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Terms of Empowerment/Exemplars of Prevention: Toward a Theory for Community Psychology[1]

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In order to develop theory any community of scientists must agree as to what constitutes its phenomena of interest. A distinction is made between phenomena of interest and exemplars. The concept "prevention" is viewed as an exemplar, whereas the concept "empowerment" is suggested as a leading candidate for the title "phenomena of interest" to Community Psychology. The ecological nature of empowerment theory is described, and some of the terms of empowerment (definitions, conditions, and periods of time) are explicated. Eleven assumptions, presuppositions, and hypotheses are offered as guidelines for theory development and empirical study.

Empowerment is a pervasive positive value in American culture. The concept suggests both individual determination over one's own life and democratic participation in the life of one's community, often through mediating structures such as schools, neighborhoods, churches, and other voluntary organizations. Empowerment conveys both a psychological sense of personal control or influence and a concern with actual social influence, political power, and legal rights. It is a multilevel construct applicable to individual citizens as well as to organizations and neighborhoods; it suggests the study of people in context.

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In three previous papers (Rappaport, 1981, 1985a; Rappaport, Swift, & Hess, 1984) I have suggested that empowerment is a process, a mechanism by which people, organizations, and communities gain mastery over their affairs. Consequently, empowerment will look different in its manifest content for different people, organizations, and settings. In those papers I also drew out some of the implications of adopting empowerment as the aim of our work, including our role relationships to people, policy, programs, and professionals. In particular, I suggested that a concern with empowerment leads us to look for solutions to problems in living in a diversity of local settings, rather than in the centralized single solutions of a monolithic "helping" structure, where help is considered to be a scarce commodity (see also Katz, 1984). I also suggested that the language of empowerment communicates, and metacommunicates, a number of presuppositions different from those communicated by the more familiar language of the helping professions. The intention of this paper is to make a case for empowerment as the subject of an ecological theory for the field of Community Psychology.

Although theory is essential to the maturation of any field of serious scientific study, Community Psychologists, with a few important exceptions, have paid little attention to it. While a good deal of the empirical information and much of the methodology of contemporary Psychology is potentially useful to our field (insofar as it is not held to be an exclusive or limiting set of conditions for obtaining data), much of available theory is inadequate either because it does not concern itself with the phenomena we wish to understand, or because it is derived from a different world view. In this paper I suggest that the study of empowerment is a leading candidate for stimulating theoretical developments in Community Psychology because it captures the essence of both the field's *world view,* and its *phenomena of interest.*

Community Psychology as a field of study has reached a time in its development when theory must be proposed, tested, and modified. Without theory a field cannot long survive as a scientific enterprise. Without theory the applications of a field must become increasingly cut off from the sharp edge of scientific critique. Theory serves a number of essential purposes, some of which I identify in this paper. I then propose that we engage in serious efforts to develop a theory of empowerment which can serve the purposes identified. In doing so I discuss some of Thomas Kuhn's more recent observations on the activities of any community of scientists,[3] particularly his description of *exemplars.* I suggest that the concept "prevention" is an exemplar for our field, whereas the concept "empowerment" describes the phenomena

[3]In this paper use of the word "community" has two meanings. One pertains to the subject matter of Community Psychology; the second meaning refers to any group of scientists who share serious scientific interests in particular phenomena, and who engage in professional activities related to those interests.

of interest, and therefore is a proper subject for theory. While there may be other candidates for theory in Community Psychology, some of which I mention here, I argue that a theory of empowerment is the most suitable. The kind of research and some of the terms and assumptions of such a theory, including its essential ecological nature (Kelly & Hess, 1986; Trickett, 1984) are then described.

The Purpose of Theory and Why Community Psychology Needs One

A scientific theory gives a field coherence, direction, and a focus of attention. It presents hypotheses, suggests goals, ideas, applications, and domains of interest. A scientific theory must be broad enough to encompass important phenomena of interest, yet narrow enough to provide testable hypotheses. Theory will contain certain presuppositions and make certain nontestable assumptions. While its hypotheses will be falsifiable, and its generalizations modifiable, there is a mutual influence process from data to theory and vice versa. That is, good theory "can be characterized as involving two way linkages with the data . . . (it is) interactively generated . . . and receive(s) . . . (its) epistemic justification via the mutual meshing of rationalism and empiricism" (Royce, 1984, p. 418).

The purpose of scientific theory is usually said to be to explain or account for the observables of a specific domain of investigation (Royce, 1984). The point of a theory is, among other things, to explain, predict, create, stimulate, and encourage understanding of certain phenomena of interest. If a theory is not about the phenomena of interest it is useless in guiding the scientist's work. Borrowing theories (as opposed to data) from domains that have a different scope and intention, no matter how successful they are for other purposes, will not serve the purposes of a theory for Community Psychology. Lack of theory appropriate to the phenomena of interest reduces the value of data for applied scientists and professionals who wish to identify and encourage or stimulate the phenomena. Although this would seem to be a truism, failure to appreciate the point has heretofore limited development in the field of Community Psychology, where our theories are largely borrowed. If we do not develop our own theories we will adopt other (less appropriate) theories by default.

Theory is useful for more than telling us which data are relevant, although it does do that; properly used, theory is consciously directed by an awareness of our presuppositions, values, and goals (Rappaport, 1984). Theory is modified by data, but it also tells us what the data mean and what other data might be useful. It is a part of our world view. To be concrete, if somewhat obvious, let me suggest that low IQ scores mean very different things to Arthur Jensen, J. McV. Hunt, and Herbert Ginsburg (see Rap-

paport, 1977) or Steven Jay Gould (1981) before they ever see the data. The scores themselves have no meaning. Rather, what they mean, if anything, is determined by the theory in which they are embedded. Theory places these data in a context for interpretation.

A theory of use to Community Psychology must place data in the proper context for interpretation. Likewise, for a field that has aspirations to be the basis of a profession even more is necessary. Techniques, sometimes called strategies and tactics for intervention, are also required. But in and of themselves, these professional tools are pointless for a field of study. They may serve certain immediate purposes for the professional and may be the subject of applied research that can even help to modify the theory, but what is learned by action research loses much of its meaning for a filed of study in the absence of a theory in which to place that learning (Argris, 1985; Rapoport, 1985).

A good theory is open to falsification, but it does not abandon its phenomena of interest. Without a phenomena of interest a theory cannot exist. The phenomena of interest must identify and encompass the entire class of relevant issues to which a theory addresses itself. The community of scientists, if they are to be a community with that relative ease of communication identified by philosophers of science as characteristic (Suppe, 1977), must share in a theory that includes each of their specific individual research interests yet excludes those things not pertinent to the community. Although the theory is defined by the community of scientists, it also defines that community.

The Importance of the Scientists' World View

As I have noted elswhere (Rappaport, 1977), Thomas Kuhn's (1970) classic analysis of scientific revolutions is a useful heuristic because it helps us to understand what happens when a new theory is adopted by a community of scientists. Rather than operating within the bounds of normal science, as defined by currently acceptable theories and assumptions, i.e., working from within to disconfirm or extend existing theories, to encompass all or even most known facts, his analysis suggested that it is often the case that scientists begin with a different world view and therefore see the world differently from the outset. In the case of Community Psychology, while we may use a good deal of what psychologists know, because we are psychologists, we need not use these data in the same way they have been used by their original users. Indeed, we may not even see in these data what others see in them.

When we fail to develop our own theories it is like borrowing someone else's glasses—or perhaps more like putting on prisms that reverse the world.

If one puts on prism glasses that appear to turn the world upside down, at first he or she is disoriented. After a short while the person wearing these glasses adjusts to them, and although the world is turned upside down by the glasses, the one who wears them no longer knows it. When we adopt the prisms of a theory we allow what we see to be observed through the world view of those prisms. Adopting the theories of those with other agendas for psychology means adopting their agendas.

Kuhn's analysis suggested that in developing theory consistent with a Community Psychology world view, we may legitimately propose theories more suited to our purposes than those that are available, without needing either to disconfirm existing psychological theories or to account for all the phenomena to which they have been applied. Faith and conversion are important components in the process. The radical scientist is seen to look for ways in which a new theory, selected at the outset on the basis of faith, and in part *because* of its differences from existing theories, can be developed, supported, and modified. The new theory is selected on the basis of a belief that it can help us to understand the phenomena of interest. We accept the theory first, and act as if it were true. Only after this leap of faith are we able to think of ways in which to systematically test what happens when we act "as if." Although we remain committed to the rules of confirmation, the rules for discovery are different.

Following Kuhn's original work on scientific theorizing he has proposed, in response to critiques of his use of the concept "paradigm," a number of new ideas that I find quite useful. Among them are what he called disciplinary matrices and exemplars, terms that are helpful in describing the activities of any scientific community; that is, describing how a community of scientists behaves.[4] I believe that Kuhn's (1977) modified approach is particularly helpful for understanding the different functions that concepts such as prevention and empowerment play for the community of community psychologists, a subject to which I turn shortly; but first I need to summarize his description of the activities of any community of scientists.

[4]Kuhn does continue to maintain that the scientist's world view is central to his or her adoption of a particular theory, and that the adoption of new theories appears to be more similar to the process of faith and conversion than to a formal logical process, as had been assumed by the philosophy of science (Suppe, 1977). It is important to note that the adequacy of world view philosophical positions for formal technical analysis of the structure of scientific theories, a matter of controversy within Philosophy, does not necessarily damage their usefulness for other purposes, such as describing how a community of scientists behaves.

Kuhn's Modified Approach: The Role of Exemplars and Theories in the Disciplinary Matrix

Kuhn, correctly I think, suggested that the notion of paradigms can be defended as an empirical generalization with regard to how scientific communities behave. In his words:

> A paradigm is what the members of a scientific community and they alone share. Conversely, it is their possession of a common paradigm that constitutes a scientific community of otherwise disparate men (and women) . . . Bound together by common elements in their education and apprenticeship, they see themselves and are seen by others as the men (and women) responsible for the pursuit of a set of shared goals, including the training of their successors . . . . To a remarkable extent these individuals will have absorbed the same literature, and drawn similar lessons from it . . . (They will) have access to the same conferences, to preprint distribution lists, and above all to formal and informal communication networks . . . Individual scientists, particularly the ablest, will belong to several such groups, either simultaneously or in succession. (Kuhn, 1977, pp. 460-462)

What, asked Kuhn, accounts for the relatively unproblematic nature of professional communication and judgment within a scientific community? Here he replaced the paradigm with the "disciplinary matrix." This is said to be composed of a variety of elements, including symbolic generalizations, models (which provide analogies and heuristics), and exemplars ("concrete problem solutions, accepted by the group as, in a quite usual sense, paradigmatic," p. 463).

The exemplar is described most easily as the community's shared examples of problem solution. Exemplars demonstrate the ways in which a community of scientists approach what I have called the phenomena of interest. One learns the community's exemplars, at first by solving textbook and classroom problems, and then by applying similar thinking to new problems that fall within the phenomena of interest, through a process which Kuhn described as "the learned perception of similarity." This is learned, he argued, not by first adopting shared rules but rather by an analysis of shared examples. Such analysis leads the young scientist to develop a world view shared with those other scientists who are to become a part of her or his disciplinary matrix.

This formulation suggests that disciplinary matrices in part supply a conceptual framework or world view, learned by the study of exemplars. While this world view approach poses certain philosophical problems, it retains the "sound insight that one learns to use symbolic formulations through the study of exemplars" (Suppe, 1977, p. 498). That insight is useful for the purposes of this paper. It clarifies the distinction between exemplars, phenomena of interest, and theories. We are led to the conclusion that the answer to the question "what accounts for the relative ease of communica-

tion within a scientific community?" is that the members of the community are in agreement as to:

1. What theory to employ.
2. What the relevant questions (phenomena of interest) are.
3. What sorts of work to take as exemplary.
4. How to apply theories to nature.
5. What counts as good and bad science.

This is an outline of an agenda for the development of a scientific community. To the extent that we want the community of Community Psychologists to be a scientific community, it must be our agenda. Although I do not have the space to discuss here questions of what constitutes good and bad science, or how to apply theories to nature (essentially questions of method rather than substance), I do wish at least to begin discussion of the other three issues, i.e., what theory to employ, what the phenomena of interest are, and what work to take as exemplary for the field of Community Psychology. Again, the preceding suggests that theories, phenomena of interest, and exemplars are different things.

It is this distinction that may help to clarify some of the controversy I seem to have created in an earlier attempt to introduce the idea of empowerment to Community Psychology (Rappaport, 1981; see for example Cowen, 1985, Felner, Jason, Moritsugu, & Farber, 1983; Price, 1983; Swift, 1984). I seem to have suggested that adopting the concept of empowerment requires rejecting the concept of prevention, an idea that has become so important in the thinking of Community Psychologists as to perhaps be paradigmatic. I, mistakenly I think, suggested that these two ideas are *necessarily* incompatible.

I now believe that, while the distinction between the terms empowerment and prevention is very important, they are not necessarily incompatible. Rather, these terms and their associated meanings serve very different functions. The term empowerment refers to the *phenomena of interest,* and as such empowerment should be the focus of our theory development. Empowerment is what we try to define, understand, explain, predict, and create or facilitate by our interventions and policies. The term prevention, on the other hand, refers to an *exemplar,* or embodies a set of examplars, and as such prevention is not the focus of our theories, but rather is (or should be) an important focus of our concrete problem solutions, that is, our strategies of intervention. Grasping this difference, and the potentially complementary relationship between empowerment and prevention, is very important to the future development of our field.

Prevention as an Exemplar

In the field of public health, application of strategies for prevention of illness is a concrete problem solution which serves, in Kuhn's terms, as an exemplar. No one would deny that for the public health specialist exemplars of prevention serve as "paradigmatic in the usual sense of the term" (Kuhn, 1977), but the phenomenon of interest is not prevention per se, rather it is the promotion of healthful living environments. Similarly, for Community Psychology prevention serves as an important exemplar, a way of thinking that is paradigmatic. We think it is a very important strategy applicable to a variety of specific content areas, not limited to the prevention of mental illness, although commonly associated with it (cf. Cowen, 1985; Felner et al., 1983; Seidman, 1983). But in and of itself the strategy of prevention, no matter what it is one is trying to prevent, is not sufficient to serve as a descriptor of the phenomena of interest for our field. Rather, we are required to simultaneously consider other exemplars.

In order to develop a set of "learned similarity relationships" (Kuhn, 1977) which serve the purpose of contributing to understanding the world view of our disciplinary matrix we must apply a variety of exemplars in addition to prevention. For instance, a second exemplar, one which must be understood by anyone in our community of scientists, is captured in the term "blaming the victim" (Ryan, 1971). We are, as a community, concerned with designing interventions and understanding organizations, policies, and programs, that are not victim blaming. It is quite possible, and this is what I was trying to say in an earlier paper (Rappaport, 1981) when I spoke of empowerment as a term that may be incompatible with prevention, to design so-called preventive interventions which violate the exemplar "non-victim-blaming." I have no doubt that many community mental health programs, as well as a variety of prevention research projects do violate this exemplar, and while I do not repeat my critique of the community mental health movement and of at least some of what is often called "high risk" research here (Rappaport, 1977, 1981, 1985b), I remain convinced that much of what is termed prevention suffers from the maladies I suggested several years ago.

Felner and his colleagues (1983, pp. 5-6) have described some of the conditions under which a preventive intervention in the mental health domain *would be* consistent with empowerment: The interventions are collaborative, concerned with providing or facilitating resources to free self-corrective capacities, delivered in a context that avoids the one down position of many helper–helpee relationships, and sensitive to the culture and traditions of the settings and individuals. Thus, while prevention is an important term for a class of concrete problem solutions, one which helps us to discover different problem solutions than would be likely without the con-

cept, it does not per se denote, even in the domain of mental health, the phenomena of interest for Community Psychology. For the clothing designer a stitch in time may indeed save nine, but the subject of interest is creating garments of a particular type, and only as a practical matter is it helpful to know when to do the sewing. To continue with the analogy, if one sews up the pockets of a dress the fact that the stitching took place at an early time does not save it from being useless for carrying things. In short, not all prevention programs are good exemplars for Community Psychology. It is only those that are consistent with other criteria that are good exemplars.

I submit that what holds the diverse contents of our field together is that subject matter about which we wish to make empirical generalizations, i.e., the phenomena of interest that I have called empowerment. As described below, empowerment is a term that captures, better than any of the currently available competing alternatives, the overarching goals of our community of scientists. Therefore, it is the phenomena of empowerment about which we must develop theories if our field of study, that is to say our community of scientists, is to develop a mature science of Community Psychology.

Empowerment as the Phenomena of Interest

A proper focus of theory for Community Psychology can be summarized, in a word, as empowerment. Put in its simplest terms, empowerment is the name I give to the entire class of phenomena that we want our research to understand, predict, explain, or describe; that we want our applications and interventions to stimulate, facilitate, or create, and our social policies to encourage. This is the "bottom line" for Community Psychology. When we study children, adults, the elderly, organizations, neighborhoods, or social policies, what holds these diverse efforts together is a concern with empowerment.

The word "empower," according to the *Random House Dictionary of the American Language* (1966, p. 468) has two related meanings: 1. to give power or authority to; authorize; and 2. to enable or permit. The *Oxford English Dictionary* (1971) includes the sense of investment with legal power, and the sense that persons or settings may be empowered for some specific goal or purpose. Notice that these definitions do not include specification of what the person or the setting is empowered to do, nor do they suggest that the word refers to a single person in isolation. Rather, empowerment refers to a process of becoming able or allowed to do some unspecified thing because there is a condition of dominion or authority with regard to that specific thing, as opposed to all things. That is, there are limitations as well as powers. What

are the limits of empowerment in one sphere of life as opposed to others? What spheres of empowerment lead to generalization such that empowerment becomes a way of being in the world? A theory needs to ask such questions.

To understand the meaning of empowerment one must know something about more than individuals; one must also know what, or who, one has authority over. There is built into the term a quality of the *relationship* between a person and his or her community, environment, or something outside one's self. Part of our task then must be to specify what these relationships are like for people, organizations, and communities. What is the nature of the settings in which empowerment is developed or inhibited?

There are at least two complementary ways in which to learn about such things. One to study them in settings where we would expect empowerment to be an operative principle, i.e., in those settings called mediating structures (Berger & Neuhaus, 1977) where people are experiencing the conditions that are hypothesized to lead to the sorts of outcomes we wish to understand. This approach makes the researcher an observer and describer of the conditions that lead to the phenomena of interest.

A second way to learn about empowerment is to study environments where one would not expect empowerment to occur, because of built-in environmental constraints. Here the researcher may also be an observer and describer of environments that do not lead to the phenomena of interest. However, an additional role is also appropriate, i.e., the role of the intervener, facilitator, or change agent who, in collaboration with those who reside in the setting, seeks to create and understand the conditions that permit change in relationships and environments that lead to development of empowerment.

Empowerment is not only an individual psychological construct, it is also organizational, political, sociological, economic, and spiritual. Our interests in racial and economic justice, in legal rights as well as in human needs, in health care and educational justice, in competence as well as in a sense of community, are all captured by the idea of empowerment. The reason we care about fostering a society whose social policies appreciate cultural diversity (*The Community Psychologist,* 1986) is that we recognize that it is only is only in such a society that empowerment can be widespread. We are as much concerned with empowered organizations, neighborhoods, and communities as we are with empowered individuals (Kelly & Hess, 1986). The interest in empowerment is one that reduces the tendency for psychologists to be one-sided (Rappaport, 1981) and person blaming (Caplan & Nelson, 1973).

When I say that the phenomena of interest for a theory of Community Psychology is empowerment, I do not mean to imply that empowerment is named explicitly in every study, or that Community Psychologists do not study a diverse set of topics, or that we should limit our use of data from

Psychology and other disciplines. Quite the contrary. We have a variety of specific interests expressed by the outcomes and variables we study in our specific research projects; e.g., mental health, educational attainment, social competence, citizen participation, social support, social networks, life transitions, educational success, employment, social justice, self- and mutual help, and so on. But the hallmark of a Community Psychology world view, developed in the context of the community of Community Psychologists, toward which we direct our symbolic generalizations, our models, and our exemplars, or concrete problem solutions, at every level of analysis, from the individual to the community, and into which all our data (as well as the data we adopt from others) can ultimately fit, is empowerment. We want to know what it is, how it develops, and under what conditions it occurs. In short, the aim of our community of scientists is to develop a theory of empowerment. A theory of empowerment is the best candidate for putting together our various facts, the data of our observations, into a coherent picture.

The most prominent other candidates for the title "phenomena of interest" to Community Psychology are terms such as positive mental health or competence building; but each of these candidates tend to be person-centered (Cowen, 1985) and developed in the traditions of the psychology of individual differences.[5] These concepts tend to exclude much of what the community of Community Psychologists care about and research. That is to say, as candidates for the phenomena of interest they are too narrow and too biased in the direction of a person blame ideology. They do not lend themselves easily to the study of people in context, of settings, and of communities. Although the development of research programs and interventions designed to enhance individual mental health, or competence, such as interpersonal problem solving, are legitimately within the domain of Community Psychology, they are best understood as limited aspects of the phenomena of interest to the field. It is also the case, and this point is very important for understanding what I mean, that one can be concerned with individual positive mental health and competence, and interpersonal problem solving skills, but violate a variety of other exemplars of the phenomena of interest to Community Psychology. Such violations are more difficult to conceal from

[5]Since this paper was first presented a number of people have suggested that "the psychological sense of community" may also be a viable candidate for the title. This is a phrase which I have felt, ever since Sarason (1974) introduced it to Community Psychology, has had a good deal of heuristic value. Although I am unable to develop the idea in this paper, the relationship between "the psychological sense of community" and "empowerment" is an area of research which I suspect could lead to fruitful developments (cf. Maton & Rappaport, 1984).

one's self if, at the outset, the phenomena of interest is understood to be empowerment.

Recent commentary on my earlier arguments vis-à-vis the importance of empowerment (Cowen, 1985) has been very helpful in forcing me to clarify a point that I think has been misunderstood. Declaring empowerment, rather than mental health or competence, as the phenomena of interest should not be construed to suggest an exclusive attention to what Cowen has characterized as "macrosocial" changes at the broad societal level. While I do intend the term to include such matters, attention to empowerment does not suggest that one is *only* interested in very broad social change. Quite to the contrary. A key point I had intended to make by advocating the praise of paradox, and attention to divergent rather than convergent problem solving (Rappaport, 1981), was that we must look for solutions in a variety of local settings rather than in any single monolithic program type, including those operated at the macrosocial level by well meaning professionals. Empowerment is expected to be found in a diversity of apparently contradictory settings and programs, especially those in which the people of concern have a large and controlling voice in determining what takes place and how it is done. Such settings and programs can be expected to be found, and can be developed most easily, on a local rather than a grand scale.

The size of the program, or even its attention to people as opposed to systems, is less of an issue than is its attention to the radiating impact, the unintended consequences, and the metacommunications of the intervention—including those that are intended to be preventive, whether person-centered or situation-centered, whether micro- or macrosocial. This attention to the radiating impact of our work must be informed by an awareness that the goal of empowerment, rather than individual adjustment per se, is of paramount interest. To the extent that empowerment goals are forgotten, we are more than able to fool ourselves into believing that we have done an adequate job when we have fallen prey to the tendency of the helping professions to blame victims for their own victimization, and to apply criteria for evaluation that are culturally, racially, and ethnically biased. To the extent that empowerment goals are attended to, we are more likely to contribute constructively to reducing the problems of racism, sexism, ageism, and other such matters. However, that attention need not stop us from being involved with individual people and small groups in local communities.

Because of our history, many community psychologists are also clinical psychologists, which explains why mental health interests are widespread. We know that those who experience serious mental illness tend to have a difficult time in the world, both because of their own behaviors, thoughts, and perceptions, and because of the ways in which they are regarded and treated by others. We expect that studying mental health and mental health policy will contribute to our knowledge of empowerment. But all communi-

ty psychologists do not study mental health, and many mental health researchers are not interested in empowerment. Similarly, the same behaviors that are sometimes called mental health or illness can, for the Community Psychologist, be understood as aspects of empowerment rather than aspects of health and illness. We need not speak of doctors and patients but rather of citizens and advocates, collaborators and participants.

Within the mental health professions arguments over community mental health and traditional individual psychology interventions, or about prevention as opposed to treatment, or about specific versus global quality of life interventions, which have preoccupied much of the early history of our field, are essentially arguments about strategies and tactics. This is analogous to arguments over public health versus clinical medicine. Such arguments are important but not ultimately of theoretical interest. To say we are interested in empowerment rather than health and illness is to make a theoretical statement, one which suggests that mental health is but one aspect of the phenomena of interest.

The community of Community Psychologists is interested in mental health and individual competence because it seems to be important for empowerment. But we are interested in far more than this. Empowerment is a multileveled construct, and consistent with the Community Psychologist's concern for the radiating effects of interventions (Kelly, 1971) we are concerned with how empowerment at one level of analysis influences the other levels. For example, while person-centered approaches to competence or social skills may be legitimate interventions for the prevention of individual problems in living, particularly for children (Cowen, 1985), we are also concerned with how such programs affect the social context in which they take place. What, we want to know, are the metacommunications of the program to the children in it and those not in it?

When such programs are developed in schools we want to know something about the impact on the teachers, the administrators, the social climate, and the educational policies. We want to know about more than changes in test scores. We want to understand how it is that some children grow up with a sense of their own ability to influence the outcomes of their life and the life of their various communities, while other children do not. We want to know how the nature of the setting in which they are learning about themselves and about the world influences their lives. Conversely, when we study organizations and policies we want to know how they affect the people in them and those to whom the policies are addressed. We want to know what conditions make for effective organizations and neighborhoods, and how individual people are affected by the settings in which they find themselves. Such concerns are best kept in mind when the community of Community Psychologists describe the phenomena of interest as empowerment, rather than in more limited mental health terminology.

It is of course the case that any one of us can also be a member of some other community of scientists, including the community of Clinical, Social, Personality, Organizational, or Developmental Psychologists, Gerontologists, Behaviorists, Criminologists, and so on. As Kuhn (1977) has observed, any individual scientist may belong to more than one community of scientists, and often the ablest belong to several at once or in succession. But the community of Community Psychologists is more than any individual. The community of which we are a part is interested in more than individuals and in more than mental health, and we are interested in those topics in the same way and for the same reasons we are interested in racism, organizational processes, neighborhood networks, and citizen participation in voluntary organizations; that is, all of these things may have something to say about the underlying phenomena of interest that makes us a community and about which we wish to make generalizations that go beyond those limited to the specific topic of a specific research project, or even about the precise subject of any of our own individual research. We are members of the community precisely because we want our work to contribute to understanding its jointly held phenomena of interest.

The Ecological Nature of a Theory of Empowerment

Although the subject of theory for the community of Community Psychologists is captured in the imagery and implications of empowerment, I am convinced by the arguments of James G. Kelly and Edison J. Trickett and their colleagues (e.g., Kelly & Hess, 1986; Trickett, Kelly, & Vincent, 1985) that the nature of the theory must be ecological. An ecological theory suggests how to take the environment into account, but as Trickett (1984) noted, it also "needs a guiding set of premises to promote action congruent with its underlying world view" (p. 266).

Trickett (1984) has pointed out the difference between looking at phenomena from an entirely person-centered as opposed to an ecological perspective. The ecological approach provides a much broader range of contextual understanding than is typically the case in the person-centered approach. The ecological approach suggests an interest in what he calls "environmental reconnaissance and the identification of resources." It also suggests an interest in the role relationships between people, policy, programs and professionals, in change over time, and in the contextual meaning of the variables of interest. This is the type of theory that best serves the phenomena of interest to the community of Community Psychologists. And the phenomena of empowerment is a subject matter that lends itself to this kind of theory. In short, the community of Community Psychologists is best served by a theory of the ecology of empowerment.

The concept of ecology with its emphasis on "community embeddedness of persons and the nature of communities themselves" (Trickett, 1984, p. 265), and on context, diversity, and resources, as well as attention to the *costs* and the benefits of "solutions," has been proposed as an antidote to what I have called the "one sidedness" of person-centered programs (Rappaport, 1981). This sort of understanding is an essential element in a theory of empowerment. Research on organizational processes, citizen participation, change in general and social change in particular, networks, social skills, and the psychological sense of community, can provide better grist for the mill of Community Psychology to the extent that we organize our descriptions, make predictions, and test outcomes, in the context of a theory of the ecology of empowerment. What the field requires is that each of these areas of work be brought together in a unifying framework that permits us to interpret the data such that one domain speaks to the other. Much of this could be incorporated conveniently into a theory of the ecology of empowerment, but it remains to be accomplished.

Terms of Empowerment: Definitions, Conditions, and Time

In the above discussion I have used the plural, phenomena, rather than the singular, phenomenon. Empowerment is a term that has multiple referents, and the first task of a theory is the specification of the class of things to which the term refers. To some extent this is already done by the commonsense and dictionary meaning of the word as described above, and by the explication of its implications, to which I have already alluded (Rappaport, 1977, 1981, 1985a; Rappaport et al., 1984). In a more formal sense there are at least three ways in which the terms of empowerment can be explicated. The word "terms" may refer to (a) definitions, words, and meanings (meta and symbolic as well as literal); (b) conditions (those qualities of environments that yield particular processes and products); and (c) periods of time. Below I mention a few examples of studies that have begun to explicate these terms of empowerment.

Thinking about the *definitions* of empowerment suggests that we need to research the phenomena by studying how empowerment is actually experienced by those individual people who express the sense that they are, and are not, in control of their own lives, and by studying the mediating structures in which they reside. That is, in addition to a focus on professionals creating programs, we need to study people in settings that are a part of their ongoing life.

Some of this work is already begun as empowerment has been described for a variety of populations. Kieffer (1984) applied a life span developmen-

tal approach to understanding the changes in individuals who became politically involved. He conducted a series of intensive interviews with a small number of participants in grass-roots community organizations. Those interviewed were by definition empowered; that is, they were selected because of their self-acknowledgment of transformation from a sense of powerlessness to a proactive engagement of issues and evidence of their continuing commitment to leadership. Kieffer's research suggests that at the individual level of analysis the process of empowerment passes through several phases, and his work can be recommended as a fruitful source of hypotheses about the process of empowerment and how it is experienced over time. Such hypotheses can be studied in a more nomothetic fashion as well.

Maton and Rappaport (1984), studying a large number of individuals in a single setting to which they devoted a large portion of their lives (a religious community), found the development of a psychological sense of community and commitment to be related, contemporaneously, to empowerment and 3 years later to life satisfaction. They have hypothesized that as we study other kinds of settings we might expect to find that settings that develop a sense of community and commitment enable members to become empowered but by criteria that are unique to the goals and purposes of the different types of settings. That is to say, it is hypothesized that common processes may lead to empowerment as measured by criteria appropriate to the particular setting goals.

More recently, Zimmerman (1986) studied relatively large samples of both college students and community residents participating in a wide variety of different kinds of community organizations, ranging along a spectrum from self-help for former mental patients, to community betterment organizations, to political action of both a liberal and a conservative bent. He found, for both the student population and the community residents, consistently significant differences in their sense of empowerment assessed by a wide variety of cognitive, motivational, and personality measures, as a function of both level and extent of involvement and participation. While such differences are important in validating the expected relationship between participation in voluntary organizations and empowerment, perhaps of even more theoretical significance, Zimmerman found in both samples a single consistent dimension of empowerment. This dimension was described by a sense of civic duty, political efficacy, and perceived personal competence, and was negatively related to alienation and positively related to willingness to be a leader. Such findings across populations and settings suggest that empowerment may be both describable and developed in a wide variety of local experiences.

Thinking about the *conditions* of empowerment means we must study settings as well as people. There are a variety of general frameworks for the

study of settings (see below); but I would like to note briefly a few specific studies designed to directly confront the question of setting issues in the development of empowerment. These studies emphasize postive setting characteristics as well as those which are problematic. It is unusual for applied psychologists to admit that we learn from the failures as well as the successes, yet such work leads us to a variety of hypotheses for future study as well as to a number of new variables of interest.

Gruber and Trickett (1987) have followed, over a period of several years, the development of an alternative school which in many ways was very successful (Trickett et al., 1986). However, despite the explicit intention of its originators, the researchers think that the school failed to empower the students and their parents (in the sense of giving them actual control over decision making). In describing the school's characteristics they point to a variety of issues and variables that would lend themselves to systematic future study, and here I cite only one example. These authors make a useful distinction between actual control and the psychological sense of control. While the setting incorporated students and teachers into its policy-making apparatus, it was the teachers who retained actual control over the school, often with the complicity of the students and their parents, a result that the authors attribute to the contradictory reality of the distribution of resources in the community in which the school is embedded.

Similar issues have been raised by Serrano-Garcia (1984) in her analysis of empowerment efforts in Puerto Rico, under circumstances in which real political control is not possible. Both of these papers call our attention to the larger context in which a program operates and the need to distinguish psychological empowerment and political empowerment. An important area for future work is the relationship between actual power and perceived power. Such work will bring our field to the intersection between Psychology and Political Science—two disciplines that each have an interest in empowerment.

I cannot do justice here to the rich description of many of the problems confronted by these researchers, but they each raise a variety of variables that require study in future work. For example, the nature of the roles available to members, the availability of information as a resource, and the tension between the goals of empowerment for members and the desire to preserve the institution. This latter issue is one that Riger (1984) has also written about in the context of women's social movement organizations, and in many ways is crucial for the study of the creation of alternative settings, if we are concerned with thinking about how such settings can be maintained without losing their original intentions.

On a more positive note, in our recent work at Illinois my colleagues and I have been engaged in the longitudinal study of a large mutual help organization for former mental patients, most of whom have a history of

hospitalization (Rappaport *et al.,* 1985). We have been tracking how this organization, entirely run by its membership as an "autonomous alternative setting" (Rappaport, 1977), expanded from a handful of groups to almost 100 throughout the State within a period of less than 4 years. Using a variety of organizational strategies that we call the "Johnny Appleseed Approach" (Zimmerman *et al.,* 1985) and mechanisms such as the intentional creation of undermanned settings, i.e., those that provide genuine and meaningful roles and responsibilities for many who outsiders and professionals expect to be incompetent (Reischl, Zimmerman, & Rappaport, 1986), this organization has now established itself as a major mental health resource for the State of Illinois. We have recently described four ways in which the members of the organization demonstrate the effects of belonging to it.

A collaborative research program has enabled us to collect longitudinal data on the progress of many individuals from the time of initial membership, often following hospital discharge, every 6 months for up to several years. Interview and psychological assessment data, behavioral observation of actual group meetings, reports of significant others, and participant observation of organizational behavior, both within and outside the organization, provide a rich data base to describe the changes among members at various stages of empowerment.

For a subset of those who join this organization there is a transformation from help seeker to help giver and an increasing sense of responsibility to both other persons and to an organization which seeks to have social influence. The development of empowerment can be observed among the membership along a continuum. At one end are those who simply attend meetings and social functions as a source of maintaining themselves in the community. Others are able to begin to provide social and interpersonal comfort and support to peers, through learning how to be a helper as well as a helpee. Still others take on formal roles in the organization and develop a sense of efficacy which extends to a small group. Some members move toward even larger responsibilities of internal organizational development, whereas others acquire the ability to act in the larger context of social influence as the organization expands and seeks new resources. The creation of formal roles and responsibilities for every member, regardless of that person's level of functioning, the culture of the groups, the way of construing problems in living, and the structure of the organization, are identified as empowering mechanisms which combine intrapsychic, interpersonal, and organizational processes to foster empowerment of the membership and of the organization.

Thinking about empowerment in terms of *time* suggests that we need to understand its longitudinal development in both people and settings. An ecological theory, as noted above, is well suited to such work. As already

indicated, a methodology for the study of settings, as opposed to individuals, over time, is suggested by the approach of Kelly and his colleagues (cf. Kelly & Hess, 1986) in their application of ecological analysis; and the possibilities for studying the interactions among people and their environments are suggested by Bronfenbrenner (1979), Moos (1984), and by Barker's (Barker, 1978; Wicker, 1979) work on the description of behavior settings, as well as by various environmental approaches (cf. Wandersman & Hess, 1985). But each of these approaches, if they are to be used seriously and systematically in Community Psychology, requires an overarching focus which directs them toward the phenomena of interest, that is, to ask questions about the definitions, development over time, and conditions under which the processes and products of empowerment, in all of its many forms, are created.

An Incomplete Outline of Assumptions for An Ecological Theory of Empowerment

Rather than repeating the already extensive thought on the nature of ecological theory per se I want to emphasize that the study of empowerment is a subject matter well suited to such a theory. With that intention I conclude with an outline of 11 assumptions, presuppositions, and hypotheses built into a theory of empowerment. These are offered as guidelines and starting points for theory development and empirical study.

1. *Empowerment is a multilevel construct.* It is concerned with the study of and relationships within and between levels of analysis—individuals, groups, organizations, and other settings, communities, and social policies. It is assumed that there is a mutual influence process across levels of analysis, and that this process takes place over time.

2. *The radiating impact of one level of analysis on the others is assumed to be important.* This is a point best explicated by Kelly (1971) over 15 years ago, but one that has been largely ignored in practice. Empowerment theory assumes that understanding persons, settings, or policies requires multiple measures from differing points of view and different levels of analysis. As a practical matter not all research can be at every level of analysis, but the subject matter, and therefore the theory, and the research community as a collectivity, must address all levels. For psychologists the largest danger is that we will limit ourselves to the study of individuals.

3. *The historical context in which a person, a program, or a policy operates has an important influence on the outcomes of the program.* Following Sarason's (1972a) dictum, those who hold this viewpoint are concerned

about understanding what conditions prevailed "before the beginning," and for some purposes, after the end of a project as well (Rappaport, Seidman, & Davidson, 1979). For psychologists, the largest danger is that we tend to study only the program per se and fail to understand its place in the community before and after its existence. We therefore tend to lose much information about both generalizability and culture.

4. *The cultural context matters.* We are concerned with what Sarason (1972b) called the "culture of the setting." Furthermore, we expect that individuals as well as settings will bring with them a variety of cultural assumptions, and that the match or mismatch between person and setting is of consequence. The implication is that a diversity of settings and programs with a variety of styles, attitudes, and goals is needed, to the extent that we study, and have a concern for, a diversity of people.

5. *Longitudinal research, or the study of people, organizations, and policies over time, is seen to be at least desirable, and perhaps necessary.* It may therefore be useful, as a practical matter, to conduct descriptive and intensive case studies over time, as a supplement to extensive nomothetic cross-sectional research. Although this is largely a methodological point in practice, it is one that is theory driven. If empowerment operates as expected, longitudinal research is necessary in order to understand it. It may be that we can learn as much from the study of one setting, or a few people over time, as from the study of large numbers of individuals.

6. *Empowerment theory is self-consciously a world view theory.* That is to say, those who hold this view do so because they admit to certain presuppositions that are a derivative of their values, goals, attitudes, beliefs, and intentions. This is understood to be making what would otherwise be implicit, explicit, and while I do not argue the case here, such presuppositions are seen as necessarily operative in all research (cf. Rappaport, 1984; Seidman & Rappaport, 1986). As a practical matter this reality, which is sometimes seen by scientists as a negative, is turned into a positive. To whatever extent possible presuppositions are to be shared openly between researcher, intervener, target of the intervention, and the community of consumers of the research. There are at least two implications of this assumption:

(a) *The people of concern are to be treated as collaborators; and at the same time, the researcher may be thought of as a participant, legitimately involved with the people she is studying.* The researcher in this way may be more like an anthropologist and action researcher (Rapoport, 1985) than like a laboratory scientist. Because our research and our interventions require us to interact with other human beings, and because we are also human beings, there is an acknowledged mutual influence process (cf. Tyler, Pargament, & Gatz, 1983; Chavis, Wandersman, & Stukey, 1983; Maton & Rappaport, 1984).

(b) *The choice of our language is seen to be very important as to what it communicates, and metacommunicates, not only to other researchers and policy makers but also to the people who we are studying.* This is a point that is crucial to a theory of empowerment. It is suggested that the terminology used communicates important connotative as well as denotative meaning to those with whom we work. The implications of this assumption for the relationship between helper and helpee are rich and various, lending themselves to a variety of research hypotheses and a number of implications for practice. The language of helping often leads to the trivializing of observed positive change outside the control of professionals by calling it "spontaneous remission" or a "placebo effect," words that suggest it is an artifact to be controlled. Such language deprives people of the opportunity to comprehend their own ability for self- and mutual help. It suggests that help is scarce rather than abundant, that people are weak rather than strong, and powerless rather than powerful. It directs us away from looking for natural resources potentially under the control of and available to the people of concern. In the language of empowerment such self-directed changes and resources are seen as genuinely important in their own right, as examples of self-healing to be understood rather than explained away (Rappaport, 1985a). The terms we use to describe our work with people change the way they think about themselves. Gallant, Cohen, and Wolff (1985), for example, have described how their work with elderly persons in Massachusetts drastically changed when they "repositioned" the agency from one that was perceived as a service provider to one that took on the language of empowerment and became a membership organization rather than a service provider–client oriented agency.

7. *It is assumed that the conditions of participation in a setting will have an impact on the empowerment of the members.* This impact will be discernible as both a "main effect" and as an interaction with the individuals' background characteristics. Those who participate in decisions and activities that are meaningful to them are more likely to be empowered. Settings with more opportunities for participation are expected to be more likely to be empowering settings, and the history and culture of the person will mediate the impact of the intervention, as will the history and culture of the setting.

8. *Other things being equal, an organization that holds an empowerment ideology will be better at finding and developing resources than one with a helper-helpee ideology,* where resources will be seen as relatively scarce, and dependent on professionals.

9. *Locally developed solutions are more empowering than single solutions applied in a general way,* and applied in the form of prepackaged interventions.

10. *The size of the setting matters.* Settings that are small enough to provide meaningful roles for all members, yet large enough to obtain resources, are hypothesized as more likely to create the conditions that lead to empowerment. The specification of such parameters as size and number of available roles are topics for future research.

11. *Empowerment is not a scarce resource which gets used-up, but rather, once adopted as an ideology, empowerment tends to expand resources.* This outline is a starting point, a beginning for theory development and empirical testing.

To conclude a long paper very briefly, the terms of empowerment are a proper subject matter for a theory of use to our field. An interest in empowerment is what can hold us together as a community of scientists and professionals. Empowerment is a term that cuts across levels of analysis, expresses our world view, and our commitment to a diverse society. Empowerment suggests a belief in the power of people to be both the masters of their own fate and involved in the life of their several communities. Empowerment is the phenomena of interest to which our theories must speak.

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