means of producing psychosocial knowledge that has attracted a range of proponents. It combines research, intervention, and participation of the targeted population. This action-oriented research is particularly sensitive to the distance between researchers and participants (referred to as “epistemology of distance” by Fernández Christlieb, 1994, 1995 and as “cultural distance” by Moghaddam, Walker, & Harré, 2002). A greater role for research participants has led to the redefinition of concepts, processes, and practices in community and political psychology (Montero, 2003, 2004; Sánchez, 2004; Sawaia, 1999; Serrano-García, Bravo-Vick, Rosario-Collazo, & Gorrín-Peralta, 1998; Serrano-García & López-Sánchez, 1994).

A good example of the impact of liberation psychology is Ignacio Martín-Baró’s (1994a) unconventional use of public opinion polling during El Salvador’s Civil War. State discourse (the “Official Discourse”) falsely portrayed the Salvadoran people as eagerly supporting the government’s actions, such as condoning U.S. intervention, barring social democrats from the 1984 elections, and rejecting dialogue between the insurgents and the government. Martín-Baró used traditional survey methods to shape a counter-propaganda that reflected back to the Salvadoran people their true opinions about the civil war underway. In this manner, the public opinion poll was employed as a “de-ideologizing instrument” that brought lived experience into harmony with collective sentiment, and in doing so unmasked Official Discourse as propaganda.

A second example of empirical research in liberation psychology comes from work with slum neighborhoods in Caracas, Venezuela (Montero, 1994c). Using participatory action research methods, researchers performed needs assessments with 346 neighborhood residents. Discussions with residents revealed that problems, such as unreliable running water and free-flowing sewage, had become naturalized, or part of an acceptable norm. Community members perceived running water and sewage control as unmet needs, but they took no action to change their conditions. The study showed that only when unmet needs are brought into conscious awareness and carry strong emotional valence are people capable of acting to change the situation. The needs assessment process, a discursive act between community members and researchers, sets off a process of conscientization, whereby what was once considered acceptable is de-ideologized. Rather than impose their own value systems onto community members, researchers engaged in dialogue with members to bring to surface the community’s own needs. This type of research empowers a community to transform in ways that are more relevant and lasting than if change is directed by the research team.