From the President

John Moritsugu
moritsjn@plu.edu
Pacific Lutheran University

Moving into our fiftieth year following Swampscott, we address the questions of where we are and where we want to go. Strategic planning for the Society is one of the activities which occupy us at this time. As we deal with this process, I am reminded of the transactional nature of development and maturation. We certainly have grown and matured as an organization. Yet there are the new challenges to face given our changing contexts societally and in our science and profession. We confront new developmental tasks and recognize that our world has changed as well. Similar to Sameroff’s (2010) transactional developmental model, where the individual and the individual’s environment influence each other, the society and the society’s present day contexts influence each other. We are aware of the need for considering these transactions and the society’s needs to be better aware of where it stands at present and where it needs to go.

I am reminded of the recent work on wisdom during these times. Working with both qualitative and quantitative methodologies, researchers believe they have distilled qualities which are found in wise decisions. Among these qualities are the inclusion and consideration of multiple perspectives, a recognition of the inevitability of change, an understanding of more than one possible course of outcomes, and accepting the limits of what we know and of the uncertainty of the future (Grossman, Na, Varnum, Kitayama, & Nisbett, 2013). Such qualities of consideration are emblematic to a community psychology (SCRA Vision, Mission and Principles). In the coming year we will be engaged in following through on this strategic planning and efforts to implement the outcomes of this planning.

You may start to see changes coming in the months ahead, but the changes have been in the organization’s planning and process for some time and are the outcome of transactional developmental progression. As to the specifics, they are yet to be finally determined. It is an exciting time to be here as President.

References


From the Editors

Daniel Cooper
and Tiffany McDowell
Adler University, Chicago

Winter Greetings! We are excited to introduce ourselves as the new editors of The Community Psychologist. We would like to thank Gregor Sarkisian and Sylvie Taylor for their excellence over the past several years as co-editors, and for working hard to ensure a smooth transition for us. We have some big shoes to fill and couldn’t be more grateful for all
the hard work they’ve done to keep TCP so central to SCRA and the field of community psychology. This is an exciting time for SCRA as it begins implementing new strategic initiatives. We have heard a lot of exciting ideas from membership and TCP readers about the future direction of the publication. We look forward to maintaining the legacy of TCP while also instituting new features that will help it evolve in exciting new ways. Stay tuned!

Dan and Tiffany

The Community Practitioner
Edited by Olya Glantsman

Imagining the Future of CP Practice: Update on the Visioning Session at the 2015 Biennial
Written by Nicole Freund
(nmfreund@gmail.com)

While early summer in Lowell, Massachusetts was a little on the cool side during the 2015 SCRA Biennial this past June, one room was hot with energy and ideas. The SCRA Practice Council sponsored a two-part 2.5-hour session designed to celebrate the 50th anniversary of community psychology and to generate ideas for guiding SCRA members into the future. This visioning session was inspired by past success in tapping the human capital of SCRA members to launch great concepts and contribute to the field of community psychology. Celebrating how far community psychology has come set the stage for looking to the future and trying to plan for positive, if challenging, change.

In an effort to strike the right balance between wildly open brainstorming and focused action planning, the moderators structured the discussion around specific areas of interest regarding the future vision for SCRA and community psychology practice.

These areas of interest were generated through both practice council discussions and an open invitation to the entire SCRA membership to offer thoughts about the burning issues facing the field of community psychology. From these inputs, there were ultimately seven interest areas identified:

1. Community Spaces (physical and virtual public spaces),
2. Dissemination (bridging the gap between research and practice),
3. Education (all levels of training, academic and community),
4. Intersectoral Partnerships (connections to other fields, organizational and interpersonal),
5. Policy and Systems Change (large scale change),
6. SCRA as an Organization (member engagement), and
7. Visibility (awareness of community psychology).

In addition to the seven specific
areas, an eighth area was set aside for “Open Space,” which allowed for very broad, undirected visions for the future.

The session took place in a multi-level room, and members came and filled the space with strong voice and positive energy. As Biennial attendees came in, they self-selected to the interest area that mattered most to them. Through this process, some of the interest areas combined so that, ultimately, discussions centered on five areas: 1) Community Spaces and Education, 2) Dissemination, 3) Intersectoral Partnerships, 4) Policy and Systems Change, and 5) SCRA as an Organization and Visibility. Within the context of each interest area (or combined areas), the groups were first tasked with finishing this question: “If we really got it right, in 2065…” The remainder of the first session was spent fleshing out these ideas. After a short intermission when some visioners had to depart and the tables acquired some new participants, action planning took place to try to prioritize and set next steps for the envisioned ideas. Over the course of the three hours, more than 30 SCRA members contributed to the session and plotted a course for the future of SCRA and community psychology.

Some of the ideas that emerged from the discussions as priorities included:

- Finding ways for practitioners to access some of the same research resources and literature that academics have at their fingertips,
- Creating a SCRA endorsement for practitioners so that students at various levels of education know which internship opportunities are good ones,
- Developing target policy topics around which to begin gathering tools and research resources, and
- Getting practitioners to identify as community psychologists and be more vocal about community program successes.

Within these ideas, participants identified the assets and groups that currently exist to bring these goals to fruition. Discussions included identifying ways to work with other councils and committees and finding the common ground to pursue goals. The SCRA as an Organization/Visibility group, in particular, had a lot of overlap with the current work of the Executive Committee in their strategic planning efforts. Several EC members were present at this discussion, which helped both to guide the vision and to create new ideas for those who also serve on the strategic planning committee to take back for that work. The end results of this session were more compelling ideas and concepts than there are column inches to report them. The Practice Council would like to thank sincerely
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AGING
The Aging Interest Group focuses on the productive role of aging in the community and the prevention of mental health problems in the elderly.

Chair:
Andrew Hostetler,
andrew_hostetler@umid.edu

CHILDREN, YOUTH & FAMILIES
The Children, Youth & Families Interest Group facilitates the interests of child and adolescent development in high risk contexts, especially the effect of urban poverty and community structures on child and family development.

Chair:
Michelle Ronayne,
michelle.ronayne@gmail.com

COMMUNITY ACTION
The Community Action Interest Group explores the roles and contributions of people working in applied community psychology settings.

Co-Chairs:
Bradley Olson,
broadly.olson@uml.edu
Susan Torres-Harding,
storresharding@roseveelt.edu

COMMUNITY HEALTH
The Community Health Interest Group focuses on health promotion, disease prevention, and health care service delivery issues as they relate to the community.

Co-Venches:
Venencia M. Batá-Ambru,
criollav@hotmail.com
Darcy Freedman, ala@frcu.ca
David Lounsberry,
david.lounsberry@einstein.yu.edu

DISABILITIES
The Disabilities Interest Group promotes understanding of the depth and diversity of disabilities issues in the community that are ready for research and action, and influences community psychologists’ involvement in policy and practices that enhance self determination, personal choice, and full inclusion in the community for people with disabilities.

Co-Chairs:
Naoko Yura Yasui,
nakoyurayasui@gmail.com
Erin Stack, erinstock@gmail.com

EARLY CAREER
The ECG focuses on developing and enhancing the skills of early career community psychologists (less than seven years of experience post terminal degree) by creating opportunities for mentorship, networking, and leadership within the SCRA organization.

Co-Chairs:
Ashlee Lion,
loia@oldwestbury.edu
Ben Graham,
BenjaminGraham@gmail.com

ENVIRONMENT & JUSTICE
The Environment & Justice Interest Group is focused on research and action related to global climate change and environmental degradation. With a focus on environmental justice, particularly how environmental change affects and often perpetuates social inequality, this group explores the role community psychology can and should play in understanding these urgent changes to our ecology.

Co-Chairs:
Lena Bain, lenabain8@gmail.com
Allison Early, allisonearly@gmail.com

INDIGENOUS
The Indigenous Interest Group is hosted by the Australian, New Zealand and Pacific branch of the Society for Community Research and Action. The aims of this group are intertwined. Firstly, it wants to support SCRA members who are conducting Indigenous research by providing a forum for the exchange of ideas, literature and experience. This will assist the Group’s more specific focus which is to utilize our combined resources more effectively to conduct strength-based and praxis towards raising public awareness of the plight of indigenous people and addressing the social justice issues they face in oppressive dominant societies.

LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL, & TRANSGENDER (LGBT)
The LGBT Interest Group increases awareness of the need for community research and action related to issues that impact LGBT people, and serves as a mechanism for communication, collaboration, and in supporting and connecting community psychologists who are interested in research and policy related to LGBT people and communities, and/or who identify as LGBT.

Co-Chairs:
debbie.oejeda@gmail.com
Christopher Jenne,
cjonne@marymountcaifornia.edu

ORGANIZATION STUDIES
The Organization Studies Interest Group is a community of scholars who are interested in community psychology themes (e.g., empowerment, ecological analysis, prevention, sense of community) in organizational contexts, and in conducting organization studies concepts, methods, models, and theories into community psychology.

Co-Chairs:
Kimberly Boss,
kimberly.b.boss@vandebilt.edu
Neil Boyd, neil.boyd@bucknell.edu

PREVENTION & PROMOTION
The Prevention & Promotion Interest Group seeks to enhance development and dissemination of prevention and promotion research, foster active dialogue about critical conceptual and methodological action and implementation issues, and promote rapid dissemination and discussion of new developments and findings in the field.

Chair:
Toshi Sasaos, tssaoa@gmail.com
Jessica Norman,
jessicaronman@gmail.com

RURAL
The Rural Interest Group is devoted to highlighting issues of the rural environment that are important in psychological research, service, and teaching.

Chair:
Susana Helm,
helms@dop.hawaii.edu

SCHOOL INTERVENTION
The School Intervention Interest Group addresses themes, methods, knowledge gaps, and science-based factors pertaining to prevention and health promotion in school.

Co-Chairs:
Melissa Maras,
marasme@missouri.edu
Jori W. Splett, spletj@unl.nebraska.edu

SELF-HELP/MUTUAL SUPPORT
The Self-Help/Mutual Support Interest Group is an international organization of researchers, self-help leaders, and policy makers that promotes research and action related to self-help groups and organizations.

Chair:
Greg Townley, gtownley@pdx.edu

TRANSFORMATIVE CHANGE IN COMMUNITY MENTAL HEALTH
The vision of the Transformative Change in Community Mental Health Interest Group is to strive to establish an alternative paradigm that focuses the promotion of mental health based in community settings based upon the values of citizenship, recovery, empowerment, inclusion, and social justice. This includes the articulation of models, the identification of promising practices, and research to demonstrate the value of this alternative paradigm and its exemplars.

Chair:
Geoffrey Nelson,
geoff@uw.edu

*Last updated 01/01/16
planned initiatives. The power to engage in change for an ever better future is in everyone’s hands. To those who began the journey in June and to those who carry these ideas into the future, many thanks.

**Education Connection**  
*Edited by Carie Forden*

This issue’s column features a discussion of a participatory action research project to investigate student experiences in a community-based learning program. It describes some of the advantages and challenges of participatory research with undergraduates, and provides us with a nice example of how community psychology can be practiced on our own college campuses.

If you have an idea for a future Education Connection column, please contact the editor, Carie Forden (cforden@aucegypt.edu)!

**The Community Narrative Research Project:**  
Undergraduate students examining their own and others’ experiences of civic engagement over time  
*Written by Natasha Main, Chigozie Emelue, Eann Malabanan, Adele Malpert, Shannon Hoffman, Marsha Walton, and Elizabeth Thomas, Rhodes College*

The integration of action and research is central to the field of community psychology, and collaborative, participatory approaches to research are highly valued (Kloos et al., 2012). Yet the possibilities for undergraduate students to contribute to action research in higher educational institutions—our own community contexts of teaching and learning—have not been fully explored in community psychology.

In the university context, civic engagement and research with undergraduate students are understood as “high impact” practices that increase student retention and engagement in college. They are increasingly promoted across disciplines and institutional contexts (Kuh, 2008). How can we bring these high impact practices together in action research with undergraduate students in community psychology? What do civic engagement and research look like when practiced together? And how are they experienced by undergraduate researchers?

The Community Narrative Research Project (CNRP) team is taking up these questions as we examine undergraduate student experiences of civic engagement and community-based learning over time. In this brief article, we describe our efforts to establish collaborative learning and shared inquiry. We affirm the value of participatory research for undergraduates as we continue to learn about how students make meaning of their experiences and how these experiences contribute to student identity, development, and learning outcomes. We acknowledge that we still have much to learn about the conditions under which community partners are more likely to benefit from collaboration with undergraduate research teams.

Our research team represents a collaboration that has developed over the last three years between the Psychology and Urban Studies departments and the Bonner Program at Rhodes College, a small, urban liberal arts college in Memphis, Tennessee that holds
civic engagement as a core value in its undergraduate experience. The research team includes faculty (Elizabeth Thomas, a community psychologist, and Marsha Walton, a developmental psychologist), undergraduate psychology research students (Adele Malpert and Eann Malabanan), Bonner staff (Shannon Hoffman), and undergraduate Bonner Scholars (Chigozie Emelue and Natasha Main).

At the center of the project is the collection and analysis of narratives written by student participants in the Bonner Program at Rhodes College over a four-year period. We are looking across levels of analysis, from individual student development to program and institutional learning and change. More specifically, we are investigating how students change as they participate in the Bonner Program, how the Bonner Program changes over time, and how the college supports these changes.

The Research Context: The Bonner Program and Bonner Scholars at Rhodes College

The student participants with whom we collaborate at Rhodes are part of a national Bonner Program that was founded in 1990 at Berea College with a goal of providing students with access to education and an opportunity serve. The program came to Rhodes in 1992, and since then it has become a model for student development and sustainable community partnerships. The basic requirements for Bonner scholars include 10 hours of community service a week, or roughly 140 hours of service a semester. Additionally, Bonner Scholars are required to complete two summers of either domestic or international service totaling 280 hours each.

Our research team has been interested in understanding more fully how the intense level of engagement experienced by the Bonner Scholars in their four years at Rhodes influences their educational experience and identity development. The CNRP narrative data collection process is tied to the Bonner Scholars’ ongoing reflection process. Bonner Scholars engage in regular written reflection on their individual experiences, and they routinely hold formal discussions in which they share their reflections with one another. Stories about community engagement, incorporating both personal experiences as well as community and societal/structural issues, become part of the culture of the program. Over a four-year period, this story sharing process builds an atmosphere of long-term trust and a community of support that goes well beyond a single service-learning course or internship experience.

Our CNRP team is investigating the experience of Bonner Scholars who participate in this cultural community of storytelling and service to better understand how students’ involvement with the program impacts their academic, social, and personal lives. The research approach is based in scholarship in developmental, community, and cultural psychology. It relies on narrative as a way to understand development and meaning making as well as organizational learning and change.

Establishing and Nurturing the CNRP Research Team

For the planning phase and first year of the study, two Bonner scholars and two Psychology majors were recruited to the team. Students were involved in all aspects of the initial research planning, including early discussions of relevant research and theory, preparation of an IRB proposal, and planning and implementing the logistics of data collection and data management.

As we began to work with the narratives we collected twice each year from Bonner Scholars, we used weekly team meetings to explore the data together, with students and faculty members reading narratives out loud, noting recurring themes, and identifying points where multiple interpretations were possible. We have intentionally treated these meetings as the development of an interpretive community, in which each member of the team understands that his or her unique perspective is critical to the overall success of the project.

We have tried to be sure that student members of the research team represent second through fourth-year students, so that older members of the team can orient newer members. With longitudinal research, the regular loss of experienced researchers to graduation requires that we are very attentive to keeping good research notes and to documenting all of our observations and procedures. This is, of course, good research practice, and the regular integration of new team members makes it imperative that we keep these research skills sharp.

CNRP as an Undergraduate Research Experience

Students on the CNRP team have reflected on our experience as undergraduate researchers over time. We feel that the professors and students on the research team operate in a power-sharing capacity that empowers students to step out of the typical undergraduate apprentice role to hone a variety of professional skills. We believe that the collaborative model strengthens the research process and increases the value of the research.

We have conceptualized all of the Bonner Scholars at Rhodes whose experience we study as collaborators in the research project, and we have been in regular communication with all sixty of the research participants, attending their program retreats and
some of their regular meetings. But the role of the Bonner Scholars on the research team is distinct, with each contributing 5 to 10 hours a week to the CNRP and serving as liaisons to the larger group at Rhodes. From the beginning, the Bonner Scholars on the CNRP team have helped us to negotiate an ongoing tension between our desire to work with all of the students as genuine collaborators with a need to be respectful of their limited time and an awareness that we cannot expect extensive commitments from all of them in our research.

In addition to serving as liaisons to the larger group, we have reflected that the Bonner Scholar team members offer valuable insights from their own knowledge of the program that would otherwise be completely opaque to the team. For example, last spring when we collected narratives at a program retreat, we felt like something was not quite right. The students seemed frustrated and impatient. We were a bit worried, not sure whether to attribute this to technical difficulties in saving the stories or a greater dissatisfaction with the project. The Bonner Scholars on the team helped us to understand the timing of the data collection at the end of the retreat was the most salient issue for the students. We were able to plan the next data collection in ways that led to a much better experience and positive feedback on the project from the students this fall.

The Bonner Scholars on the team have helped to tailor research questions and interpret data. In analysis of individual narratives, for example, Bonner Scholars have identified themes from program meetings and resonances from shared reflections. They see the influence of shared storytelling on individual narratives much more clearly than those of us who are outsiders to the community do. They also help in communicating research findings to Bonner Scholar participants, as they are much more aware of the group’s priorities and concerns.

The participatory model of the CNRP has served as a tool for empowering stakeholders in the different phases of the research by allowing them to make meaningful and engaging contributions. An example of this has been the development of student leadership within the Bonner Program. One of our team members has presented our work at national Bonner conferences, and she has become active in institutional efforts to better integrate civic engagement experiences with our academic curriculum. This fall, she co-facilitated a meeting of student leaders in civic engagement from across the campus. Another team member has become an expert in qualitative data analysis software, writing tutorials, helping to teach advanced research methods classes, and mentoring other students on the team. Three years into our project, we have had eight student team members, five of whom have graduated. The interdisciplinary team includes students going into graduate school in community psychology as well as other health professions.

**CNRP as an Action Research Project**

The CNRP provides a feedback loop, strengthening the Bonner Program and building institutional capacity for civic engagement and community-integrative education.

For example, one theme that has emerged from our work with narratives and our discussions with Bonner Scholars concerns their struggles to integrate their identity as a student with their community work and their identities off campus. As part of an effort to respond to this, we are now in the planning phases for a new first year course that will focus on community integrative learning in Memphis.

An additional insight that our work has stimulated concerns a lack of communication and integration across campus between various civic engagement programs. The meeting for student leaders we described earlier, co-facilitated by one of our team members, has resulted in a new Student Advisory Committee for the Memphis Center, an emerging academic hub for engagement on campus.

**Student-Led Evaluation of the CNRP**

In the fall of 2014 the CNRP team launched a student led evaluation of the CNRP. As it unfolded, the project became a site for reflexive practice and positive change within the CNRP. One of the authors, a student researcher on the CNRP team, examined Bonner Scholar-written narratives, conducted interviews with researchers, and held focus groups with Bonner Scholar research participants. Results from the CNRP evaluation highlighted methodological strengths within the project as well as a number of potential areas for methodological improvement.

A noteworthy finding from the evaluation was a tension related to Bonner Scholars serving directly on the research team. Participants perceived a number of advantages related to direct Bonner Scholar participation in the research, but also indicated potential concerns around issues of privilege, access, and privacy. While direct participation was seen as a strength in terms of data interpretation, Bonner Scholar participants were concerned that they could be left out or made vulnerable. Some of them noted that Bonner Scholars on the research team were in a privileged position to influence the research processes.

Through the evaluation process, these tensions—related to the research, but also the social and
political climate of the organization and institution—became a topic of discussion between the research team and the Bonner Scholar community. As a result of community discussions, we adjusted our participatory methods to include an advisory committee of peer elected students. This is made up of Bonner Scholars, selected from each class, who agree to meet with us two or three times a semester. We seek input from them about their experience of our research and we encourage them to raise questions and to identify areas where further investigation would be fruitful. This gives us more input from our research participants without demanding too much of them. We are also able to provide more information about the routine procedures established by the team from the beginning of the project for maintaining confidentiality, including stripping names from stories before student researchers have access to the narratives.

**Recommendations and Conclusion**

Even as we continue to learn and shape our research model, we recommend that others adapt its core features: 1) a team of faculty, staff, and students engaged in participatory research, 2) focused on issues of concern for undergraduate students, 3) with distinct opportunities and empowering roles for members of the team, and 4) producing knowledge that simultaneously contributes to scholarship, student development, and community change.

We believe that the field of community psychology is uniquely positioned to contribute to our understanding of the undergraduate role in action research and participatory, collaborative research on student experiences in higher education. We hope that in sharing our project, we are able to contribute to this growing interdisciplinary arena blending innovative pedagogy and engaged scholarship.

**References**


**Living Community Psychology**

*Written by Gloria Levin (Glorialevin@verizon.net)*

“Living Community Psychology” highlights a community psychologist through an in-depth interview that is intended to depict both personal and professional aspects of the featured individual. The intent is to personalize Community Psychology as it is lived by its diverse practitioners. Prior columns are available online, at http://www.scr27.org/publications/tcp/tcp-past-issues. These past columns contain a wealth of life advice gleaned from over 60 profiled community psychologists, from graduate students to retirees, representing an invaluable resource for community psychologists.

*For this installment, we introduce a community psychologist whose academic career has shifted among psychology and Black and African studies but always incorporates the values and basic principles of community psychology.*

Craig Kwesi Brookins, Ph.D.
North Carolina State University
Raleigh NC
Craig_Brookins@ncsu.edu

Craig was raised in a predominantly African American, middle to working class community in Chicago. His family had migrated to Chicago from Mississippi in the post-World War II migration of Blacks to northern urban centers. Family members had talked some about discrimination they had suffered; but only later did he learn of the most severe examples of racial victimization they had endured or witnessed. For example, before she passed, his mother, one of nine children, wrote an autobiography in which she related how her grandfather (a minister who had often spoken out about racial justice) had been killed by a White racist because he refused to sell land he owned. “She said that everyone knew who did it, but nothing was done.” In the north, they still found discrimination and segregation, but “it just was not that every-day, in your face type,” says Craig.

Craig attended an all-male Catholic high school in a low income neighborhood in Chicago, adjacent to Hyde Park, founded by Franciscan Brothers to educate African American boys. The faculty was mostly White—both the Franciscan Brothers and lay teachers—and were dedicated to teaching Black history and instilling a pride in Black identity.

On his way to the bus stop to get to school each day, he would walk past a bookstore, in whose windows he spotted intriguing books on the
Black experience. He began buying books from the store and discovered he had an affinity for psychology—why people think and behave as they do. At Bradley University in Peoria, Illinois, he majored in psychology and, in his junior year, he was a caretaker at a mental health halfway house with severely mentally ill persons who were transitioning to the community after institutionalization. In his senior year of college, he worked in a halfway house for hard core substance abusers who were transitioning from prison to the community. He recalls: “My caseload included people at least twice my age, and I was fascinated when they recounted their life experiences in our counseling sessions.”

However, he was less interested in individual treatment approaches and more in system-wide community-based models. One of his college professors, spotting his attraction to preventive, systemic approaches, gave him a brochure for Michigan State University’s graduate program in ecological-community psychology. “Upon reading the brochure, I immediately knew that was what I was looking for.” Accepted to MSU’s program, he spent the next nine years as a graduate student (1981-1990). During that time, however, he worked ¾ time as assistant director of Michigan’s Children’s Trust Fund, supervising a team of students and staff who were monitoring and evaluating child abuse and neglect programs across the state. One notable friendship formed in graduate school was with Carolyn, then a secretary in MSU’s Psychology department (later in the Geography department). They married and had two children while he was in graduate school. The Brookins’ household now includes Nailah, age 29 and working toward a certificate in child care, and her two children (ages 3 and 7). Gideon, age 27, has a master’s degree in professional writing and works for Oracle in North Carolina.

Most of his graduate field work was in Detroit. His master’s thesis was a descriptive analysis of ten independent schools for African Americans. His dissertation was guided by the Fairweather model—an experimental evaluation of a parent aide program in Detroit conducted over a period of three years—which included a commitment to dissemination of research results.

In preparing to enter the job market, he had no particular interest in an academic job, not having conceived of that as a natural role for African Americans because he had not seen many African Americans in academic roles. However, by then married and with two children, his main goal was to support his family financially, so he cast a broad net for his first professional job, post Ph.D. “I realized that my training should include preparation for an academic job, thereby qualifying myself for a broader range of job options.” Having taught Black psychology at MSU, he applied for positions in both African American studies and in psychology departments. However, he learned that Black Studies are more oriented to the humanities than to the social sciences; furthermore, they do not tend to involve community-based interventions.

Determined to take advantage of all possible networking opportunities, he attended professional conferences. At SCRA’s first biennial conference, held in Columbia, SC, he met Jean Ann Linney. In a “soft recruitment,” she encouraged him to apply for a position at the University of South Carolina. “I knew that universities were looking to hire Black folk then.” However, Craig was leery of living in the South, remembering his family’s tales of Southern segregation and terror. Carolyn’s family was originally from central Arkansas, with its own stories of the Black experience in the Deep South.

Craig received six or seven interviews for academic jobs—divided between Black Studies and Psychology—from which he received two offers. An earlier MSU graduate, Dennis Grey, had encouraged Craig to join him at North Carolina State University in Raleigh. Notwithstanding Craig’s resistance to living in the South, he was impressed by the warm reception he received during his NCSU interviews. In addition, he was heartened by the enlightened culture found in the Research Triangle area, encompassing a concentration of universities in Raleigh, Durham, and Chapel Hill—home to NCSU, Duke, UNCC and UNC, respectively. “The Triangle was a cocoon. There were no Confederate flags hanging, for example.” The clincher was that, at the time of the interview, the early spring weather was beautiful, everything in bloom—a sharp contrast to cold winters in Michigan. Overcoming his qualms about the South, he accepted NCSU’s assistant professor offer, which included directing the undergraduate, field-based program in human resource development.

Craig notes two disadvantages from his choice: First, that his family would be far from the comfort of their extended families in Chicago and Michigan, and second, that, “for every ten miles one traverses outside the Triangle, you are stepping back one decade in time.”

As soon as he arrived in Raleigh, he reached out to the community to create his own connections, especially in the areas of African American youth, schools, and communities. He initiated 10-week rites of passage programs for African American youth. His
initial linkages were with the local Health Department and a few schools, who allowed him to bring in his undergraduate and some graduate students. He recognizes that this would not have been possible without his prior training at MSU, where he was thrown into the community on Day 1 of graduate school—having to form relationships and “figure it out” on one’s own. In particular, his eventual success was dependent on the skills of diplomacy he had acquired during graduate school. He also had earlier learned that community-engaged work requires a team approach. “I learned early on that working independently was neither effective nor personally satisfying for me.”

His path as a tenure-seeking assistant professor was relatively smooth. His department was collegial, characterized by a “live and let live” tone. In addition, he was supported by a network of mentors from within and without his department. NCSU professors negotiate a statement of mutual expectations with their employer. “I pursued my community-based interests and just hoped that would be appreciated and valued by my colleagues in the end.” Upon receiving tenure (1997) and based on relationships he had developed in Africa, he was asked to direct NCSU’s Africana Studies program, a position he held until 2009, while continuing on the Psychology faculty.

Craig’s notion of “community” has always been broader than the proximate Raleigh community, extending to the African diaspora and to Africa itself. He was first awakened to African studies (especially political and economic) through his high school reading but also had been inspired by Patrick Bellegarde Smith, under whom he studied at Bradley, now professor emeritus of Africology at the University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee.

Dr. Smith studied African culture in Haiti and in other islands of the Carribbean—and is a voodoo high priest.

As a college graduation gift to himself, Craig travelled to Cuba to observe Afro-Cuban culture. He pursued this interest as a graduate student, through MSU’s African study abroad program in Kenya, when he studied Swahili. His first visit to Africa was a powerful experience, one that Craig wanted to repeat often. “(Africa) felt like home,” he remembers. “Unlike in America, I did not feel like an outsider, marginalized.” In particular, he appreciated Africans’ valuing of relationships. “When I’m away from Africa, I miss it.” He was determined to continue his involvement in Africa, by marrying it to his community psychology scholarship. This was enabled when, about four years after joining NCSU, he was asked by NCSU’s Associate Vice Provost to participate in the university’s development of a linkage to Ghana, reigniting his interest in Africa. (During this period, his focus shifted away from community psychology some.) His subsequent work in Africa involved developing psycho-educational interventions and consciousness raising. His family accompanied him on trips to Africa, Carolyn on three or four occasions and his children participated as teenagers in student travel programs with which he was associated. Although his primary association is with Ghana, he also has worked in east Africa, especially Tanzania.

From now on, the subject of this profile will be called by his second given name—Kwesi (pronounced KWAY-C), a West African name which means born on Sunday. “The belief is that the Creator brought us into the world on a particular day for a particular purpose.” He adopted the name after being embraced by the Ghanaian people several years ago. “I go by both names although I have not yet officially added it to my birth name.” He accepts that Africans consider him an outsider. “This requires a healthy dose of humility, especially since I mostly work with educated Africans. However, there is no pretension. Sincerity and reciprocity are paramount.”

He takes great pride in having introduced many students to Africa. “Even for students with no special interest in Africa, it proved to be a powerful cultural experience.” Some of the students returned to Africa on internships. Also some Africans, primarily Ghanaians, came to NCSU to study. However, the work in Africa tended to be more solo than he preferred, and over time, the resources available to pursue opportunities were insufficient. Consequently, Kwesi stepped down from directing the Africana Studies program and again shifted his focus back to psychology and accordingly, to the local community. “I felt like I was starting all over again.” Kwesi is now director of Interdisciplinary Degree Programs in the College of Humanities and Social Sciences, with concurrent appointments in Applied Social and Community Psychology and Africana Studies.

As Kwesi shifted his focus from Psychology to Black Studies and back to Psychology, his professional affiliations have ebbed and flowed. SCRA is now again his primary affiliation, with Black Studies and Black Psychology associations (the latter being more clinically oriented) now taking a secondary role. (“I was never trained in Black Studies so had to learn it on my own.”) He is also involved in the Engaged Scholarship Consortium, a higher education association promoting “strong university-community partnerships anchored in the rigor of scholarship and designed to help
build community capacity.” With regard to SCRA, he is heartened by the current large number of ethnic minority students and early career graduates, having been one of only a handful of Blacks, especially males, attending SCRA conferences for many years. “SCRA is making tremendous movement toward diversity, due to major recruitment efforts by the larger training program.”

Calling his students his greatest joy, Kwesi’s fundamental approach to teaching and mentoring is his respect for students. “My mentoring model is to find out where a student wants to go and then provide the resources to get there.” He introduces the basic concepts and values of community psychology into all his classes, including those not explicitly in the field. His sincere commitment to mentoring was acknowledged by SCRA in 2007 with the Ethnic Minority Mentor Award as well as outreach and engagement awards from NCSU. Considering his former students to be colleagues and friends, he commits to stay involved with them after they graduate. As an example, in 2011 he co-founded with a former student (and includes other former students as staff) Triangle Research Associates to assist communities (local, national, and international) in reaching their goals.

Now 25 years into his career, he is re-examining his options for the future, “I am aware that my work is often on the margins, both in Psychology and Black Studies. I am constantly fighting to justify my work, which gets tiring.” His most recent research, a 3-year interdisciplinary community engagement program, is coming to an end. The data from this project points to considerable opportunities for the university to further institutionalize its local engagement efforts. Nevertheless, he feels his skills and energy can still be applied to positive ends, in particular, his evolving interest in urban economic development. To that end, he is working to stimulate greater partnering between NCSU and the local community.

“I am an egghead by nature. I love to learn new things. And I see myself as a boundary spanner, a broker between groups.” He is especially intrigued by interdisciplinary work, noting the diversity of definitions across disciplines. For example, a landscape architect is more likely to define the phrase “community-based participation” as an opportunity for community input rather than in psychosocial terms as community decision making. “To work together, collaborators must be clear on the different meanings and perspectives they hold, such as social justice.” Kwesi foresees that he will be narrowing his intellectual path in the future to the general area of engaged scholarship. “We’ll watch for his progress along this new path.”

Public Policy
Edited by Jean Hill

Getting Started in Policy Work: Strategies for Community Psychologists
Written by Julia Dancis, Portland State University, and Surbhi Godsay, Jennifer Hosler, & Kenneth Maton
University of Maryland, Baltimore County

Individuals are situated within a complex network of interrelated systems, including their families, communities, and broader society (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Kloos et al., 2012). Woven into this ecological system is public policy, which affects these networks and all individuals dwelling within their limits. As community psychologists, we value using social science as a means for social change; it follows then, that we should work to change policy so that communities are more equipped to exist and thrive autonomously (Wolff, 2013; Kloos et al., 2012). Furthermore, community psychologists offer a unique contribution to shaping social policy, with a distinctive blend of social justice values, empirical grounding and interdisciplinary orientation (Maton, Humphreys, Jason, & Shinn, in press). Yet, many community psychologists—who strive for macro-level change—likely will not engage with policy work during their careers (Maton, Strompolis, & Wisniewski, 2013).

Why aren’t more community psychologists involved in policy work? Research suggests that many real and perceived barriers exist for psychologists considering work in the policy arena, such as lack of exposure, limited training in research translation, and others (DeLeon & Kadzin, 2010). These barriers may seem daunting. Yet opportunities exist to attenuate the roadblocks and bolster the possibility of policy work. There are a number of community psychologists who have greatly affected policy through their expertise and skills (Maton, et al., in press). Learning about their entry points into policy may guide others to avenues of access.

Purpose of the Study
The current study is a part of a larger research project examining community, social, and developmental psychologists’ involvement in public policy (Maton, forthcoming). For this study, we focused on participants’ specific entree points into policy-related work. Though not all of the interviewees are community psychologists, there is much to learn from these examples.
**Methods**

Participants were recruited through four different sources: (1) nominations by leaders of the Society for Research on Child Development (SRCD), the Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues (SPSSI), and the Society for Community Research & Action (SCRA); (2) winners of SRCD, SPSSI, SCRA, and APA policy awards; (3) review of policy-related scholarship in developmental, community, and social psychology; and (4) recommendation from the William T. Grant Foundation, who funded the research. From this initial list, snowball sampling identified additional participants. In total, 79 interviews were conducted. Participants influenced policy using a range of mechanisms (e.g., policy advisory groups, policy insider positions, external advocacy) and from a variety of vantage points (universities, intermediary organizations, policy insiders).

To explore participants’ pathways into policy-related work, they were asked to discuss: 1) When they first decided to enter policy-related work; 2) What led to the decision to get involved; and 3) What prior experiences may have predisposed them to a policy-related career. Three research team members, using an iterative process, coded and analyzed transcribed interviews using qualitative software.

**Findings**

For many interviewees, policy-related work was not on their radar upon entering graduate studies. Numerous participants reported shifting their thinking—from micro to macro levels—through coursework, research, and practice experiences. As a possible career trajectory, policy work was introduced through theories, psychological research and practice, and interdisciplinary work, as exemplified below.

**Exposure to systems theory.** As one participant explained, being introduced to ecological theory led to considering how systems impact the individual:

"The first time I was introduced to Bronfenbrenner, I did cartwheels because that is what made sense to me. It explained the world."

**Exposure to policy implications through practice.** Direct service work—through clinical practice, prevention, or community-based programs—helped other participants recognize how policy can have an impact on a larger scale. As one explained:

"I had spent years developing and testing interventions. It was the desire to get those implemented in wider public service systems that prompted the interest in how policy related to decisions to implement evidence-based practice..."

**Building policy skill sets.** In addition to theory and practice exposure, learning specific skills (such as how to translate research) facilitated participants’ understanding of how research can impact policy. Recognizing the policy implications of their research, as well as gaining research translation skills, enabled some participants to get involved. For some psychologists, these skills were gained through interdisciplinary coursework, and for others through psychology coursework in graduate school:

"We had to engage in [policy] brief writing. It was at that point that I really understood, that as a... psychologist in training, our research could be translated and have application out in the real world."

**Influence of academic mentors.** Research experience under mentors or advisors was an important aspect of participants’ initial involvement in policy work. Some interviewees actively sought advisors who did policy-related work. More often, however, it was the general influence, over time, of mentors or advisors that prompted participants’ thinking about policy-related research questions:

"The research projects I was working on, having to do with three-generation families of adolescent mothers living together after the passage of welfare reform,... helped me think through the way the policy was impacting those real people's lives and [the] pros and cons of different aspects of the policy in ways I hadn’t thought about before."

**Graduate student applied policy opportunities.**

Finally, for many participants, exposure to policy-related work occurred during graduate school or early in their careers. Participants also described getting started in policy work via APA, SCRD, SPSSI and other fellowships, applying knowledge from their theses or dissertations to policy issues, or by working at interdisciplinary research centers focused on social issues.

**Discussion**

The results suggest there are multiple pathways to enter policy work as a graduate student or a professional. As described in Maton (forthcoming), those interested in getting involved in policy may do so through different pathways. In the university setting, students and professionals can be purposeful about asking policy-relevant research questions and gaining policy-relevant skills (such as research translation), by exposing themselves to policy-relevant coursework or theory. Students may also consider seeking out interdisciplinary policy centers on their campus, which actively conduct research on social issues. Through community settings, students and
professionals may engage with policy-oriented organizations, including non-profit or advocacy organizations. Additionally, students and professionals may find policy-relevant opportunities by joining the policy committee of a professional association (e.g., SCRA Policy Committee), or seeking out a policy-relevant fellowship (such as APA, SPSSI, or SRCD).

To facilitate greater involvement of community psychologists in policy, we believe that a systemic shift must occur, embedding policy work in psychology training. Despite SCRA’s guiding concept that community psychology will engage in the “formation and institutionalization of economic and social policy” (Who We Are, 2015), it appears our graduate programs are overwhelmingly not prioritizing this goal. Among 20 U.S. universities offering graduate degrees in community psychology, only three [Data calculated by reviewing curricula of MA/MS and Ph.D. community psychology degrees. Degree programs were found through the SCRA website: http://www.scra27.org/what-we-do/education/academic-programs/] universities require policy courses in their curriculum (SCRA Academic Programs, 2015). This does not bode well for future community psychologists getting involved in policy work.

Uniformly putting policy work in psychology curricula will give psychologists a baseline knowledge and a lexicon essential to working with policymakers. Additionally, exposing students to interdisciplinary systems approaches for understanding behavior will give students a foundational framework. Paired with policy coursework, encouraging students to do research projects with policy implications can open doors to future engagement.

Strengthening relationships with existing policy centers and opening new centers on college campuses will increase student opportunities for involvement in policy, as early as their undergraduate years (Chandler, 2006). Policy work in community psychology should be incentivized. Currently, researchers often feel they must choose between policy engagement—a worthwhile endeavor that in most cases does not hold currency in academia—and publishing (Chandler, 2006).

As noted above, every corner of society is affected by policy decisions. By actively engaging in policy work, we propel the discipline of community psychology toward its intended ideal (Jason, 2012; Jason & Maton, 2014; Shinn, 2007).

References
Every quarter, there are coordinators to thank and to welcome. Welcome to Rachel Jantke at DePaul University, who is a new regional coordinator for the Midwest, and to Angela Nguyen at the University of California at Santa Cruz, who is a new Student Regional Coordinator. Additionally, thank you to Judy Lovett, who has been the International Regional Liaison in the UK and Northern Ireland, and welcome to Dr. Ronni Greenwood, at the University of Limerick, who is taking over this position. Also, the Northeast Region has been busy and I am delighted to welcome Andrew Martinez, at DePaul University (but currently living in the Northeast) and undergraduate, Emily Stecker, from Washington College as new Student Regional Coordinators. I want to thank Suzanne Wasileski from White Mountains Community College in New Hampshire for her long-time work with the Northeast region. Finally, there are some changes in the Southeast region. Thanks to Natalie Kivell, from University of Miami, who has been an amazing Student Regional Coordinator for some time. Welcome to Susie Paterson (University of Miami) and Douglas Archie (University of South Carolina), two new Regional Student Coordinators.

Australia/New Zealand and The Pacific
International Regional Liaison
Katie Thomas,
mothercarematters@gmail.com,
Antony Street Specialist Centre
Student Regional Liaison
Rahman Gray,
rahman.gray@live.vu.edu.au,
Victoria University

Australasian Barn Raising:
Radicalising Resource Access
Community Events:
In conjunction with Fork Films, SCRA Australia/New Zealand and the Pacific (ANZP), is proud to be presenting Community Screenings of Voices from the Frontline of Peacebuilding. The film series focuses on female activists in situations of oppression with an emphasis on women countering violent extremism (CVE). The screenings are part of a conscientizaciòn process to advocate for inclusion of women peace-builders in peace processes. A new report by the International Peace Institute shows that women’s meaningful participation in consultations like CVE means peace agreements are more likely to last. Women and women-led organizations have effective solutions to address the challenge of violent extremism, and their meaningful participation is key to building lasting peace. At the current time, screenings are scheduled for Western Australia and New South Wales. Each screening will be followed by community discussion, and in New South Wales, with a question and answer session with a panel of international experts. This will be a professional development activity eligible for Community Psychologists to maintain obligations under the new Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency and the Psychology Board of Australia. If there are other regional members who would like to host a film screening or organize a Community Psychology PD activity, please contact Katie Thomas at (08) 9339 3333.

Membership Drive:
All members in the ANZP region are invited to participate in the annual Membership Drive. This year there will be an award of $100 to the member whose enthusiasm and passion for Community Research and Action generates the most new members! Student electronic membership is at the low amount of $10AUD per annum and graduate students can access a free year of membership.

The list of membership benefits can be found at http://www.scra27.org/members1/. If you would like some cards and flyers to give to prospective members and/or to advise new members, please send an email to mothercarematters@gmail.com with the name of the new member you have generated. The membership drive will end on March 1, 2016, and the winner will be contacted after this date.

Australasian Barn Raising: At the completion of the Membership Drive, we will be holding a one-day symposium. Similar to the concept of community barn raising, the symposium will provide new members with a concentrated structure of resources and support to do in a day what would take months or years to be achieved alone. Established members are invited to prepare a concise folio or short presentation or the most powerful techniques or resources for community activism they have identified over their career. A core component of the symposium
will be the establishment of network, mentoring, and support links for new members. If you are willing to develop a collegial support system in your region for members and/or would like to offer a new resource to new members please forward your name, contact details, and 50 words outlining your proposed resource/technique to either Rahman Gray or Katie Thomas. The forum may be in teleseminar format to enable the inclusion of as many SCRA representatives as possible across the Australian, New Zealand, and Pacific region.

**Europe/Middle East/Africa International Regional Liaisons**

Sedar Degirmencioglu  
sedardegirmencioglu@gmail.com,  
Cumhuriyet University,  
Turkey

José Ornelas  
jornelas@ispa.pt,  
Instituto Universitário,  
Lisboa, Portugal

Caterina Arcidiacono  
caterina.arcidiacono@unina.it,  
Federico II University,  
Naples, Italy

Julia Halamova  
 julia.halamova@gmail.com,  
Comenius University,  
Bratislava, Slovakia

Ronni Greenwood  
Ronni.Greenwood@ul.ie,  
University of Limerick, Ireland

**Student Regional Liaison**

Hana Shahin  
hshahin@aucegypt.edu,  
The American University in Cairo, Egypt

**News from Egypt**

*Written by Hana Shahin*

The 1st MENA Region Conference on Community Psychology will take place March 24-26, 2016 at the AUC Tahir campus. The theme of the conference is “Collaboration for Community Change: Insight, Innovation, and Impact.” The primary objective of the conference is to bring together academics and practitioners across the region to network and share effective practices for community change. As community psychology is a nascent field in the region, interactions among attendees will be structured to promote a deeper understanding of the synergies between community psychology research and community change efforts.

The opening ceremony on Thursday night will showcase a panel of speakers along with cultural entertainment. The main conference sessions will be on Friday and Saturday. Each day will begin with a talk from a keynote speaker, followed by panel sessions and workshops. Panel sessions will include short presentations in line with the conference theme. Workshops are longer skills-building trainings. Additionally, the conference will include smaller workgroups for community psychologists to develop recommendations for the field on key issues such as theory/epistemology, training competencies, ethical challenges, and research methods. There will be a final closing session to reflect on what was accomplished in the conference and lay the framework for moving the field forward.

In line with the overall theme, the conference sessions will revolve around three threads:

1. Establishing effective partnerships, including between organizations and stakeholders, such as coalition-building and collaborative networks, as well as between organizations and community members, such as use of participatory and empowerment approaches.

2. Finding creative practices and new solutions to tackle systemic issues.

3. Using empirical research and evaluation to design and assess the outcomes and impact of community-based initiatives.

These major emphases were determined based on a needs assessment conducted with NGOs by the Gerhart Center, as well as current literature and observations regarding key areas of growth needed for improving community interventions in the region. The presenters are likely to be tackling diverse and timely issues related to refugees, behavioral health and health (e.g., hepatitis, pneumonia, traumatic stress), social issues (e.g., sexual harassment), marginalized groups (e.g., orphans, street children), and long-standing issues (e.g., poverty).

The anticipated audience is 75, not including the organizing committee. Of these, about a third are expected to be AUC alumni, graduate students, undergraduate students, and faculty. About two-thirds are expected to be community practitioners and public health specialists. This will include primarily staff from NGO’s and also potentially representatives from social enterprises, multilateral organizations like WHO/UN, foundations, CSR offices, and ministries. Additionally, the opening ceremony will be open to the public and we hope will attract an audience of about 200.

- Benefits to the community:
  - “giving back” to the community by sharing knowledge;
  - raising capacity of nonprofit organizations through training workshops; introducing community psychology as an alternative model for effective community intervention;
  - identifying and documenting effective practices for
community change.

- Benefits to the discipline: explicitly discussing the formulation of a regional community psychology; identifying training competencies and priorities for the field; allowing the opportunity for networking among the community psychologists in the region.

A call for proposals will be publicized to solicit proposals for workshops, panels, and symposia. Anyone (including students, NGO staff, university faculty, etc.) is welcome to submit a proposal. A multidisciplinary and international review committee will evaluate the potential proposals and make the final selections.

Southeast Region, U.S.
Regional Coordinators
Sarah L. Desmarais, sdesmarais@ncsu.edu
North Carolina State University
Winnie Chan, wchan1@gsu.edu
Georgia State University
Pam Imm, pamimm@windstream.net
Community Psychologist, Independent Practice, Lexington SC
Student Regional Coordinators
Candalyn Rade, cbrade@ncsu.edu
North Carolina State University
Jaimelee Mihalski, jmihalsk@unc.edu
University of North Carolina-Charlotte
Dominique Thomas, dthomas60@student.gsu.edu; Georgia State University
Susie Paterson, University of Miami
Douglas Archie

Regional Update
Written by Candalyn Rade

The Southeast region would like to thank Natalie Kivell for her years of service as a regional student representative. We are pleased to announce that Susie Paterson and Douglas Archie have joined the southeast region as new regional student representatives.

We are entering the third year in our work toward building a strong and connected community within the across programs of the Southeast Region (SE) of SCRA. Based in conversations around the campfire during previous SE ECO conferences, we are continuing to focus on ways to build community within and between the wonderful and diverse community psychology programs in our region. As one way to strengthen our community and promote collaboration, the SE SCRA student representatives would like to ‘map the region’ by creating an accessible list of the community psychologists in our region.

To get this initiative started, we ask that you please follow the link to complete the short survey about you, your work, and your research interests: http://ncsu.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_eKFR4PselDn9nHD

If you would like more information, have ideas on how we can keep the momentum going, or would like to become more involved, please contact Candalyn Rade (cbrade@ncsu.edu).

Update from North Carolina State University
The Applied Social and Community Psychology graduate program at North Carolina State University is pleased to welcome Drs. Elan Hope and Laura Widman as new faculty members who joined the program in Fall 2015. The Applied Social and Community Psychology program is a research-intensive doctoral program that trains students to produce knowledge and solutions that serve the public interest through the application of psychological science. Students learn how to use psychological, as well as social science theory and research methodology to examine societal issues from individual, community, organizational, and policy perspectives. Faculty and students participate in collaborative research with both public and private organizations in local, national, and international communities.

Midwest Region, U.S.
Regional Coordinators
Rachel Jantke, rjantke@depaul.edu, DePaul University
Olya Glantsman, oglantsman@gmail.com, DePaul University
August Hoffman, august.hoffman@metrostate.edu, Metropolitan State University
Student Regional Coordinators
Jaclyn Houston, jhoust12@depaul.edu; Abigail Brown, abrown57@depaul.edu, DePaul University

News from the Midwest
Written by Olya Glantsman

The 2015 Midwest ECO Regional Conference, Forwarding Inquiry and Action for Social Change, was
Upcoming events:

The annual MPA conference is just around the corner (May 5-7, 2016). The SCRA meeting at the Midwestern Psychological Association will be held Friday, May 6, 2016 in Chicago. For more information about the MPA conference (e.g., lodging, fees, etc.) please visit the MPA website at http://midwesternpsych.org. Also, plan to join us for the annual dinner, which will include the poster award ceremony, following the Conference on Friday night (dinner location will be announced shortly via SCRA’s listserv). See you in Chicago!

Announcements and information for inclusion in future Midwest updates should be sent to Rachel Jantke (rjanke@depaul.edu).

News from the Northeast
Written by Bronwyn Hunter

We are looking forward to the 2016 Annual Meeting of the Eastern Psychological Association in New York on March 3-5. We are excited that we will be having a social event Saturday evening (more details to follow). We are also starting a student poster award competition. We look forward to meeting and networking with regional community psychologists from the northeast!

Our regional team is growing! We are excited to welcome Melissa Whitson from the University of New Haven as a regional coordinator, Andrew Martinez from DePaul University as a graduate student coordinator (Andrew is living in the Northeast currently), and Emily Stecker from Washington College as an undergraduate student coordinator. If you are interested in serving as a student-level coordinator, please email Bronwyn Hunter at bhunter@umbc.edu. Coordinators serve three-year terms and provide regional leadership and guidance to the processes of membership development, activities, and communication.

We are also grateful for the leadership that Suzanne Wasileski (White Mountains Community College in NH) has provided to the Northeast Regional Coordinators over several years. She is officially rotating off the committee, but continues to help as we grow and develop our regional network. THANK YOU, Suzanne!

Rural Interest Group
Edited by Susana Helm, Co-Editors Cheryl Ramos and Suzanne Phillips

The Rural IG column highlights rural resources as well as the work of community psychologists, students, and colleagues in their rural environments. In this issue, we are pleased to provide a ‘brief report’ from newly elected co-chair Dr. Suzanne Phillips. For future issues, please email Susana if you would like to submit your own brief rural report of if you have resources we may list here.

In addition to selecting the Rural IG when you become/renew SCRA membership, you may also become a Rural IG member by contacting Susana (Rural.IG@scra27.org) to be added to the Rural IG listserv, which we use for announcements (rural grants, rural resources, SCRA news, etc.)

Rural Resources
Rural Sociological Society:
http://www.ruralsociology.org

According to their website, RSS “is a professional social science association that promotes the generation, application, and dissemination of sociological knowledge. The Society seeks to enhance the quality of rural life, communities, and the environment. This website is intended to serve all those interested in rural people and places.” RSS administers three publications, one of which is peer reviewed, with an impact factor of 1,409: Rural Sociology.

AgrAbility: http://agrability.org/

I learned about the national AgrAbility program while attending the National Association for Rural Mental Health Association meeting held in Honolulu this past summer. Sponsored by USDA, and affiliated with a number of universities and public service entities across 24
states, “AgrAbility helps to eliminate (or at least minimize) obstacles that inhibit success in production agriculture of agriculture-related occupations.” According to their website, their vision is to “enhance quality of life for farmers, ranchers, and other agricultural workers with disabilities. While the term ‘disability’ often brings to mind conditions such as spinal cord injuries and amputations, AgrAbility addresses not only these but also many other conditions, such as arthritis, back impairments, and behavioral health issues.”

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**Brief Report**

One in a Million? Or Same Old Story? Suspended Between Particularity and Generality

Written by Suzanne Phillips, Rural Interest Group Co-Chair (2015-present), White Mountains Community College

New England’s Great North Woods is a wilderness, spanning northern Vermont, New Hampshire, and Maine. At its heart is the City of Berlin, NH (pronounced BURR-lyn), once the site of a cluster of paper mills that drew power from the Androscoggin River, pulp from the surrounding forests, and immigrants from Scandinavia, Canada, Ireland, and Russia. As the U.S. paper industry faltered and mills closed, Berlin’s population shrunk from over 20,000 in 1930 to less than 10,000 today, dwindling every year. Simultaneously, poverty expanded, along with substance abuse and the number of empty houses abandoned to the city for unpaid taxes. The Catholic Church had to consolidate four previously flourishing parishes into one. The population decline has been especially sharp among youth: since the 1950s, the city has gone from seven elementary schools to two, and the city’s sole remaining high school now graduates just 100 students a year. Berlin’s growth sector is incarceration: a large federal correctional institution (FCI) opened three years ago, alongside the state prison. Absent any shopping malls in the region, the FCI provides orange light pollution from sodium-vapor lamps, obscuring what used to be a spectacular view of the night sky.

Berlin is one of thousands of once-vibrant rural communities, now in economic decline, set against a backdrop of stunning natural beauty. This essay reflects on the tension between the particularity and the generality of Berlin’s story, from the perspective of a community psychologist trying to find her footing in the Great North Woods.

It is offered in response to Langhout’s (2015) invitation to “engage in affective politics” (p. 268), and to “make visible our own heart-work” (p. 269).

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I relocated to Berlin two years ago, after 24 years of teaching college, with the goal of practicing community psychology. No one in my daily life calls me a community psychologist: I work ‘undercover,’ as the Institutional Researcher (Institutional researchers (“IRs”) get almost as many blank looks when they identify their profession as do community psychologists. For readers who do not know: IRs generally work in higher education, supporting evidence-based decision making processes and evaluating initiatives, primarily for an internal audience. There is a significant overlap between the practice of community psychology and IR. Learn more at www.airweb.org.) for the region’s public community college. The National Center for Education Statistics describes our location as ‘remote.’ I love my new role and I value my work. My desire to increase access to higher education for people in poverty aligns well with my school’s mission. Even so, I have the persistent sense that I have cheated in coming to Berlin. Legitimate community psychologists “support communities that have been marginalized in their efforts to gain access to resources and to participate in community decision making” (Competency 2) and have “the ability to value, integrate, and bridge multiple worldviews, cultures, and identities” (Competency 3; Dalton & Wolfe, 2012). Those plurals—‘communities’ and ‘cultures’—give me pause. In seeking to practice community psychology here, I took a shortcut: I chose a community where I have family roots.

Inevitably, when I meet people in or around Berlin, they want to know where I am from. They know I have moved in: otherwise, we would at least recognize each other. So the question dangles like a test: Where am I from? My best (honest) answer is that I was born in West Stewartstown (a nearby village) and that my family has lived in northern
We may trade family names until we wonder what ‘it’ is, where I got it, when I was an infant, to escape Country.” Though I remained likely be branded as ‘not getting it.’

If I were to reveal these things to Massachusetts, I would find a connection, or not, but in any case, I know I am ‘in.’ Sometimes explicitly, always implicitly, I hear the phrase, “You get it, then,” a benediction over my presence here.

I walk away from these exchanges reflecting on what my best (honest) answer does not reveal. My parents moved away from northern NH when I was an infant, to escape poverty. My father found work in southern NH in construction. My parents endured criticism from extended family for the move, which demonstrated that “they think they are too good for the North Country.” Though I remained connected to northern NH through my grandparents and cousins, I have no personal memory of living in the region. After high school in southern NH, I went to a private 4-year liberal arts college in Massachusetts, then to graduate school at SUNY Buffalo (studying with Jan Hastrup, Paul Toro, and Murray Levine). I then taught college, first outside Pittsburgh and later in the Boston suburbs, before returning to NH in my current ‘undercover’ role. Most of my adult life so far has been lived in eastern MA, origin of the much despised MA**holes, reputed to be a loud, rude, fast-driving race of people who care only for themselves. If I were to reveal these things to my questioner, particularly the Massachusetts influence, I would likely be branded as ‘not getting it.’

My angst around being perceived as ‘getting it’ or not has led me to wonder what ‘it’ is, where I got it, and why this is so important to me. First, what do I ‘get’?

- The economic and social problems in this community have no easy solution. If they did, the people here are smart enough to have figured it out already.
- Local people have not been sitting on their hands waiting to be rescued. They have experimented with myriad ways to grow the economy, some rooted in the forest products industry, others the result of creative ways of understanding the region’s resources.

- Many experts have come to northern NH, most often from the state capital and the state university (both in southern NH), bearing pre-fabricated solutions. They have their own agenda, they talk more than they listen, and most can’t be bothered to spend more than a few hours in the region, traveling up and back on the same day.

Subpoint: Some of these experts cloak their agenda with rhetoric emphasizing their “collective empowerment perspective, [claiming] to support communities that have been marginalized…” (Competency 2; Dalton & Wolfe, 2012). These in particular are not to be trusted.

- While Berlin has significant social problems, the fabric of this community is strong. Dignity and pride live here, alongside shame. Parents struggle with how to advise their teens: Cling to rich family ties and the beauty and hope of this place? Or get out of town and make a ‘better life’ elsewhere (as my own little family did)? Shame comes from parents not providing the level of local economic opportunity to their own children that they experienced as young people.

In constructing this list, as in writing the first paragraph of this essay, I sense that I am simultaneously describing a particular place and most rural communities in the U.S. In the particularity, the list above catalogs lessons from my childhood, scraps gleaned from eaves-dropping on adult conversation about what is wrong with the world. In my inner ear, the voices of my parents and grandparents and uncles and aunts resonate through the points above. However, as an adult, I have begun to learn about the generality of these issues. I could substitute ‘steel’ for ‘paper’ and be transported back to my years teaching children of miners and iron workers in the ‘rust belt’ western Pennsylvania. My new rural-interest-group friends in Hawaiian could substitute ‘sugar’ for ‘steel’ and tell a similar story. If this is a common story, why do the lessons feel so personal, so unique, that outsiders are sure to misunderstand?

The concept of solidarity helps me here. Langhout returns time and again to the importance of being aware of whether one is “doing with” or “doing for.” She advocates attending to affect as a “barometer of my ability to conduct research from a place of solidarity” (2015, p. 266). Being perceived as ‘getting it’ carries the sense of working alongside, of doing-with-ness. The shortcoming of the experts critiqued in the list is not that their ideas are necessarily bad; it is that the process by which they are developed and delivered is hierarchical and patronizing. When I present myself as a native of northern NH, people assume that I am ‘doing with’ unless I prove otherwise. My motivation for working here is clear: we are peers, working in solidarity, in caring about
our community.

This brings into relieve what I expect would be most challenging if I did not have local credibility: my motives would be suspect. Why would I want to meddle in this corner of the world? What do I gain from living and working in a poor, remote rural area? Would people believe I am operating from the lofty and selfless stance of a community psychologist, that I am not seeking “white savior work” (Langhout, 2015, p. 270)? If we could get past questions of motive, another set of concerns would arise. What could I contribute as an outsider? If I think I can contribute solutions, I fall under the criticisms listed above. If I don’t offer solutions, what do I offer? If my answer is facilitating and building process, why do I think the community can’t do that for itself?

All this causes me to wonder how all of you practicing community psychologists work effectively in places without the local credibility that comes from having a personal connection to a place. I would be delighted to hear others’ thoughts about all of this. I can be reached at suzannemphillips47@gmail.com.

### Self Help & Mutual Support

**Edited by Greg Townley and Alicia Lucksted**

**ERRATUM**


### Who Decides? Self-Direction is Key to Self-Help: Preliminary Musings

**Written by Elizabeth R. Stone**

Elizabeth.Stone@my.pacifica.edu

Pacifica Graduate Institute

Mental patients are stigmatized not by language, but by the fact that it is legally acceptable to treat them differently... People who are labeled mentally ill become part of a system that deprives them of control over their own life as part of their treatment. (Chamberlin, 1979)

Self-determination and self-direction are the foundations for recovery as individuals define their own life goals and design their unique path(s) towards those goals. Individuals optimize their autonomy and independence to the greatest extent possible by leading, controlling, and exercising choice over the services and supports that assist their recovery and resilience. (SAMHSA, 2012)

Power is inherent in making a decision; for a decision is a determination of some sort—a determination of what is happening, what has happened, what to do or not do about it, what something means. By appending “Self” to a word, one indicates that any actions undertaken will be initiated by the identified individual: The recipient (object, acted upon) transforms into the actor (subject).

What, then, does this look like from the perspective of an individual who experiences mental or affective states that cause discomfort or that lead to a decreased ability to achieve meaningful roles in one’s community? When such an individual seeks to get support/guidance/help, how can others offer that in a way that maintains the integrity of the individual’s desire to be seen and heard not as broken or sick, not needing to be fixed, but as a person with agency who has desires and dreams and needs—which may be momentarily thwarted by seemingly overwhelming mental or emotional states, who may be feeling temporarily adrift—and to explore and define his or her experiences in such a manner that he or she can still feel whole, with possibilities to choose from to again move toward living a more fulfilling life?

Although nomenclature varies (peer-directed, consumer-operated, person-driven, client-led, etc.), Self-Help has been offered as one option. In practice, what Self-Help looks like within the vast continuum of behavioral health sciences can be significantly different. I will argue that it is most effective when imbued with the values upon which the c/s/x (consumer/survivor/ex-patient) movement was founded (Morrison, 2005). In particular, claiming the authority to define one’s needs and realities based on one’s own experiential knowledge, leading to the human right to be an equal partner in determining and participating in treatment/services. Specifically, I will apply this lens in three cases: 1) the guiding values in peer-directed services and the concomitant potential dangers of peer staff

### References


Written by Elizabeth R. Stone

Elizabeth.Stone@my.pacifica.edu

Pacifica Graduate Institute

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relationships are based on shared experiences and values and are characterized by reciprocity and mutuality” (p. 11).

It is a testament to the potential power of a peer perspective that many service locations now include some sort of peer support, whether that be due to admonishments/encouragements from funding or licensing sources or to a commitment from internal administrators. Frequently, however, peers have reported finding themselves asked to use the ‘special’ relationship they are able to build with individuals who use those services to do clinical bidding, such as ensuring medication compliance and adherence to institutional norms for behavior and expression. In some other cases, where peer staff are the majority of decision-makers, peer staff may perceive themselves as knowing what is best for those who use the services, taking on a stance of expert, authority or even protector, without actually engaging in dialogue with those affected or helping them to develop the tools and skills to articulate for themselves what it is they desire. Sometimes, people who attend peer-run programs expect peer staff to adopt those roles, and then complain when others attempt to rupture hierarchal relations. I would suggest that this is not Self-Help, but rather a continuation of business as usual, albeit with differently-labeled players.

An alternative is to ground relationships in the values espoused in Intentional Peer Support (IPS), an approach developed by Sheri Mead (2015). After establishing connection with another peer, IPS asks the peer supporter to take a stance of not-knowing, to view interactions as chances to learn together and to grow, moving towards what is defined as valuable by the person utilizing services. Key to this is, “Helping each other understand how we’ve come to know what we know (which) means stepping back from our ‘knowledge’ and thinking about how we’ve acquired that knowledge” (p. 12). This includes looking at how we’ve defined roles of helping and how we make sense of our experiences, specifically around our ‘illness story.’ This is important for everyone, but especially for peer providers because we might think we can automatically understand someone if we have the same diagnosis, when, in fact, everyone’s experience of and explanation for the feelings/thoughts/behaviors that accompany that diagnosis may have different meanings and understandings. It is crucial, then, to listen “with genuine curiosity and interest, to what is being said, how it’s being said, what’s not being said… how this person has learned to think/see/understand things in this way” (p. 33).

A third expression of self-directed or non-hierarchal relationships can be found in a collaborative decision-making process. In the case that follows, a group of peers came together to co-coordinate a series of projects in their community, the core of which was a speakers’ bureau (Stone, 2014). The administrative group consisted of four individuals who met regularly to decide on projects, direction and tasks. In a recent review of the project, participants emphasized the importance of working collaboratively, even though it was a novel experience that also initially caused some confusion and discomfort. In particular, one participant explained:

Witnessing how L. was trying to get us together…. I realized I was following a mode of participating that I had learned from a long time ago and that I had to either accept it or deny it and I didn’t want to accept it when I had the opportunity to learn something new… I needed to slip myself out of it, to be part of (TPL)… and I decided to put myself forward more… knowing that I could voice my ideas better—I hardly ever did it, but I knew I could do it (Stone, 2014).

All of this is taking place within a greater societal/cultural context where people are increasingly aware of varied identities and positionalities that inform deciding those aspects of a situation/experience/condition delineated in the first paragraph: what is happening, what has happened, what to do or not do about it, and what it means or how to explain it. No one can any longer presume to know for another individual. It is imperative, therefore, that we ASK, that we are curious, that we listen, that we heed the responses, no matter how tentatively given, that we cede our role as expert no matter how tortuously earned, and fulfill the promise of Self-Help as...
an opportunity for the “Self” in question—the individual seeking—to be the director, the determiner, the decider.

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Early Career Interest Group
Edited by Ashlee Lien and Ben Graham

Selecting a Career in Community Psychology
Written by Ashlee Lien, SUNY College at Old Westbury, and Adam Voight, Cleveland State University

Contributors to this column:
Ashley Anglin, Atlantic Health System;

David Asiamah, Atlantic Health System;
Ashley Boal, WestEd;
Jamie DeLeeuw, Monroe County Community College;
Andrew Greer, Westat;
Laurel Lunn, Westat;
Neal Palmer, CUNY Institute for State & Local Governance

A task that every aspiring Community Psychologist faces is selecting a career. Deciding on a career direction can be daunting, even with guidance from mentors in the field. When seeking advice, the first question is often whether you intend to go into an academic or a practice-related field. The distinction that is often drawn between these career directions is unclear at best, although the advice for preparing for a future career is often targeted for one specific direction. While preparing for a career is typically more of a concern for graduating students, it can also be an issue for early career individuals who may be questioning the direction they have chosen.

How to determine the best direction for your career
Determining which specific direction you want to follow for your career means that you must understand what the direction means. In spite of the distinction we often draw between academic and practice-related fields, there is often overlap between the two and a wide range of directions that one may pursue.

Many academic jobs in community psychology include an emphasis on community partnerships and direct practice work, while others may place a higher value on traditional academic research. As community psychologists, it is important to advocate for practice and non-traditional forms of research, but institutional support is an important aspect of a career. In the academic career direction, therefore, there are varying amounts of practice involved. Practice-related fields typically include direct action in a specific setting, but include a vast amount of diversity. With this career direction, community psychologists work in a wide range of settings that may not always be classified as “practice” by the community psychologists working in those settings.

Making the decision to pursue one specific direction is difficult. In academic settings, you may not be able to engage in as much application of research, but you have an added benefit of engaging students in research and training future practitioners to apply the research in community settings. When considering this direction, it is important to know whether the academic setting is teaching or research focused, but research publications are becoming more important for all academic settings. Engaging in ongoing research and some teaching is an important consideration for anyone who may want to have an option for an academic career. The decline in tenure-track positions, however, places increasing importance on emphasizing practice skills in academic programs and providing more directed guidance for graduating students and early career community psychologists who may be considering practice-related fields.

One of the highlights of choosing to go into practice-related fields is the ability to engage in direct action around specific causes. Applying research and practice-skills for a good cause is often a drive for
individuals who go in the practice-related fields. Others may choose this direction because they do not want an academic orientation, don’t like teaching, or may have the perception that practice fields are less stressful than academic settings. Given the diversity of settings, however, this assumption may not always be justified and it is important to realize the different pressures of any career direction.

In actuality, however, many community psychologists choose their career simply by which direction they feel most adequately prepared for or by the job market. This places increasing importance on academic programs and mentors in guiding graduating students and early career professionals toward the ongoing development of applied skills and advice in being marketable in a variety of career directions.

Where and from whom to get guidance (especially for jobs in practice)

For many graduate students, most career guidance comes from their graduate school advisor and faculty. Because most academics are familiar with academia, guidance from advisors and faculty may—intentionally or not—be partial to academic jobs. In some cases, advisors and faculty may operate from an implicit or explicit hierarchy of possible student career outcomes that views academic jobs as superior to practice jobs. For students seeking guidance for a practice career, finding a faculty person who values a non-academic track is important. For CP students involved in collaborative projects with community organizations, members of those organizations may be potential career guides—both for finding jobs in those organizations, in particular, and for advice on how to go about a job search in practice-related fields, in general. Students may even consider reaching out to organizations with which one has no ties to request an informational interview. Fellow graduate students are often good sources of career guidance, as well, and it can be helpful to solicit alumni of one’s doctoral program for advice, particularly those who have placed into a relevant job (academic or practice). Finally, many universities have career centers that may be particularly helpful with searches in practice-related fields, where conventions related to resume preparation and interviewing are unique from academic searches.

Finding position openings

While academic position openings are typically advertised on university human resources websites, professional association email listservs, and websites like The Chronicle of Higher Education, identifying openings for practice-related positions often requires more creativity. For these latter searches, it helps to be broad—it is unlikely that a doctorate in community psychology will be listed as the required or preferred education for many practice jobs. It may be helpful to consider fields related to community psychology, like public health, community development, and education, and related skills like program evaluation and technical assistance. For students intent on working in a particular geographic location, a good start may be to identify local organizations that work in these areas and search their human resources websites and, even if there are not current openings, contact a representative to indicate interest and share a resume. For any type of position, it is important to network within one’s professional associations and among other students, faculty, and alumni to make it known that you are on the market and learn about potential openings. For practice jobs, the application and hiring timeline does not always follow that of academia.

Applying

Given the climate of competitiveness for jobs in both academia and in practice-related fields, you can increase your odds by sending out many applications. It is important, however, to ensure that your materials are tailored to the requirements of the position. Learn as much as you can about the organization and position prior to applying. In academia, it is important to distinguish between positions that emphasize research versus teaching and prepare your vita and personal statement accordingly. This customization may be more demanding when applying to practice jobs, as there may be significant differences in the experience and skills required from position to position. Most practice jobs are not simply looking for an academic vita and cover letter, and it may pay to emphasize experiences that are often undervalued in academic searches, like program and project management, evaluation, and consultation. Other skills that may be helpful to emphasize in applications for practice jobs include quantitative and qualitative analysis (including proficiencies with specific software), technical writing, and oral expression. Make sure you give your references plenty of notice to either write you a letter or to be available for a call from a potential employer. Some references will appreciate it if you help them out ahead of time by giving them information about how to tailor their letters or verbal comments and what skills or experiences of yours they should emphasize.

Specific Resources

Job advertisement websites:
- glassdoor.com
- globaljobs.org
- idealist.org
- indeed.com
- linkedin.com
Egyptians have been living in a context of socio-political violence and turmoil since the uprisings of 2011. As part of our Advanced Community Psychology undergraduate course at The American University in Cairo, we wanted to develop a project that targets parents and their parenting styles in order to enhance child resilience and prevent mental health problems resulting from the community violence. While developing this project—which consisted of a short film and guide for non-governmental organizations (NGO’s) and mental health professionals—several cultural considerations and dilemmas were raised.

**Background**

Egypt has been known for many things, such as pyramids and the pharaohs. After the 2011 uprisings in Egypt, this quickly changed. In 18 days, the country and the lives of the people in it transformed in ways they hadn’t imagined. After millions of Egyptians protested against the president and the government, the president was eventually ousted, leaving behind political vacuum. Given the ex-president’s monopoly over power for around 30 years, it was no surprise when several political parties, as well as the military, began to compete for power over the country. This political climate was accompanied by an increase in violence both in political and in general community settings with unprecedented death and arrest rates.

Children were increasingly exposed to this violence through multiple ways, such as witnessing violence on the streets, watching it on television, and hearing about it from classmates and family members. Naturally, many parents became more concerned over the wellbeing of their children and worried about their children becoming traumatized. According to a survey we conducted, over 90% of parents found it difficult to raise their children after the uprisings in Egypt. While the demand for support increased, the supply had not changed to match the needs of the parents and children. Limited efforts were being made by the government, non-profits, and professionals to tackle the challenges being faced by parents.

**What We Wanted To Do**

Based on the apparent need for parental support, we decided to design a community-based prevention project in order to identify the challenges parents and children faced, how they are coping, and the best ways to support them. Our program aimed to prevent child mental health problems by giving advice to parents on how to enhance resilience in their children.

**How We Did It**

To begin with, we conducted a thorough literature review. The main issues investigated included the current situation in Egypt, the effect of exposure to violence on children, how to prevent child trauma and other violence-related mental health problems, how to build resilience, as well as related intervention programs that had been done before. Unfortunately, we found minimal literature on socio-political violence or community violence. The literature’s focus is primarily on individual rather than community traumas, and when addressing the community, the context is often war or disasters rather than the pervasive fear and confusion in society.

Moreover, many of the interventions proposed were inapplicable to the Egyptian context like suggesting integrating policemen in the process of identifying traumatized children (Lieberman & DeMartino, 2006). Therefore, we decided to conduct various interviews with mental health professionals, researchers, and people working in the field of child development and protection including both NGO’s as well as a governmental agency. The purpose of these interviews was to gain more knowledge about what is actually needed, what the cultural considerations are, and what kind of prevention approach would be most suitable.

Furthermore, a convenience sample survey was completed by 156 parents across Cairo, online and in hardcopy, identifying the following: a) demographics and living arrangements of the parents and their children, b) types of violence they had been exposed to and affected by the most, c) how parents and children coped with aforementioned exposure, d) how this affected their...
parenting abilities, e) what signs children showed suggesting that they were affected by the violence, f) what kinds of information the parents wished to receive regarding this topic, and g) their most preferred medium for receiving the aforementioned information.

This information was then used to create a comprehensive guidebook for NGO’s and mental health professionals that included information on parenting strategies to support child resilience, as well as a short movie entitled Matkhafsh (Don’t Be Afraid). Moreover, a public conference was held to launch and disseminate the guidebook and short movie.

We hoped that parents could empathize with the boy’s emotions and generalize them to all children rather than attributing them to weak feminine emotions if it were a girl.

Moreover, we casted a mother figure to display how various actions of primary caregivers could affect their child’s sense of security and ability to build resilience during times of crisis and turmoil. This is due to the presumption that female figures, particularly mothers, in Arab societies habitually adopt the role of the caretaker, thus resonating well with the general public’s reality.

When selecting a candidate to narrate the video, we agreed that a male voice would be ideal to represent an informative and inspiring direction to the film. Not only would a male voiceover gain credible approval from the audience, but it would also show that caretaking and child protection are both the mother’s and father’s responsibility.

Classism and Division of Classes

Another salient cultural aspect that we needed to account for is the strongly divided society along class lines. Egypt is facing significant social inequality levels where the richest 10% own about 73% of the country’s wealth (Kiersz, 2014). Unfortunately, the income differential is rooted in prejudice and distrust between the classes, resulting in classism and extreme perceptions of inequality. From 2000 to 2009, the World Values Surveys showed a significant increase in aversion towards income inequality among Egyptians (Hlasny & Verme, 2013). This was even apparent during the last presidential and parliamentary voting patterns in which we saw that some members of high-income groups voiced concern about allowing low-income groups to vote, claiming that their choice will always doom the country.

We discussed these challenges when deciding what socio-economic level should be depicted by the characters in the short film, in order for more viewers to identify with it. We therefore portrayed a middle class family whose house and clothing wouldn’t cause an identification obstacle to most Egyptians. In one of the scenes, we had a plain background with minimal furniture in order to focus the attention on the scene while avoiding other influencing factors that may allow class prejudice to reduce the impact of the video. We also wanted to avoid relating community violence to a certain class, indicating that community violence is a national phenomenon and is not limited to certain regions or groups. Moreover, the video was in colloquial Arabic, using vocabulary and a dialect that anyone can understand. Lastly, in the data collection itself, we targeted both lower and higher income groups in order to represent the opinions and needs of a wider array of experiences.

Political Tensions

Given the context of political instability and tension, and lack of political security, we made sure that our products targeted overall community violence and not specific political violence under a certain regime. We didn’t take political sides and even the scenes of violence we portrayed in the video couldn’t be identified with a certain era of leadership. Moreover, for the data collection and out of fear from the political authorities, we minimized data collection on the streets, asking NGOs to help us collect data from lower-income areas and depending on online dissemination of the survey to target more affluent groups.

In the End...

Our project showed that it is hard to apply Western models of intervention to Middle Eastern cultures, and that many cultural and
contextual aspects need to be taken into consideration for a program to be effective and reach the target audience. These included patriarchy, class division, and socio-political insecurity. Access the video and guidebook can be found at http://aucegyupt.edu/huss/sape/psyc/Pages/Parenting-in-Times-of-Turmoil.aspx.

References

Transformative Change in Community Mental Health Interest Group
Edited by Geoffrey Nelson

Social Benefits of a Health and Wellness Intervention for Individuals with Serious Mental Illnesses
Written by Amy Shearer, amy.shearer@pdx.edu, Portland State University, Greg Townley gtownley@pdx.edu Portland State University, and Christina Overgard covergard@luke-dorf.org Luke-Dorf, Inc.

Individuals served by the public mental health system die an average of 25 years earlier than the general public, largely from preventable diseases and suboptimal healthcare (Colton & Manderscheid, 2006; Mauer, 2006). In a study of Medicaid claims, 75% of people with serious mental illnesses had chronic preventable health conditions, such as pulmonary and smoking-related illnesses (Jones et al., 2014). Individuals with schizophrenia in particular have more risk factors for cardiovascular disease, including smoking, obesity, lack of exercise, and harmful levels of salt consumption (Davidson et al., 2001).

Individuals with serious mental illnesses also experience social risk factors. They often have fewer opportunities for engagement with the broader community (White, Simpson, Gonda, Ravesloot, & Coble, 2010); and when these opportunities are present, individuals face the added barrier of stigma. These factors contribute to social isolation, which in turn has been linked to all-cause mortality, physiological aging, and increased mental illness symptomatology (Hawkley & Cacioppo, 2010).

Programs to improve the physical health of individuals with serious mental illnesses have been successful (Brown, Goetz, & Hamera, 2014; Happell, Davies, & Scott, 2012; Osborn, 2001), and in some cases are as effective as psychotherapeutic interventions (Richardson et al., 2014). In addition to physical benefits (e.g. reduced BMI and blood pressure), commonly reported psychological benefits include decreased symptomatology, improved quality of life, and improved self-efficacy (Hawkley & Cacioppo, 2010). However, less is known about the impact of physical health interventions on social health risk factors (e.g., stigma and isolation).

Despite its benefits to mental and physical health, exercise continues to be under-utilized by mental health programs (Callaghan, 2004; Hawkley & Cacioppo, 2010). Recently, mental health consumer advocates have called for efforts to incorporate physical wellness into existing recovery programs (Fricks, 2010). Responding to this call, Luke-Dorf, a supportive housing mental health agency in Portland OR, developed and implemented the Healthy Eating and Active Lifestyle (HEAL) initiative for their residents. The intervention provides nutritious food options, individual and staff-led group physical activity, and health education. Residents are encouraged to set SMART wellness goals—i.e., goals that are specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and time-bound (Bovend’Eerdt, Botell, & Wade, 2009). Thus far, over 400 residents have engaged in HEAL, averaging 220 staff-led activity minutes per week. This brief report focuses on the unanticipated social benefits of participating in HEAL, noted by numerous residents in a series of focus groups.

Methods
Four focus groups were conducted among 22 individuals with serious mental illnesses residing in six supportive housing sites in the Pacific Northwest. Purposeful sampling was employed to select participants from a variety of housing and treatment sites to maximize diversity of experience with the intervention. Sampling continued until theoretical saturation was reached. Resident focus groups ranged in size from three to eight participants. Residents ranged in age from 24 to 66 and had resided in their current housing for an average of 2.5 years, 64% were male, 75% of participants were White, and the majority (68.2%) indicated a schizophrenia-spectrum diagnosis. One focus group was conducted
with housing staff to triangulate resident reports. Staff (N = 5) ranged in age from 28 to 60 and had been employed by Luke-Dorf for an average of 3.4 years.

After collecting informed consent, participants were asked to discuss general experiences with the HEAL program, their attitudes about health and wellness, and factors that help or hinder their healthy lifestyle. Focus groups lasted approximately 60 minutes and were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. Participants were given a small cash incentive. We used thematic content analysis to determine central themes.

**Results**

Findings highlight several important factors that influenced program engagement. In addition to improved physical health, participants noted increased opportunities for community participation, social support, and even perceived reduction in community stigma. We focus on these benefits below.

**Community participation.** Staff and residents reported that increasing physical activity encouraged them to participate more actively in the community. Residents reported more chance friendly encounters with community members while walking in the neighborhood to fulfill a fitness goal: “Getting out and about… I may meet other people when I walk in the way to the park… physically, my physical presence makes the difference.”

Other participants commented on the benefits of being challenged to have new experiences: “[You] have what you might call new experiences because just staying inside and being reclusive, you ruminate rather than express. It is more a challenge and an opportunity with getting out and about.” Similarly, another resident said, “It changes my mental focus on being more sociable with my family and kind of get to know the neighbors and… get to know other people and try to be involved in the community out there.”

**Social support.** A common theme among residents and staff was that HEAL fostered social relationships within the housing site. As one staff member noted, “Before [HEAL] they were just taking their meds or trying to go back to bed. We would try to engage with them, but… we didn’t have a plan to follow.” Participants particularly enjoyed group exercise because it brought residents together and created a sense of camaraderie: “I like the group exercise activities… playing volleyball with a big beach ball. You know, it’s fun… the way we interact.” Residents talked poignantly about cheering each other on during group sports:

> There is that coming together. Maybe you can’t put into words exactly, but it is a common experience that… we kinda root for each other… we have fun bouncing the ball around the group… and it goes off this way, and someone unexpectedly isn’t ready for the ball. It hits them, and we laugh… I think the camaraderie and the atmosphere and mood level in the house is better.

Exercise was also noted as an opportunity to get to know new residents:

> We just got a couple of new guys, and one of the staff and myself and both the new guys went on a walk and got a chance to talk to them a little bit. I think next week we are going to go pick blackberries.

Other HEAL group activities, such as communal meal preparation, had similar perceived benefits:

> I really enjoy Fridays which they bring basically raw meat… and we cook it together… we agree on something. There’s more of a sense of ‘oh, I’ll do the potatoes,’ ‘oh I’ll do the broccoli or salad’... we all come together and cook a meal.

Staff and residents appreciated that HEAL gives them an opportunity to interact with one another absent of formal roles. One staff member commented:

> It’s nice to have fun with them. To be honest, sometimes it’s almost like they think we are superior to them or above them. When you are playing a game, no one is superior and everybody is having fun, so it is really nice to kinda just be humans.

Residents also viewed these closer relationships with staff as a benefit: “It brings the community together and it seems like we have more of sense of a house that way. We get to interact with staff and stuff, and that’s really nice.”

Social support was particularly important in encouraging individuals to set and meet health goals. This process appeared to be cyclical, in which group activities strengthened friendships and participants would then encourage and cheer each other on, thereby increasing engagement:

**R1:** …When you walk with people, you can talk and it makes it go faster. Somebody else must be walking faster than you and you’ll be able to pick up their pace and maybe go a little faster.

**R2:** You can push them or they can push you. One more rep.

**Stigma reduction.** Participating in outdoor HEAL activities also helped to normalize relationships with neighbors and reduce some of the perceived stigma associated with living in the housing site. Neighbors could see residents engaging in relatable games and cheer players on, or even join them. Staff noted that rather than only going outside to smoke cigarettes, residents now spent more time outside engaged in...
These findings are particularly encouraging and should be a focus of future studies. The limitations of our small sample size and restricted geographic scope must be noted. However, while our specific findings cannot necessarily be generalized to all individuals with serious mental illnesses, the importance of attending to the social benefits of participation in health interventions transfers across setting and sample. Programs that operate out of different settings can apply the findings in a similar way by focusing on group exercise and shared community activities. Our findings also suggest that health interventions can strengthen cohesion between mental health consumers and staff, contributing to an organizational culture of health, wellness, and inclusion.

References

Now we have more active people than we have smokers, and the neighbors will comment on shots made or playing soccer; and it really has normalized their relationships with their neighbors. I think that has gone a long way to feel like we have a legit place in this neighborhood.

Residents also noted this increased sense of belonging: “I think the healthier I get, the more I fit into the community… I meet other people that are healthy.” Residents also appreciated the nature in which HEAL acts as a socializing agent, facilitating their interactions in the broader community: “[HEAL] helps because you learn… how to be accepted out in society.”

Conclusions and Implications for Practice
Our findings illustrate the importance of attending to diverse outcomes when examining the effectiveness of health and wellness interventions for individuals with serious mental illnesses. Participants largely reported increased opportunities for social support, strengthened friendships, more active participation in the broader community, and decreased perceptions of community stigma. These findings are particularly relevant as mental health policy has shifted over the last decade to an emphasis on providing services to assist persons with mental illnesses to live, work, socialize, learn, and participate fully in their communities (Townley & Sylvestre, 2014). Future physical health programs should incorporate and measure facets of social support, community participation, and stigma reduction in addition to more traditional physical health indicators. The role of physical health interventions in normalizing relationships between individuals with serious mental illnesses and members of the broader community is particularly encouraging and should be a focus of future studies. The limitations of our small sample size and restricted geographic scope must be noted. However, while our specific findings cannot necessarily be generalized to all individuals with serious mental illnesses, the importance of attending to the social benefits of participation in health interventions transfers across setting and sample. Programs that operate out of different settings can apply the findings in a similar way by focusing on group exercise and shared community activities. Our findings also suggest that health interventions can strengthen cohesion between mental health consumers and staff, contributing to an organizational culture of health, wellness, and inclusion.

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- **Length:** Five pages, double-spaced
- **Images:** Images are highly recommended, but please limit to two images per article. Images should be higher than 300 dpi. Photo image files straight from the camera are acceptable. If images need to be scanned, please scan them at 300 dpi and save them as JPEGs. Submit the image(s) as a separate file. Please note that images will be in black and white when published.
- **Margins:** 1” margins on all four sides
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