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Re-Examining the Definition of Community Psychology Practice

David A. Julian, Tom Wolff, Brian Bishop, Kyrrah Brown,
José Ornelas¹, Megan Renner and Victoria Scott

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Author Biographies: *David A. Julian*, is a Program Director and a Translational Research Scientist at the Center on Education and Training for Employment (CETE) in the College of Education and Human Ecology at the Ohio State University.

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Corresponding Author: David A. Julian, Center on Education and Training for Employment, 1900 Kenny Road, Columbus, OH 43210. Email: julian.3@osu.edu

¹ APPsyCI/ISPA – Instituto Universitário, Lisboa – Portugal

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Abstract

Throughout the early and mid-2000s, Community Psychology practitioners worked with the Society for Community Research and Action (SCRA) Executive Committee (EC) to revisit relevant organizational goals and objectives. These conversations resulted in the recognition of the need to more fully operationalize the “action” component of SCRA. Ultimately, a draft statement was brought to the first International Community Psychology Conference in Puerto Rico. Through a highly participative process, a group of conference attendees emerged with a definition of community psychology practice:

The aim of community psychology practice is to strengthen the capacity of communities to meet the needs of constituents and help them to realize their dreams in order to promote well-being, social justice, economic equity and self-determination through systems, organizational and/or individual change.

Since the definition was developed over a decade ago, much has changed. This special issue was conceived as a means for the field to consider the definition of Community Psychology practice in light of these and other advances in our thinking. The special issue editorial team invites the field to ponder proposed changes and new definitions of community psychology practice.

Throughout the early and mid-2000s, Community Psychology practitioners worked with the Society for Community Research and Action (SCRA) Executive Committee (EC) to revisit relevant organizational goals and objectives. These conversations resulted in the recognition of the need to more fully operationalize the “action” component of SCRA. A few years later the Community Psychology Practice Interest Group (which later became the Community Psychology Practice Council or CPPC) organized the first day-long retreat focused on Community Psychology Practice. This session drew over 100 academics, practitioners, and planted the seeds for the beginning of the *Global Journal of Community Psychology Practice (GJCPP)* and resulted in the formation of a group convened to define competencies associated with Community Psychology practice.

Ultimately, a draft statement was brought to the first International Community Psychology Conference in Puerto Rico. Through a highly participative process, a group of conference attendees emerged with a definition of community psychology practice (Julian, 2006, p.68):

The aim of community psychology practice is to strengthen the capacity of communities to meet the needs of constituents and help them to realize their dreams in order to promote well-being, social justice, economic equity and self-determination through systems, organizational and/or individual change.

Since the definition was developed 13 years ago, much has changed. The CPPC, in collaboration with the Council on Education (CoE), developed and published the Competencies for Community Psychology

practice inspiring much reflection from the field. As the editorial team sees it, five key concepts have emerged or re-emerged that might have some bearing on our efforts to revisit the original definition of community psychology practice and associated competencies:

1. Continued exploration of community psychology practice competencies and methodologies
2. Reinvigoration of the attention to systems and policy change especially as it relates to public health and systemic racism
3. Reaffirmation of social justice and health promotion values including efforts to address structural racism and decolonization
4. Developments in theoretical perspectives related to community engagement and community power
5. Elaboration of the science to practice process, including efforts to define "evidence" as it relates to practice

This special issue was conceived as a means for the field to consider the definition of Community Psychology practice in light of these and other advances in our thinking. The special issue consists of six papers. Robinson describes the potential of Community Psychology practice and Community Psychology, more generally, to address a vast array of contemporary issues. This narrative calls us to action and forces us to confront the very values that define our field. Ciafola and Watkins provide an overarching view of the colonial context in which Community Psychology practitioners operate the world over. Ciafola and Watkins also point to the challenges our colonial history present to community psychologists intent on meaningful community change. Fernandez and Silva pick up on this point and provide clear examples of how community psychologists operate vis-à-vis the constituencies they serve. Svartman, Filho, Massoal, Cordiero and de Oliveira dos Santos

extend these perspectives and illustrate a series of interventions in specific communities in Brazil. Evans is firm in his belief that practice must ultimately address social and racial justice. Finally, Jimenez, Mingo, Viola, Olsen and Balthazar reinforce the perspectives presented by other authors and argue for a continuum of practice that ranges from basic scientific discovery to action based on indigenous knowledge. The special issue completed by Wolff and Henderson's "call to action."

The special issue editorial team invites the field to ponder proposed changes and new definitions of community psychology practice. Potential changes center on a long list of prominent themes. From the editorial team's perspective, three of these themes deserve special consideration. The first theme focuses on action. Action, in the context of Community Psychology practice, clearly centers on the production of concrete outcomes resulting in efforts to enhance health and wellbeing and address other critical issues such as racism and colonialism. The second theme focuses on engagement of relevant communities in efforts to address local issues. This theme is addressed by each of the special issue authors and is of critical importance. Finally, each of the papers in the special issue focuses considerable attention on the values that guide our field. Some critical values include an emphasis on social and racial justice, equity and acknowledging and remediating long-standing colonial practices at all levels of society. It would appear new definitions of Community Psychology practice are in the offing. However, as Robinson suggests, it is imperative that the field examine potential options that result in a practice that positions human dignity, civil society, civic discourse, the salience of collective efficacy and community wellbeing at the heart of Community Psychology.

References

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