Perkins, D.D. & Schensul, J.J. (2016). Interdisciplinary contributions to community psychology and transdisciplinary promise. In M.A. Bond, C.B. Keys, & I. Serrano-García (Eds.), *Handbook of Community Psychology (2nd Edition)* (pp. 189-209). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Chapter 9:

**Interdisciplinary Contributions to Community Psychology and Transdisciplinary Promise**

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This chapter, coauthored by a community psychologist and an anthropologist who has contributed to community psychology, reviews the relevance of other disciplines to our field and why transdisciplinary work is critical in moving community psychology closer to its fundamental mission: reducing the social, structural and psychological factors that prevent psychological well being. Community psychology recognizes local communities as critical and complex social systems in which internal and external forces converge at multiple levels to influence human behavior and wellness. In this chapter we review the interaction of community psychology with other social sciences and applied fields. We link this review to a conceptualization of community psychology as a transdisciplinary field that can bring complex theories, methods, results, and interventions to bear on reducing injustices in local communities.

We begin with an analysis of the major social science disciplines by levels of analysis followed by a brief review of definitions of multidisciplinary, interdisciplinary, and transdisciplinary modes of collaboration. We present a model for ecological (multilevel, transdisciplinary, dynamic) community research and action with special attention to issues of power and social justice. We then delve into historical and recent contributions to community psychology made by ideas from public health, epidemiology, ecology, natural biology, and environmental studies; sociology; anthropology/ethnography; community organizing and development; organizational studies; educational research and intervention; legal and policy studies; women’s, ethnic, LGBT, and disability studies; and religious studies. [[1]](#footnote-1) The chapter briefly identifies important gaps in interdisciplinary influence-- areas in which there is critical and largely unfulfilled potential for community psychologists to collaborate with political scientists, economists, geographers, urban and regional planners, design researchers, and historians. We conclude by envisioning the potential for the development of truly transdisciplinary applied community science. The goal of such close cross-disciplinary collaboration is to create new theories and test them with new methods and applications. Transdisciplinary knowledge synthesizes and synergizes the contributing disciplines rather than reinforcing disciplinary insularity.

**Community Psychology is Ecological and Interdisciplinary**

Disciplines and Ecological Levels of Analysis

Community psychologists believe that social behavior and problems must be understood *ecologically*—that is, in terms of how people actually and naturally live and work in organic social groups (families, networks, organizations, and communities). An ecological perspective also considers how people are influenced systemically by these same social levels, as well as by structural factors - institutions, societal forces, and government policies, and by material (economic and physical environmental) forces. These social levels, structures, and forces potentially represent different disciplinary foci beyond individual psychology. To encompass all of those levels and domains, in addition to the intrapsychic and individual behavior level, community psychology must be interdisciplinary in scope, as depicted in Figure 1. Macroeconomics and most of political science concentrate on the societal (metropolitan, state, national) and international levels of analysis. Microeconomics analyzes market behavior mainly at lower levels of individuals, households, businesses and other organizations. Like community psychologists, anthropologists and sociologists study individuals, groups, organizations, and communities, but tend to emphasize cultural patterns; group, subgroup or population differences; and larger institutional and policy influences on them. In contrast, traditional psychological theory and research are primarily individualistic. Thus, sociology and anthropology are both complementary to psychology while also being the disciplines most similar to community psychology as multi-level, ecologically-oriented social sciences. The major differences are in community psychology’s traditional focus on individual wellness as the primary dependent variable and sociology and anthropology’s longer, richer history of theory development, particularly at all the social levels beyond the individual.

As community psychology has become more global, its focus on international issues such as immigration and cross-cultural research has also increased. Although community psychology in the United States was born in response to national policy needs in community mental health and early-childhood education and other prevention programs, activity at the levels of national and international policy and social justice movements has often been more aspirational than realized. Many of the communities with which we work are affected by grave disparities. The reasons for the disparities are structural and embodied in the routines and constraints of everyday lives in communities experiencing injustices. For all those reasons, we argue for a community psychology that transcends individual wellness, a community psychology of *ecologically complex, collaborative research and interventions promoting individual and community development through social justice-oriented action*.

Multi-, Inter-, and Trans-disciplinary Collaboration

To address the multitude of factors at different levels that produce poor quality of life, health, and other inequities, we must engage and collaborate with those disciplines best suited to understanding specific types of problems (access to healthcare and healthy environments, education reform, housing, economic development, etc.). We must also include those relevant applied sectors (health care and promotion, schools, housing and development agencies, business, etc.) that can act on these issues. To be effective, collaboration must be close, open, active and egalitarian.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Levels of analysis** | **Social science disciplines** |
| international relations | CommunityPsychology:(aspirationally) |  |  | PoliticalScience | Macro-economics |
| cities, states, nations  | Sociology |  |
| institutions | Anthropology |  |  |
| cultures/ethnic groups | (currently) |  |  |
| communities |  |  |
| organizations |  | Micro-economics |
| groups: families, households |  |
| events, social interactions |  |  |  |
| individuals | Traditional Psychology |  |  |  |

Figure 9.1. Community Psychology in relation to levels of analysis and other disciplines

According to Rosenfield (1992), cross-disciplinary (and we would add intersectoral) work can take one of three forms from weak to strong collaboration. The weakest (though still worthwhile) form is *multidisciplinary* collaboration, which implies researchers from two or more disciplines working, either simultaneously or sequentially, but independently, from their own disciplinary perspective, in order to solve the same problem. This includes publishing in a journal outside one’s discipline without direct collaboration with others from that discipline. In *interdisciplinary* collaboration researchers from different disciplines work together to solve a common problem, yet each one still operating from their respective disciplinary perspective without necessarily creating new theories or methods. The strongest form of collaboration is a *transdisciplinary* process in which researchers bring together their discipline-specific ideas to jointly create new theories, concepts, or methods that transcend disciplinary differences to solve a shared problem. This chapter focuses on the history and evolution of a multi- and interdisciplinary community psychology and the promise of transdisciplinarity.

**A** Transdisciplinary, Multilevel Model for Community Research and Action

We believe community psychology needs a new, transdisciplinary paradigm for theory, research, intervention, and graduate training. We believe that such a paradigm must continue to attract and engage psychologists at all levels, but must move beyond the disciplinary constraints of psychology and engage collaborators from many other disciplines in central and meaningful ways. Further, it should emphasize our strengths in action research while addressing our theoretical and methodological limitations, for which the other disciplines will provide new ideas, methods, and expertise. The new paradigm can be built around a framework of ecological and “psychopolitical” validity (Christens & Perkins, 2008; Prilleltensky, 2008).

Prilleltensky and Nelson (1997) identify social justice as an historical value in community psychology and call for the field to move from a paradigm based on reforming existing structures to ameliorate symptomatic problems toward one that challenges the status quo by addressing underlying structural issues of power, oppression, and liberation. They point to critical psychology, and we would highlight critical or transformational anthropology and participatory action research (Schensul et al., 2014) as sources of analytical insights to help community psychology reclaim its original values and work to fundamentally transform oppressive institutions and community conditions. To make such a grand vision a reality, however, requires two main ingredients: 1) careful consideration of the specific ecological contexts of each problem at different levels of analysis and intervention, and how change occurs over time; and 2) relationships with communities that are experiencing injustices. Understanding the nature of injustices requires an understanding of power inequities and the ways in which they are translated into regulatory action, and institutional actions to reinforce economic, political and other disparities. To take this approach, we need critical theory. We must also look beyond psychology to the various applied social sciences, each with vast literatures and methods of analyzing the operation of power—in all its diverse forms, structures, and systems at the community, institutional, and societal levels.

In response to this vision, Christens and Perkins (2008) proposed a comprehensive framework for interdisciplinary community research and action in three dimensions (Figure 9.2). The first dimension examines oppression, liberation, and wellness as stages of empowerment-- a dynamic process over time. The goal is to identify sources of oppression and help oppressed groups become liberated which leads to social, material, physical, and spiritual wellness. Theories, research, and practices in human, organizational and community development may be useful. The second dimension includes the various levels of analysis and intervention, including what are actually clusters of levels in Figure 9.2 from the individual psychological level of personal emotions, cognitions, and behaviors to micro-systems; from the group and organizational level to relational meso-systems; and from the community or exo-system level to higher collective and structural levels of societal macro-systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The third dimension encompasses four environmental or substantive domains that are essential for understanding the ecology of oppression, liberation, and wellness. It is these environmental domains that most clearly imply a need for transdisciplinary research to understand the economic, political, socio-cultural (psychology, sociology, and anthropology), and physical (environmental planning and design research; environmental psychology, environmental sociology, environmental law and economics, and environmental and development policy) contexts of community disadvantage, power, and wellness at each level and stage.



Figure 9.2 Adapted from Comprehensive Framework for Ecolologically and Psychopolitically Valid Community Action-Research (Christens & Perkins, 2008; Levine, Perkins & Perkins, 2005)

**Disciplinary Influences on Community Psychology Theory, Research and Interventions**

Historical Influences on Community Psychology from Other Disciplines

The history of community studies across multiple disciplines suggests that psychology was relatively late to discover the community as a setting for social research and action. All of the precursors to community psychology in other disciplines were available and, as we know from the Swampscott and Austin conference reports, known to the founders of our field. In the opening keynote address of the first global conference on community psychology, Perkins (2009) presented over a century of influences from other disciplines on the development of community psychology in the United States (see Table 9.1). Community psychology, as the applied science of individuals in context, has developed certain concepts and theories, but focuses most effectively on solving pressing and important problems or threats to society. The same is true of interdisciplinary work more broadly. The demarcation of time into decades is admittedly arbitrary and the perceived threats, societal responses, and influential disciplines and authors identified are debatable and most definitely incomplete. In reality, every decade sees many threats (as now). Threats are fluid and dynamic. They may be ascendant in a particular period, but continue, attenuate, reappear. Most important, many disciplines contributed theory and interventions to addressing each threat and this underpins our argument for a transdisciplinary community psychology. The intent in Table 9.1 is to spark some consideration of the many diverse social and political movements, disciplines, and authors who have influenced the development of community psychology, which continues to address many of the same threats listed over the 130 years.

Table 9.1

Historical Influences on the Development of Community Psychology in the United States

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Decade: | Perceived Threat | Societal Response: | Influential Discipline / Authors: |
| 1880s | Genetic “inferiors” | Social Darwinism | Biology, Ecology / Darwin |
| 1890s | Victorian repression | Liberalism | Psychology, Anthropology / Freud, Boas |
| 1900s | Illiteracy, immorality | Pragmatism, democracy | Philosophy, Education, History / Dewey, Du Bois |
| 1910s | Immigrants | Settlement houses | Social work/Addams |
| 1920s | Industrial urbanism | Chicago School | Sociology, Institute on Human Relations / Park, Burgess, McKenzie, Wirth, Lynd |
| 1930s | Economic depression | Government expansion | Economics/Keynes, Myrdal, Jahoda |
| 1940s | World War, genocide  | Globalism | Interdisciplinary, Research Center for Group Dynamics / Warner, Whyte, Lewin |
| 1950s | Legal racism | Civil Rights | Law, Social Psychology, Sociology & Anthropology / Hunter, Long, Mead, Clark, Chein, Cook, Jahoda |
| 1960s | Institutions, poverty | **Change conditions** (CMH, Great Society, Head Start) | Community Development, Policy, Planning, Eco psychology / Alinsky, Biddle, Gans, Jacobs, Swampscott, Albee, Sarason, Kelly, Barker, Moos |
| 1970s | Reactive Medical Model | **Prevention** | Public health / Caplan, Cowen, Dohrenwend, Levine, Newbrough, Bronfenbrenner |
| 1980s | Oppression | **Empowerment** | Political sociology, Organizational Studies / Bellah, Berger, Bourdieu, Freire, Argyris, Rappaport, Keys, Serrano-Garcia |
| 1990s | Class/race/sex/cultural hegemony | Human/method Diversity, **Strengths**, Globalism | Anthropology, Eco methods / Gow, Merry, Oliver-Smith, Schensuls, Singer, Trickett, Watts, Birman, Riger, Shinn |
| 2000s Future direction: | Disease  | Technological innovation | Bio redux / (Community Psychology w/in Psychology in flux, shrinking) |
| Simplistic reductionism | Interdisciplinarity (to integrate all the above) | Transdisciplinary eco-psycho-political action-research / Stokols, Maton, Perkins, Saegert, Schensul, Trickett  |

Note: Adapted from Perkins (2009)

The rise of Darwin’s theory of evolution in the 19th century, and subsequent concerns among eugenicists in the 1880s about genetically “inferior” human populations, was critical to the emergence and development of ecological understanding of the role of environment and species adaptation among plants and animals, and by extension, similar processes in human communities and habitats. The most important reasons to include Freud’s 1890s psychoanalytic revolution in this history are that it burst the “otherness”, or “us-them”, myth of mental illness, and it influenced an era of Liberalism that led to the development and cross-fertilization of social sciences, art, and literature. Around the same time, similar trends in anthropology critical of racialized genetic determinism and superiority appeared in the work of Franz Boas and others (Gossett, 1997).

Around the turn of the 20th century and prior to World War I, the principal perceived threats to democracy in the U.S. were illiteracy and immorality. Universal public education was the policy response, and the philosophical movement in response to both threats was Pragmatism (Dewey, 1909), which combined moral and political philosophy with the then-fledgling disciplines of psychology, pedagogy, and other educational studies. Du Bois (1898) was another early, applied interdisciplinarian whose approach to history evolved to address contemporary race and related social problems from a blend of political, economic, sociological and anthropological perspectives. A major concern in the 1910s, and almost constantly from the 1870s through today’s headlines, has been immigration. U.S. society’s most constructive responses were the settlement house movement, represented by Jane Addams’ Hull House, and the development of social work which has provided community psychology with many direct service, advocacy, and mobilization approaches to social intervention.

In the 1920s, there was growing recognition, interest, and concern about the problems associated with industrial urbanism, such as unsafe and unhealthy working and living conditions and high rates of crime and other social problems in America’s rapidly growing cities. The field of community sociology, starting with Tönnies in the late 1800s (1887/1955), is an important source of relevant theory and empirical work for community psychology. Two important institutions in the 1920s were the “Chicago School” of sociology (Park et al., 1925; Wirth, 1928), which foreshadowed the development of community-based prevention programs (Keys, 1987), and the Institute on Human Relations at Yale University.[[2]](#footnote-2) Early sociological analyses of smaller towns were also models for later community case studies (e.g., Lynd & Lynd, 1929). In the 1930s, the major threat was global economic depression and the response was expanded government intervention. John Maynard Keynes challenged the laissez-faire, free-market paradigm and advocated activist government intervention and spending to stimulate the economy; and Gunnar Myrdal (1944) wrote about the racial dilemma of American democracy, not just as an economist, but from a multidisciplinary perspective. Such “old left” policies would be reborn in the “new left” era 30 years later at the start of community psychology and President Johnson’s Great Society and War on Poverty (see below). Psychologist Marie Jahoda and colleagues (1932/2002) published one of the first studies of the social impact of unemployment on a small community.

The chief evils of the 1940s were World War and genocide. The international response was Globalism in the form of the U.N. and of other pacts based on security, ideology, and markets. Community-oriented and socially constructive writing in this period included work by socio-anthropologists Warner and Lunt (1942) and sociologist Whyte (1946). Jahoda and other psychologists were also deeply engaged in research on community ethos and the causes and effects of racial and religious prejudice and discrimination. At M.I.T., Lewin (1946) founded the Research Center for Group Dynamics, which moved to Michigan and later joined with the Survey Research Center to become the interdisciplinary Institute for Social Research. In the 1950s, the major threat was legal racism, and society’s response was the Civil Rights Movement. Social and political change was led by faith leaders and communities while legal changes were led by activist lawyers aided by psychologists such as Clark, Chein, and Cook (1952/2004). The 1950s were also an era of community-focused political sociology (Hunter, 1953; Long, 1958) and anthropology (Mead, 1954), which focused on a variety of participatory and other community action-research and development efforts (Schensul & Schensul, 1978) and the creation of alternative community health and mental health institutions (Jacobs, 1974).

The different societal responses to perceived threats in each decade from the 1960s through the 1990s (changing community conditions, prevention, empowerment, and strengths) are highlighted in Table 1 as they provided core principles for community psychology (Levine et al., 2005; Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2010). Two of the great threats in the 1960s were social ills resulting from large bureaucratic institutions (particularly psychiatric hospitals and prisons) and from poverty. The solutions proposed by the newly self-identified community psychologists, were to change the community conditions underlying poverty and social and mental health problems and to bring mental health and other social services and early intervention programs like Head Start permanently into every community where they are needed. As was explicitly recognized at the Swampscott conference in 1965, psychologists needed to collaborate with-- and psychology graduate training needed to include-- many other disciplines: sociology (Gans, 1968), anthropology, political science, philosophy, theology and especially applied ones such as public health/epidemiology, medicine, nursing, social work, education, law, public policy and administration, community organizing (Alinsky, 1941) and community development (Biddle, 1965), urban planning (Jacobs, 1961), program development and evaluation, economics, and organizational management (Anderson et al., 1966). Even the critique of institutionalized mental health care that led to the community mental health movement was largely leveled from outside of psychology by authors such as sociologists Goffman (1961) and Scheff (1966), psychiatrist Szasz (1961), and anthropology-trained sociologist and psychiatric researcher Leo Srole (1962). Meanwhile community psychologists such as Albee (Albee & Dickey, 1957), Sarason (1966), Kelly (1966), Barker (1968), and Moos (1973) drew on those and other fields.

In the 1970s, there was increased recognition of the limitations of the reactive therapeutic Medical Model, even when it is community-based. The major societal response was to develop and improve new approaches to prevention based on a public health/community psychiatry model (Caplan, 1964) that influenced psychologists (Cowen, 1977; Dohrenwend, 1978; Levine & Levine, 1970; Newbrough, 1973). Anthropologists, often working with psychologists, also organized communities to prevent mental health problems stemming from marginalization and exploitation, and the cultural conflicts and contradictions arising as White mental health professionals encountered minority populations whose views of mental health and situational anxieties were poorly addressed by the mental health establishment.

In the 1980s, the concentrated power and oppression of both big business and government bureaucracy were seen as a threat. The solution was a whole new paradigm for community psychological theory, research and application: citizen participation and empowerment. The roots of empowerment theory can be found in popular education (Freire, 1970), social work (Solomon, 1976), political sociology (Bellah, 1985; Berger & Neuhaus, 1977; Bourdieu, 1985), and organizational studies (Argyris et al., 1985). Those fields influenced community psychological conceptions of empowerment (Hoffman, 1978; Keys & Frank, 1987; Rappaport, 1981; Serrano-Garcia, 1984).

A prominent threat to society during the 1990s (and in other times) were the myriad problems associated with hegemony on the basis of class, race, sex, sexual preference, disability, and culture. The solutions revolved around recognizing, celebrating and developing all the strengths associated with diversity. Here we include not just global human and cultural diversity, but also the strengths in methodological diversity. Anthropologists have particularly important perspectives for this agenda (Gow, 1996; Merry, 1981; Oliver-Smith, 1996; Schensul & Trickett, 2009; Schensul et al., 2006; Singer, 1993). It is thus surprising that anthropology’s influence on community psychology did not happen sooner. Five community psychologists we would highlight are Trickett, Watts, and Birman (1994) for their writing and editing on issues of culture and community in human diversity and migration, Riger (1992) for her work on gender issues and epistemology, and Shinn for her interdisciplinary work on homelessness, organizational and institutional impacts on people, and diverse, ecological assessment methods (1996 special issue of *American Journal of Community Psychology*; Shinn & Toohey, 2003).

In the 2000s, the threat Perkins (2009) identified was disease and the primary societal response has been reliance on technological innovation. The leading disciplinary influences bring us back to where we started, that is biology, albeit very complex and advanced—e.g., neuroscience, psychopharmacology, etc. Community psychology’s contribution to this agenda has been to continue to develop the psychosocial stress, coping, and prevention model (Dohrenwend, 1978) and to identify the important mechanisms that operate in the interpersonal, group, community and societal spheres that are critical to the complex etiology of disease and how to prevent or treat it. There is some promise in that route toward drawing clinicians’, public health professionals’, researchers’, and policy makers’ attention to community and setting-level influences on physical, mental and behavioral health outcomes; but this direction will likely always favor reductionistic and technological solutions found in the biomedical sciences.

Finally, at the bottom of Table 9.1 is the potential future direction of community psychology that defines the overarching problem as simplistic scientific reductionism and the solution as transdisciplinary eco-psycho-political action-research (to integrate all the above historical influences while addressing power relations and dynamics at and between each level). Just some of the authors arguing for this direction are Stokols (2006), Maton (et al., 2006), Perkins (Christens & Perkins, 2008; Schweizer-Ries & Perkins, 2012), Saegert (Freudenberg et al., 2009), Schensul (et al., 2006), and Trickett (et al., 2011).

Contemporary Influences on Community Psychology by Other Disciplines

Having considered the long history of influences of other disciplines on community psychology, let us now examine each discipline’s influence on the contemporary field in a little more detail. We then consider some apparent gaps in the influence on the field by certain key disciplines before concluding with some ideas about the potential for the development of transdisciplinary community theory, research, and interventions.

*Public Health/Epidemiology/Ecology/Natural Biology*. Because of community psychology’s original central emphasis on prevention in mental health, and its later focus on health promotion, it has borrowed extensively from the fields of epidemiology, public health, and preventive psychiatry (Caplan, 1964). Public health research has provided community psychology with many of the best exemplars of interdisciplinary or even transdisciplinary applied, community-based research (Kessel et al., 2003; Schensul et al., 2006; Stokols, 2006; Suarez Balcazar et al., 2006; Trickett et al., 2011). An example of the use of epidemiological data and methods in community psychology is analysis of unemployment’s effects on depression (Dooley et al., 1994). Another area of early and continuing professional practice related to secondary and tertiary prevention (Caplan, 1964) is mental health consultation (Levine et al., 2005), which has also both informed and been informed by ideas from management consulting (see the “Organizational Studies” section, below).

Community psychology’s interest in identifying, understanding, and intervening with contextual influences on individual development, health and wellbeing led early on to taking an ecological perspective on research and intervention. The most typical source cited for taking such a perspective may be developmental psychologist Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) micro-, meso-, exo-, and macro-systemic ecological levels of analysis. As important as those are, however, ecological theory in community psychology goes back much farther to the very beginnings of the field (Barker 1968; Kelly, 1966). A 1967 National Institute of Mental Health report by Kelly *et al* identified the importance of developing an interdisciplinary approach to ecological theory, which they understood to be key to understanding communities and creating effective mental health programs. After all, the primary sources for ecological theory are from natural sciences, particularly biology. That is especially true of specific ecological concepts and principles such as the ecosystem, habitats, species diversity, competition, interdependence, conservation or cycling of resources, adaptation, succession, niche/niche breadth, population density and cycles (Levine et al., 2005; Moos, 1973; Trickett et al., 1985; Trickett & Todd, 1972), which were adapted from naturalistic field observations in bio-ecology (Cherrett, 1989).

The most obvious example of the influence of ecology on community psychology is community psychology’s emphasis on analyzing, and intervening in, the extra-individual social and environmental systemic context of psycho-behavioral problems, rather than accepting psychology’s general tendency to locate the etiology of disorders within the individual and thereby blame the victim. This has led to some attention to how the physical world influences public health and how environmental modifications (and the political goals required to achieve them) and lifestyle changes in how humans interact with the environment can be engineered to protect and promote health (Culley & Hughey, 2008; Dean & Bush, 2007; Freedman & Bess, 2011; Rich et al., 1995; Stokols, 1992). This focus on the interface between environmental research, design, and public health has only grown in recent decades, yet community psychologists’ interest in the physical environment has been inconsistent at best over the years (see the section below on Geography/Urban and Regional Planning under “Gaps in Interdisciplinary Influence”).

*Sociology*. As noted in the historical section above, sociological influences, in a general sense, on (later) community psychology go back to the original sociologists in the late 1800s through the Chicago School of sociology and urban ecology (e.g., Shaw & McKay, 1942) and the more immediate influences in the1950s and 1960s, including the work of Hunter (1953) on political sociology and local decision-making; Alinsky (1941) and Long (1958) in analyzing the behavior of local community leaders and institutions functionally and ecologically in terms of overlapping systems of power or territories; Goffman (1961) on stigma; and Schur (1965), Scheff (1966), and Gove (1980) on labeling theory and the sociology of mental illness and other forms of deviance.

Berger may be best known for his 1966 treatise with Luckmann on the social construction of reality, but likely his greatest influence on community psychology was his 1977 paper with Neuhaus on individual and community *empowerment* through participation in mediating structures and their influence on public policy. Empowerment theory, research and applications have had so much influence on community psychology that empowerment has become a guiding paradigm, or at least a ubiquitous principle in the field (Rappaport, 1981).

Another area of theory in which sociology has had substantial influence is *social capital* (Bourdieu, 1985; Flora, 1998) and *citizen participation* (Bellah, 1985). Despite their relevance to empowerment, the appeal of these concepts has not been quite as widespread in community psychology. Interest among community psychologists in social capital took a long time to develop perhaps because related psychological concepts of empowerment and sense of community and behaviors such as neighboring and citizen participation were already prevalent in community psychology (Levine et al., 2005). Indeed, community psychology has played an important role in exploring what motivates the development of social capital in individuals and how it operates in different contexts and at multiple levels (Perkins et al., 2002; Saegert & Winkel, 2004; Vieno et al., 2010; Xu et al., 2010). Sociologists have also made major contributions to theories of place attachment and community identity (e.g., Cuba & Hummon, 1993; Guest & Lee, 1983) that have had (not always widely recognized) relevance for community psychology. Other community psychology topics influenced by sociology (and vice-versa) include self-help, support and mutual aid groups (Katz, 1981), and social factors in stress, social support, and coping (Kim & Ross, 2009), which has also been a central framework in the field of community psychology (Dohrenwend, 1978; Maton, 1989).

*Anthropology/Ethnography/Area Studies*. Anthropology and the related field of ethnography have most influenced community psychology in their development and modeling of social constructivist (in-depth, qualitative) field research methods (Bernard & Gravlee, 2014; Schensul & LeCompte, 2012). Such methods were rarely published in community psychology journals until the 1990s, but have since become much more prevalent and appreciated to the point that post-positivist, quantitative-only studies have been criticized as lacking both constituent validity (Keys & Frank, 1987) and phenomenological validity (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2010). Along with geographic area studies, anthropology also has influenced community psychology in its appreciation and understanding of cultural diversity (O'Donnell, 2006; Trickett, 2011).

Anthropology has also influenced several content areas relevant to community psychology, including these three: (1) responses to disasters and other community threats, (2) medical anthropology, and (3) international development (see also Community Development, below). Anthropologists such as Oliver-Smith (1996) have studied how natural disasters influence communities and their efforts to rebuild community, also an interest in community psychology (Norris et al., 2008). Urban anthropologists have analyzed cultural and spatial forces that influence communities’ responses to crime, social disorder, and ethnic and racial diversity (Merry, 1981), work used in community psychology (Perkins & Taylor, 1996).

Perhaps due in part to available research and evaluation funding, applied medical anthropology has been a particularly productive area of inquiry (Singer, 1993) and one that has led to anthropologists publishing in community psychology journals (Keefe & Casas, 1980; Schensul et al., 2006; Schensul & Trickett, 2009). A number of anthropologists conduct multilevel interventions designed to change health behaviors at the individual, group and community levels (e.g., Berg et al. 2009; Schensul et al., 2009). Many community psychologists have also published in journals in public health, education, social work, disability studies, community development, urban policy, and many other fields. Yet this sort of direct cross-fertilization of the literature is, unfortunately, not as common as it should be.

Anthropologists have also been instrumental in planning and evaluating the impact of community and national development programs and policies in less developed countries around the globe (Gow, 1996; Jackson & Kassam, 1998). There has been some attention to international development issues in community psychology (Kroeker, 1995; Trout et al., 2003), but more is needed. Because community organizing and development are both applied, interdisciplinary fields, distinct from their contributing social science disciplines, we will consider their influence on community psychology next.

*Community Organizing and Development*. Community organizing has obvious relevance to mobilizing citizens for any kind of social, political, or environmental change, such as those of interest to community psychologists and their partners or clients. Community organizing theory and research has been most closely aligned with the disciplines of sociology (see above) and political science (see below under “Gaps in Interdisciplinary Influence”). Yet the sources that have been most often used to inform community organizing efforts and even research have not been disciplinary, but rather based on praxis, or applied theory and experience (Alinsky, 1941). This has directly influenced the research of Christens and Speer (2011; Speer et al., 2003), Florin and Wandersman (1990), Harper and Schneider (2003), Perkins (et al., 1996), Saegert (Saegert & Winkel, 2004), and other community psychologists and their grassroots partners.

Community development has also long been a focus of community psychology (Levine et al., 2005) and is similar to organizing in being a very applied field focused on the improvement of the political, economic, social, and physical environment of communities. It is more formally professionalized, however, and operates through, or in closer collaboration with, community development corporations, banks, nonprofit human service organizations, voluntary associations and government agencies and policies at all levels (Biddle, 1965; Perkins et al., 2002). Community development therefore draws more directly from applied areas of traditional disciplines, such as sociology (especially rural sociology; Flora, 1998), anthropology (Gow, 1996)—particularly in its appreciation and effective use of local, indigenous knowledge (Sillitoe, 2007), economics (especially agricultural and development economics; Gaventa & Lewis, 1989), public administration (more than political science; Cotton & Linder, 1977), organization development (Fedi et al., 2009; see Organizational Studies, below), public health (Wallerstein, 1993), education, and many applied technical fields such as urban planning, design, and engineering. Community psychologists who study or work on community development projects may therefore also be influenced by all those fields (Florin & Wandersman, 1990; Gordon, 1985; Perkins et al., 2002; Trout et al., 2003).

*Organizational Studies*. From early on, community psychology turned to the field of organization development (and other organizational studies) as well as general systems theory and research. For example, Trickett and Todd (1972) drew on Bennis (1969) and Buckley (1968) for their ecological analysis of high school culture. In the 1980s, Keys and Frank (1987) explored the reciprocal contributions of organizational studies and community psychology. In the 1990s, community psychologists were at the forefront of developing and testing empowerment theory in the context of a wide variety of organizational settings and characteristics (Bond & Keys, 1993; Kroeker, 1995; Maton & Salem, 1995). More recently, many more concepts, models, and theories from the organization/management literature have been used by community psychologists (see 2007 special issues on organizational studies in the *Journal of Community Psychology* and on systems change in the *American Journal of Community Psychology*). In addition, community psychological ideas and values, such as participatory change, have been applied to community-based health and human service organizations (Bess et al., 2009).

*Education*. As schools have been perhaps the most common type of setting for community psychological preventive interventions (Durlak et al., 2007; Shinn & Yoshikawa, 2008), it is no surprise that pedagogical theory and research on teaching, learning and education have been relevant to the planning and evaluation of those interventions. The influence of educational philosophy on community psychology research and especially graduate and undergraduate, community-based experiential training goes all the way back to Dewey’s (1909) democratic and other moral principles in education. Racial justice in schools and improvement of educational and developmental outcomes for all children was a central focus of social psychological progenitors of community psychology (Clark et al., 1952/2004; Levine & Levine, 1970; see *Legal/Policy Studies,* below). Sarason (1966) may have done more than anyone to both bring schools to the attention of community psychologists and bring community psychology to the education literature. Community psychologists proceeded to analyze and evaluate schools and social and institutional change from an ecological perspective, both internally and in their external transactions (Trickett & Todd, 1972).

*Legal/Policy Studies*. Schools were even at the center of the most important landmark court case of the 20th century and community-oriented social psychologists’ central role in it. Kenneth Clark, Isidor Chein, and Stuart Cook (1952/2004) wrote the famous Social Science Statement on the effects of racial segregation of schools and the consequences of desegregation for the U.S. Supreme Court in the *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* case. That case ushered in a new era of legal and policy studies, in which community psychologists were early participants, although their role has not been as prominent in legal or political change as our expertise and values have warranted (Melton, 2000; Perkins, 1988). Landmarks in community psychology’s recognition of legal studies have been the work of Murray Levine (Levine & Levine, 1970; Levine et al., 2005) and a 1988 *American Journal of Community Psychology* special issue on community psychology and the law.

More recently, theories and research on multilevel governance and the social psychology of legal innovation have been applied to analyses of psycho-social processes of individual and community responses to environmental threats (Castro & Mouro, 2011). The Society for Community Research and Action (SCRA) Public Policy Committee has been providing small grants for policy work, and actively soliciting and developing urgent rapid advocacy responses and more deliberative official policy position statements on such topics as recovery residences, primary prevention, mass incarceration, and global warming (see www.scra27.org). SCRA has collaborated with other organizations in American psychology, such as Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues, but also other disciplines and internationally in some of these policy analysis and change initiatives (Maton, 2013).

*Women’s/Ethnic/LGBT/Disability Studies*. Feminist theories from other disciplines have been critical to analyzing, not only the status and wellbeing of girls and women in families, communities and the workplace and how they are affected by societal issues of justice and fairness, but also the status of women in community psychology. One of the earliest articles in the community psychology literature on the implications of changing roles for women was by a sociologist (Hiller, 1981). Riger (1992) is among many community psychologists who have addressed epistemological debates in the field from a feminist perspective borrowing examples and arguments from philosophy, women’s and gender studies, sociology, education, and organizational studies. Sociological and political theories of knowledge, of the women’s movement, and of disparate societal effects on women’s lives and concerns were prominent in Mulvey’s (1988) and other contributions to an important special issue of the *Journal of Community Psychology* on women in the community. Those theories and others from race and gender studies, education, ethnology, organizational management, public health, social work, disability and rehabilitation studies continued to influence community psychological analyses of feminism and community psychology in a double special issue of the *American Journal of Community Psychology* (Angelique & Culley, 2000; Bond et al., 2000; Bond & Mulvey, 2000; Hill et al., 2000). Interdisciplinary interest among community psychologists in women’s issues is international; for example, Cheung (1989) used anthropology, demography, educational research, communication and management studies, and social history in exploring a community approach to feminism in Hong Kong’s first women's center.

As diversity has been a core value of community psychology (Trickett et al., 1994), race and ethnic studies have been important to the field throughout its history, although our research methods have not always reflected that (Sasao & Sue, 1993). Most of the attention early on was about racial and ethnic disparities in access to mental health services and forms and outcomes of those services, which drew on psychiatric and epidemiological data (Snowden, 1982). More recently there has also been substantial interest, drawing on other disciplines, in issues of racial socialization and ethnic acculturation in families and communities. For example, Birman *et al* (2005), in their replication of a study on the acculturation and adaptation of immigrant adolescents from the former Soviet Union, showed interdisciplinary growth in their own research by drawing, not only upon various branches of psychology, but also ethnic and migration studies, anthropology, education, demography, population economics, sociology, social work, and nursing research. Hughes (2003) cited literature from sociology as well as developmental psychology in her comparative study of African American and Latino parents' racial socialization of their children about ethnicity and race. Shen and Takeuchi (2001) used public health, sociology, gerontology, and demography in a study of acculturation and mental health of Chinese Americans. Domínguez, who was trained in Sociology and Social Welfare Policy, and Maya-Jariego (2008) used ethnography, anthropology and social network analysis in their study of immigrant destination communities and acculturation of host individuals. Similarly, Dinh *et al* (2008) used anthropology and education research in studying the effects of contact with Asians and Asian Americans on White American college students.

There has also been significant attention in community psychology journals to the intersectionality of gender and race or ethnicity that has drawn on economic and demographic data and theories from sociology and other disciplines. Examples include the social challenges of dual minority status and competing community contexts for women of color (Wilson, 1997) and social embeddedness and psychological well-being among African-American and White women and men (Snowden, 2001).

Community psychology only began to address LGBT concerns over the past decade or two, but as those concerns have been more prominent in public health and policy studies, it behooves community psychologists to pay more regular and systematic attention to them (Harper & Schneider, 2003). Community psychology has been more involved, and for much longer, in disability studies, which is greatly influenced by community organizing, organizational studies, law and public policy (see 2001 and 2014 special issues of *Journal of Prevention & Intervention in the Community*; e.g., Balcazar et al., 2001). We as a field have much to learn and to gain from our foci on all these fields of diversity studies.

*Religious Studies*. Churches were one of five key types of behavior settings studied by Barker (1968) and colleagues. Yet there was relatively little attention to religious communities, organizations, or spirituality in community psychology until the 1980s, when Dokecki (1982) reviewed the implications liberation theology in Latin America held for community psychology, Pargament (et al., 1983) and Maton (1989) highlighted the roles of religion and religious settings in buffering stress, providing support, and in prevention and health promotion. Subsequently, the focus on religion and faith organizations in community grew and diversified substantially. In addition to religion, per se, other disciplines that influenced these studies include sociology of religion and organizational management (Pargament et al., 1983), health education and community psychiatry (Maton & Wells, 1995), community development and philosophy (Dokecki et al., 2001), international human and economic development (Trout et al., 2003), geography and criminology (Speer et al., 2003), anthropology (Pargament, 2008), liberation theology, law, policy and society (Jones & Dokecki, 2008). A high point was the publication of two special issues of *Journal of Community Psychology* in 2000 and 2001 on spirituality, religion, and community psychology, which included a wide variety of interdisciplinary topics.

Gaps in Interdisciplinary Influence

The preceding review identifies many diverse multi- and interdisciplinary influences on community psychology. Yet there are also some glaring gaps in which certain disciplines that have much to offer a fuller and ultimately more effective understanding of community phenomena have had relatively little impact on the field. Following are a few brief examples.

*Political Science*. Given the centrality of empowerment, and the increased attention to public policy, in community psychology, political science potentially has much to contribute to community psychology. Yet despite the late Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives Tip O’Neill’s famous maxim that “all politics is local,” political science has generally focused on institutions at the city, state, federal, and international levels rather than community or other levels within locales, as shown in Figure 1. Early theorists, such as Friedrich (1959), Janowitz (1961), Gamson (1966), Putnam (1966), and others began to develop a political science of communities, but they received little attention in community psychology. The more recent work of political scientists Putnam (2002; on social capital) and Rich (et al., 1995; on empowerment in the context of local environmental hazards) is somewhat more familiar, but community-level politics are ripe for deeper exploration by both disciplines. Further, as SCRA has begun to engage more systematically in policy analysis and advocacy, we need to better understand how legislative politics work from a practical perspective.

*Economics*. Similar to political science, *macro*economics (as the name implies) operates mostly at the macrosystem level (see Figure 1). Yet Keynesian fiscal policies to stimulate the economy fund programs that benefit individuals, families and local communities, although these interventions are under grave threat by recent trends toward neoliberalism. Community psychologists sometimes examine economic influences on social relations and individual wellbeing (e.g., Albee & Perry, 1998; Fryer & Fagan, 2003; Mulvey, 2002; Saegert et al., 2009) which shows the breadth of our field across all levels. Yet applied *micro*economics may hold even greater promise for influencing community psychology through attention to cost-efficiency analysis of preventive and other community programs and policies (see www.npscoalition.org and www.healthpeople.org/PreventionModel.pdf). To realize that promise, however, community psychologists and economists must speak to each other more often and more effectively than they have in the past.

*Geography/Urban and Regional Planning*. As the study of physical places and features, their location, and relation to human activity-- including the distribution of populations, resources, land use, and industries—geography is extremely relevant and useful for the study and work of community psychology. There have been surprisingly few applications of Geographic Information Systems or other geospatial analyses used in our field, however. Important exceptions include Luke’s (2005) argument for using GIS and other new methods for capturing community contexts and a 2009 issue of *Journal of Prevention & Intervention in the Community* on GIS as a tool for community assessment. As a field that is closely aligned with geography and environmental design, urban and regional planning is also very relevant to the concerns of community psychology. A handful of articles with clear implications both from and for planning have appeared in community psychology journals (e.g., Perkins et al., 2009; Plas & Lewis, 1996; Suarez Balcazar et al., 2006), but planning is an applied and naturally allied field that has remained largely under-utilized by community psychologists.

*History*. Finally, more community psychologists should follow the lead of Levine and Levine (1970) as critical historians of human services, clinics, courts, schools, and communities. A historical perspective would lead more community psychologists to Tocqueville’s writings on communitarian democracy in America in the early 1800s, as it did sociologist Bellah (1985). These kinds of temporal analyses of past social and political trends and their influence on community settings are plentiful in history and would help us better understand and predict all kinds of contextual factors in individual and community problems (Mulvey, 2002), but are all too rare in our field.

Conclusions: The Potential for Transdisciplinary Community Research, and Action

The focus of community psychology has been on the development and study of interventions to ameliorate problems in the lives of people in the many diverse settings in which people live, work, socialize, pray, go to school, engage in conflict, and seek help. Community psychology has much to learn from every science and practice of social intervention and change about how to design and evaluate prevention programs; consult with self-help groups, community organizations, schools, and public and private human service agencies; mobilize communities for social action, policy analysis and transformational change. All of this begs certain questions community psychology faces as a field of research and practice: Should it become a more explicitly interdisciplinary field (which might be called “community research and action”)? Is that possible within psychology departments and disciplinary organizations or should it stake a more independent path outside institutions of psychology? What are the costs and benefits of each of those alternative courses? Transdisciplinary work has the most potential to create new ideas, methods, intervention approaches, and new paradigms but it also leads to disciplinary dilution and challenges to fundamental discipline-based theoretical paradigms and identities that are critical to a discipline’s survival especially in the academy.

We began this chapter by distinguishing between multi-, inter-, and transdisciplinary work. What we propose for the future of community psychology is that it continue to evolve from a small, applied subdiscipline of psychology, members of which often engage in multi- and interdisciplinary work, to become a transdisciplinary movement in community-based research and, more than that, part of a “transepistemic” (Schweizer-Ries & Perkins, 2012) collaborative approach to participatory action research involving many applied disciplines and diverse cultures outside the social sciences. To reach that goal, the field must pay closer, more systematic attention to faculty transformation and interdisciplinary graduate training especially in community-based applied and activist settings. That can occur in academic psychology departments, but we suggest that it is much easier to manage, and do so more completely, in multidisciplinary academic programs and multisectoral community partnerships. Only by striving for transdisciplinarity can we begin to more fully comprehend and ultimately solve and prevent complex community problems at their root causes.

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1. Despite their importance, fields that have had a primarily methodological influence (e.g., statistics) will not be covered as our main interest is in disciplines that have had a broader conceptual or topical influence. We also will not review the influence of other branches of scientific or applied psychology, which are covered elsewhere in this volume. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. For more on Yale’s I.H.R. and later Institution for Social and Policy Studies, whose faculty included Seymour Sarason, the University of Chicago’s Committee on Human Development, Harvard’s Department of Social Relations, and other long-time, interdisciplinary applied social research programs at Northwestern and Cornell Universities, University of Michigan’s Research Center for Group Dynamics and Institute for Social Research, University of California-Irvine’s School of Social Ecology, and other historical interdisciplinary institutions and academic programs and their relevance for community psychology, see Perkins (2009). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)