Locating Ethics in Community Psychology Theory and Practice

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Presentation Outline

• Work in Progress – journal article
• The Problem
• Ethics – meaning and principles
• APS Code of Ethics
• Community Psychology - history and values
• Review of Literature
• Reflection and Direction
• Although I began writing a paper especially for the AAPAE conference, the main aim of the paper is to increase awareness of ethical issues in community psychology.

• Another more challenging task will be to develop a system of ethics or ethical framework for community psychology.
The Problem

• The code of ethics for Australian psychologists does not cover all the ethical issues of relevance to community psychologists
- guidelines are directed towards the ‘individual’ rather than ‘community’ psychologist
- guide for ethical behaviour of psychologists but does not speak for the ethical values of each sub-discipline or explicate the ethical issues or moral dilemmas that can arise. Ethics is a much broader topic that needs to be discovered by each field.
Ethics – meaning one

• scientific study of morals;
• system of morality (Penguin English Dictionary);
• the rules of conduct of a particular class of human actions, group, culture, or profession;
• the moral principles, as of an individual;
• a branch of philosophy dealing with values relating to human conduct, the rightness or wrongness of certain actions and goodness and badness of motives influencing such actions (Random House Dictionary of the English Language).

(University of South Australia, 2003).
The field of ethics, also called moral philosophy, involves systematizing, defending, and recommending concepts of right and wrong behavior.

Theories of ethics are generally divided into:
- **Metaethics** - which is concerned with the meaning and origin of ethics.
- **Normative Ethics** - which attempts to arrive at moral standards that regulate right and wrong conduct.
- **Applied Ethics** - which involves examining specific controversial issues.

(Feiser, 2003).
Ethical – principles (1-5)

• **Personal benefit:** acknowledge the extent to which an action produces beneficial consequences for the individual in question.

• **Social benefit:** acknowledge the extent to which an action produces beneficial consequences for society.

• **Principle of benevolence:** help those in need.

• **Principle of paternalism:** assist others in pursuing their best interests when they cannot do so themselves.

• **Principle of harm:** do not harm others.

(Feiser, 2003).
Ethical – principles (6-10)

• Principle of honesty: do not deceive others.
• Principle of lawfulness: do not violate the law.
• Principle of autonomy: acknowledge a person's freedom over his/her actions or physical body.
• Principle of justice: acknowledge a person's right to due process, fair compensation for harm done, and fair distribution of benefits.
• Rights: acknowledge a person's rights to life, information, privacy, free expression, and safety. (Feiser, 2003).
APS Code of Ethics

• Three “general principles which operate in all situations” (APS, 2002, p.1):
  - Responsibility, Competence & Propriety
• Numerous guidelines relating to conduct in the specific areas of:
Community Psychology - history and values

- Emerged in the United States - 1960’s - associated with “community mental health” ideology
- Inspired by J.F. Kennedy’s address to congress which announced a bold new approach to the care of the mentally ill calling for the prevention of personal waste and misery, the promotion of mental health, and the reintegration of mental patients into the community.
- Swampscott Conference in 1965 marks official birth of community psychology and focus on prevention vs. treatment.
- Second major conference - Austin, Texas in 1975 - focus on broader ecological levels - from individual to community change; and pathology or deficits to strengths and competencies (Heller, Price, Reinharz, Riger & Wandersman, 1984).
Community Psychology – history and values

- Other important values include:
  - Empowerment (Rappaport, 1981; Riger, 1981)
  - Promoting a psychological sense of community (Sarason, 1974)
  - Respect for cultural diversity and enhancing the potential and capabilities of all citizens (Serrano-Garcia, Costa, Perfecto & Quiros, 1980).
  - Community wellness/well-being (Prilleltensky, 2001)
• Golan (1969) conducted surveys with psychologists to determine whether there were any significant gaps between the requirements of psychologists and the guidelines in the APA code of ethics.

• In this study, community psychology was identified as an emerging area of concern because of the multiple loyalties and conflicting demands inherent in the work and the ethical dilemmas that could arise in community work (Golan, 1969).
• Pettifor (1986) claimed that various codes of ethics have been found to be inadequate for community psychologists because they emphasize the relationship between a clinician and individual client rather than the relationship between a community psychologist and the community.

• Argued that the Canadian and American codes of ethics did not adequately make value statements explicit, did not offer criteria or models for ethical decision making and did not provide adequate guidelines for dealing with conflicting values and principles.
Review of Literature – article 3

• O’Neill (1989) claimed that the two key ethical questions of relevance to the field were: To whom is the community psychologist accountable or responsible, and for what? (1989).

• Responsible to whom?
  - work collaboratively to do what the client wants
  - serve the interests of the vulnerable

• Responsible for what?
  - responsibility for unforeseen outcomes or unintended effects
  - carry an ethical problem to an acceptable solution.
Riger (1989) argues that many ethical dilemmas should be viewed within a political rather than structural framework. The political framework assumes that organizations consist of a complex variety of individuals and interest groups, each with their own agendas and all competing for scarce resources.

It is not simply a lack of information that can prevent a psychologist from foreseeing consequences but the failure to see the world in political terms.

Before engaging in community interventions, community psychologists need to develop an understanding of power at the organisational and systemic level and be aware of the possible political struggles that can occur.

Community work “always promotes the ends of some interest group, even though we do not recognize that explicitly” (Riger, 1989, p.382).
• Prilleltensky (1991) criticised psychology for adopting “a narrow interpretation of ethics that gives primacy to the welfare of the individual at the expense of the entire community” (p.200).

• He argued that psychologists had a moral responsibility to actively pursue ‘social ethics’ on behalf of their clients and society at large.

• Individual ethics focuses on the enhancement of “well-being of a particular person” whereas social ethics seeks to “promote the welfare of society as a whole” (Prilleltensky, 1991).
• Prilleltensky, Rossiter, & Walsh Bowers, (1996) argue that while practitioners might refrain from blatant forms of harm such as sexual, emotional and financial harm; subtle forms of harm such as undermining client participation and self-determination and not respecting cultural diversity can be more easily overlooked.

• One of the frameworks designed to prevent harm and promote ethical discourse in the helping professions was the participatory conceptual framework outlined on the following slide.
Review of Literature – article 6 (cont.)

• 1. Power and control: Equal power between professional and client; Maximal input from consumer; Professional and consumer driven.

• 2. Decision making process: Balance between rules and attention to subjective processes; Public "property"; Proactive.

• 3. Scope: Based on individual and social ethics; Broader definition of what constitutes an ethical issue; Broad conception of informed consent; Maximally challenging of organizational culture and social structures.

• 4. Relevance: Proximal; Maximally relevant to daily practice.

• 5. Conceptions of harm: Harm regarded as expression of latent potential in all professionals; Harm identified also in its subtle form (Prilleltensky et al., 1996).
Reflection and Direction

- A broad framework of ethics is needed for community psychology. This should:
  - Include reference to relationships with and responsibility to multiple stakeholders as well as individuals
  - Refer to interventions beyond the individual, e.g., attention to social issues, community well-being
  - Assist community psychologists in various ways (guide ethical behaviour, assist problem solving, inspire meaningful action)
References