

## Developing Alliances: Commentary on Lobbying for Endorsement of Community Psychology in Australia

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This article provides a good example of community psychology in action, mobilizing resources, organizing constituents, utilizing allies and partners, and working political systems to effect change (or, more specifically, to prevent an adverse change). Knowing your enemy, using social networks, tailoring your message to the values of your audience, and working to “convince the organ grinder, rather than the monkey” are all important aspects of good community change efforts.

Yet, the fact that there is a need to continually fight battles to convince policy makers and educational administrators of the “difference, specialness and contributions of community psychology” suggests that we are not collectively doing the work needed to advance the discipline and maximize our impact on the communities where we work. Because most of us identify as psychologists, we tend to rely, perhaps too heavily, on “psychology” to “endorse” us or otherwise recognize our value. Because mainstream psychology, at least in the United States, but I suspect elsewhere, tends to act as if clinical psychology IS psychology, we have to (1) continuously remind mainstream psychology (in the US, that means the American Psychological Association; APA) that there are other areas of study, research and practice in psychology; and (2) develop stronger alliances with other professions and organizations that have similar goals, values and methods. While much of mainstream psychology seems to be dominated by a focus on narrow “guild” issues (e.g., licensure, reimbursement), I believe that the popularity of psychology as a discipline/field of study and the resources of mainstream psychology are assets we should capitalize on, despite the disconnect in values and practice.

Dealing with mainstream psychology is always going to feel like an uphill battle, given the relative numbers of clinical versus community psychologists and the degree to which clinicians are willing to bankroll mainstream psychology to further their financial interests. However, major psychological organizations (e.g., APA, APS) provide important information about psychology and specializations within psychology, but we need to ensure that the information provided is accurate. For example, the web page where APA describes

the Society for Community Research and Action, (SCRA) the community psychology division, is out of date and minimally informative; on the APS web page for the College of Community Psychologists, there is a broken link to “Learn more about what community psychologists do” (as of 5/28/2012). We need to better use the resources that mainstream psychology provides to help people (other psychologists and others who are using the web sites to learn about psychology) understand what community psychologists do. SCRA has recently begun efforts to place more community psychologists on committees, task forces, and other groups within APA. We hope that this will increase our visibility and our influence, but we have yet to make significant inroads. In sum, we need to become a greater presence within mainstream psychology, despite our relatively small numbers.

The authors point out that community psychology is formalized in Australia “to a greater degree than anywhere else in the world”, existing as a college within APS and endorsed within the country’s licensing system. Yet, “the people with whom we like to think we have most in common – community development workers, social planners, indigenous mental health workers, political activists...” have limited interactions with and understanding of community psychology. Unfortunately, this seems to be all too common in other places as well. For example, when attending meetings of the Community Campus Partnerships for Health (CCPH), where there is a strong emphasis on community based participatory research and social justice, I’ve seen only a handful of community psychologists. Similarly, at the international Living Knowledge Conferences, supporting community-based research that empowers people in local communities, I’ve encountered only one other community psychologist; furthermore, community psychologists seem to have no knowledge of this organization. The authors point to the need for “a more transformative, outward engagement” for the discipline; connecting with organizational partners who share our interests and goals, and who, ultimately, will work with us to effect community change and value what we bring to the table. We need to do have better visibility among these types of groups.

Critical to our partnering with other organizations is to engage them *as community psychologists*. I suspect that, when community psychologists attend meetings of program evaluators, they often become program evaluators while there, rather than community psychologists who conduct program evaluation. We need to help our partners better understand how “what we do” is a function of our disciplinary training, and to clearly label what we do as part of the practice of community psychology (for example, a group of community psychologists have created a “community psychology interest group” within the American Evaluation Association, to highlight how training in community psychology contributes to the practice of program evaluation and evaluative research). This will then help advance the discipline and potentially reduce the cyclical need for self-

justification. If our partners value us *as community psychologists* (not just as good, competent individuals), this will help them to value the discipline and therefore support community psychology as a discipline. The effort needs to be made at multiple levels, targeting individuals from other disciplines (or subdisciplines of psychology); programs that train community psychologists; and organizations such as SCRA or the APS College of Community Psychologists. We need to make clear and concerted efforts to help others understand “what we do”, which is part of who we are as community psychologists. To the extent that our partners value community psychology and community psychologists, we could then expect that they would help promote the discipline when under threat.