

a common vision, help us select more valued activity and products, and encourage us to aspire to higher levels of excellence and attainment.

A central question in outlining such standards is how community psychology can be both a field of study *about* communities and a field *for* and *with* those communities that we study. Community psychology, like many academic disciplines, places a premium on conceptual and methodological sophistication, devaluing action components that can contribute to improvement and inform theory. We must match our rhetoric about prevention and empowerment with actions that empower people and that prevent the problems in living that we examine. Our challenge is to discover standards that optimize both rigor and relevance in the pursuit of understanding and action.

The purpose of this chapter, then, is to outline some issues in and standards for conducting both research and action with communities. These dimensions constitute an attempted synthesis of the insights of alternate models in traditional community psychology and the behavior-analytic paradigm of community research. Emerging standards for guiding community research and action efforts are outlined, and their implications for the field are noted.

## **INTEGRATING VARIOUS TRADITIONAL AND BEHAVIOR-ANALYTIC MODELS**

We should have no illusions about the ease of producing a synthesis of traditional and behavior-analytic models in community psychology. Ecological, organizational, developmental, and behavior-analytic models have differing world views. Traditional models in community psychology draw attention to the complexity of relations within and between social contexts and seem to suggest that many social problems are intractable (Bogat & Jason, in press). By contrast, the behavior-analytic paradigm focuses (seemingly exclusively) on the objective features of the proximal environment and holds that social problems can be analyzed and solved, although practitioners to acknowledge potential limitations.

The behavior-analytic paradigm views the conditions that people label as social problems as a function of an interaction between the behavior of people (in the territories, organizations, and subcultures that define the community of interest) and the physical and social environmental events (of the proximate and broader context). It would be assumed under this paradigm that welfare dependence and the related behavior of job seeking, for instance, are affected by a

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variety of events antecedent to looking for work, such as information about job openings, and of events consequent to job seeking, including the costs and benefits of working. These include broader structural variables (such as welfare regulations that function as disincentives to working by reducing benefits for health insurance and child care) and such proximate variables as knowledge of job opportunities and participation in social networks that link applicants with people who are able to provide decent jobs. Social interventions derived from that paradigm assume that what can occur depends on the physical structure of the environment, and that what will occur depends on behavior-environment relationships in the current context (see Morris, 1988, for a discussion of the fundamentally contextual nature of behavior analysis).

The behavior-analytic paradigm uses experimental designs to examine the effects of social interventions composed of modifiable variables (such as work incentives, job skills programs) on the behaviors (such as job seeking) and outcomes (such as employment and reduced welfare dependency) valued by client audiences.

I could recite a litany of possible limitations of the behavior-analytic paradigm. However, my colleagues and I have done this elsewhere (e.g., Fawcett, Mathews, & Fletcher, 1980), and each community psychologist may have his or her own cherished list. Our collective list of potential limitations might note interventions that may disrupt beneficial aspects of the context, procedural specifications that may limit flexibility, process and outcome goals that may violate norms of cultural relativity and respect for diversity, and a small-wins orientation that may draw attention away from other needed changes in the larger system that affect behavior and related community conditions.

I could also spell out an apologia for the behavior-analytic paradigm, which might take note of the value of focusing on real behavior of actual members of the community of interest (not analog responses of analog subjects), reliable measurement systems, preference for experimental designs that provide formative evaluations that can be used to improve interventions, effective and replicable social interventions, and attention to environmental features upon which action can be taken. The issue is not whether the list of limitations or of strengths is longer, but rather how the valued contributions of the behavior-analytic paradigm can be forged with other models to produce a stronger paradigm (and a related set of standards) for community research and action.

## **SOME KEY CONCEPTS IN COMMUNITY RESEARCH AND ACTION**

A number of important concepts in the practice of community research and action are suggested by a synthesis of traditional and behavior-analytic models. This section addresses several of them: the question of who the client is, the idea of collaboration, the idea of problem, questions about what levels at which to study, the idea of small wins, values of researchers, and the broader context of research and action.

The basic question—Who is the client?—invites consideration of the legitimacy of the endeavor's constituents. Those permitted to influence the goals for research and action through funding or other relationships constitute our (often implicit) choices of clients. Targets of research—those whose behavior would be understood or changed—should not be confused with clients, whose ends may be furthered by studies. The choice of clients—whether homeless people living on an urban street or the proprietors and residents of nearby stores and homes—provides insight into researchers' values and the prevailing assumptions about which community conditions are truly in the public interest and how societal benefits should be distributed.

The *idea of collaboration*, a major tradition of community psychology, calls for researchers to involve clients as partners in the consultation process (e.g., Kelly, 1986a). It leads researchers to avoid "colonial" relationships with research targets by sharing information and resources and by ensuring that an equitable distribution of benefits results from the research (Chavis, Stuckey, & Wandersman, 1983).

A central issue in collaborative relationships is framed in the question, What goals are valued by the client? This question is made complicated by the recognition that there is no such thing as *the poor*, *the disabled*, or *the tribe*, from whom what is valued by the community of interest can be reliably discerned. We have addressed this problem by using a "concerns report" process that combines quantitative and qualitative methods so as to involve groups of disadvantaged people in setting issue agendas and identifying acceptable alternatives for action (Fawcett, Seekins, Whang, Muiu, & Suarez de Balcazar, 1982). Concerns data from poverty families (Seekins & Fawcett, 1987), residents of low-income neighborhoods (Schriner & Fawcett, 1988), people with physical disabilities (Fawcett, Suarez de Balcazar, Whang-Ramos, Seekins, Bradford, & Mathews, 1988), or other client groups can shape collaborative relationships by helping to build a consensus about agendas for both research and action.

The *idea of problem*, used extensively in the behavior-analytic model, is another key concept in community research and action. When research is driven by issues defined by clients, rather than by those defined by the discipline, we have a greater chance of discovering variables that will contribute to actions that are acceptable to communities and outcomes that are valued by them.

A *problem* is a discrepancy between an actual and an ideal level of behavior and related community conditions that is labeled by communities of interest as important. Communities may label a situation as problematic because of one or more aspects of the behavior or condition, such as its frequency or duration. For example, frequency may be a problem if there is a discrepancy between actual and ideal numbers of low-income people registered to vote (Fawcett, Seekins, & Silber, 1988). For some clients, such as welfare rights organizers, the actual frequency may be too low. For others, including many incumbent elected officials, the condition may not be labeled as a problem, because avoiding an influx of new voters may be in their interest. Regardless of the kind of discrepancy,

however, its legitimacy depends on its being labeled as problematic by true clients—those persons primarily affected by the behavior and related conditions in the community.

Problems are not reflected in community members alone. They may be seen in mediators or service providers, the community structure or system, or some combination of these. The problem of unemployment, for example, may be identified both in community members who are out of work and in the community's employment opportunities that show a discrepancy between the number of available jobs paying a just wage and the number of people (whether skilled or unskilled in job finding) seeking such employment.

Problem statements need not be "victim blaming" (Ryan, 1971). Functional problem statements acknowledge discrepancies in dimensions valued by those affected: They do not convey the notion that people are "bags of deficits." Rather than deflecting attention away from system variables, such problem statements can give primacy to client issues rather than to concerns of the discipline.

The question of *what levels of problems should be studied and acted upon* relates to the distinction between first- and second-order changes. First-order changes are those within a context that itself remains unchanged; second-order changes are those in the basic systems in which wealth and power are distributed (Watzlawick, Weakland, & Fisch, 1974). Perhaps for pragmatic reasons, we have been slow to shift research and action to higher-order targets within the ecosystem, for example, from welfare clients to decision makers. When we do so, community research and action can be extended to new independent and dependent variables, such as the effects of voter-registration campaigns on resource allocations to poverty programs or the effects of divestment by international corporations on compliance with human rights practices.

The difficulty in effecting any change, however, especially second-order change, suggests the importance of another concept, the *strategy of seeking small wins* (Weick, 1984). Too often, community psychologists dismiss such controllable outcomes, justifying inaction with the assertion that modest changes fail to affect the broader context and system. Small wins are important, however, because they have detectable consequences that help maintain social action over the long haul. Although we should continue to challenge each other to effect systemic change, we must also discover how to detect and credit those modest approximations of goal attainment known as small wins.

These choices of goals, clients, and levels cannot be separated from a consideration of the *values of researcher-collaborators*. Those of us who are predisposed to the value of freedom, for instance, will be more likely to design social interventions to affect the number and range of choices available to consumers. By contrast, those who are particularly sensitive to injustice will be more likely to select such problems as inequality of opportunity or inequity in the distribution of resources among potential beneficiaries.

The kinds of community conditions that we value and our choices of targets

for research and action are, in turn, affected by the *broader context of research and action*. One feature of the broader context is the type of change model used (Rothman & Tropman, 1987). Models of change—whether prevention, empowerment, conflict organization, or community development—affect which discrepancies are targeted, the resources mobilized for action, and the timing of the intervention. Individual community change projects should be consistent with an overall model of social change.

A second important feature of the broader context is the likelihood of disapproval from powerful client audiences. Decision makers and power elites may decry social action components of research or even threaten the researchers and their institutions with retribution. My colleagues and I have described elsewhere separate incidents in which state legislators and local officials denounced research and action efforts directed toward them as “advocacy” or “lobbying” (Fawcett, Seekins, & Jason, 1987; Seekins, Maynard-Moody, & Fawcett, 1987). Yet it is possible to maintain scientific standards while generating and communicating knowledge that is likely to benefit clients (Coleman, 1972). Taking sides and bearing witness to the truth are necessary to transform research knowledge into community change (Price, 1988). However, this is usually done *despite* the broader context, which does little to support the tight coupling of community research and action.

A final aspect of the broader context to be considered is the control exerted by client audiences. Those audiences that provide clearer standards and more powerful consequences exert greater control over our research and action. Academic disciplines, such as psychology, promulgate standards suggesting that it is proper for researchers to determine what questions to ask, what measures and interventions to use, and whether the effects are significant. Until academic disciplines are held accountable to client audiences for their contributions to improvement as well as to understanding, we should expect continued emphasis on methodological rigor, rather than on societal benefit, and promulgation and enforced compliance with these standards through systems of graduate training and peer reviewing in professional journals. Professional journals in Community Psychology, with their emphasis on description rather than on action, place a higher value on whether theoretical relationships of interest to the discipline are demonstrated than on whether the community studied actually benefited from the research (Walsh, 1987b). More fundamentally, the view that problem solving is not actually science further delimits opportunities to contribute to society through currently conceived modes of community research and action.

## **EMERGING STANDARDS FOR COMMUNITY RESEARCH AND ACTION**

Articulating standards for community research and action could contribute to the solution of puzzles confronted in this endeavor. The 10 standards outlined in this

section reflect the complementary contributions of traditional and behavior-analytic paradigms and may be useful in charting a more functional course for the field.

### **Standards for Collaborative Relationships**

A proposed standard for establishing collaborative relationships between researchers and those who are studied attempts to characterize an important tradition in anthropology and ethnography (e.g., Agar, 1980), community organization (Rothman & Tropman, 1987), and community psychology (e.g., Chavis et al., 1983; Kelly, 1986a; and Serrano-García, 1984). This standard is consistent with the constitutional ideal of the consent of the governed (Adler, 1987)—an idea that calls for a reciprocal relationship between citizens (clients) and public servants (researchers).

*Standard 1. Community researchers should form collaborative relationships with the participants with whom they do research.* Several questions may help assess the quality of the collaboration: (a) To what extent is the “emic” (native or insiders’) view of the community and its goals represented in the research goals along with the researchers’ view? (b) To what degree is the community’s influence evident in the identification or choice of new research questions that are not suggested by either the discipline or the researchers’ past choices of topics? (c) Does the method system require that the researcher become sufficiently knowledgeable about local ways by participating in activities of local origin—not just research activities—before, during, and after data collection? (d) If an intervention is used, is it designed, adapted, and implemented in collaboration with participants? (e) To what extent is the work responsive to initiatives from the community—does it encourage such initiatives, and do community members describe the research and action goals as their own?

### **Standards for Research Goals and Methodology**

Emerging standards for research goals and methods reflect contributions from the methodology of quasi-experimentation (Cook & Campbell, 1979), applied behavioral research (Baer, Wolf, & Risley, 1968, 1987), social validation (Wolf, 1978), and the values and traditions of community psychology (e.g., Heller, Price, Reinhartz, Riger, & Wandersman, 1984; Rappaport, 1977).

*Standard 2. Descriptive community research should provide information about relationships between environmental events, behaviors presumed relevant to community functioning, and related outcomes valued by communities.* Some key questions help evaluate the contribution of descriptive research: (a) To what degree are the strengths and problems of people in communities given priority over questions of concern merely to the discipline? (b) How adequately does the research contribute to our understanding of naturally occurring aspects of the setting and of participants’ behavior over time? (c) Does the research contribute knowledge about what naturally occurring changes in behavior or environmental

events, such as development of competence or changes in laws, bring about and maintain changes in the behavior and the related community conditions identified as problems? (d) To what extent does the research document the full variety of functional arrangements that enable or facilitate attainment of individual and community goals?

*Standard 3. Experimental community research should provide information on the effects of modifiable and sustainable environmental events on behaviors and outcomes of interest, on the generality and maintenance of the effects, and on the social importance and appropriateness of the research and action.* Using within- and between-group designs and appropriate analytical methods, experimental research should yield valid and reliable answers to these questions: (a) Is there evidence of internal validity—that is, does the experimental design rule out other plausible explanations of the effects? (To what extent does the independent variable produce changes in the behaviors and processes labeled as the problem or in the outcomes, such as productivity or incidence of disease, that are labeled as the problem?) (b) Is there “subject generality?” (To what degree do the effects generalize across participants?) (c) Is there stimulus generalization or setting generality? (To what extent do the effects generalize across conditions, settings, or stimulus situations?) (d) Is there “maintenance” of effects? (Over what duration are the effects sustained?) (e) Is there evidence of response generalization? (That is, are other behaviors and outcomes also affected?) (To what degree do the effects generalize to other important behaviors and outcomes?) (f) Is there social validity? (To what extent are the goals and target behaviors socially important from the perspective of clients? Are the procedures used in this social intervention acceptable to participants? Are the effects of the intervention socially significant according to clients? Do the effects lead people to say that the problem is solved or the goal is attained?) (g) Are there side effects? (What are the unintended consequences, both positive and negative, of the intervention suggested by follow-up observations of the setting and by interviews with participants?)

*Standard 4. The chosen setting, participants, and research measures should be appropriate to the community problem under investigation.* To judge the validity of settings, participants, and measures, the following questions are useful: (a) Are the participants studied in their own natural settings, and to what extent are the normal, valued features of the context undisturbed as a result of the research? (b) If the goal of the research is to solve a problem, do the chosen participants and setting actually experience the problem at a level that is socially important? (They should not be chosen for the convenience of the investigators.) (c) Is there sufficient evidence that the participants in the setting to be observed are the ones in whom the problem actually resides, or is the locus of the problem at a different level? (Perhaps the problem is with administrators, service providers, or decision makers, and not with the targets, who are insufficiently empowered to avoid the research.) (d) If the problem is with a behavior or community condition, is that condition measured, and not a rating, verbal statement, or some

other proxy for the issue of interest? (e) If questionnaires are used, are additional direct measures of the behavior and conditions related to the problem also taken, to avoid exclusive reliance on proxy measures?

*Standard 5. The measurement of dependent variables must be replicable by typically trained readers of community research reports, and chosen measures should attempt to capture the dynamic and transactional nature of the interaction between behavior and the environment.* Evaluative questions for judging the reliability and sensitivity of the measurement system include: (a) To what extent can other researchers implement the behavioral observation systems (i.e., behavioral definitions, observer scoring instructions), rating scales, and other assessment instruments used to collect dependent measures? (b) Can the observers, scoring simultaneously but independently, produce satisfactorily high levels of interobserver agreement using the measurement system? (c) In addition to measures of the behavior of people in communities, does the research include measures of events in the environment? (d) Does the research provide measures of transactions between people's behavior and events in the environment? (Measures of mutual aid, for example, would presumably indicate both disclosures of need and others' provision of aid.) (e) To what degree are the measures sensitive to variations in the phenomena over time, in ways such as those provided by time series designs and longitudinal studies? (f) Do the measures convey the influence of behavior on environments as well as the influence of environmental events on behavior? (Evaluations of empowerment efforts, for example, would perhaps show evidence that the intervention affected the participants' behavior and that participants, in turn, effected changes in specific features of their environment.) (g) Are qualitative data, such as those gathered in ethnographic or structured interviews, used to complement knowledge gained through quantitative research?

### **Standards for Intervention and Dissemination**

Standards for community intervention and dissemination of social innovations are drawn from the literatures on behavioral principles and procedures (e.g., Zeiler, 1978) and strategies for designing and disseminating social interventions (e.g., Seekins & Fawcett, 1984).

*Standard 6. Community interventions should be replicable by typically trained implementors and sustainable with local resources.* Questions helpful in evaluating social interventions include: (a) To what extent can other community researchers and typical collaborators implement the procedures (i.e., instructions, prompts, reinforcement, environmental design changes) that make up the social intervention? (b) To what degree are the effects on the behaviors and outcomes of interest replicable in different communities, including those with similar goals but different resources and different participant and setting characteristics? (c) Does the social intervention rely sufficiently on local resources (i.e., people, setting features, money, equipment, and events), and is the intervention maintained by the local community? (d) To what extent do the effects of the social intervention continue after the researchers' departure?





blaming of relatively marginal and unempowered people for their problems in living? (e) To what extent are the results communicated openly, even when at least some of the clients, researchers, collaborators, purchasers, or decision makers may not benefit from open communication? (See Price, 1988, for a consideration of some of the serious dilemmas of truth-telling.) (f) Does communication also flow from relevant audiences to researchers, providing the clients' perspectives on what was important about the research and action?

*Standard 10. Community research and action projects should contribute to understanding and change, especially that which fosters prevention of problems in living and empowerment of people of marginal status.* Questions useful in assessing the contribution to community change include the following: (a) Who are the clients? How much, and in what ways, does each benefit from the research and action? (b) In particular, to what extent are the lives of clients of relatively marginal and disempowered status improved by the research and action? (c) How adequately does the social intervention increase the number of people, events, and settings available to facilitate attainment of community goals? (d) To what degree does the intervention enhance the capacities of existing resources to meet individual and group goals? (e) To what extent are the small wins or improvements consistent with a larger plan or model for social change?

## **CLOSING COMMENTARY**

These 10 standards, emerging from a synthesis of research paradigms, identify promising ideals for the field. As modified to face a changing array of puzzles, they suggest guidelines for planning and evaluating our work. Should these (or other) standards be adopted, perhaps new or modified arrangements will be necessary to facilitate their attainment. These may include new undergraduate training programs in community research and action, adjustments in existing graduate training and peer-reviewing criteria, new journals devoted to the integration of research and action, and revised journal policies setting a percentage of journal space for such work. Other promising approaches include creating interdisciplinary institutes for change agents, expanding the labor market for practitioners of the model, and establishing and enhancing rewards and recognition for community research and action (see Keys, 1988, for a discussion of strategies for supporting community research in the public interest).

It is in the fusion of research and action that community psychology can best fulfill its dream. We can achieve distinction by serving as a model of science in the public interest. As we attempt to live up to these ideals, we might be guided by Martin Luther King's (1968) call for leaders in service to higher values:

Yes, if you want to say that I was a drum major, say that I was a drum major for justice; say that I was a drum major for peace; I was a drum major for righteousness. And all of the other shallow things will not matter.

. . . I just want to be there in love and in justice and in truth and in commitment to others, so that we can make of this old world a new world.

Perhaps future historians will use similar values and standards to judge community psychology's contributions to understanding and improvement. Should they do so, and should the field measure up, this old world will be a little better off for our presence.

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