

Introduction To Special Issue

Science and Community Psychology: Enhancing the Vitality of Community Research and Action

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We think that community psychology is at a crossroads. It has been successful, more successful than many would have imagined at Swampscott (some 40 years ago), in influencing not only clinical psychology but many areas on the social and behavioral side of psychology. On the other hand, as Kloos (this issue) notes, there may be grounds for concern about the future relevance and position of community psychology in public discourse about social problems and promotion of well-being. Much health related research and policy continues to overlook the importance of context in understanding human problems and resources for intervention. Despite analytic and conceptual innovations of the past 40 years, many exemplars of research promoted by social scientists tend to focus on standards for scientific methods that are incongruent with the complexities of community-based phenomena (e.g., Institute of Medicine's (Mrazek & Haggerty, 1994) view of prevention, views of randomized, controlled trials as the pre-eminent gold standard of quality research). All too often, the role of values in scientific inquiry has largely been neglected or subverted by researchers and policy makers (Rappaport, this issue). Over the past 40 years, community psychology has had something to say about these issues. Why have we not been heard to a greater extent? What will we say in the future?

This special issue has recent roots in several discussions about the role of science in community psychology. A 2002 symposium at the American Psychological Association, a 2003 symposium at the Biennial Conference of the Society for Community Research and Action, and in a special section of the American Journal of Community Psychology (June 2003) spotlighted the topic of science and community psychology. In these forums, Wandersman and colleagues have raised questions that have a cen-

tral bearing on community psychology as it looks forward to developing in the 21st century. For example, Wandersman (2003a) focused this discussion on consideration of three questions:

1. What is science?
2. What is the relationship between research and practice?
3. How does the goal of improving the quality of community life influence a science of community research and action?

Similarly, Sarason (2003), Price and Behrens (2003), Kelly (2003), Wandersman (2003b) addressed one or more of these questions in the previous special section.

In the current special issue, many distinguished authors deepen the intellectual development of community psychology and the integration of theory, research, values, and action around these areas of concern. The articles raise central issues for community psychology, but also for psychology and social science in general. We think that the contributions in this issue advance traditional issues of community psychology concern—context, the nature of science, and the relationship of research and practice. In addition, they heighten the understanding and the significance of continuing challenges: *What can science contribute to community psychology? How can community psychology articulate our perspectives on what constitutes science to a wider audience? What might be the contribution of an interdisciplinary field of community science?*

Linney (this issue) clusters the 10 articles in this issue around four themes: 1) strategies to bridge the gap between science and practice (e.g., Spoth & Geenberg; Sandler et al.; Chinman et al.; Julian); 2) redirection of attention with regard to the source of important ideas and questioning the directional

linearity of community psychology work (e.g., Miller & Shinn); 3) the selection of methods (e.g., Luke; Baker & Pistrang), and 4) questions of epistemology and the fulfillment of community psychology ideals and values (e.g., Tebes, Rappaport; Hess). The issue also includes two commentaries on the significance of these articles for community psychology, the prospects for creating an interdisciplinary specialty called “community science,” and the relevance of community psychology in the future (Kloos, Linney). Collectively, we believe that these articles provide tools for improving community-based research and practice. They also provide points of reflection for the field as it passes a milestone 40th anniversary, and challenges to others who engage in research and action in community settings.

Many people responded to the call for papers for this issue, far more than were possible to include. We are grateful that a well-qualified group of reviewers joined this project of examining the roles of science in community psychology and the roles of both in societal challenges. The reviewers’ comments not only improved the manuscripts but helped create a dialogue about these issues that you will see documented in these pages. The reviewers are listed below. We hope that you will find these articles of great interest and that you will contribute your intellectual capital to these highly significant issues for psychology and for society.

Rebecca Campbell
Paul Dokecki
James Emshoff
Diana Formoso
Leonard Jason
James Kelly
Gina Langhout
Murray Levine
Raymond Lorion
Eric Mankowski
Jeffrey Mayer
Robin L. Miller

Geoff Nelson
Douglas Perkins
Isaac Prilleltensky
Ron Prinz
Bruce Rapkin
Julian Rappaport
Susan Ryerson-Espino
Patrick Shrout
Manolya Tanyu
Edison J Trickett
Roderick Watts

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