because there is so little at stake).

Other participants commented more positively on theory: the combining of constructionist and discursive approaches with attempts to understand subjectivity was applauded, and the journal *Subjectivity* was also spoken of positively (although the change of name from *International Journal of Critical Psychology* was seen as indicative of wider changes in UKCP). Theoretical engagements with the body and embodiment were also viewed positively, as were recent emphases on the concepts of experience, materiality and spatiality:

> At the moment the whole psychosocial development, and the (related) turns to experience/embodiment/affect/materiality/ spatiality etc. I think that some important challenges have been raised to the purely discursive approach, and people are responding in various interesting ways. (P45; Q3)

The turn to affect, mentioned here, was also elaborated upon by other participants. Some also described how such recent developments are not necessarily strictly situated within UKCP but are of interest nonetheless. However, although the treatment of affect as an analytic was welcomed, its association with psychoanalysis tended to divide opinions. Some viewed psychoanalysis positively and talked of opportunities to combine psychoanalytic (particularly Lacanian) ideas with concepts from critical social and developmental psychology:

> New developments in critical discursive and narrative analysis. The deployment of Lacanian psychoanalytic ideas to challenge psychological assumptions. (P63; Q3)

> Uses of psychoanalytical concepts along with social and developmental concepts. (P66; Q3)

Conversely, some viewed psychoanalysis much more negatively. There were suggestions that theorising the 'unconscious' is unhelpful, perhaps because of the abstractness and indeterminacy of this concept, and because of the apprehensions of those who have historically been less than enamoured with psychoanalysis. Despite these differences, numerous participants wanted to encourage more engagement between non-psychoanalytic critical psychologists and those with psychoanalytic interests, and some felt that this is already occurring in psychosocial studies.

At the same time, many were much more negative about UKCP theorising. One participant suggests that the concepts of UKCP are:

chaotic and underdeveloped, poorly theorised. (P18; Q2)

Moreover, several participants saw significant problems associated with the apparent obscurantism of much UKCP theorisation, which they felt makes UKCP inaccessible and impractical:

I think it's in danger of disappearing up its own theoretical arse, to be entirely honest. […] We're so busy worrying about the detail of this theory or that, with the purity of our methods, that we're in danger of becoming what we beheld. (P21; Q2)

Here, we see the suggestion that UKCP could become as insular and disconnected from everyday life as mainstream psychology. For some participants such problems flow from the dominance of poststructuralist ideas, and the introduction of process philosophy and other complex theorising that is seen to lack clarity and hence might serve to alienate and disempower:

[It] is not to say such theorists are not interesting and useful, but there is both a problem that those of us who are drawing on other theories - or who are not quite so theoretical - get left behind, and also that everything becomes very abstract rather than grounded in empirical work, in practical implications, and in everyday experience. (P45; Q4)

Related to such concerns about the practicality and accessibility of critical psychology work were calls for UKCP to address the 'right' issues:

I think that it would be a good idea for critical psychologists to engage with practical and applied questions and issues, demonstrating their criticality in action, rather than writing/talking about 'critical psychology' as a reified entity. (P61; Q5)

For participants like P61, then, articles such as this one - which is primarily focused upon UKCP *per se* – may be problematic. Nevertheless, it is not always readily apparent which issues UKCP should address, although P25 suggests some possibilities:

I'm not sure. At a political level we need to resist the cuts, ameliorate their effect as much as possible and link up with other campaigning groups to build a critical mass.   However, I suspect attention will, over the next few years, be directed to dealing with their effects. We can help in this battle by collating, conducting and disseminating relevant research (Danny Dorling's work on how the increase in homicide over the last 20 years was due to unemployment in the Thatcher era comes to mind). At a more parochial level, perhaps engage with practical issues more so the value of critical approaches is more obvious to others. Possibly build alliances with others with similar interests. (P25; Q5)

Methodological issues also garnered several comments, particularly in respect to qualitative methods being used without due regard for their philosophical commitments and so becoming just another tool in the box. Conversely, others warned of methodolatry and the temptation that UKCP might become as empirically obsessed as the mainstream. Nevertheless, against the dominance of DA (and perhaps in response to its limitations) as mentioned above, the adoption of participatory approaches and methodologies was welcomed and some explicitly noted how such ways of working are beneficial to communities and marginalised groups:

[T]he links with community and participatory approaches (eg PAR) is exciting (P25;Q3)

3.2. Power and Ideology

Another topic that several participants commented on involved power and ideology. The psy-complex, individualism, politics, economics, and so on were central to several people's responses. The following two extracts are exemplary:

> I particularly liked the 2010 annual review of critical psychology on psychologisation [..] To my mind the key points of interest in critical psychology are long term ones rather than merely contemporary. That is, the interest in power, the tendency to look for explanations in supra-individual, collective processes, the methodological scepticism, particularly where self-report questionnaires are concerned, the interest in language and discourse, the awareness of and willingness to incorporate insights from other disciplines, the philosophical orientation, the concern with discourse. (P53; Q3)

> Anything that feels like genuine insight - when there is more emphasis on the critical than the defence of a particular theoretical standpoint or nuance, and critical of injustice. Areas of particular interest are political economy (e.g. pharmaceutical industry & mental health). Genuine insight also, for me, means unsettling the ideologies, or taken-for-granted rules we follow, behind the things we do, and making them seem strange; consequently alternatives seem more possible, the present becomes, at times, absurd. Sometimes it's not explicitly 'critical psychologists' who do this well, e.g. Goffman, Foucault, Vonnegut. Still lots of work dedicated to the study of power asymmetries and their impacts on individuals/groups involved - subjective experience and quality of life. (P27; Q3)

These concerns were occasionally made concrete with reference to specific initiatives and policies. Positive psychology was mentioned negatively, and there was some discussion of the Improving Access to Psychological Therapies (IAPT) programme, a UK government initiative to deliver relatively short bursts of therapy to people identified as being unable to work because of depression and anxiety (thereby supposedly rendering them fit for work and so eligible only for lower levels of welfare support):

> The work that came out in reaction to the IAPT agenda was powerful, timely and much-needed. But psychology as a whole responded in a very fractured and disorganised way to IAPT, and what was probably needed (hindsight is easy) was a more unified and co-ordinated response from the BPS; some of the response should have been positive (in the sense that increasing access to psychology, in the context of a medically-driven model of distress, could be a good thing); some of it should have been strongly critical (RCTs are not the only kind of evidence; therapy is not the only kind of 'intervention'; CBT is not the only kind of therapy; individuals are not the only 'unit' of distress); and some of it should have been territorial (compared with what IAPT has provided - protocol-driven therapy delivered by therapists with a very narrow-range of 'expertise' - services led and delivered by applied psychologists have the potential to be much more flexible, progressive and empowering). The BPS was completely out-manouevered on that; I'm not sure whether the critical community could have done any more than it did on that point, at the time, but I wonder whether there's anything to be gained from an 'I told you so' now? (P9; Q3)

4.   Institutional Matters

UK critical psychological scholars work within institutions – often universities and colleges, but also hospitals, clinics and other settings. Consequently, institutional issues continuously inform, mediate and constrain their work: these issues were highlighted with respect to financial matters, the Research Excellence Framework (REF), and the drawing and assertion of disciplinary boundaries.

4.1. Financial Matters

Here, participants indexed concerns about UK higher education funding in general, and about research funding in particular. Several referred to the ongoing "financial crisis" as a serious threat to the future of UKCP, with deficit reduction being used as a tool to accelerate

neoliberal privatising and marketising initiatives (cf. Klein, 2008). Consequently, UKCP may be abrogated by limited funding opportunities and an institutional disregard for unfunded research, in a context where preference is given to areas of psychology presented as more 'scientific' - albeit that in many instances these merely constitute what Parker (2007) calls 'fake science'. Many expressed the view that funding cuts, combined with increasing tendencies to fund only those project driving 'technology' and 'industry' forward in very obvious ways, will impact negatively upon UKCP:

> The general trend towards a managerial, bureaucratizing, 'entrepreneurial', bottom-line driven way of running higher education in the UK. The academy is in danger of being co-opted en masse into a docile wing of government primarily oriented to the production of further docile subjects who will fulfil the needs of late capitalism. (P55; Q4)

However, smaller numbers of participants saw possible reason for hope in the workings of an academic market where 'scientific' psychology might be "overcrowded and competitive":

> In this era of the 'student experience', one potential line of defence is that critical psychology seems to be popular with students. Whether it remains popular as tuition fees are increased (which could be associated with a shift in student priorities) remains to be seen. (P67; Q2)

4.2. Research Excellence Framework (REF)

The REF and its likely consequences drew many comments, particularly with regard to its restrictive notion of what counts as good psychological research. Many associated with UKCP go outside of psychology—typically to sociology—to submit their research for assessment purposes. Coupled with this were comments about the growing dominance of cognitive neuroscience and the continuing narrowness of psychology. Some participants described how social psychology and other areas of psychology deemed less 'scientific'— particularly qualitative and critical work—are increasingly marginalised and unacceptable within many psychology departments. Consequently, there are fears that UKCP will eventually be 'squeezed out':

> I cannot see that external assessment exercises such as the REF will change or will be amenable to great change over the coming years and this I think will serve primarily to narrow the scope of what is considered valuable psychology and a worthwhile use of academics' time. Social and critical psychology will likely be among the first disciplines to feel that squeeze. (P31; Q6)

4.3. Disciplinary Boundaries

Many participants aired concerns about the British Psychological Society (BPS), particularly with regard to its control over the curriculum of accredited psychology degree programmes which seems to allow little space for critical psychological perspectives: consequently, many participants felt unable to teach critical approaches. Several solutions were offered by respondents, including a call for new textbooks covering the core BPS curriculum from a critical perspective; lobbying the BPS to get critical psychology onto the accredited curriculum; or, conversely, removing the BPS from any role in the design of psychology curricula.

Finally, many participants expressed concerns that university psychology departments are increasingly conservative and ever more dominated by cognitive and neuroscientific approaches. Some described how this means that social psychologists—critical or

otherwise—are increasingly found in other university departments, and that this feeds forward to deprive students of exposure to critical psychology:

> The purging of critical and social psychologists from mainstream psychology departments and the ongoing homogenisation of psychology as a discipline that is obsessed with neuroscience, and blind to the power and force of alternative critical modes of thinking is the main obstacle. […] The main problem is around teaching - if critical psychologists are not employed within Psychology departments, and their work not valued, published, cited etc, then students fail to engage with this work, and it's difficult to see how this tradition can build. (P16; Q4)

Thus, participants fear that psychology undergraduates are increasingly socialised into a natural science paradigm, from within which critical perspectives do not even appear to be part of psychology: consequently, students will fail to understand the reflexive nature of their own subject.

Suggestions were made to address these problems, including establishing a new independent discipline by breaking away from the BPS and forming an alternative body for critical psychology. Some respondents wanted to mount direct challenges to the discipline of psychology, both from within and from without:

> More fight and more direct engagement outside the academy. There is a dangerous tendency for critical psychologists to lose themselves in theory (and this includes me) and fail to engage beyond the immediacy of the personal worlds we inhabit. Beyond this there is a serious need to mobilise resistance to the dominance of the traditional with, for instance, direct challenges to the discipline from within and without. Whether this will make much difference I do not know but I worry that the move from the fights of yesteryear may signal a future for critical psychologists outside psychology within other disciplines or in some inter-disciplinary space rather than within the discipline that once formed the foundation of our identities. (P34; Q5)

Discussion

We situate our results with respect to a series of tensions: some that run through the data and others which, whilst less visible within it, co-constituted the material conditions of its production and analysis.

Tension 1: method

This tension surrounding method refers solely to the method we used in generating this analysis, the effects of which are continuous and must be taken into account when considering all of our findings. The data we have were not naturally occurring comments upon UKCP, and were not validated with respect to some external criterion or measure. They were occasioned by our questionnaire (itself occasioned by a host of other influences), and further occasioned by the specific prompts within it. Further, they were situated in the contexts of a particular medium (email) and particular settings (the various local circumstances within which participants chose to address the prompts). They were, moreover, situated temporally in a particular moment (March 2011). The data, then, were thoroughly contingent and continuously mediated. Their subsequent analysis into themes facilitated their treatment as honest self-report and allowed the mass of detail they contained to be reduced and rendered relatively accessible. However, this came at the cost of imposing a particular and partial theory of meaning, stripping away the influence of context, treating a single moment as a general indication, and losing much of the fine detail of commentary that the raw data contained. All of our findings, then, need to be situated within a tension between

how UKCP is being enacted and how our data and analysis may have constructed it at a specific moment.

Tension 2: theory

The role of theory in UKCP was spontaneously much discussed by our participants, and running through these discussions were various tensions to do with the amount, novelty and relevance of theory. Thus, some participants seem to feel that UKCP is overly preoccupied with theory, although most of these also explicitly recognised that theory is necessary. Some also acknowledged that it has a particular contribution to make to critical analyses, which necessarily invoke theory in order to deploy concepts that go beyond the taken-for-granted of the status quo. Even acknowledging this, though, many participants still expressed the view that theory sometimes predominates in ways that are unhelpful.

A specific tension was evident with respect to new theorising. Whilst no-one expressed the view that UKCP theorising should simply stand still, numerous participants were concerned that theorising moves at such a pace that they simply cannot keep up. Whilst for some this reflects their simultaneous commitment to other topics and disciplines, for others it seems to be a more general reflection of the demands placed upon them elsewhere in their working lives, demands which impede their ability to absorb and reflect upon new ideas. This tension may gain particular relevance in institutional contexts where it seems that UKCP scholars are sometimes expected to take on disproportionate amounts of teaching and administrative work (Frosh & Baraitser, 2007). The striking relevance of this tension suggests that innovative psychological work can be neutralised in ways that precede overt censorship, marginalisation or critique. There is no need to explicitly regulate what critical psychologists read, think and engage with if the pressing material constitution of the circumstances of our reading leads us to regulate it for ourselves.

A further set of tensions were apparent with respect to the relation between theory and practice. There is no absolute divide here: there is nothing so practical as a good theory (Lewin 1951, p.169), and we imagine that all of our participants recognise this. Nevertheless, there were frequent concerns that theory is often presented in ways that divorce it from practice, that its explication takes precedence over the establishment of its relevance, and that its critical import is therefore diluted because its ability to generate new perspectives upon enduring problems is not sufficiently clear.

These tensions clearly have multiple origins (and we return to this issue below). Here, we wish to acknowledge that these concerns are sometimes well-grounded and are not unique to UKCP. Everyone reading this article will be familiar with journal articles whose purpose seems to be primarily performative. Rather than inform, illuminate, educate, provoke, question, guide inspire, such papers serve primarily to demonstrate that the author is a competent scholar who has read some difficult material. Similarly, we have all encountered papers that, in purporting to present an analysis, seem designed mostly to illustrate a theory. Rather than use theory to extend understanding, foster new modes of engagement or develop innovative practice, such papers simply mobilise a phenomenon to argue for their pet theory's validity.

In an academic culture thoroughly imbued with the competitive logic of the capitalist market, where scholarship is frequently driven by the stark need to publish *something*, it is inevitable that some papers, sometimes, will have relatively little to say. But it is unfortunate that the

circulation of such papers may generate suspicion of and hostility toward innovative theorising.

Tension 3: incoherence and marginalisation

This tension was already apparent before we began our study, when we recognised the difficulty of defining critical psychology, and it spontaneously re-appears throughout the analysis. The diversity of UKCP was variously recognised as an inevitability, celebrated as a strength, and excoriated as a flaw that generates incoherence and contributes to its marginal status. This sometimes engendered further tensions with respect to responsibility for this state of affairs. Some participants suggested that critical psychologists should forget their differences and unite around a single (typically unspecified) perspective; others suggested that the marginalisation of UKCP is almost entirely self-produced.

To understand this tension we must first remind ourselves that intellectual activity does not follow its own trajectories, independent of the mediation, exchange and circulation of material interests, powers and resources (and their contingently associated discourses, affects and practices). From this perspective it is clear that critical psychology has indeed suffered by its exclusion from the core of the discipline. Critical psychologists understand that psychology is *already* laden with ethics, politics and values, already torn between the objective and the subjective and, therefore, riven by profound contradictions in its very conceptualisation (Brown & Stenner, 2009). But this understanding is anathema to psychologists who position their work as rigorous, objective, methodologically pure science, on a procedural par with physics. It is an inconvenient truth that simply cannot be accommodated by, and is quite literally unthinkable within, the empiricist bounds of the discipline. Hence core, high-impact ™ journals tend to reject critical psychological work because on the basis of the standards they promulgate it is indeed both deviant and deficient.

Second, this material practice of exclusion and policing feeds forward into the activities and choices of practitioners, where it both provides part of the intentional fabric of their doing and, simultaneously, encounters other influences. In psychology, not publishing in high-impact ™ journals is costly for one's livelihood and career: at best yielding a significantly higher than average teaching or administrative load, at worst leading to a teaching-only contract or even dismissal. Despite the undoubted successes achieved by some important figures associated with critical psychology, overall the evidence suggests that being located on the margins of a discipline is detrimental (Rhoten & Parker, 2004). The exclusion and censorship of the core journals is therefore sometimes matched and mirrored by the pre-emptive self-censoring of UKCP practitioners, who may choose to deliberately downplay the political aspects and consequences of their efforts for the very good reason that, ultimately, they prefer not to be homeless or unemployed.

Third, the different perspectives within UKCP are themselves contingently located within pre-personal matrices of interest, affect, discourse and resource, which together co-constitute the circumstances which promulgate sometimes vehement disagreement between advocates of incompatible positions. For those located differently, debates between them might well appear irrational and counter-productive. But for those who enact them, these debates simply reflect the actualities of their lived practice and the various interests (personal, career, institutional, disciplinary etc.) with which it is already imbued: in this sense, and notwithstanding any affective charge they enact, these debates are thoroughly rational. We agree with those participants who suggested that uniting UKCP around a single perspective

might yield benefits (and costs), especially at a moment when (political) unity is eminently desirable; but recognise that this will prove difficult without some (temporary, partial) resolution of these competing imperatives.

Tension 4: affects

It is no simple matter inferring affects from texts. Nevertheless, affective sensibilities permeated our data and contributed powerfully to the circumstances of both its production and its analysis: some attempt at their explication is therefore sensible.

Returning to our participants' comments about theory, for example, it seems that these comments frequently enact some impatience of or hostility toward theory—in respect of its novelty, and in respect of its seeming disconnect from other concerns. Rather than refute or critique this affective sensibility we seek to understand it with respect to the material contexts of UKCP and their associated bureaucratic imperatives and administrative structures. The sensibility visible in comments such as "The funding crunch is nailing us" (P21; Q4) illustrates how affects are not random, free-floating, and purely biological: instead, they continuously mediate the social and material circumstances of those subject to them. Impatience with and hostility toward theorising are not 'natural' responses to this kind of scholarship: they are the subjective, pre-reflective enactments of enforced bureaucratic imperatives as they structure the lives and work of critical psychologists.

The spending cuts and privatisation initiatives currently being imposed mean that many UK critical psychologists are now painfully aware that their careers and futures are less secure. In the new accelerated and extended market economy of psychology, all must compete as never before, all must become leaner, meaner, more focused, more ruthless, more determined. At the same time, all are distracted by increased teaching or practice demands, new administrative and bureaucratic procedures, and all are compelled to work harder, faster, longer, with fewer resources and for less reward. There are more students and clients, more demands from students and clients, more monitoring of students and clients, more monitoring of psychologists' activities, more forms to complete, goals to specify, targets to hit, deadlines to meet.

This relentless, accelerating flurry of proximal demands, imposed within a wider context of enforced precarity, necessarily promulgates multiple, shifting affects. Professional psychologists of all stripes exemplify what Berardi (2009) calls the 'cognitariat', the class of knowledge labourers, and their scholarship exemplifies the affective or immaterial labour which many now see as central to the global capitalist economy. Eden (2012) notes that analysts of immaterial labour differ with respect to the affects they foreground: Virno (1996) emphasises anxiety and fear, Berardi (2009) emphasises sadness, misery and loss, whilst Hardt & Negri (2005), more optimistically, emphasise love.

Regardless of these emphases, in the contingent affectivities of lived experience feelings of anxiety, fear, sadness, misery and love will necessarily get bound up with each other and with many other feelings besides. For example, anxiety about failure or its consequences (when—as inevitably happens—deadlines are missed, grants refused, papers rejected, tasks neglected) will sometimes get folded into shame, humiliation or embarrassment, sometimes into anger and impatience, at other times into sadness, misery or despair, and at yet others into defiance and resolve.

Myriad institutionalised structures and dynamics of feeling are thus produced, even in the most fleeting, most proximal moments of bureaucracy and administration. These structures and dynamics tie shifting, variable affects to objects and tasks that are at least seemingly manageable—as opposed to those which, for the most part, are simply too dreadful to contemplate. They trade small fears and miseries, small victories and celebrations, for larger ones, whilst simultaneously enrolling personal interests within institutional obligations. And it is precisely these socially and materially inculcated structures and dynamics of feeling, we suggest, that engender impatience and hostility toward theorising as one of their co-incidental aspects. Why it is specifically theory that attracts these hostile affects – rather than method, or practice – may be contingent upon symbolic influences such as the anti-intellectualism of UK culture and psychology's self-image as an empirical discipline with a strongly applied dimension, intertwined with material influences such as the relative values accorded to theory, method and practice by funding bodies and service commissioners.

In this regard, we take it as significant that most of our participants barely mentioned the pressures that they are undoubtedly currently experiencing. This omission is particularly striking given that these were *critical* psychologists, people we might reasonably expect to be both well-informed about current neoliberal initiatives and especially concerned about them. At the time we gathered our data, these initiatives (and the angry responses to them, from students and others) were being widely debated, but most of our participants did not mention them: why?

Whilst there are numerous reasons for such silences (Gill, 2009), on this occasion the wording of our questionnaire probably contributed since we did not ask specific questions about the current context. The normative requirements to present as competent, thoughtful, co-operative professionals, well equipped to deal with any demands placed upon them, were no doubt also relevant. But alongside and within this, we suspect that there are also affective tensions that rendered this wider context too massive to articulate, too difficult to address, too amorphous to understand - and yet, simultaneously, too painful and potentially overwhelming (cf. Sparkes, 2007) to ignore.

We conclude our reflections by highlighting these affective tensions because they show something of how the associations between neoliberal policies, market forces, institutional imperatives, bureaucratic and administrative regulations, constellations of resources, and situated material demands upon time and energy are being subjectively, psychologically enacted. Elsewhere, other affective responses include the hope and rage of the so-called Arab Spring, the determination of the 'Indignados' in Spain, the anger and resolve of the general strikes in Greece, and the widespread revulsion at corporate greed and exploitation being spectacularly crystallised by the direct actions of the US and UK 'Occupy' protesters and, here, the UK Uncut movement. In these turbulent times it may be that the collective excesses of love, trust and solidarity that already co-constitute the UKCP community will also engender practices that establish its relevance, and – in so doing - secure its future.

Appendix: Questionnaire prompts

1   Would you describe yourself as a critical psychologist?
2   How would you characterise the current state of critical psychology in the UK?
3   Of the recent developments in critical psychology, which do you feel are particularly important or interesting?
4   What obstacles can you see to the development of UK critical psychology?

5   What might help critical psychologists to overcome those obstacles?
6   In your opinion, what are the future prospects for UK critical psychology?
7   Is there anything else you would like to say about UK critical psychology?

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