American Journal of Community Psychology, Vol. 29, No. 5, October 2001 (© 2001)

Value-Based Praxis in Community Psychology: Moving Toward Social Justice and Social Action[1]

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The purpose of this paper is to articulate a rationale for value-based praxis in community psychology. Although values need to promote personal, collective, and relational wellness at the same time, it is argued that community psychologists pay more attention to personal and relational wellness than to collective wellness. In order to address this imbalance it is important to promote the value of social justice. While praxis requires that we engage in a cycle of reflection, research, and social action, community psychologists devote more resources to the first two phases of praxis than to the last one. This paper offers a framework for deciding what values and what praxis considerations we should attend to and how we may advance social justice and social action in community psychology.

KEY WORDS: values; praxis; interdisciplinary; oppression; wellness; social justice; social action.

We teach many courses on methods, statistics, social problems, social theory, and social interventions, but few, if any, on values. We expect journal authors to give a detailed account of the statistics employed in their research, but there is not a demand to justify their values. We are expected to prove to funders that interventions have an impact on health, but not necessarily on the values of the community.

[1]Partial support for this research has been provided by Human Resources Development Canada. I thank Claire Chamberland, Marie Claire Laurendeau, Geoff Nelson, and Leslea Peirson for stimulating conversations on the topic of this paper. I also thank the Editor and the reviewers for their constructive comments.
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0091-0562/01/1000-0747$19.50/0

Graduate students in community psychology are well versed in various methodological approaches to research, and in the merits of different social interventions. However, they could not easily critique liberal or communitarian social policies. This is despite the fact that trends in social policy and community services are highly influenced by these competing philosophies. While questions about methods are typically well formulated, questions about values remain inchoate and embryonic (Prilleltensky, 1997). I believe this is the case because academic and professional traditions pressure us to concentrate on the science and not on the morals of our actions (Dokecki, 1996). Hence, students are capable of questioning the validity and reliability of instruments, but I am not sure they would know what criteria to employ to assess the comparative worth of values.

I submit that a framework for the identification and implementation of values can help us evaluate the benefits and shortcomings of different tenets. Value-literacy, which is just as important as methodological sophistication, can be enhanced by systematic attention to the criteria we need in selecting values. Consequently, the first objective of this paper is to propose a framework for choosing and implementing values in community psychology. I will argue that our field pays more attention to values that promote personal well-being than to principles that promote collective wellness, such as social justice.

We proclaim the unity of research and action, but we devote more resources to the former than to the latter. We invoke the need for interdisciplinary research, but it is not often that we do it. When we engage in interdisciplinary dialogue we seem to privilege certain fields such as health and education but we rarely converse with ethicists or social movement scholars.

In general, praxis refers to the unity of theory and action. In this paper I use praxis to refer to a cycle of activity that includes philosophical, contextual, needs, and pragmatic considerations. These four considerations form the basis of a framework designed to help us bridge across disciplines and integrate values, research, and action. In addition, these praxis elements combine what is desired and needed by citizens with philosophical analysis, social research, and social action.

The unique contribution of the praxis framework is that it integrates considerations that are typically studied in isolation. Needs, norms, context, values, and social change are not always studied in an integrative fashion. This paper offers a way of integrating seemingly disparate but highly complementary praxis deliberations. Praxis-literacy requires familiarity with the cycle and integration of reflection, research, and social action. Yet it seems that many academics and practitioners engage only in one piece of praxis or another, thereby falling short of achieving the aim of praxis, which is

the translation of ethical reflection and social research into social action. Consequently, my second objective in this paper is to suggest a framework for the promotion of praxis in community psychology. I will argue that our field concentrates on needs and contextual considerations and that it needs more emphasis on philosophical and pragmatic tasks. This is why we are not always explicit about our values and why we do not engage more often in social action.

COMMUNITY PSYCHOLOGY IN CONTEXT

Community psychology emerged in the sixties to address some of the shortcomings of clinical and traditional applied psychology (Rappapart, 1977; Sarason, 1988). The new subdiscipline of community psychology was to transform fundamental premises related to our understanding and treatment of mental health problems. While clinical psychology defined problems in terms of individuals, community psychology adopted ecological metaphors that encompassed various levels of analyses. While traditional applied psychology concentrated on professional help, community psychology fostered self-help and mutual help organizations taking place in natural settings. While clinicians operated very much as experts, community psychologists saw themselves as collaborators. The latter wanted to build on the strengths of individuals and groups, and not just concern themselves with diagnosis of pathologies. The promotion of wellness was to become a central focus of community psychology (Cowen, 1991, 1994). Among the key transformations in the field was of course the shift from treatment to prevention.

In addition to these important changes, community psychologists also challenged the prevailing professional and scientific norms that excluded values and social change from psychology. Influenced by the crisis in confidence in social institutions in the sixties, community psychologists began to question the value of helping individuals when so many societal structures were inimical to human welfare. This realization led to calls for social change. As community psychologists, pioneers in our field wanted to use their skills to improve not just the well being of individuals but of society as a whole. There was the promise of social change and the expectation that community psychologists would become allies with oppressed groups in the struggle for social justice (Prilleltensky & Nelson, 1997).

It can be safely said that community psychology has changed the ways psychologists understand and treat psychosocial problems. There is a growing literature on prevention, not just in community psychology but in mainstream psychology as well, with calls from APA presidents like Martin Seligman to advance prevention and positive psychology, and with several

divisions of APA collaborating with the division of community psychology on community-based projects to promote resilience and wellness. Community psychology faced many challenges in the last 35 years, and has been quite successful in fulfilling several of its goals. Prevention, collaboration, self-help, coalition building, and wellness promotion are not foreign concepts in psychology any more. But our field has not been equally successful on all fronts. As has been argued by internal critics of the field, the promotion of social justice remains an unfulfilled promise (Chavis & Wolff, 1993; Prilleltensky & Nelson, 1997).

The promotion of social justice within community psychology has been hampered by various professional and political barriers. As veteran preventionist Albee (1986) has argued, promoting social justice threatens the interests of those invested in protecting the status quo. Power structures are resistant to the idea of social change because personal investments are at risk. Within psychology, the whole idea of improving societies by treating individuals one at a time is threatened by the concept of social justice. Funding agencies prefer to remain conservative and support research that stays within the traditional parameters of person-centred explanations and interventions. To promote social justice means to be very explicit about social values, a change that still encounters a great deal of resistance within psychology and the social sciences in general. As a result, it is not surprising that the promise of social justice has been hard to keep. Against this backdrop, we need to ask ourselves what to do: Should we resign ourselves to the idea that social justice is just too hard to pursue, or should we persist in the face of adversity? I believe most community psychologists would choose the latter. We need to refresh our collective memory to reacquaint ourselves with the values and goals of community psychology, as envisioned by pioneers of our field.

Clarity with respect to values and praxis is essential for the promotion of community psychology's aims. Two central goals of community psychology are (a) the elimination of oppressive social conditions conducive to problems in living and (b) the promotion of wellness. Conditions of domination, exploitation, and oppression lead to many of the social and psychological problems that community psychologists struggle with. The elimination of oppression, discrimination, and violence would lead to healthier citizens and healthier communities (Hill Collins, 1998; Montero, 1994; Prilleltensky & Gonick, 1996). To achieve that objective, we need to promote social justice and social action, and not just individual empowerment and compassion for disadvantaged populations. Similarly, we need social action and social justice to promote wellness in society. Wellness may be defined as a favourable state of affairs, for individuals and communities, brought about by the presence of psychological and material resources. "Wellness is not the same as

the absence of disease. Rather it is defined by the presence of positive marker characteristics that come about as a result of felicitous combinations of organismic, familial, community, and societal elements" Cowen, (1996, p. 247). According to Cowen (1996, p. 246) wellness is

> the positive end of a hypothetical adjustment continuum—an ideal we should strive continually to approach . . . Key pathways to wellness, for all of us, start with the crucial needs to form wholesome attachments and acquire age-appropriate competencies in early childhood. Those steps, vital in their own right, also lay down a base for the good, or not so good, outcomes that follow. Other cornerstones of a wellness approach include engineering settings and environments that facilitate adaptation, fostering autonomy, support and empowerment, and promoting skills needed to cope effectively with stress.

As Cowen noted (1991, 1994, 1996), in order to promote wellness we have to attend to multiple pathways and cornerstones. One such cornerstone is a just society where everyone can enjoy good health and have access to resources (Albee, 1986). One such pathway is social action to change adverse social conditions (Hill Collins, 1998; Prilleltensky, 1999).

The need for social justice emerges from the analysis of values in community psychology, whereas the need for social action derives from the examination of praxis considerations. I start the discussion with a framework of values, followed by a conceptualization of praxis. In each section I offer (a) *criteria* for the selection of values or praxis considerations, (b) a *proposal* for values or praxis in community psychology, and (c) *applications* of the respective frameworks. My overall objective is to foster a value-based praxis conducive to social action and social justice.

VALUES FOR COMMUNITY PSYCHOLOGY

Criteria

Kekes (1993) defines values as "humanly caused benefits that human beings provide to others. . . . By way of illustration, we may say that love and justice are moral goods" (p. 44). Kekes provides an abstract concept of values as well as concrete illustrations. This is a useful point departure for thinking about values.

Values guide the process of working toward a desired state of affairs. These are precepts that inform our personal, professional, and political behavior. But values are not only beneficial in that they guide behavior toward a future outcome, for they also have intrinsic merit. We espouse values like self-determination, caring, and solidarity, not just because they lead toward a good or better society, but also because they have merit on their own

(Hill Collins, 1993; Kane, 1994; Kekes, 1993). Indeed, according to Mayton, Ball-Rokeach, and Loges (1994), "values may be defined as enduring prescriptive or proscriptive beliefs that a specific mode of conduct (instrumental value) or end state of existence (terminal value) is preferred to another mode of conduct or end state" (p. 3). Schwartz (1994) points out that values "serve as guiding principles in the life of a person or other social entity" (p. 21). Values, then, are the principles that guide our actions, but the question remains: how do we choose our values? Values should meet certain criteria.

1. *Values should guide the processes and mechanisms that lead toward an ideal scenario*. The values we choose should be compatible with our vision of a good society and they should bring us closer to the desired end. But we have to ensure that there is a compatibility between our means and our ends. We cannot strive toward self-determination while eroding people's ability to control their lives in the process. This is a common path undertaken by dogmatic regimes that advocate for complete sacrifice of personal aims in order to achieve some supreme collective principle in the future. Some governments advocate for the complete elimination of deficits, a desirable collective aim, but they do that at the expense of the poor, who suffer because of the elimination of essential services. In cases like that, there is a lack of congruence between the ends and the means.
2. *Values should avoid dogmatism and relativism*. Dogmatism leads to the coercive enforcement and application of single sets of beliefs, an approach that undermines human diversity (Taylor, 1992; Trickett, 1996). At the same time, we should also avert complete relativism, for it grants equal merit to any set of values. The latter would paralyze us because we would have no criteria to praise or condemn competing orientations (Hill Collins, 1998; Kane, 1994). Dogmatism and relativism are common traps in discussions about values and although they present serious challenges to moral and practical philosophy, these impediments are not insurmountable (Bauman, 1993; Hill Collins, 1998; Kane, 1994, 1998; Kekes, 1993; Lerner, 1996).
3. *Values should be complementary and not contradictory*. Values should be internally consistent and should complement each other. Collaboration and democratic participation are intrinsically good features of a good society, but they are also constructive in that they enable self-determination. Human diversity, in turn, also bolsters self-determination, for without appreciation for diverse social identities one's unique aspirations cannot flourish. The point is that values should work in concert. Caring should complement justice, collaboration should complement democratic participation, and human

diversity should complement self-determination. Just like the value of health cannot be fulfilled without access to preventive and medical resources, self-determination cannot be promoted without justice and access to social resources.

4. *Values should promote personal, collective, and relational wellness*. These three types of wellness are needed, respectively, for the fulfilment of individual aspirations, for the creation of enduring community structures that aid in the accomplishment of personal and social aims, and for the facilitation of interpersonal and communal collaboration. The interdependence of these three types of wellness is persuasively reasoned in feminist (Frazer & Lacey, 1993; Hernández, 1997; Hill Collins, 1993), native (Gunn Allen, 1993), and communitarian writings (Etzioni, 1996; Habermas, 1990; Sandel, 1996) that elaborate on the intimate connection between individual and collective aspirations.

   These writings recognize that there is a dialectic between personal and collective values; one kind cannot exist without the other. Although this dialectic has been amply recognized (e.g., Bauman, 1993; Sandel, 1996), what is often missed in the literature is the need for relational wellness that mediates between the good of the individual and the good of the collective, a need that is often invoked in feminist (Lorde, 1993) and native theories (Gunn Allen, 1993). Neither personal nor collective values can exist without mechanisms for connecting them (Habermas, 1990; Putnam, 1996). Lorde (1993) spoke eloquently about relationality and interdependency between women. Her writings illustrate the intimate connections between personal, collective, and relational wellness (Lorde, 1993, p. 486):

> Interdependency between women is the way to a freedom which allows the *I* to *be*, not in order to be used, but in order to be creative. This is a difference between the passive *be* and the active *being*.... Only within that interdependency of different strengths, acknowledged and equal, can the power to seek new ways of being in the world generate, as well as the courage and sustenance to act where there are no charters.... As women, we have been taught either to ignore our differences, or to view them as causes for separation and suspicion rather than as forces for change. Without community there is no liberation.

Proposal

Based on these four criteria, there cannot be a *single* value that can promote personal, collective, and relational wellness. Rather, we need a *set* of values that is internally consistent, that avoids dogmatism and relativism, and that promotes congruence between means and ends. While some values

may advocate personal more than collective wellness, such as the principle of self-determination, others may balance it by fostering caring and compassion for others. This reasoning calls for a search of values that can balance the promotion of personal wellness with the affirmation of collective and relational wellness at the same time. Guided by such a call we can identify a set of seven values that work in concert to meet the four criteria established earlier: *self-determination, health, personal growth, social justice, support for enabling community structures, respect for diversity, and collaboration and democratic participation*.

Table I states the objectives of each value and points to their interdependence. To emphasize the interdependence and synergy of the various values, each one of them asserts an objective *in consideration* of other values and types of wellness. In concert, these values promote personal, collective, and relational wellness. For example, the objective of *respect for diversity* is to promote respect and appreciation for diverse social identities and unique oppressions *in consideration* of need for solidarity and risk of social fragmentation. Respect and appreciation for diverse identities promotes personal and collective wellness of individuals and a group, whereas solidarity with other groups fosters relational wellness and sensitivity to the collective wellness of other communities. *Self-determination* is another value that

Table I. Values for the Promotion of Personal, Collective, and Relational Wellness

Values	Objectives
Self-determination	Promote the ability of community members and groups to pursue their chosen goals in life *in consideration* of other people's needs
Health	Promote the physical and emotional well-being of individuals and groups through acquisition of skills and behavioral change *in consideration* of structural and economic factors impinging on the health of the population at large
Personal growth	Promote the personal growth of community members *in consideration* of vital community structures needed to advance individual health and self-actualization
Social justice	Promote fair and equitable allocation of bargaining powers, resources, and obligations in society *in consideration* of people's differential power, needs, and abilities to express their wishes
Support for enabling community structures	Promote vital structures that meet the needs of entire communities *in consideration* of the risks of curtailing individual freedoms and fostering conformity and uniformity
Respect for diversity	Promote respect and appreciation for diverse social identities and unique oppressions *in consideration* of need for solidarity and risk of social fragmentation
Collaboration and democratic participation	Promote peaceful, respectful, and equitable processes of dialogue whereby citizens have meaningful input into decisions affecting their lives, *in consideration* of need to act for social justice and not just avoid conflicts

promotes personal wellness, but always in consideration of others' needs. Similarly, *social justice* reminds us that for individuals to experience personal wellness there has to be collective wellness and a fair allocation of resources in society (Benhabib, 1996).

These values are premised on the assumption that strong communities benefit everyone. Whether we like it or not, the fulfilment of the self is linked to the contentment of the group. Violent neighborhoods and families constrain personal well-being. Poorly resourced communities limit opportunities for health and development. High quality public institutions like schools and hospitals benefit the community at large. Accessible child care and affordable recreational facilities benefit children and families in low income neighbourhoods. Support for community structures and social justice in allocation of resources promote collective wellness because they enhance the quality of life for all citizens and not just of those who have the resources to look after themselves.

But values are needed not only to promote wellness, but to prevent problems as well. If we did not have rules to protect communities and individuals, the incidence of harm would increase. If we did not have rules against intoxicated driving, more innocent people would be killed. If we did not have rules against smoking in public spaces, more children would be affected by second-hand smoking. These and other collective norms are needed to protect citizens against potential abuses of power and excesses of individual rights.

In some cases, personal and collective goals come into conflict. Smokers demand their right to engage in the habit, public health officials uphold the public good by imposing smoking bans; unprepared teenagers want to have babies, preventionists strive to avert teenage pregnancy. Ideally, personal and collective aims would be mutually enhancing, but it is often the case that conflicts arise. This is why we should promote relational wellness in the form of partnerships, conflict resolution, and collaboration (Putnam, 1996). Unless we teach people how to negotiate differences, it is not realistic to expect social harmony. This is not to say that we can avoid conflict altogether. In some instances conflict may be the only way to bring about social justice.

Table I serves as a template for the examination of community psychology values. If we reason that we need the entire set of values to achieve the aims of community psychology, then we need to probe our theories and practices to see if there are any values that are neglected. In community psychology, concern for autonomy and self-determination is reflected in efforts to promote psychological empowerment and a sense of mastery and control (Prilleltensky, 1994; Zimmerman, 1995; Zimmerman & Rappaport, 1988). The concepts of prevention, health promotion, skill enhancement, and

the pursuit of wellness exemplify the values of health and personal growth (Cowen, 1994; Rosenblum, 1971). Concerns with justice and equality, political education, and social change movements reflect the value of social justice in community psychology (Albee, 1986; Prilleltensky & Nelson, 1997). Support for vital community structures is expressed in efforts to launch and preserve informal and formal networks of support (Gottlieb, 1981; 1983; Lavoie, Borkman, & Gidron, 1994).

Although it is clear that community psychology pays attention to personal, collective, and relational wellness, it is important to determine just how much attention and what type of attention we are talking about. Is our level of interest in social justice high or low? Is our interest in such a value at the level of discourse or also at the level of action? I believe the distinction between discourse and action is a crucial one because we often write about values but we do not always act on them.

With regards to personal wellness, we place high emphasis on personal well-being and there is significant congruence between discourse and action. Many community-based prevention programs are designed to enhance the level of skills and knowledge of individuals on a particular topic, such as parenting, drug abuse, social skills, and assertiveness. In fact, it has been argued that most prevention programs tend to be person-centered (Albee, 1996; Albee & Perry, 1995; Cowen, 1985; Levine, 1998), an observation that confirms our concern for personal wellness.

Relational wellness is a focus of attention in groups but not so much at the societal and political levels (Riger, 1993; Surrey, 1991). I believe this is the case in both discourse and action. Although we develop techniques for collaboration and democratic participation in research and community programs (Kerruish, 1995; Nelson, Ochoka, Griffin, & Lord, 1998; Toulmin, 1996), we are not as attentive to social and political processes needed to ensure dialogue and conflict resolution at the political levels. We concern ourselves with dispute resolution in small circles such as steering committees and community programs, but we are somewhat remiss in addressing class and racial differences that are being played out in the political arena. It is important to strive for harmony, but it is equally important to realize the limits of negotiation and the need for some type of conflict to advance the needs of oppressed populations (Hill Collins, 1998).

In comparison to personal wellness, collective wellness occupies a background position in community psychology's agenda, particularly at the level of social policy. Although we exhort citizens and professionals to embrace concepts of community in our discourse (McMillan, 1996; Newbrough, 1995; Youniss & Yates, 1997), in actual practice we promote community mainly by creating networks around particular topics, such as depression, drug-abuse prevention, or safe communities. These are important interventions

but tend to be limited to the interpersonal, organizational, or neighborhood levels. When it comes to promoting social justice and a fair distribution of societal resources, we look to others to fulfil the job. Prilleltensky and Nelson (1997) maintain that most of our efforts in community psychology are ameliorative—as opposed to transformative—in nature. Community interventions strive to alleviate suffering and to minimize the impact of unjust social policies, not to change society in order to prevent problems in the first place. More focussed attention to collective wellness and social justice, in both discourse and action, will bring us closer to the mission of community psychology.

Application

Values are guidelines for helping others (Baier, 1973; Kekes, 1993). Community psychologists are interested in values that promote the well-being of disadvantaged people. However, given that people's needs vary according to their particular circumstances, it is nearly impossible to formulate a universal list of values (Giddens, 1994; Kane, 1994, 1998; Kekes, 1993). Hence, we must remember that any proposed set of values contains contextual limitations. Therefore, we should avoid the dogmatic application of values regardless of the context. Some groups may require, because of their context, certain values more than others. While people with low income may need financial support more than signs of compassion, wealthy people with a disability may need emotional support more than material help. We should also keep in mind that the meaning of values varies according to people's experiences. The value of independence may have a completely different meaning for an able bodied person than for a person with a physical disability. People with disabilities and those close to them may appreciate more the value of interdependence. In cases like this, interdependence may be more valued than independence. Keeping in mind that the context determines the set of values that is required is a good antidote against the dogmatic application of beliefs. Asking people themselves what they need goes a long way to ensure that we do not impose on them inappropriate values.

Prilleltensky and Nelson (1997) suggested that advancing the well-being of oppressed groups requires actualizing all values in a balanced way. We need to remember that within a given social environment some values appear at the foreground of our consciousness while others remain in the background. To attain the necessary balance among the various values, we must relocate the neglected values to the foreground. Within the present North American social context, this means shifting the value of social justice from the background to the foreground, and pushing the obsession with personal

advancement from the foreground to the background. If we keep neglecting social justice and our collective duties we will merely reinforce the same unjust state of affairs that perpetuates oppression, whereas if we keep exalting self-determination we will undermine any possible sense of community.

It is also crucial to distinguish between ameliorating living conditions within the present social structure and transforming the conditions that create and perpetuate oppression. Caring should not be limited to meeting people's basic needs on a charitable basis. Caring should entail a commitment to changing negative social conditions so that charity becomes obsolete. Compassion at the interpersonal level is both wonderful and insufficient. There is a definite need to expand the implementation of values from the group and neighborhood contexts to the political context. Otherwise, our efforts at caring will be perpetually undermined by structural conditions of injustice. Alleviating suffering is a commendable social cause, but there comes a point where amelioration by itself works against the eradication of oppressive conditions. Efforts should always be directed toward the long-term goal of making society more humane for everyone.

Perhaps the most obvious application of value-based practice is in programs and policies. If we agree that our interventions should procure an equilibrium among personal, collective, and relational wellness, we should develop guidelines that prevent excessive emphasis on one kind of wellness at the expense of another. Table II provides a summary of such guidelines. This table can be used as a template in devising value-based interventions in multiple settings (e.g., schools, workplace, hospitals, communities) and with a variety of foci (e.g., health promotion, drug-abuse prevention, teen pregnancy, formal and informal support, minority rights, child abuse). To illustrate how we can balance the three types of wellness, values address personal, relational, and collective needs in interpersonal, group, community, national, and political contexts.

PRAXIS IN COMMUNITY PSYCHOLOGY

In general, praxis refers to the unity of theory and action. In the context of this paper praxis refers to the completion of a cycle that entails three separate but interconnected phases: reflection, social research, and social action. Praxis is supposed to complement the value-orientation explicated earlier. While an analysis of values brings clarity to our priorities in community psychology, a praxis orientation ensures that we act on our insights. As in the previous part dealing with values, the purpose of this section is to present a framework that can help in identifying challenges and opportunities in our field. I follow in this portion the same outline used in the discussion on

Table II. Application of Values in Policies and Programs

Values	Policies	Programs
Self-determination	Devise policies in consultation with community stakeholders	Promote voice and choice of community members in selection and administration of programs
Health	Facilitate access to health care services through universal and outreach programs	Establish networks of support and create self-help groups
Personal growth	Establish policies for teaching employment skills and for accessible recreational and educational opportunities	Build into programs competency enhancing components for personal, educational, and occupational growth
Social justice	Implement equitable policies and taxation laws that provide adequate resources to the poor	Offer comprehensive supports that meet the needs for housing and economic security of disadvantaged families
Support for enabling community structures	Promote policies that strengthen high quality basic community services such as education, health, and income security	Create awareness and support for creation and preservation of effective formal and informal supports
Respect for diversity	Promote inclusive work and social policies that do not discriminate on basis of marital status, gender, ability, sexual orientation, class, culture, or any other source of social power	Consult with diverse groups of stakeholders and develop inclusive and culturally sensitive programs based on partnerships with the community
Collaboration and democratic participation	Promote educational policies that teach importance of civic duties and skills required for meaningful participation in democracy	Foster climate of respect and develop skills for meaningful and democratic participation in programs

values. I start with criteria for praxis considerations, make a proposal for a praxis framework, and conclude with applications.

Criteria

Praxis should be based on criteria that will facilitate the completion of the cycle entailing reflection, research, and social action. I propose four basic criteria for praxis.

1. *Balance between philosophical and grounded input.* A balance between philosophical and grounded input is needed to complement deductive with inductive approaches to knowledge and praxis. Abstract philosophical analyses of what values and practices can lead

to the good society are useful but limited. One reason for the limitation of philosophical analyses is that "to cover a wide range of cases, ethical principles typically are formulated at a high level of abstraction and consequently leave much room for individual discretion" (Jaggar, 1994, p. 9). Feminist philosopher Jaggar (1994, p. 9) goes on to say that

> individual discretion is always required to determine which principle or principles are appropriate for a given situation and, in cases of conflict between them, which principles should take precedence over others. . . . The consideration of particular cases thus plays an indispensable role in formulating moral principles.

What good is it to have an internally consistent framework of values that does not reflect the living realities of most people? The corollary of this question is that *moral philosophy is not enough*. On the other hand, we can ask what is the point of knowing people's needs and aspirations if that knowledge is not processed into principles and guidelines for action? The main corollary of this question is that *grounded knowledge is not enough* (Kane, 1998). Moral philosophy and grounded experience are complementary. Theories of values have to be validated with lived experience. Otherwise, we can end up with notions that are theoretically flawless but practically worthless.

2. *Balance between understanding and action*. This is needed to ensure that knowledge does not remain the sole object of intellectual interest. The ultimate purpose of values like love and justice is, to go back to Kekes (1993), to enjoy a fuller life. To make an impact in the world, our theoretical sophistication has to be followed by action, a principle inscribed in the very name of the division of community psychology of the American Psychological Association: The Society for Community Research and Action.

   But the urge to act should be tempered by the need to know; to know our goals, and the risks and benefits of pursuing one course of action and not another. Understanding pertains not only to the internal consistency of any set of values, but also to the context of application. While one set of values may be appropriate to one social context, it may be inimical to the well-being of people in another setting. Thus, while we promote more autonomy and control for disadvantaged people in oppressively controlling environments, we do not want to push for more self-determination of violent people in disorganized societies. Blind adherence to any value, from personal empowerment to sense of community, is risky. Actions to promote personal control, for instance, have to be considered in light of social repercussions (Macedo, 1994).

3. *Balance between processes and outcomes*. This is required to ensure that dialogue is not an end in itself. By the same token, we need to assert that ends do not automatically justify the means. If the object of an intervention is to uphold the rights of an oppressed group, do we justify any means, including terrorism? On the other hand, can we justify endless talk when the lives of vulnerable children and families in conflict zones are at risk? These are very difficult questions for which there are never easy solutions, but the tension between valid processes and just outcomes should be reflected in any framework of values.
4. *Balance between differing and unequal voices*. This is the fourth criteria for constructing a framework of praxis. Social policies and programs that have an impact on the health and welfare of the population are typically formulated by powerful politicians, educated government officials, and privileged academics. Efforts by community psychologists to work in partnership with disadvantaged members of society are not typical of social policy formation. Quite the contrary, most social policies are conceived in the absence of meaningful input from those most affected by them (Taylor, 1996; Wharf & McKenzie, 1998). Hence, a framework of praxis should be attentive to differing voices and in particular to those who are often rendered inaudible by the political process. Unequal power and unequal representation must be considered in praxis. Actions that are based on the voice of the powerful will irrevocably perpetuate the status quo, whereas actions that are based on the voice of the powerless have a chance of promoting social justice (Jaggar, 1994). This is why it is crucial for community psychologists to work closely in collaboration with members of oppressed groups.

Proposal

Based on these four criteria, I propose a framework of praxis consisting of four complementary considerations: *philosophical, contextual, needs,* and *pragmatic*. Table III shows the four sets of considerations with their respective unique features. Each set answers a key question, deals with a particular subject, calls on different analytical and disciplinary resources, and leads to a specific outcome. This framework illustrates the cycle that community psychologists need to complete in order to move from reflection to research to action. Such a cycle begins with philosophical reflections on values, continues with research on needs and contextual factors, and ends with pragmatic considerations for action. Although many community

Table III. Considerations for a Praxis Framework in Community Psychology

Considerations	Key question	State of affairs explored	Analytical resource	Outcomes
Philosophical	What should be?	Ideal vision	Philosophical and political discourse about values and society	Vision of good life and good society
Contextual	What is?	Actual state	Survey of norms and of economic, social, and cultural trends	Identification of prevailing norms and social conditions
Needs	What is missing and what is desired?	Desirable state	Grounded theory and lived experience of community members	Identification of human needs
Pragmatic	What can be done?	Feasible change	Resource mobilization and social change theory	Social change strategies

psychologists already engage in this process, a clear articulation of the praxis cycle may help others evaluate their practice. I discuss next the unique contributions of each set of praxis considerations. Following a presentation of their distinctness I offer reasons for their inseparable and mutually enhancing nature.

Philosophical Considerations

Moral and political philosophy probes what is the good life, what is the good society, and how to get there. Moral theories explain the merits and drawbacks of diverse tenets, the conditions under which one value may supersede another, potential contradictions among competing orientations to the good life, and the like. These considerations answer the question *what should be*? Moral philosophy contributes to the discussion on values by portraying an *ideal vision* of what we should strive for; it can provide a blueprint of a better society in which values of personal and community wellness will be mutually enhanced (Etzioni, 1996).

When proposing a set of values, it is crucial to appreciate the "dynamic complexity and diversity of specific situations, and the particular needs, desires, intellectual and emotional habits of the persons participating in them" (Bowden, 1997, p. 3). A framework for values should strive to answer

Toulmin's call for an approach that is "particular not universal, local not general, timely not eternal, and—above all—concrete not abstract" (1996, p. 7). This is not to undermine the importance of conceptualization. Theory is needed to reflect on potential conflicts among competing values. We can appreciate a community psychologist advocating for the empowerment of community members, but we should remember that too much self-determination can lead to preoccupation with rights and neglect of social obligations. Personal control and sense of community are not always compatible goals. We need to conceptualize the values that are conducive to a good life and a good society, for without organizing schemes we can easily become confused as to what values should take precedence in real-life contexts.

The balance between theory and grounded input is required to scrutinize people's wishes. Asking people what they regard important in life is essential, but not enough to guide action, for the simple reason that people can wish upon others objectionable and reprehensible things. This is why we need philosophical critique of people's voices as much as grounded validation of conceptual frameworks.

Contextual Considerations

This set of considerations explores *what is the actual state of affairs* in which people live. Community psychologists and social scientists strive to understand what are the social, economic, cultural, and political conditions of a specific community. This line of inquiry helps us to determine social norms and cultural trends influencing people's choices and behavior (Trickett, 1996). A contextual assessment is necessary to understand the subjective experience of residents of a particular community. Individualist and collectivist societies differ markedly with respect to socialization, customs, and visions of the good society. Poor and rich communities vary with regards to their ability to fulfil basic needs. Different ethnic communities celebrate unique traditions and uphold distinct values. An analysis of culture and context draws on resources from history, anthropology, sociology, communications, economics, and cultural studies. These sources of information combine to provide a picture of the context in which we want to promote certain values. Knowing the context will help us determine what values are missing and what values are in the foreground of society.

Values attain their meaning within a social context. The meaning of self-determination in an individualist society is vastly different from its connotation in a collectivist environment. In a totally collectivist society, citizens yearn for more autonomy and resent state and communal intrusion.

Examples include "curtailing individual rights in the name of community needs; suppressing creativity in the name of conformity; and even suppressing a sense of self, losing individuality in a mesh of familial or communal relations" (Etzioni, 1996, p. 26). In an individualistic environment, on the other hand, citizens wish to experience more sense of community and less selfishness, as evidenced by accounts of citizens in such communities (Interfaith Social Assistance Reform Coalition, 1998).

We understand values more fully when we comprehend the set of circumstances within which they are embedded (Avineri & De-Shalit, 1992; Bell, 1993; Etzioni, 1993; Sandel, 1996). Pushed to extremes, values lose their merit. Excessive collectivism violates one's right to privacy, whereas flagrant individualism numbs our sensitivity to others and leads to desolation. It is incumbent upon us, then, to watch out for signs of value immoderation (Kane, 1994). The moment one principle takes too much space, others shrink proportionately. Applied to North American society, this means that collectivist values such as solidarity, sharing, cooperation, and social justice have shrunk in reverse proportion to the increase in individualism (Saul, 1995). This trend is reflected in conservative preventive programs and policies that concentrate on person-centred approaches (Albee, 1996; Albee & Perry, 1995).

To reach a balance of values that is sensitive to the social context, it is our task to evaluate the salience of each desirable value. In our social environment, the eminence of individualism has led to the obscurity of collectivism. What's the solution? A full swing toward the collectivist end of the spectrum is not advisable, for we would confront another conundrum. A creative equilibrium that would foster the rights of the individual *and* the needs of the community is a more tenable approach. This is why we should favour a perspective that empowers the person to claim his or her rights in full consideration of societal obligations. Entitlements and duties do not have to be mutually exclusive (Etzioni, 1993, 1996; Lerner, 1996). Such an approach, congruent with the tenets of community psychology, seeks a balance between self-determination and social justice, and shows high degrees of concern for the well-being of individuals and communities alike. This philosophy envisions a good life and a good society built on mutuality, social obligations, strong public institutions, and the removal of oppression. Emancipating every member of the community and nurturing a sense of solidarity are the foundations of this vision (Frazer & Lacey, 1993), a vision congruent with feminist and community psychology principles (Bond, 1997; Montero, 1994; Mulvey, 1988; Rappaport, 1977; Prilleltensky & Nelson, 1997; Riger, 1993; Wilkinson, 1997).

Needs Considerations

Philosophical and contextual considerations have to be infused with real-life sentiments. It is not enough for philosophers to ponder what the rest of us need, or for social scientists to recommend what will make our communities a better place to live. What good is it to have an internally consistent set of principles that does not reflect the realities and desires of most people? Philosophical tenets have to be validated with the lived experience of community members and with the knowledge of social scientists (Kane, 1998; Montero, 1998). It is only when most people attest to the benefits of having voice and choice that the abstract notion of self-determination becomes palpable.

Needs considerations contribute to the framework by answering the question *what is missing* and what is a *desirable state of affairs* for community members. This set of considerations pays explicit attention to the voice of the people with whom we partner to improve their well-being. The assumption followed in this consideration is that community members are experts on what they need to experience wellness. Needs are simply defined as the resources missing and required to achieve wellness. Community psychology is uniquely placed to elicit the needs of people in positions of disadvantage. Grounded theory and lived experience serve to identify basic human needs of people in context.

By asking people what they want, need, and consider meaningful in life, we learn about the ingredients of an appealing vision. This is not to say that whatever people say should be acceptable. For it is quite conceivable that the majority of people in a society may be wrong, or malicious. History could prove that majorities are capable of endorsing and enacting vicious attitudes. Just like philosophical arguments have to be checked against human needs, expressed human needs have to be subjected to careful philosophical scrutiny. This ensures that human desires are tested for their ethical validity. Grounded input should be assessed using philosophical criteria, whereas philosophical notions should be verified through studies of human needs. This is a task that should be collectively undertaken by communities and should not be left to the discretion of professionals or academic experts alone. Community members' voices are crucial in the cycle of praxis. Collaboration among professionals and communities is the best way to combine the strengths of scholarly and grounded knowledge. Input from community members is valuable not only in terms of information about needs and context, but also in terms of the collaborative process that should characterize praxis in community psychology.

Pragmatic Considerations

While the previous sets of considerations examined actual, ideal, and desirable states of affairs in society, pragmatic considerations concern *feasible change*. Unlike previous deliberations, which asked what is, what is missing, or what should be, the main question answered by this set of considerations is *what could be done*. This question is meant to bridge the gap between the actual state of affairs on one hand, and desirable and ideal visions on the other. Feasible change draws our attention to what social improvements can be realistically accomplished—a distinct political goal.

This set of considerations meets the criterion stipulated earlier for balancing research and action. By reflecting on previous efforts at social change and learning from agents of change we can hope to close the gap between the ideal and the actual. A specific outcome of pragmatic thinking is a plan for social action.

Agents of change translate moral values and grounded input into action. These are the professionals, paraprofessionals, politicians, volunteers, and activists who combine values with human experience to improve the welfare of a particular population. Agents of change strive to promote wellness by combining values with knowledge of what people want, need, and regard important in life. Agents of change bridge between the abstract notions of philosophers and the lived experience of children, parents, and community members. They try to adapt ideals of the good society to specific contextual realities. In that sense, all of us who work in communities are agents of change.

Within the social sciences in general and within psychology in particular, community psychology is one of the few disciplines explicitly concerned with oppression and social change (Prilleltensky & Gonick, 1994; Rappaport, 1977). This is a unique feature of our field that requires and deserves further impetus (Bond, 1997; Chavis & Wolff, 1993; Prilleltensky & Nelson, 1997).

The complementary nature of the four sets of considerations now becomes apparent: without a philosophical analysis we lack a vision; without a contextual analysis we lack an understanding of social forces; without a needs assessment we lack an idea of what people want; and finally, without pragmatic thinking we lack a plan of action. The interdependence of these deliberations makes it impossible to privilege one set of considerations over another. The framework promotes not only a cycle of complementary actions, but also a dialogue of different voices. Praxis calls upon the voices of academics, researchers, social change activists, and community members themselves. This is a framework to be shared by everyone concerned with eliminating oppression and promoting wellness. There is not one group that can, by itself, decide what changes are necessary. Partnerships across

stakeholder groups are vital to ensure the interests of community members are advanced (MacGillivary & Nelson, 1998).

If our mission is to promote value-based social change (Bond, 1997; Montero, 1994; Rappaport, 1977; Prilleltensky & Nelson, 1997), we should feel confident about our values. If we believe that philosophical, contextual, needs, and pragmatic considerations are crucial for praxis, then we should explore to what extent community psychologists pay attention to them. We can use the framework by determining our field's attention to each one of the four praxis considerations. Thus, we could speculate that community psychology pays only moderate attention to social and philosophical analyses of values, and that we are relatively uninformed about philosophical debates that affect social policy. At the level of pragmatic assessments, for instance, we could say that community psychology pays attention to change processes at the organizational level, but that we could be more attuned to social change.

I suggest that our field is stronger in the two middle rows of Table III (contextual and needs considerations) than in the top and bottom ones (philosophical and pragmatic). That is to say that our discipline is stronger in research than in action, and stronger in applied research than in philosophical and political scholarship.

Philosophical deliberations are important because they scrutinize the direction of our efforts; they make sure we are on course to reach a vision and that we do not work across purposes. This type of thinking identifies contradictions and limitations in our programs and policies; it fosters reflection and it serves as a meta-dialogue within our discipline. As such, it can help us determine the relative emphasis we put on the remaining three sets of considerations. Are we doing too much research on needs and not enough on processes of change? Are we describing in detail the culture of local communities but only superficially social and political norms?

Earlier tensions between empowerment and prevention (Rappaport, 1981, 1987), and more recent ones between empowerment and sense of community (Dokecki, 1996; Riger, 1993) are examples of philosophical discussions that help to reconsider the direction of our work. At present, I think that we could invest more effort in developing a coherent philosophical position that responds to the changing nature of social conditions. Should our agenda be the same as it was in the sixties and seventies, when the state offered support to the needy, or do we need to refocus to challenge the demise of the welfare state? (Leonard, 1997). Do we align ourselves with liberal individualist policies that place heavy responsibility on vulnerable people to help themselves, or do we make a strong political statement about the need to sustain vital community structures? While we endorse community supports, we often deal with the casualties of unfair

social policies instead of strengthening civic institutions. The latter is more in line with a communitarian vision that we endorse implicitly but not quite practically yet. I believe we need to come to terms with the changing social landscape and realize that we have to develop a stronger philosophical position with respect to the role of the state in community wellness.

Community psychology is attentive to contextual considerations in varying degrees, depending on the level of analysis. There is differential progress in our understanding of various contexts. I think we are clear on how personal, family, work, and school contexts influence basic human needs, but I am not sure we have yet understood clearly the role of cultural and political norms in wellness (Levine, 1998). A similar observation can be made about research on needs. Although we inquire in needs assessments about personal, familial, and organizational needs, we seldom explore what changes should take place at the social and political level to foster basic human needs. The relative lack of attention to political considerations extends to pragmatic issues. In community psychology, pragmatic considerations leading to change are limited to groups and organizations. The challenge of social action is still awaiting an operational paradigm (Chavis & Wolff, 1993).

Applications

The praxis framework can be used to evaluate current social policy debates and to guide community psychology research and action. In both instances we can see how the cycle of praxis promotes the unity of theory and action. I will offer first an example of research and action guided by the praxis cycle and will consider later a social policy debate.

I am part of a team of researchers who received a grant from a federal agency to write a book on the promotion of family wellness and the prevention of child maltreatment. Our work followed pretty much the four praxis considerations delineated in Table III. Our research design included philosophical, contextual, needs, and pragmatic considerations. The first section of the report we wrote deals extensively with vision and values for child and family wellness. We based the vision for wellness on The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, on other applied philosophical writings, and on extensive consultations with a wide range of stakeholders, including youth, parents, child welfare workers, researchers, administrators, and policy makers. All of these stakeholder groups had a chance to express their vision for child and family wellness. In doing so we met the criteria for merging philosophical with grounded input, but the deliberations within our own research team were not without controversy.

While some team members wanted to be quite vocal about the need to address social injustice in child wellness, others preferred a more cautious approach that refrained from controversial political statements. Our team re-enacted familiar debates within the social sciences, with some colleagues in favor of being very explicit about our own value base, and others reluctant to come across as too radical. Interestingly enough, the community psychologists within our group were more comfortable with explicit value statements, whereas those from other disciplines were apprehensive about such statements. This conflict necessitated a fair amount of discussion and negotiation among the various sides. As the main author of the chapter dealing with vision and values for child wellness, I struggled with retaining my preference for explicit value statements on one hand, and respecting the views of my colleagues on the other. This example shows that although in principle all of us understood the need to promote social justice, not all of us felt comfortable making unequivocal statements about it. Although this was a definite struggle, it was a good struggle in that it forced us to make choices related to social justice. This was one of the advantages of having the framework to orient our work. We decided that vision and values would be an integral part of our work on child and family wellness. Without the framework, these issues would not have even come up.

Our report also dealt extensively with the context for the promotion of wellness and the prevention of abuse. As in the previous section, our writing was based on a very thorough review of empirical research and on original qualitative interviews and focus groups with more than 120 stakeholders. The same consultation process was used to ask the various key informant groups about the needs of children and families in general, and of those at-risk in particular. Thus, our participants had a chance to articulate the needs of the population of interest. This exercise followed the praxis framework in that it facilitated the merging of expert and professional opinions with those of the people experiencing the problems themselves. The integration of various voices raised important questions regarding whose voice should be privileged in the case of conflicting opinions.

As in the conflict surrounding values, people differed with respect to the importance they ascribed to various precursors of child abuse. Some ascribed more importance to family dynamics than to socioeconomic factors, whereas others thought the opposite was true. Referring to both the contextual and the needs considerations of the framework forced us to look at various levels of analysis in our interpretation of etiological factors.

Sensitive to the contextual considerations of child and family wellness, our team had two researchers exploring these issues in aboriginal communities. These two team members, one of them of aboriginal ancestry, and the other very experienced in work with native communities, studied in depth

the cultural, sociological, and psychological dynamics of child wellness and child abuse in native communities. Their work culminated in the longest chapter of our book, devoted to child wellness in the context of aboriginal families and communities.

To complete the cycle of praxis, members of our team realized that we needed to go beyond documenting promising programs and policies. In addition to preparing accessible summary bulletins documenting the main findings and distributing those widely across the country, a few of us formed a child advocacy group designed to lobby on behalf of children. We used our findings to demand from government more action on child and family wellness. The group, called Action for Children, is a coalition of parents, child professionals, physicians, academics, and community members. Some of our social action initiatives took place in the context of an upcoming election. They included (a) writing a petition demanding that all politicians commit themselves to a series of initiatives to improve child and family wellness, (b) organizing a letter-writing campaign to local newspapers to draw attention to the plight of children at risk, (c) distributing informational brochures in the community, and (d) publishing large ads in newspapers calling on the public to vote in the election for a party that would pay serious attention to children's issues. The group also made formal presentations to a government task force dealing with young children, and some of our members attended presentations by politicians and questioned them about government action on behalf of children.

A tangible achievement of the family wellness project was a collaboration with the local United Way that resulted in a commitment of the agency to increase its funding for primary prevention from 4% of their annual budget to 10%. This is in addition to a long-term commitment in principle to eliminate child abuse in the region. Such commitment has already influenced resource allocations and has been assumed as a priority by the governing board. This collaboration responds to the action component of the praxis framework. There are many research projects that end up in shelves. Guided by the call for action, we ventured into the community, disseminated our findings widely, and made sure people used them.

Among other initiatives, two of us in the research team had a conference call with 613 people all across Canada to disseminate the results. To date, we have been called to present our findings in various regional and national forums and our social action group has been asked to present on child advocacy on a number of conferences and public events. In the context of a regional election campaign, our group was instrumental in bringing many children's agencies together to have a common political strategy on children's issues. We feel that our work went beyond the production of a research report based on need and contextual considerations.

Philosophical and pragmatic issues were an integral part of the project as well.

In summary, we engaged in multiple activities to translate research findings into community action. Our project attended to philosophical, contextual, needs, and pragmatic considerations. It is not presented here as an exemplar but merely as an illustration of how research findings can lead to social action.

As noted, the praxis framework can also be used to scrutinize social policy debates. In our own project on child and family wellness we dealt at length with policy making. Following an analysis of the liberal–communitarian debate I will present its implications for the promotion of child and family wellness.

Not surprisingly, philosophers differ among themselves with respect to visions of the good life and the good society. Liberal philosophers, for instance, emphasize autonomy, self-determination, and the rights of the individual. They are reluctant to promote too much state intervention because they are afraid that governments will end up dictating to private citizens how to run their lives. Communitarian thinkers, on the other hand, claim that we have gone too far in meeting the needs of individuals and that we have sacrificed our social obligations in the pursuit of private satisfaction (Berman, 1997; Etzioni, 1993, 1996; Korten, 1995; Lerner, 1996; Mulhall & Swift, 1996; Sandel, 1996; Shapiro, 1995). Communitarian philosophers argue that for citizens to fulfil their dreams they need one another. A vision of mutual help and commitment to the welfare of the collective benefits the individual as well, for the attainment of one's aims depends on collaboration from others.

Each position poses risks as well as benefits (Avineri & De-Shalit, 1992; Kymlicka, 1990; Sandel, 1984). Liberals deserve recognition for promoting the liberation of individuals from oppressive social norms and regulations. But these worthy ideals notwithstanding, this philosophy is not without risks. In excess, the pursuit of private goals can lead to unmitigated individualism, selfishness, and materialism (Bauman, 1993; Bellah et al., 1985; Etzioni, 1996; Leonard, 1997). "When people pursue private goals, the risk is that they may never acquire an ennobling sense of a purpose beyond the self" (Damon, 1995, p. 66). This risk is very apparent in market societies where state intervention is minimal and the powerful is free to seek pleasure at the expense of others (Leonard, 1997). Not everyone in society has the same amount of power, and those with less power have fewer opportunities to advocate for themselves and to pursue chosen goals without undue restrictions, a condition obviated by many liberal thinkers (O'Neill, 1994).

Communitarian thinking is based on the assumption that without cooperation individuals cannot achieve their private goals. Like liberals, they endorse the fulfilment of personal goals and the liberation from oppressive

social forces, but unlike liberals, they think that we should strengthen social and communal institutions because personal happiness is not possible without them (Etzioni, 1993, 1996; Haste, 1996). We know, for example, that strong communities provide a better environment for children than weak communities. Essential public programs, sufficiently funded and effectively managed, can have long lasting and beneficial effects on all children (Loizou, 1996; Schorr, 1989, 1997).

But communitarian thinking is not without risks either. Collectivist societies are known for expecting great sacrifices from their members for the benefit of the public good. Citizens feel coerced to do things they do not like and they experience state intervention as oppressive (Melnyk, 1985). The Israeli kibbutz, for instance, used to expect a great deal of personal sacrifice from its members. While this demand was reasonable in the early stages of the kibbutz, when communal effort was essential to the survival of the collective, this expectation became too onerous in later years. Members denounced expectations for heavy personal concessions and started to request more personal freedoms. This realization led to more liberal policies regarding employment, family practices, and opportunities for personal development.

By using the praxis framework we can see more clearly the shortcomings of liberalism and communitarianism. In the case of liberalism, the philosophy of freedom and liberty fails to take into account contextual and needs considerations. In the context of a highly competitive and individualistic society it does not make sense to promote yet more individualism because it leads to extreme competition and lack of solidarity. Moreover, the current market economic system fails to address the basic needs of millions of people (Allahar & Côté, 1998; Barlow & Campbell, 1995; Korten, 1995; McQuaig, 1998). With respect to communitarianism, it can be argued that its philosophy is more grounded and addresses contextual and need considerations. However, communitarianism falls short on pragmatism and social action because it does not challenge fundamental structures of inequality (Bell, 1993; Kymlicka, 1990).

We have seen in this section how the praxis framework can be used. It can be applied to guide community psychology research and action, as in the case of the family wellness project, and it can be used to assess the strengths and weaknesses of social philosophies influencing social policies. Community psychologists can use the framework to probe their practices for the possible neglect of important praxis consideration. According to my own assessment of community psychology, more attention to pragmatism and social action is what is needed for value-based praxis.

In our family wellness project we realized that the prevailing social policies in Canada and several western countries followed a liberal philosophy.

Most social policies in Canada and the United States are based on the sole responsibility of the parent to look after the children, a model that often leads to mother-blaming and that leaves parents to their own devices, without any meaningful government support (Eichler, 1997; Febbraro, 1994; Griffin Cohen, 1997). In contrast, countries with communitarian orientations, like Sweden and Holland, have in place universal policies to help families. Among others, these countries have advanced child care systems, parental leave policies, free and accessible prenatal care, and generous unemployment insurance schemes. An impressive result of some communitarian policies is that child poverty is not a major concern in countries like Sweden, Denmark, and Holland (Prilleltensky & Nelson, 2000).

In North America, parents are expected to care for their children without much supports; supports that are crucial for raising healthy children. Contemporary values in North America accord preference to individual rights and responsibilities and neglect the role of public institutions in caring for its citizens (Evans & Wekerle, 1997).

The philosophy of individualism has an impact on child and family problems—it influences how we define and deal with child maltreatment. Maltreatment tends to be defined in mother or family-blaming terms (Febbraro, 1994), in large disregard of societal factors such as unemployment, a culture of self-indulgence, and structural violence. While maltreatment is played out in the family, and parents cannot be absolved of responsibility, parents are subject to negative market forces that distort their abilities to strive for a balance between their personal well-being and the well-being of their children. Eichler (1997, p. 9) refers to the tendency to blame families as the *microstructural bias*, according to which there is

> a tendency to treat families as encapsulated units. Behaviours are then explained by simply looking at what happens within the unit rather than by trying to understand how familial behaviours are partially affected by extraneous factors. . . . There are still expressions of this bias to the degree that individuals within families are blamed (there seems to be no celebration of strengths!) without any regard to external circumstances. An example is when people express a concern about 'fostering dependence' among families who receive social assistance without considering the availability or non-availability of jobs, day-care, and other institutional supports that are necessary if one is to get off welfare.

Questioning the value base of our social vision for children is part of the praxis framework. An advantage of using the framework, with its emphasis on philosophical and policy considerations, is that we do not take for granted the prevailing social philosophy. Guided by the need to question what is the ideal state of affairs for children and families, the framework helps to consider alternative social arrangements that are more in line with the needs of parents and children.

CONCLUSION: TOWARD VALUE-BASED PRAXIS

I presented in this paper two frameworks that can inform the efforts of community psychologists in reducing suffering and promoting wellness. I discussed criteria, proposals, and applications for values and praxis in community psychology. By applying the template of values to community psychology I conclude that efforts should be intensified to advance social justice. At present, most programs and interventions focus on personal wellness by promoting coping skills and healthy behaviors. These are undoubtedly important, but there should also be room in community psychology for social justice interventions at the political level.

Praxis was conceptualized as a cycle of reflection, research, and social action. My analysis of community psychology indicates that most resources are devoted to research. Social action is not as salient an activity as community research.

When both frameworks are brought together, we can easily see their complementary nature. Contextual and needs considerations aid in the selection of values for one group or another. The context and expressed needs of the community are key factors in deciding what values to promote. In addition, pragmatic considerations remind us that value-based research has to be complemented by value-based action. Needs considerations are equally helpful in reminding us that we cannot ascertain for other people what values are good for them. Grounded input is crucial in formulating the preferred values of communities and of the individuals within it.

Value-based praxis begins with the identification of a set of values that is capable of promoting personal, collective, and relational wellness. The next step is to engage in the cycle of praxis and ask ourselves what should be the ideal for a community, what is the present state of affairs, what is desired by members of the community, and what can be done to close the gap between the ideal and the actual states of affairs. Engaging community members themselves in these questions will bring about value-based praxis. If my analysis is shared by community psychologists and by our community partners, we should be moving toward social justice and social action.

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