PART II

THEORY, RESEARCH, AND PRACTICE
5.

THEORIES

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Chapter Five Objectives

By the end of this chapter, you will be able to:

• Explain the role of theory in Community Psychology
• Describe the main foundational theories of Community Psychology
• Illustrate how community psychologist use theory in their work
Theories are important for anyone that is trying to bring about social change. They help point us to what is really important to change, versus what might be more trivial and lead to ineffective action. But first, let's look closely at what theories enable us to do. Most simply, theories allow us to describe, predict, and better understand something. Here is an example: Newton observed that an apple fell from a tree. In that famous story, he was able to first describe the apple falling. It is the first part of the scientific journey, to describe something that you might see. The second step is to predict something based on what you just saw. For example, when Newton dropped a ball or other object, he predicted it would also fall, and that allowed him to be able to make predictions, which is the second part of a theory. Finally, a theory provides an “explanation” of what you just saw, in this case, the explanation being that gravity was causing the objects to fall to the earth.

Why are theories important?

That brief example reviews all the basic parts of a theory and can help us understand the role of theories in the field of Community Psychology. Theories have provided us with useful ways of thinking about the importance of the individual in relationship to the environment or community. The individual is influenced by the environment, which means that we must look beyond just individual factors when we try to analyze social problems or develop community interventions. Case Study 5.1 illustrates why theory matters, as it can provide us a lens to see the individual closely connected and influenced by the context.
Case Study 5.1
Ecological Theory

Partners in Policy making™ is a national model of leadership training for people with developmental disabilities, and parents or family members of those with those disabilities. Partners in Policy making™ is designed to provide knowledge about issues related to disability and to develop competencies of the participants to become effective advocates in influencing public policy in their local settings and at all levels of government. Partners in Policy making™ uses ecological theory in how they have designed the training for participants so they understand how ecological principles influence their advocacy. Partners in Policy making™ uses an ecological model of disability advocacy that takes into consideration the perspectives of people at multiple levels of community, including 1) the experiences of the individual person with the disability, 2) others in the local area affected by the same challenges, 3) the local policies that need to change to make things better for the whole community, and 4) the policy changes that may also need to change at the national level. For example, a person with a disability who uses a wheelchair may be struggling to find adequate housing that has an elevator for their full inclusion in that building community. They will need to find out if this is a shared experience of other people in the community area and organize locally to pressure local policy change to enforce building requirements for people using wheelchairs. This could also become an opportunity for national policy change. Community psychologists are collaborating and supporting the work of community advocates through a state-funded agency that facilitates funds, and evaluates this training and community intervention.

As this case study illustrates, theories in Community Psychology help us think about developing interventions that involve not just the challenges experienced by certain people with disabilities but also the environmental factors that maintain these challenges. In this case, we may learn that the community of people with disabilities extends to people that might temporarily or long-term need to use a wheelchair. Toward this goal, the theories of Community Psychology assist in understanding how to bring about change by involving both the youth and their schools and other community settings. As indicated in Chapter 1 (Jason, Glantsman, O’Brien, & Ramian, 2019), theories in Community Psychology are based on core values and principles that involve a commitment to social justice for marginalized groups, creating more equitable distribution of resources across groups, an appreciation for a diverse array of worldviews, working in collaboration with communities, and adhering to a strengths-based approach to working with others. Community psychologists want to address the needs of people affected by natural disasters, people who have been historically marginalized (e.g., people living as ethnic minorities in the US, aboriginal people living in Australia, etc.), and people who identify with a community that is dealing with some type of societal discrimination (e.g., people with disabilities, people identifying with the LGBTQ community, etc.). Ultimately, Community Psychology theory helps to broaden our understanding of the social contexts in which we live so we can better work
with others to identify important levers for change and assist in creating healthier spaces within our communities. As we will show in this chapter, theories help focus community psychologists on these areas for both their research and activism.

In a survey that recently asked community psychologists to nominate theories that have been used in their work, over 30 were mentioned (Jason, Stevens, Ram, Miller, Beasley, and Gleason, 2016). Barker (1968) for example developed behavior setting theory to understand the relationship between individual behaviors and varying characteristics of the physical environment. A behavior setting is considered to be a place, a time, and a standing pattern of behavior. The main finding of this research was that settings generally have rules where any person within the same setting would act similarly; that people are interchangeable and you would still get the same behavior patterns. Understanding this information helps us to better understand the features of settings, including the social and cultural dynamics that maintain certain types of settings. This type of work can explain why some settings, such as prisons, often end up producing similar negative outcomes for individuals that are confined to these total institutions.

As several of the theories have been described in other chapters in this book (e.g., Empowerment and Behavioral models), they will not be reviewed below. This chapter will review some of the more prominent and influential theories that have laid the foundations of this field.

ECOLOGICAL THEORY
The ecological theory was developed by James Kelly (1966) who was one of the founders of the field of Community Psychology. The purpose of his theory, as shown in Table 1 below, is to provide a framework for understanding the structure and function of community. This theory assists in learning how the characteristics of the environment of the community can play a central role in the ways people interact and relate to each other. Through this framework, we can consider the dynamics among groups, organizations, and whole communities as they relate within certain settings, and help guide thinking around the development of community interventions (Kelly, 1968).

### Table 1. Kelly’s Ecological Theory

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Principle</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Interdependence</strong></td>
<td>All levels are connected; changing one aspect of an environment will have many ripple effects</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Adaptation</strong></td>
<td>Focuses on interactions between persons and their environments to better understand why behavior that is effective in one setting may not be useful in others</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Cycling of Resources</strong></td>
<td>The systematic process of using and developing materials and resources that impact community growth and development</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Succession</strong></td>
<td>Refers to the fact that communities are in a constant process of change, and this process causes changing requirements for adaptation</td>
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Kelly’s theory outlines four principles necessary for understanding inherent undercurrents within social systems that can be used to guide the assessment, development, and evaluation of preventive community interventions. The four principles include 1) interdependence, 2) adaptation, 3) cycling of resources, and 4) succession.

The principle of **interdependence** helps us understand that any change in one component of a system can affect changes in other components of the system as well, such as a domino effect. The concept of interdependence is central to the theory and practice of Community Psychology because it helps individuals to recognize that everything is interconnected. Case Study 5.2 provides an example of this principle.

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**Case Study 5.2**
**Mini-Grants Can Have Radiating Effects**
One intervention developed by community psychologists that captures how interdependence works is a local community mini-grant program. The program provided “mini-grants” to community residents that were designed to improve the physical structure and appearance of neighborhoods (i.e., refurbished schools, fixing broken windows on local houses, recreational and park systems, etc.). When community residents were provided with mini-grants, they not only improved their neighborhoods and school systems, but more importantly, they were provided with opportunities to build relationships with other neighbors through increased interactions and communication. Community psychologists would recommend that investigators assess and capture these types of interdependent dynamic processes that often occur with these types of easy to implement change strategies (Foster-Fishman, Nowell, & Wang, 2007).

Adaptation refers to the process of change and how what might be adaptive in one environment might not be in another. A child might be very extroverted and sociable, and have many friends due to these characteristics. But the child’s popularity among peers might not be valued by the teachers in the school, who might not appreciate if this child talks to others and socializes frequently in the classrooms. So, what might be very adaptive in one type of setting might not be in another setting. Kelly (1979) found that schools that had many new students entering each year facilitated more youth exploratory behavior than schools that were stable in terms of enrollment. These types of findings help us understand this process of adaptation, to better understand the factors that account for why certain environments are more effective than others.

The third ecological principle is cycling of resources. Cycling of resources refers to the process of how communities identify, incorporate, and use different types of resources that exist within their communities. Resources can be skills and expertise, information, networks of social support, access to supplies or equipment, and socialization processes that either deter bias (i.e., gender or racial) or provide events (e.g., celebrations) for social and cultural cohesion. Using this principle, psychologists might either uncover existing competencies in a setting or match individuals with the settings that provide the resources they need, as indicated in Case Study 5.3.

Case Study 5.3
Resources Within Community Gardening
Community gardening, forestry, and fruit tree planting programs provide unique opportunities in demonstrating the importance of teaching community residents the psychological and physical benefits of green space sustainable activities (Hoffman, 2019). In a sense, these are resources available to everyone if we just notice them in our environment. Community gardening and horticultural programs can promote valuable educational skills as they provide opportunities for individuals to collaboratively engage in healthful restorative and sustainable practices with other community residents and understand the multiple benefits of basic gardening knowledge and skills. The basic resources of soil, compost, and seeds are used to grow foods and the garden area is used to teach younger children (and adults) the principles of horticulture and healthy food production. In community gardening, what may have once existed as a piece of unused land within a community would be converted to a community garden, where healthy foods are produced and consumed by the community members, promoting a new local resource for healthy natural foods cultivated by local people at minimal cost. Read more about the project here.

The final component of Kelly's ecological theory is succession, which refers to the fact that communities are in a constant process of change, and this process causes changing requirements for adaptation. What is true about a person or setting today may not be true tomorrow. The process of change and development within the community over time is inevitable and communities have an obligation and need to help residents meet the demands of changing environments. For example, as populations within the community tend to age, newer and younger families can work with older residents by sharing information and creating a more holistic environment for all community members. Additionally, as new family groups from different ethnic backgrounds become prevalent within the community, traditional institutions (i.e., school systems and community businesses) will need to evolve and adapt to meet the demands of a changing population. An example of a problem with succession in practice is illustrated in Case Study 5.4.

Case Study 5.4
The Evolution of Coalitions Over Time
Campbell, Greeson, Bybee, & Fehler-Cabral (2012) found that communities can become “over-coalitioned” or have too many coalitions, leading to poorer outcomes. These community psychologists studied a community coalition that was working to facilitate better case outcomes for sexual assault cases in the criminal justice system involving adolescent victims. They found that over time, the addition of a related coalition in the same community—focusing on sexual assault cases involving young children—led to poorer outcomes for the first coalition. They theorized that the new coalition spread thin the existing human and other system capital needed to ensure good outcomes.

SENSE OF COMMUNITY THEORY

The theory of *sense of community* was first described by the community psychologist Sarason (1974). This theory was meant to capture the feeling a person experiences when they perceive themselves as having an interdependent connection with a broader community outside themselves. More specifically, psychological sense of community is: “the feeling one is part of a larger dependable and stable structure” (p. 157). McMillan and Chavis (1986) defined sense of community as a feeling that members have of belonging where members feel that they matter to one another and the group. There is a shared faith that members’ needs will be met through their commitment to be together. Community psychologists measure sense of community by assessing: 1) membership, 2) influence, 3) integration and fulfillment of needs, and 4) shared emotional connection. Membership involves clear boundaries regarding who is in and who is out of the specific community. Influence refers to the ability one feels they have to influence the broader community- and individual-level norms that guide the practices...
of the community. Integration and fulfillment of needs refer to feeling connected to a network that holds shared values, that exchanges resources, and meets needs. Shared emotional connection refers to participating in the celebrations of others, and participation in specified rituals or ceremonies.

If sense of community is a core value, then it is important to try to find ways to reliably assess and measure it so that we can assess how an intervention might affect the sense of community. If for example, an intervention is effective in a particular outcome, such as increasing academic grades in youth, but has the negative consequence of reducing the sense of community for the students in the classroom, then community psychologists would judge this an ineffective and potentially harmful intervention. There have been attempts at better conceptualizing and measuring sense of community, in order to understand how people experience their connection with their community. The following case study used a brief and reliable scale developed by Jason, Stevens, and Ram (2015) to measure the psychological sense of community among those involved in the Columbian peace process.

**Case Study 5.5**
**Columbian Peace Process and Sense of Community**

As part of the Colombian Peace Process victim assistance programs, Maya-Jariego, De La Peña-Leiva, Arenas-Rivera, and Alieva (2019) used the nine-item Psychological Sense of Community scale which evaluates the value attributed to the community (e.g., “I am not planning on leaving this neighborhood”), the relationships among the members of the collective (e.g., “neighbors can get help from other neighbors if they need it”), and the emotional connection of the individual with the collective (e.g., “I feel good helping the neighborhood and its neighbors”). The study was part of the effort to reincorporate into civilian life the ex-combatants, and demobilized persons of the armed conflict. They interviewed 143 community leaders, and they found a significant relationship between the density of personal networks and the psychological sense of community. They concluded that socio-geographic segregation derived from housing policies can be an obstacle to the effective functioning of the coexistence and reintegration programs of victims and demobilized persons of the armed conflict.
Rudolf Moos (2003), another influential community psychologist, developed the **social climate theory** in an effort to better understand the natural interplay between individuals and their social contexts. Social climate theory helps to understand how people adapt to their social environment and how contexts adapt to people. Social climate taps these three main dimensions: 1) how people perceive a setting organizes their perceptions of social relationships, 2) how people perceive they are being supported in their personal development, and 3) how people perceive the setting handles the maintenance of norms and supports change processes. From a psychological measurement perspective, scores of social climate are very much related to indicators of individual well-being. This measure has been useful for assessing setting dynamics within schools and juvenile treatment programs.

An example of a situation where you might use this theory is when seeking to understand the experience of people in a particular setting, such as an organization where people are said to be experiencing discrimination. You would use a social climate survey to assess to what extent the people within this organization are experiencing similar challenges in all corners of the organization. Depending on which departments/offices are experiencing the highest levels of discrimination, this may have implications...
for ways a community psychologist could intervene to change how the setting is experienced moving forward.

Scores to measure social climate are very much related to indicators of individual well-being. This measure has been useful for assessing setting dynamics within schools and juvenile treatment programs (Moos, 2003). Theories and measures need to be rigorously tested so that they can be improved, as witnessed by Leipoldt, Kayed, Harder, Grietens, and Rimehaug (2017). They found that the original subscales developed by Moos needed to have weak items removed, and once this occurred, the revised version showed acceptable measurement qualities.

**LIBERATION PSYCHOLOGY**

Liberation Psychology (or psicología de la liberación) is based within a more critical perspective which acknowledges the role of power and the ongoing battle for resources. As part of the critique of traditional psychology, Liberation Psychology was developed in Latin America during the 1970s as a theoretical framework to better understand oppressed and impoverished communities (Montero & Sonn, 2009).

Many people around the world live in an oppressive society where one group has power over another (see Chapter 4; Palmer et al., 2019), and this contributes to unequal distribution of resources. Liberation psychology emphasizes helping people to gain more control over the resources that affect their lives. Aspects of Liberation Psychology are embedded within empowerment theory (see Chapter 10; Balcazar, Keys, & Vryhof, 2019).

Core components of Liberation Psychology include praxis and dialectics. **Praxis** can be thought of as a tool for acquiring knowledge and transforming oppressive realities involving a conscious integration of theory and practice to make theory more grounded in reality (Montero & Sonn, 2009). Dialectics is a philosophy of praxis emphasizing that knowledge is not created unless acquired through a method of mediated social discourse. In other words, we develop knowledge about the world and simultaneously
work to bring about change. Dialogue needs to occur between power holders and the oppressed to raise the consciousness of all to understand the meaning of oppressive actions (see Chapter 17; Olson, O’Brien, & Mingo, 2019). This raised awareness of conditions challenges the status quo and may create a desire for those in power to be more humane. Ultimately, the hope if for the encouragement of a rethinking of problems “with and from, the oppressed; with a commitment to unveil and characterize conditions of oppression and exploitation suffered by large sectors of the population” (Montero & Sonn, 2009; p. 51).

**SUMMING UP**

Theories are used in Community Psychology to ensure we are addressing the community dynamics in all the ways needed to be most effective in promoting a social justice agenda. Community Psychology represents an innovative perspective focused on understanding how environments shape and are shaped by people's life. This requires theoretical frames that help us better understand community settings and physical contexts rather than more traditional approaches where we might only try to change the individuals experiencing a problem, such as through individual therapy or medication. In fact, individuals from around the world are drawn to the ideas of Community Psychology because it has suggested ways to respond to the social issues and needs of marginalized populations struggling with colonization, racism and oppression in North America, Latin America, South Africa, Australia, and New Zealand (Reich, et al., 2017).

Given that Community Psychology is embedded in a deep understanding of community context. Our theories help us to more clearly critically analyze the social context and historical context within which we need to consider the allocation and distribution of resources, as well as the assumptions that have developed the world we live in.

### Critical Thought Questions


1. How does the role of the community psychologist differ from other disciplines addressing human behaviors and social interaction?

2. Identify and briefly describe James Kelly’s (1966) four ecological principles. Be sure to provide examples of each and how these principles may be applied to current issues facing communities today;

3. Based on Roger Barker’s (1968) behavior setting theory identifies three different types of settings (i.e., sports, restaurants, etc.) and include how different types of prescribed behaviors (i.e., scripts) unfold over time within each of these settings;

4. Why is sense of community especially important for communities that want to address problems involving conflict, oppression and discrimination among marginalized groups?

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**REFERENCES**


Chapter Six Objectives

By the end of this chapter, you will be able to:

• Know how to use an ecological lens in guiding community research
• Identify the role of ethics in Community Psychology research
• Differentiate between qualitative versus quantitative methods
• Understand the utility of mixed methods research
In psychology, we generally call the results of our research “findings” or “outcomes.” In this chapter, we will explore how a Community Psychology lens can help shape our research and ultimately influence our findings and outcomes. We will learn how the way we measure programs cannot exist in a vacuum, and therefore we must consider the context and environment of any situation. Take this for an example: a number of years ago in a low resourced urban community, a mental health professional approached community and school leaders with an innovative program aimed at dealing with the problem of youth substance use. They agreed to use a preventive school-based intervention, and after it was launched, the research outcomes were very successful (i.e., youth substance use was reduced). However, funding for the program dried up after two years, and the mental health professional left the community when he no longer had the financial resources to mount the intervention. The school and community leaders were disappointed as they felt it had helped their youth. The mental health professional later published the outcomes in a scientific journal and described the intervention as successful. However, the community members were bitter about the program shutting down because they did not have the resources or skills to sustain it. When another mental health professional approached the same community leaders a year later with another innovative idea for a preventive program, the community was no longer receptive.
You might be wondering, was the example above considered a successful intervention? To answer this question, we need to specify the essential characteristics of evidence when measuring factors of success. Not all evidence is created equal, as the example above indicates. The best and most useful evidence is relevant, credible, believable, and trustworthy. Additionally, there are various lenses we might look through to decipher the evidence gathered from the example. From a traditional perspective, the intervention was a credible success, as youth experimented less with drugs after the intervention took place. However, from a Community Psychology perspective, the intervention was not successful as the program was not sustained, and even more important, the community members became less trusting, less open, and less willing to collaborate with others from outside their community. It is only by adopting a more ecological perspective that we can understand that interventions have impacts on individuals, groups, organizations, and communities, and even if there are positive outcomes for the youth recipients of an intervention, we must also assess a community’s receptivity for future efforts. In other words, Community Psychology would argue for broadening our research objectives to gauge the community members’ relationship to those who brought the intervention into their schools, including whether they considered them trustworthy.

To summarize, although it is important that youth might have learned certain positive skills from an intervention, it is also crucial to examine the larger context that involves whether community members feel competent to bring about effective and sustainable changes. The goals of our research need to go beyond measuring skills or abilities within youth in order to assess whether the interventions have influenced higher-level ecological issues. In this chapter, we will learn that research can be used to add to or modify our beliefs and understanding, especially when we consider how Community Psychology focuses on people and their ecological context.
The introduction of new or additional evidence can challenge existing beliefs. Consequently, there are a number of examples of research evidence that have led to changes in beliefs and behaviors, as well as the way we educate people on certain concepts. For example, as indicated in Chapter 1 (Jason, Glantsman, O’Brien, & Ramian, 2019), up until the 1960s, television, radio, and print ads encouraged adults to smoke. An example of this can be found in “The cigarette preferred by doctors” video advertisement above. Later, in 1964, the US Surgeon General’s Report on Smoking and Health reviewed over 7,000 research articles as a basis for the report, which concluded that smoking was a cause of lung cancer and chronic bronchitis. Important criteria for evidence at the time included that it was replicable and reliable. Smoking was assessed as a health hazard by checking causes of death, looking at the current health of smokers versus non-smokers, monitoring smokers versus non-smokers health over time, etc. The strongest case occurred after many investigations using multiple methods, which found similar or supporting results. After the Surgeon General’s Report in the US, policies slowly began to change regarding cigarettes and smoking. For example, advertising was significantly curtailed, cigarettes were subject to extensive state and federal taxation, and there were new regulations to reduce minors’ ability to purchase tobacco from retail establishments. As a result, rates of tobacco use declined over time.
You may have encountered the scientific process in your early schooling, and maybe you were even asked to use “description” to support conclusions that you came to. But how do we interpret and draw conclusions using the research we collect? Let’s use an example to illustrate what the term “describe” means in the research process. A description could involve the number of people living in poverty, but the exact boundaries must be set for what income falls above and below the poverty line. Another example involves describing what behaviors and characteristics qualifies someone as misusing drugs. In other words, what is the definition of “misuse of drugs”? Clearly, alcohol and tobacco kill more people than all other drugs combined, and yet both of them are legal. If you define something by whether it is legal or not, there might be varying standards in different settings. For example, in the US using heroin is illegal, so it would be thought of as “misuse of drugs,” but in the Netherlands, a government-sponsored heroin distribution program began in 1988; therefore, heroin use in the Netherlands is not illegal. In describing a social or community problem, it is apparent that cultural and societal norms need to be considered. Traditional researchers might ignore these important influences, but Community Psychology researchers would put considerable efforts into understanding the politics and values that surround and give meaning to the behaviors and conditions we intend to change.

In addition to initially describing and determining how to measure a social or community problem, research also investigates how the problem or issue is associated with other behaviors. For adolescent misuse of drugs, a traditional researcher might investigate how it is related to family history, age at first use, mental health status, etc. However, a community psychologist may focus on peer use as well as locations within the community where alcohol, drugs, and tobacco are made available to youth.
As indicated in Chapter 1 (Jason, Glantsman, O'Brien, & Ramian, 2019), if a school-based tobacco prevention program is launched, but youth in the community have easy access to commercial sources of cigarettes at gas stations and liquor stores, the youth receive mixed messages that compromise the outcomes of the school-based tobacco reduction interventions. Again, community psychologists give considerable weight to these types of ecological variables when trying to understand the various environmental influences on youth behavior.

Being able to explain why certain people develop drug misuse behaviors can be complicated as well and involve many factors that need to be considered when conducting research. Many traditional psychologists would focus on trying to understand biological and psychological reasons for substance use (such as depression or feelings of isolation). Community psychologists, on the other hand, would be more inclined to examine norms and opportunities within the environment. For example, if youth in a neighborhood admire apparently wealthy drug dealers who engage in illegal activities, then this risky environment and these inappropriate role models could be some of the primary reasons for increased illegal drug use. To the extent we can describe, predict, and explain why misuse of drugs occur, we are more likely to develop effective Community Psychology based interventions which deal with factors beyond the traditional individual level of analysis.

**RESEARCH AND ETHICS**
Performing Research

The Belmont Report (1978) outlined basic ethical principles and applications for research. The three major ethical principles are Respect for Persons, Beneficence, and Justice. When seeking institutional approval for research with human subjects, these three areas are addressed in the application. Once again, most traditional researchers focus on individual factors (e.g., level of self-esteem, mental health issues) when considering these areas, and they would assure that youth in a preventive program have informed consent to be involved in the intervention. Community psychologists would also be concerned with ecological factors. For instance, let's consider college students being trained to provide psychiatric ward patients with mentoring and social support. If the hospital setting was poorly run and degrading, and provided limited opportunities for skill development to prepare the patients to ultimately return to the community, this mentoring program would be considered ineffective and even unethical. If the setting's abusive features were not addressed, then the intervention would not be able to successfully help patients reintegrate back into the community.

Professional ethics from the American Psychological Association (2003) also indicate that mental healthcare professionals should have adequate skills and abilities for the roles in which they portray themselves as competent. For traditional psychologists, this might involve being knowledgeable about current testing and therapy techniques. For community psychologists, who often work with community-based samples of individuals who have been marginalized or who have suffered other systemic disadvantages, it might be more complicated, as these populations warrant extra care. For example, criminally justice-involved individuals who are exiting prison need more than aptitude tests and one-on-one therapy, as their greatest needs after leaving jail are housing and decent jobs. Community psychologists might not be trained to provide housing or jobs; however, this is where collaboration comes into play. Community psychologists would partner with community-based organizations which have the skills and competencies to provide ex-offenders opportunities for inexpensive housing and jobs. Thus an ecological perspective, as illustrated throughout this book, would focus our efforts on providing resources and changing the environment in order to provide these vulnerable individuals with concrete opportunities to successfully transition back into society.

Finally, the Society for Community Research and Action (SCRA) also has specified ethical practice competencies for professionals (Dalton & Wolfe, 2012). Some of these include recognizing the influence of one’s personal background on the collaboration, so if one is from a privileged group, this could have an influence when working with community members who did not have such advantages. One essential practice competency in the field of Community Psychology is dissemination. Dissemination is the deliberate sharing of research findings to groups and communities that would benefit from said findings. Along with dissemination is implementation, which takes dissemination a step further. Implementation is the adoption of evidence-based interventions by any organization for the purpose of better serving its population. It is most helpful to develop a professional network in
order to seek consultation and advice regarding these complex issues that are being encountered in analyzing social problems as well as implementing community-based interventions.

Research evidence also informs us as to whether our efforts actually adhere to these ethical standards, and an ineffective prevention program that consumes resources (e.g., time and money) may be considered unethical, as the case study below illustrates.

**Case Study 6.1**

A Cautionary Tale: Drug Abuse Resistance Education

The drug prevention program Drug Abuse Resistance Education (D.A.R.E.) began in the mid-1980s in Los Angeles schools, and soon was implemented nationally. During the 1990s and early 2000s, roughly 75% of students in the US were taught using this D.A.R.E. program to prevent drug use. However, research performed as early as 1994 suggested D.A.R.E. was ineffective, and by 2004, it became clear D.A.R.E. did not work (West & O’Neal, 2004). For more than 20 years, tens of millions of students were “trained” in D.A.R.E. and billions of dollars were spent on a useless program. Parents, students, and schools were, in effect, misled by “experts.”

The D.A.R.E. example demonstrates how best intentions are not sufficient in performing ethical practice, as well as shows the importance of evidence in evaluating whether harm has occurred. Without the means, resources, or system to evaluate the impact of a program, ethical concerns go unaddressed. Rather than working separately from community activists and organizations, community psychologists are trained to evaluate and conduct research with members of a community (see Chapter 7; Wolfe, 2019).

Other research issues endorsed by SCRA (2019) include active collaboration among researchers, practitioners, and community members. This work is undertaken to serve those community members directly concerned, and should be guided by their needs and preferences, as well as by their active participation. This standard recognizes the importance of the population’s voice(s) in developing and executing a research plan that has the greatest likelihood of improving the population’s well-being and minimizing harm. This principle is one of the core values of Community Psychology, and it is often referred to as community-based participatory research. Nevertheless, there will be times when funding sources have their own agendas which may not accurately reflect a population’s needs, and this can pose unique challenges for those within the field of Community Psychology. In addition, the SCRA principles embrace multiple methodologies to best generate knowledge. These attributes are more likely to lead to many studies being conducted over an extended period of time, and the development of evidence-based practices to achieve improvements.

Ethics are important in the design and performance of research. Community Psychology reduces
risks by valuing the diversity of methods, encouraging collaboration and participation, seeking to serve others, and focusing on the issues needing to be addressed by the community.

ELEMENTS OF RESEARCH DESIGN

The purpose or objectives of the research generally define the major elements of an investigation. Based on their goals and objectives, community psychologists develop a research design to best conduct their investigation. It’s important to understand that the scope of research encompasses flexibility and creativity. The basic process can be thought of as trying to achieve an objective, as well as considering what resources and sequence of activities will result in a likely success. Community psychologists specify why the research is important, determine whether the design to likely to result in credible evidence, and secure the collaboration and/or approval of stakeholders. Some of the major design elements include:

- Unit of Analysis— is the study on the individual, group, setting, community, or societal level?
- Population of Interest— is the study made up of adults, individual meeting criteria, organizations, schools, towns, or some other group?
- Sample Recruitment— how do we get members of the population of interest to participate in the study?
- Data Collection— how does information get collected?
- Time— is the study conducted at a single time point (Cross-Sectional) or at multiple observations over time per unit of analysis (Longitudinal)?
- Design— is the study observational (with no intervention) vs. experimental (with intervention)?
• Control— does the study have a control group or is there no control group?
• Power— does the study have enough participants for the research to result in credible evidence?
• Measurement and Data Structure— does the study use a qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods approach? (See below)

SCRA has identified five foundational competencies that underlie all areas of research, including specifying research questions, engaging in participatory community research, managing collaborations, developing community change models, and evaluating programs. Other competencies are in areas of research design (e.g., survey design, sampling) and data analysis (Haber et al., 2017).

QUALITATIVE

RESEARCH METHODS

Qualitative methods are very useful in the early stages of defining the topic of interest and selecting measures. This type of research usually utilizes relatively small sample sizes (less than 50) to allow an in-depth inquiry per individual. Thus, individual cases have significant weight. Qualitative data are usually collected through interviews, observation, or analysis of archival content. The interview may be unstructured (having minimal questions or anchoring by the interviewer) or structured (specific topics and questions that are consistent across the sample). The content of either interviewing or observing then undergoes analysis, and this process is how insights are formed that may be more generalizable than a single narrative.

Many analytic approaches are used in qualitative research. Four common methods are ethnography, phenomenology, grounded theory, and content analysis. Each of these has a different focus but they all place value on the “voice” of the individual being studied. The rich and complex information inherent
in qualitative content should be “listened” to very closely before any sort of evaluation or judgment is made.

Ethnography, which has its roots in anthropology and cultural studies, seeks to understand the culture or ties of a group or community from an insider’s perspective. The method used is participant observation, as shown in Figure 1, and this results in an in-depth written account of a group of people in a particular place, such as a rural area that involves migrants and farming. Additionally, this method can also focus on an aspect of contemporary social life. As an example, a community psychologist may want to better understand the operation and benefits of a cancer survivors self-help group. Ethnography may be a good analytic approach to understanding the culture, attitudes, behaviors, and benefits that group membership signifies.

Phenomenology focuses on the individual and is directed to examine a person’s narrative to capture their perceptions and lived experiences. The researcher is often thought of as an “indirect” participant due to the coding and interpretation processes involved because the goal is to expose these perceptions and experiences as unfiltered as possible. In other words, there is an attempt to set aside any preconceived assumptions about a person’s feelings, thoughts, or responses to a particular issue. Across multiple participants, common themes may emerge, but often the real insights occur from the variability and range of lived experiences within a shared context. For example, a researcher may find a theme of “to feel better” when investigating reasons for youth drug use.

Grounded theory focuses on using unstructured interviews to formulate theory that emerges from the data. The general aim is to compare and code data when interviewing participants so that an updating of what “explains” the data emerges and eventually stabilizes. When no new set of ideas or theory emerges, data collection can be halted. Guidelines would suggest 10 to 25 in-depth interviews for coding. The most important perspective of grounded theory is that the data speaks for itself, and the researcher constructs theory from the interviews and without imposing their theories on
the participants. This method has been most helpful in uncovering social processes, which are social relationships and behaviors of individuals in groups.

Content analysis includes an array of techniques for investigating material which may be text, photographs, video, audio, etc. The objective is to use a replicable, standardized process that reveals meaningful insights and patterns. Content analysis can involve text analysis where computer algorithms manipulate text to extract structured information that may be interpreted. An example of content analysis is PhotoVoice. This is a participatory, qualitative research method where individuals tell “their story” through photographs as indicated in Case Study 6.2.

**Case Study 6.2**

**Content Analysis with a Participatory Process**

PhotoVoice based research in Hawaii involved participants who were residents of Housing First (see Chapter One). Individuals took photographs and/or aided in interpretation as to their experiences in homelessness and Housing First. Fourteen major themes were developed after a participatory process of coding and summarizing findings. These included opportunity to rest, privacy, opportunity to reconnect socially, and improved mental health outcomes (greater hope, self-efficacy, and self-esteem). These findings were useful to researchers exploring different types of housing models for homelessness (Pruitt et al., 2018).

**QUANTITATIVE**

**RESEARCH METHODS**

Quantitative methods involve being able to count or quantify something. Of course, you have to be able to define the “something” but quantitative methods can help with that as well. Even the simplest of quantitative studies can have great value—for example, having a population list their top...
ten problems and rank them may provide greater insight than having an outside researcher come in and survey the population on a researcher-priority problem.

In Case Study 6.3 below is an example of this type of quantitative research, using what is called a randomized design where some individuals are provided the intervention and some are not, and then both groups are followed over time.

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**Case Study 6.3**  
**A Quantitative Evaluation of a Home Visitation Program**

A home visitation program was developed for at-risk low-income first-time pregnant women. Participants were randomly assigned to one of two groups. The first group received services such as transportation to prenatal care, routine child development screening, and referrals. In the experimental group, participants received the same services and, in addition, nurses conducted home visits during the prenatal period through early childhood. A 15-year follow-up study showed that the outcomes of the home visit group were fewer unwanted pregnancies, less use of welfare, and reduced child abuse and neglect. Additionally, the children showed fewer instances of running away from home and fewer sexual partners, as well as reduced alcohol consumption and criminal behavior (Olds et al., 1998).

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The purpose of the research greatly determines the design and methods used in quantitative studies. Some common design decisions involve whether the research is:

1. Observational or experimental—is there an intervention that the sample will experience?
2. Cross-sectional or longitudinal—is the measurement a “photograph” capturing one moment in time or is it over time, capable of capturing change?
3. Controlled—does the research include a control group? This can be very important for credibility.
4. **Random assignment**—are participants randomized to either control or experimental conditions? If not randomized, the research is defined as “quasi-experimental” and if randomized, it is a true experiment.
5. Single level or multilevel—since community psychology is interested in ecological context, clustering often occurs naturally in the data structure—think of students in a school clustered within classes.

The quantitative evaluation of interventions can encompass many methods and designs from a cross-
sectional comparison post-intervention with a control group to pre-test and post-test studies with and without controls. The choice of these designs and methods is often limited by practical constraints (e.g., no access to a control group). A large effect size in a weaker design may be more convincing than a weak signal in a more sophisticated design.

MIXED METHODS RESEARCH

Research in Community Psychology encompasses a broad range of real-world, ecological contexts, and mixed methods research uses both qualitative and quantitative methods to capture this scope within the same study or project. In essence, there are many important strategies provided by both qualitative and quantitative research in helping us better understand the transactions between persons and community-based structures. Mixed methods provide ways to stay true to Community Psychology’s values by helping to amplify the voices within the lives of unheard and historically silenced communities. This type of research can increase validity because data are collected simultaneously on the same individuals and settings using independent methods of data collection and analysis. This method can help us better understand the complexity of the multiple levels of analysis, including individuals, families, groups, neighborhoods, communities, and cultures, as indicated in the following case study.

Case Study 6.4
A Mixed Methods Approach to Institutional Change
Allen, Walden, Dworkin, and Javdani (2016) combined qualitative approaches with quantitative ones to enrich our understanding of a statewide network of family violence coordinating councils. Throughout the inquiry process, these authors used qualitative and quantitative methods. The methods were used in a sequential way so that one data collection method informed the next in terms of analysis and understanding of the data. For example, these community psychologists started by examining years of archival data, which then allowed them to better understand how the violence coordinating councils were associated with access to orders of protection across sites. This archival qualitative data allowed the investigators to better understand how the councils achieved positive outcomes. They then collected current data from councils, and this quantitative data showed a high degree of leader effectiveness. Qualitative interviews they conducted allowed them to better understand the roles of other council members not in the convener role. This helped them to better understand all the roles involved in building council capacity for institutionalized change efforts.

This innovative way of collecting data allows community psychologists to see research as a dynamic process, which helps uncover the texture and inner workings of how groups try to bring about important changes to their communities.
Several other methods that are becoming increasingly useful as tools have evolved to include **meta-analysis**, which is a method for statistically summarizing the findings of multiple studies to quantify an average effect and identify possible predictors of variability of outcomes. A meta-analysis of primary prevention, mental health programs for children and adolescents, found that very few programs reported negative results (Durlak & Wells, 1997). This research incorporated 177 studies and the findings provided strong evidence that **prevention** is beneficial for fostering the mental health of children. Another meta-analysis of youth mentoring programs suggested that evidence and theory-based programs did better (DuBois, Holloway, et. al., 2002). Overall, meta-analysis is a powerful technique to understand what past research offers as evidence. In the **mentoring** arena, many of these summary studies have been listed in the Chronicle for Evidence-Based Mentoring, which is a website developed by community psychologist Jean Rhodes.
Geographical information systems (GIS) is a method that can be useful in identifying and measuring visual influences on a map. For example, the presence of “food deserts” (i.e., areas without access to affordable, quality food) among neighborhoods can be both visually and quantitatively understood by using mapping with analytic capabilities. The presence or absence can then be modeled with other neighborhood and demographic characteristics to better understand possible remedial policy or action. For example, Chilenski (2011) found that closeness to alcohol and tobacco retailers was a significant predictor of adolescent problem behaviors.

**Social network** studies provide insight on how relationships may influence attitudes and behaviors. Let’s assume Joey ends up primarily socializing with a group where most members use alcohol. We then learn that Joey begins using alcohol. Did the group influence Joey to begin using alcohol or did Joey join the group to be able to drink with others and not be negatively judged? This question of why youth take on risky behaviors is important to know for the development of interventions and policy. Below is a very practical use of social network analysis in school settings.

### Case Study 6.5

**A Social Network Analysis of a School-Based Intervention**

Social network analysis was used with a school-based intervention focusing on improving the academic, behavioral, and social success of elementary school African American and Latino boys. The intervention included mentoring, family involvement activities, and after-school programming. The elementary school classroom teachers were supported by one or two “lead teachers,” who were meant to provide support and help with teaching strategies to improve student achievement. Social network analysis was used to help understand the teachers’ existing advice networks for spreading intervention strategies and helping document the lead teachers’ abilities to influence their colleagues. This method allowed the community psychologists to understand how the
structure of teacher advice networks could either facilitate or hinder the spread of successful classroom intervention practices (Kornbluh & Neal, 2016).

**SUMMING UP**

Community psychologists feel that effective research can utilize a multitude of designs and methods (Jason & Glenwick, 2012). One possible framework for conceptualizing methods maps the relationship between the degree of structure and the purpose of the research. The most tightly controlled experiments are focused on testing an intervention’s effect. While unstructured investigations are unlikely to lead to definite conclusions, they are, instead, an exploration of how things operate in the world. Figure 4 below portrays this arrangement.
Research is a powerful tool that helps us better define phenomena, measure it, make predictions about it, develop theories to explain it and put our knowledge to use for the betterment of our world. Community psychologists are trained to use research to understand what might be accounting for certain community problems like homelessness, as well as to evaluate whether particular interventions are effective. The ecological framework allows community psychologists to broaden the evaluation to include how the intervention affected a community’s commitment, openness, and readiness for change.

Community psychologists might have similar goals as community organizers, but their training in research and their ecological perspective provide them unique contributions to bringing about social justice. Ethics and research are interconnected—as good research should ethically generate evidence and evidence should guide ethical action. Clearly, the commitment of community psychologists is always “first do no harm” and that ineffective and resource wasteful action should be stopped. There are a variety of ecological research methods that can help point the way to bringing about social justice and more equitable distribution of resources.

Critical Thought Questions

1. Which research method (e.g., qualitative, quantitative, or mixed) would you utilize to research childhood obesity in the African-American community? Why? What are the ethical
considerations when working with this population?

2. D.A.R.E. was ineffective for numerous reasons. How would you use research to create an effective youth drug use intervention?

3. Watch the video linked in the dissemination of findings section and here. There is a movement among scientists to disseminate research findings to as many people as possible. What are the possible benefits of making research findings open access? Are there any downsides?

Take the Chapter 6 Quiz
View the Chapter 6 Lecture Slides

REFERENCES


Olds, D., Pettitt, L. M., Robinson, J., Henderson Jr., C., Eckenrode, J., Kitzman, H., ... Powers, J.


Chapter Seven Objectives

By the end of this chapter, you will be able to:

- Understand what Community Psychology practice competencies are
- Find out why Community Psychology practice competencies are important
- Learn how to develop your own Community Psychology competencies
Every job requires a specific set of skills and knowledge, and **Community Psychology** is no different. In this chapter, you will find a set of knowledge and skills that a Community Psychology practitioner needs. It starts by describing what “practice competency” means and why it is important. After presenting a brief overview of where the competencies came from and the levels of competence, the chapter will provide information about what each competency means, case examples of the competencies being used, how someone can become competent, resources related to each competency, and some self-reflection and critical thinking questions.

### Case Study 7.1

**A Community Psychology Consultant and Her Competencies**

A Community Psychology consultant just received a contract to build collaboratives to promote well-being in five rural communities. In this role, she will provide guidance and technical assistance to help the coalitions recruit historically excluded community residents, conduct a needs assessment, and use the results to develop a plan for systems-level change. When she visits these communities, she discovers that some coalitions have formed without including the historically excluded residents; three of the counties have no idea where to begin, two counties have long histories of racism and segregation, and all the counties are resource-poor in terms of health, mental health, housing, employment, transportation, and many other basic needs. The Community Psychology
consultant realizes that she is going to need all the knowledge and skills she developed throughout her training and employment experiences. As you read through this chapter, reflect upon each competency and think about how it could be applied for the Community Psychology consultant’s work with these collaboratives.

THE ROLE OF COMPETENCIES IN COMMUNITY PSYCHOLOGY

You might be wondering, what does “practice competency” mean? The Community Psychology practice competencies were developed to provide a common framework to describe the skills involved in Community Psychology practice (Dalton & Wolfe, 2012). It means that someone who is a Community Psychology practitioner has mastered some or all these skills and knowledge to some extent. Community Psychology practice competency means that the community psychologist has mastered enough of the skills to implement their work in real life situations dealing with individuals and communities in need.

Why “practice competencies” and why is this important to the work that we do? When students are deciding on their careers and what to study in college or graduate school, they usually focus on the type of work they would like to do first. The next step is to find out what degree will give them the skills needed for the work they want to do. The Community Psychology practice competencies accurately reflect the set of skills students can obtain if they get a degree in this field. Another reason having a list of competencies is important is that graduates of Community Psychology programs can easily describe their skills to potential employers. Alternately, potential employers who have job openings that require these skills will know that they need to look for in someone who is trained in Community Psychology. A common vocabulary amongst practitioners, communities, and employers will help everyone to know what to expect when working with community psychologists (Neigher & Ratcliffe, 2010).
Where did these practice competencies come from? The competencies were created collaboratively by a task group made up of members of the Society for Community Research and Action’s (SCRA) Community Psychology Practice Council and Council of Education programs. They began the work in 2010 and after many iterations and reviews, the list of competencies was approved by the SCRA’s Executive Committee in 2012.

What levels of competence are there? As with any field of study, an individual can develop any of the Community Psychology practice competencies to a different level of mastery. The first level is “exposure” which means that they have learned about the competencies and how it can be applied in practice. At the next level, “experience,” the community psychologist has actually used the competencies in supervised practice, or practice on their own, to perform the tasks related to the competency. “Expertise” means the community psychologist has had several experiences with applying the competencies in work and developed a high level of skill.

To whom do these competencies apply? While many of these competencies apply to community psychologists all over the world, this particular set of competencies in their entirety apply primarily to community psychologists practicing in the US. Community psychologists in other countries sometimes need different skills in their work because of cultural, economic, legal, political, or other differences.

THE COMPETENCIES

Foundational Principles

The foundational principles are the five competencies that all Community Psychology practitioners working in the US need, listed in Table 1 below. They represent knowledge, skills, and principles that help to guide practice work from a Community Psychology perspective, as well as the values and perspectives of Community Psychology and the competencies needed to apply the values in
practice, as also indicated in the first chapter (Jason, Glantsman, O'Brien, & Ramian, 2019). These competencies are combined with the remaining more technical skills-based competencies to ensure they are exercised using a Community Psychology approach. Elias, Neigher, and Johnson-Hakim (2015) suggest that you think of them as “foreground” processes because Community Psychology practitioners need to pay constant attention to these principles and make sure that their actions align with them.

For example, in our case study, the Community Psychology practitioner will need to work with communities to develop their coalitions. There are many coalitions in place across most communities in the US, but when the Community Psychology practitioner works with the communities to develop their coalitions, they will be sure they include community members and develop structures that empower the historically excluded populations to lead the coalitions and determine the actions to be taken on their own behalf. This contrasts with coalitions that typically include professionals who make decisions and take action from outside the community.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ecological Perspectives:</th>
<th>Empowerment:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The ability to articulate and apply multiple ecological perspectives and levels of analysis in community practice.</td>
<td>The ability to articulate and apply a collective empowerment perspective, to support communities that have been marginalized in their efforts to gain access to resources, and to participate in community decision-making.</td>
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| Skill 1. Articulate and apply an ecological systems perspective, considering multiple contextual factors at multiple levels, to understand community organizational issues. | Skill 1. Promote exercising greater power for communities that have been marginalized. |
| Skill 2. Identify processes of interdependence, resource exchange, adaptation, and succession in settings and communities. | Skill 2. Articulate and promote collective empowerment among individuals working together to achieve shared goals through meaningful community engagement. |
| Skill 3. Address multiple ecological levels, resources, and processes to design, implement, and evaluate community and social action initiatives. | |
| Skill 4. Articulate and apply ecological systems perspective in relation to other competencies for practice. | |

Table 1. Foundational Principles Competencies Defined and Described
## Skill 3. Enact empowering processes through working in genuine, inclusive partnerships with community members and organizations.

## Skill 4. Support diverse, contextual forms of collective empowerment appropriate for different communities.

## Skill 5. Articulate and apply empowerment principles in relation to other competencies for practice.

### Sociocultural and Cross-Cultural Competence:
The ability to value, integrate, and bridge multiple worldviews, cultures, and identities.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skill 1. Define one’s own worldview, culture, and identity, and how those influence one’s assumptions and interactions with the focal community context.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Skill 2. Articulate how dynamics of culture, privilege, and power influence interactions within the focal community context, including one’s own interactions.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Skill 3. Analyze social inequity and power imbalances.</td>
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<td>Skill 4. Assess cultural, social structural, ecological process, and empowerment dynamics in the focal community and use the assessment to inform community building and advocacy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skill 5. Form relationships with individuals across diverse cultures and social positions to address</td>
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</table>
Community Inclusion and Partnership:
The ability to promote genuine representation and respect for all community members, and act to legitimize divergent perspectives on community and social issues.

| Community Inclusion and Partnership: | Skill 1. Apply ecological, empowerment, and cross-cultural principles to processes and interpersonal relationships when working with community members.  
Skill 2. Make positions of power and privilege transparent, and work to facilitate empowerment among those with less power and privilege.  
Skill 3. Develop avenues for respectful dialogue and listening and promote this dialogue through one’s own actions.  
Skill 4. Identify and act upon opportunities for mutual support. |

Ethical, Reflective Practice:
Engage in a process of continual ethical improvement.

| Ethical, Reflective Practice: | Skill 1. Identify ethical issues in one’s practice and act to address them responsibly.  
Skill 2. Articulate how one’s own values, assumptions, and life experiences influence one’s work, and articulate the strengths and limitations of one’s own perspective.  
Skill 3. Develop and maintain professional networks for ethical consultation and support. |

Community Program Development and Management

This set of two competencies include a large skill set whereby Community Psychology practitioners can partner with community stakeholders from start to finish to develop and implement programs in their communities to meet identified needs, to prevent problems, and to promote health (See Table 2). The case study at the beginning of this chapter mentions that the communities are resource poor. If the collaborative decides they need to create after-school programs for youth, then the Community Psychology consultant may use the particular skills connected with community program development and management to help them with program design and implementation.

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Community and Organizational Capacity-Building

One hallmark of Community Psychology practice is that instead of going into communities and acting on their behalf, Community Psychology practitioners work to strengthen communities so they can act on their own behalf. This requires a strong, trusting relationship between the community psychologist and the various stakeholders, such as community partners, advocates, members of the target population, treatment providers, and governmental entities (Elias, Neigher, & Johnson-Hakim, 2015). If Community Psychology practitioners are successful in their work, communities they work in should eventually not need their help at all. The goal is to create change which is then adopted by the community and managed by the community members to the point where they sustain it over time. This is really important for working in disadvantaged communities that have been traditionally disempowered. By giving away our skills and knowledge, we empower them to make the changes their communities need and reduce their reliance on outside professionals. These four competencies are designed to help us do that (see Table 3). When the Community Psychology consultant in our first case study goes into the communities to work with them to build their collaboratives, she will not do any of the work for them. She will provide training and technical assistance to strengthen the skills and capacity of the community members to build and maintain their collaborative.
<table>
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<tr>
<th><strong>Table 3. Community and Organizational Capacity-Building Competencies Defined and Described</strong></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Community Leadership and Mentoring</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Small and Large Group Process:</strong> The ability to intervene in small and large group processes to facilitate the capacity of community groups to work together productively.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
**Resource Development:**
The ability to identify and integrate use of human and material resources, including community assets and social capital.

| Skill 1. Conduct a community assessment of needs, resources, and assets that facilitate organizational and program sustainability. |
| Skill 2. Translate knowledge of needs and assets into specific funding aims. |
| Skill 3. Develop relationships and partnerships with funding agencies, organizations, and foundations. |
| Skill 4. Utilize effective grant writing and fundraising skills. |
| Skill 5. Build capacity to ensure compliance with requirements of grants and resources received. |
| Skill 6. Develop and present an evaluation plan. |

**Consultation and Organizational Development:**
The ability to facilitate growth of an organization’s capacity to attain its goals.

| Skill 1. Assess organizational capacity, issues, needs, and assets. |
| Skill 2. Create and sustain effective partnerships with organization members. |
| Skill 3. Facilitate organizational learning, problem-solving, and decision-making. |
| Skill 4. Facilitate collaborative strategic planning of organizational goals, desired outcomes, and action initiatives. |

**Community and Social Change**

Typically, when there is a problem in a community, we address it by creating another program to help solve some of the issues that have arisen. For example, in one community the response to childhood obesity was to teach children and parents how to improve their diet and exercise. Nobody would dispute that this is helpful information for all people to have. That said, what happens when parents want to fix healthy meals for their children, but they don’t have access to the food they need to make them? Or, what if they don’t have a car and there is no grocery store in their neighborhood? And what if a family can’t get out to walk or ride bicycles or get exercise of some kind because they live in a neighborhood where there are no sidewalks to walk on, or it isn’t safe because of high crime? Many of our social problems cannot be fixed by working to change people’s behavior, especially if they live or work in environments that won’t support their behavior changes. We need to have the skills to change systems, policies, and the environments in which people live. This set of five competencies provides Community Psychology practitioners with the skills to make these changes to create second-order change processes that focus on ways to rearrange current relationships, roles, and power dynamics within a setting (see Table 4). The goal is to establish a more just, inclusive, and health-promoting environment (Elias, Neigher, & Johnson-Hakim, 2015). The Community Psychology consultant in the Case Study 7.1 will need these skills to help the collaboratives build their own skills to change systems, and not just...
focus on creating programs.

| Collaboration and Coalition Development: | Skill 1. Develop and maintain a network of constructive work partnerships with clients, residents, organizations, communities, and other stakeholders.  
Skill 2. Communicate the value of community members’ lived, experiential knowledge, especially those most affected by an issue, and facilitate use of that knowledge in coalition work.  
Skill 3. Facilitate inclusive coalition membership and discussion that represents views of all segments of the community.  
Skill 4. Facilitate community member efforts to identify community issues, resources, and goals for collective action.  
Skill 5. Negotiate goals of work and mediate partnerships for collective actions. |
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Community Development:</td>
<td>Skill 1. Facilitate community participation in community improvement efforts and decision-making.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4. Community and Social Change Competencies Defined and Described
| Skill 1. Facilitate community efforts to identify community issues, resources, and goals for collective action. |
| Skill 2. Help organize collective efforts by community members and facilitate community building of action plans. |
| Skill 3. Assist community members to take sustained collective action to bring about systems change. |

### Public Policy Analysis, Development, and Advocacy:
The ability to build and sustain effective communication and working relationships with policy makers, elected officials, and community leaders.

| Skill 1. Write policy briefs, present testimony, draft policies, and consult with policy makers at federal, state/province, and local levels. |
| Skill 2. Translate research findings into useful policy information and recommendations. |
| Skill 3. Build coalitions to advocate for policy changes. |

### Community Education, Information Dissemination, and Building Public Awareness:
The ability to communicate information to various segments of the public, to strengthen competencies and awareness, or for advocacy.

| Skill 1. Provide information to community members through educational approaches to strengthen their capacity for independent action and to empower them to act on behalf of other community members. |
| Skill 2. Engage diverse groups in dialogue about information through consultation, public speaking, writing, and social media, and media. |
| Skill 3. Systematically identify stakeholders to receive information and tailor messages for their use. |
| Skill 4. Use training and technical assistance to develop individual and organizational capacity to use innovation. |
| Skill 5. Identify different stakeholders’ interests, tailor messages and the medium for each stakeholder audience, evaluate dissemination and use of information, re-evaluate stakeholder needs and interests, and revise programs as needed. |
Case Study 7.2
The Community Driven Development of The Gateway

There is much one can do with Community Psychology practice competencies focusing on community and social change, even outside the field itself. Debi Starnes has served in elected positions in the local government of Atlanta, Georgia and has also held key policy advisory roles over the course of her career (Scott & Wolfe, 2015). Dually trained in both clinical psychology and community/organizing psychology, Debi was actively involved in various leadership roles in her community. She understood the importance of being an active member of her community regardless of her education. In fact, she said, “I didn’t get elected because I was a community psychologist, but being a community psychologist helped enormously in my perspective and how I approached different issues and tasks,” when serving as an elected official. During her 11-year career as a city council member, Debi was able to develop a Homeless Action Group, which brought together a wide variety of community members and groups to talk about and address issues facing people experiencing homelessness. Debi used her skills and was able to practice community and organizational capacity-building while enacting community and social change in a different role than a practitioner. Due to her efforts, the city developed The Gateway, a central intake and assessment facility that provided vital housing and services for people experiencing homelessness. This successful program required collaboration between city officials, business leaders, treatment providers, law enforcement, and community members. Debi was able to use her training and expertise, as well as her dedication to community service, to bring these groups together and enact social change. Find out more about The Gateway program.

Community Research

These last two competencies allow Community Psychology practitioners to learn about the communities they work with, and to determine whether what they have done has made a difference. Unlike more traditional research, community psychologists do research and evaluate programs with community members rather than on or about them. They use their scientific set of skills to collect and analyze data to help communities answer their questions, evaluate what they are doing, and use research to plan, learn, and make decisions. The community consultant will need research and evaluation skills to help communities to conduct needs assessments and gather data to use for planning and to evaluate the outcomes of their initiatives.

There are so many advantages when community psychologists collaborate with community members and organizations. These types of collaborations can provide mutual benefits to the investigators as well as the community members, and help get the word out regarding new innovative ways of
delivering services. The following Case Study 7.3 provides some glimpses of interactions that occurred during a 25-year collaborative relationship between a DePaul University group and the Oxford House recovery organization. By having members of the recovery community guide the types of questions that were asked, the research helped capture more crucial aspects of the changes that were occurring among residents.

| Case Study 7.3  
Community Partners Identifying Areas for Research |

During one of the annual Oxford House conventions, an individual living in one of these homes approached Leonard Jason, one of the DePaul University investigators and suggested that measures of tolerance be included in this collaborative research. He explained that prior to living in an Oxford House, he had been very prejudiced against people who were different from him, such as people who were HIV positive. But while in Oxford House, he met a woman who was HIV positive; she was now his girlfriend. He wanted to point out that, for him, living in Oxford House went beyond staying clean and sober—it made him a more accepting and generous person. That participatory input led to a series of mixed methods investigations, which allowed both the community members and university researchers to better understand the rich experiences and outcomes of residents living in these recovery houses. For example, in one randomized study, with individuals being assigned to an Oxford House or usual aftercare condition, over time, those assigned to the Oxford House condition demonstrated significantly greater values of tolerance than usual aftercare participants. These changes occurred due to living in a recovery setting where members could share time with one another, exchange life stories, discuss their prior drug use, talk about personal and group goals, enjoying eating and attending 12-step meetings, and participating in a variety of non-substance use social outings. With this type of involvement, it is likely that a sense of cohesion developed which led to increases in tolerance (Olson, & Jason, 2015).

This type of collaborative research led to the non-profit being endorsed by the federal government as the current “gold standard” for residential aftercare. Receiving this recognition from the federal government helped this community organization expand to now serving over 20,000 individuals in recovery.

An important element of community research and action in practice is the dissemination of successful interventions that have benefited communities (Scott, & Wolfe, 2015). Dissemination is a strategic, systematic sharing of information about an intervention or research to individuals and groups who can use this information to help the people they work with. The goals are to influence policy and change community psychologists’ methods in an area of practice so it is of greater benefit to the populations they are working with. An even more concentrated form of dissemination is implementation, or “the use of strategies to adopt and integrate evidence-based health interventions and change practice patterns in specific settings” (Chamber, 2009; as cited in Scott, & Wolfe, 2015).
focus on implementation leads to innovative interventions that are more effective for the groups they are meant to help. This allows the practice to advance as a whole and creates an open dialogue among practitioners to collaborate on solutions and share their work.

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<tr>
<th>Table 5. Community Research Competencies Defined and Described</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Participatory Community Research:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>The ability to work with community partners to plan and conduct research that meets high standards of scientific evidence that are contextually appropriate, and to communicate the findings of that research in ways that promote community capacity to pursue community goals.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Skill 1.</strong> Provide communities with information regarding expectations of funding agencies and other stakeholders regarding scientific methods and research.</td>
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<td><strong>Skill 2.</strong> Work with community groups to develop research and evaluation designs that balance the values of the community with scientific standards.</td>
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<td><strong>Skill 3.</strong> Employ diverse and rigorous methods to conduct research that is collaborative and inclusive, engaging community members throughout the research process.</td>
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<td><strong>Skill 4.</strong> Conduct assessments of community issues, needs, and assets, using qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods in partnership with community members and organizations.</td>
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<td><strong>Skill 5.</strong> Use qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods appropriate to the context and purposes of the community research.</td>
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<td><strong>Skill 6.</strong> Employ data analytic approaches that account for multi-level contextual influences on behavior, use variable-centered or person-centered approaches as appropriate, and examine influences longitudinally.</td>
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<td><strong>Skill 7.</strong> Communicate findings and translate research in a way that has utility for practitioners and all relevant stakeholders.</td>
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<td><strong>Skill 8.</strong> Use research-based information to promote community and organizational learning, shared decision making, and collective empowerment.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Skill 9.</strong> Utilize effective grant-writing skills and build capacity to ensure compliance with requirements of grants and contracts.</td>
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<th>Program Evaluation:</th>
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<tr>
<td>The ability to partner with community leaders and members to promote program improvement and program accountability to stakeholders and funders.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Skill 1.</strong> Develop culturally and linguistically competent program evaluation methods appropriate for program context.</td>
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<td><strong>Skill 2.</strong> When relevant, teach data collection procedures to community members.</td>
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<td><strong>Skill 3.</strong> Collect, analyze, and report appropriate evaluation data.</td>
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<td><strong>Skill 4.</strong> Integrate evaluation findings into ongoing program development.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Skill 5.</strong> Conduct program evaluations that adhere to professionally accepted standards of practice, including utility, feasibility, propriety, accuracy, and accountability.</td>
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But why should community psychologists in practice share what they find with each other? Well, this is because practitioners have to keep sustainability in mind as they are developing and implementing programs. This is especially true if a program is a success because the goal is to change best practices and policies so that the methods can be used to help more people and be spread to other locations. Focusing on sustainability can ensure that an effective program, intervention, or research finding is preserved and continues to affect practice and public policy, even after the practitioner has started working on something else. If a practitioner does not account for sustainability, it can lead to the old adage of “history repeating itself,” as their intervention and findings are ignored and lost over time.

The case study below will highlight the importance of sharing the methodology with peers in the field with a focus on dissemination and sustainability.

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**Case Study 7.4**
The Fairweather Lodge and a Successful Dissemination
An instructive example showcasing dissemination and sustainability is the work of Bill Fairweather and his colleagues. Fairweather’s seminal work was a 25-year examination and experimentation of group problem solving with people with mental disorders living in inpatient hospital facilities (Scott & Wolfe, 2015). Fairweather wanted to understand, through experimentation, how to give people in these institutional settings some semblance of freedom in the real world. Fairweather and his colleagues understood the importance of empowerment and community integration, and recognized that this vulnerable, institutionalized group could benefit greatly from community-based living. His team spent an additional 10 years implementing a community living setting for these patients, with both work and social opportunities, called the Community Lodge. The lodge was very successful in giving patients economic, social, and interpersonal opportunities and vastly improved their quality of life. Their findings were successfully disseminated to other practitioners focusing on people with mental illness, and this led to many other works involving the importance of community living in improving people’s lives.

Take a moment to think about how long it took to create this successful program for people with mental illness in hospital settings: it took 35 years total to fully understand the problem, evaluate solutions, and implement it successfully through intervention. That is quite an investment on the part of Fairweather and his colleagues, and yet they knew the importance of creating an intervention grounded in an empirical understanding of the issue and potential solutions. They wanted to make sure that their program would be effective, and they took the time to learn as much as they could before trying their lodge idea out. And they
made sure to study the most effective dissemination methods to make sure their results were spread and reached a wide audience.

**LEARNING AND STRENGTHENING COMPETENCIES**

The first way to learn the competencies discussed is to study Community Psychology, especially at the graduate level. As an undergraduate, there is a good chance that you have never heard of Community Psychology, as Bauer, Glantsman, Hochberg, Turner, and Jason (2017) found that most introductory psychology textbooks contain no reference to this field (but there are now ongoing efforts to change this). Many universities offer Master’s level programs that train students in these competencies, or you can pursue a Ph.D. for more in-depth education. Not all Community Psychology graduate programs teach all of the competencies, so someone considering graduate education in Community Psychology should first decide what kind of work they are interested in doing, and then find a graduate program that focuses on the competencies they will need. All Community Psychology graduate programs focus on the foundational principles, but for other competencies, a prospective community psychologist should explore programs. For example, some graduate programs focus more on community research competencies, and others on community and organizational capacity-building.

However, there are some universities that offer an undergraduate psychology degree with an emphasis on Community Psychology. These undergraduate programs are an excellent means of learning more about the field and getting the relevant experiences for graduate school or work post-graduate work. You can find a list of undergraduate Community Psychology programs [here](#).

Sometimes you can also find these competencies taught in other academic departments. For example, Social Work programs might offer program development, implementation, and management, and public health schools offer public policy analysis, development, and advocacy. You might take organizational psychology classes to learn more about organizational development. You could even
explore anthropology departments for more training in qualitative methods, business schools to learn more about managing people and programs, or political science to learn more about policy and government.

Once you have had exposure to the competencies, if you want to use them you will need to acquire experience. Internships and volunteer work offer opportunities to work with more experienced professionals under supervision as you gain experience. Just be really clear when you sign up that you are interested in learning more about the competency and want to get experience, so you can make sure the opportunity will support your need. Many entry-level jobs will also provide you with access to experienced individuals and opportunities to participate in supporting activities that use these competencies.

You can also look for additional outside training to further develop them. Many professional associations have professional conferences, and some of them even include pre-conference workshops and training opportunities. For example, workshops are often offered before the beginning of conferences sponsored by such organizations as SCRA, the American Psychological Association, and the American Evaluation Association. Then you can attend the actual conferences and hear presentations that describe the results of the application of these competencies.

Attending professional conferences is also a good way to learn more about competencies and network with individuals who are using the competencies. There are large, national conferences such as the SCRA’s Biennial Conferences that are held every other year. There are also regional conferences that are smaller and provide better opportunities to meet community psychologists and learn more about their work and how they apply the competencies.

Finally, look for online training opportunities as well. There are free online courses offered through Coursera; online training through professional associations; and opportunities through private organizations, such as The Evaluator’s Institute. There are often online certifications available through various universities. For example, Michigan State University offers an online Program Evaluation Certification. The Community Tool Box, which was developed by a group of community psychologists, offers a large amount of information and resources to develop the Community Psychology practice competencies.

You can also read The Community Psychologist to learn about recent research, practice, and programs developed by community psychologists. There are specific issues of The Community Psychologist that deal with competencies in the Spring and Fall 2010 issues of the Community Psychologist (The Joint Council of Education and Community Practitioner) that are about building competency for collaboration with citizens and communities and group processes. Also, the Spring 2011 column is about building Leadership and Mentoring competence and the Spring 2013 column is about policy analysis, development, and advocacy. There is also The Community Psychology website, where you can learn much more about the field.
Developing expertise in any of the Community Psychology practice competencies requires a combination of education, extra training and skill building, mentorship, and experience. Keep in mind that no matter how much anyone learns and develops expertise for any one of the competencies, there is always more to learn. It is an ongoing process that unfolds throughout a Community Psychology practitioner’s career.

**Critical Thought Questions**

1. Which competencies do you think would be most important to you if you were a Community Psychology practitioner?
2. When you think about programs and change initiatives that have been done in your own community, how does the Community Psychology practice approach, guided by the foundational principles, differ from the approach that was taken where you live?
3. How are these competencies the same, and how are they different from competencies required in other fields of study, such as Social Work, Public Health, and evaluation?

Take the [Chapter 7 Quiz](#)
View the [Chapter 7 Lecture Slides](#)

**REFERENCES**
