



Department of Psychology  
& Speech Pathology

# Interpersonal and Organisational Development Research Group

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**Collective Action and Social Change**

*Edited by Carolyn Kagan*

inside cover

**Collective Action and Social Change:  
Report of the national Community Psychology Conference  
7 and 8 January 1999**

**Edited by Carolyn Kagan**

Interpersonal and Organisational Development Research Group, Manchester  
Metropolitan University

*The conference was hosted by the IOD Research Group, Community Psychology research (and teaching) Team. Thanks to Marilyn Barnett for transcription of taped talks*

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## **Introduction to the Conference Carolyn Kagan, Deputy Head of Department of Psychology and Speech Pathology, Manchester Metropolitan University and Conference Chair.**

### **Manchester Metropolitan University as a Base for Community Psychology**

It seems appropriate to hold the National Community Psychology Conference, with the theme of Collective Action and Social Change in Manchester. The city is the home of the Trades Union movement, the Co-operative movement and the Suffragette movement. These three concerns, workers conditions and rights, people's collective action for the common good in the face of rampaging capitalism and women's rights are issues that community psychology is still rightly concerned with at the end of the century. We have included in the conference programme some explorations of people's collective action in Manchester's historical past and more contemporary dilemmas facing Manchester as marginalised citizens join forces with private capital for urban regeneration.

We have also included in the programme 'open space' sessions, wherein all of us can explore whatever issues come to mind from the talks we hear with whosoever we choose. We have not structured these sessions and leave it up to all of us to create however much structure we want (or not).

In the foyer is an *Ideas tree*. In your pack are some *ideas leaves*. We hope to grow the tree, which as you see has its roots in the context of community psychology in Britain - in its history, current activities and links with other types of work. It is up to all participants to place *ideas leaves*<sup>i</sup> on the tree as the conference progresses. These ideas may have been stimulated by the talks, local trips, workshops, open space discussion, other ideas placed on the tree, or by daydreaming. In the spirit of different kinds of participative and expressive ways of working within community psychology, we will, then, symbolically nurture and fertilise the growth of ideas linked to practice.

### **What kind of community psychology is practised at MMU?**

Staff and students teaching and learning community psychology at MMU will talk about their experiences later on. As well as teaching community psychology here, we have for a long time practised and supervised the practise of community psychology. Our community psychology can perhaps, be characterised as social and organisational psychology, combined with social and community action and activism. We do not separate research from practise, research from development, training from development, and nor do we distinguish between psychological work and other kinds of community action.

### **Focus of the Work**

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<sup>i</sup> In the event few delegates to the conference used their leaves to 'grow' the tree: the community psychology team at MMU is 'growing' the tree with students and visitors to the Department over time, and we hope to offer it for public view at an appropriate time and place.

The focus of our work is:

1. The inter-relationships between:

community ↔ organisational ↔ interpersonal change and development

For example, some work with working parents of disabled children explored the linkages between family dynamics, working practices and policies and community agencies and service.

2. Free from specific professional identities

Our community psychology team consists of people with backgrounds in social psychology, social work, counselling psychology, organisational psychology, and environmental psychology.

3. Concern with disadvantage and vulnerability

Much of our work is with people on the margins of mainstream society. For example, we have worked with severely disabled people, unemployed people, people living on peripheral, run down estates, homeless people, those from different ethnic minority communities, and those with long term mental health difficulties.

4. Concern with abuse by social systems, institutions and organisations (including psychology)

We are involved in projects which reveal how human services and other social arrangements confine people in poverty and compound any difficulties they have. We get involved in advocacy work and in investigations of abuse and poor professional practice (these have included investigations of the behaviour of police, clinical psychologists, residential carers, field health and social care workers, employers).

5. Praxis (theory ↔ practice)

We consider that theory and practice are inseparable and mutually determinant. We try to work collaboratively with those with whom we work over theory and practise planning.

6. Giving away psychology - many publications for local consumption (professional and academic writing not always a priority).

Despite the pressures in Higher Education to publish in academic journals, our first priority is to disseminate information (via written or other forms) as close to those who are affected by the work as possible. Thus we write local reports and publish some of these with permission in our own in-house series of publications. We give conference papers to those who can make use of the findings. We compile responses to consultation papers on policy change and so on. We also edit an International journal, *Community, Work and Family*, the aims of which reflect many of our ways of working. In this journal we have a 'voices' section which enables those who would not normally get published to do so.

## **Perspectives And Key Themes**

The themes running through our work include:

- Person ↔ societal ↔ historical context- combined with systems and ecological analyses
- Feminist issues and analyses
- A magpie approach to knowledge and techniques: multi-disciplinary and multi-professional
- Explorations of interpersonal, organisational and policy layers of issues  
The creation of new settings in project and service development and change
- Disability Research
- Pluralistic research methods - emphasis on non-positivist and action and evaluation perspectives
- Power
- Explicit value positions
- Subjectivity and intersubjectivity
- Integration of research, teaching and practice

## **Scope within the Department**

Over the years we have worked hard to develop a broad interest base amongst staff, and to take the lead in developing courses which facilitate explorations of community psychology at undergraduate and postgraduate levels. We link closely with critical psychologists within the discourse unit and other teams of researchers within our research group (the Interpersonal and Organisational Development Group). We have good links with colleagues from all continents. Nevertheless, we now that sustaining this base is difficult and needs constant encouragement and vigilance. Conservative pressures within both psychology and Higher Education make it continually difficult to maintain the kind of work we think is important.



## **Pushing the Boundaries? Community Psychology as part of the undergraduate curriculum** Karen Dunne, Natalie Holloway, Carolyn Kagan, Kath Knowles, Rebecca Lawthom, Department of Psychology and Speech Pathology, Manchester Metropolitan University

### **Abstract:**

Community Psychology has been taught at MMU for a number of years. This year, final year undergraduate students, undertaking the course as an option, are working with a residents' association on an overspill housing estate. Students will talk about the ways in which the work has developed and staff will contextualise the provision within debates about the boundaries of psychological training, locally, nationally and internationally. At MMU, the existence of the course forms part of a 'counter-hegemonic bloc' (see, for example, Gramsci, 1971) alongside courses in Psychology of Women, Psychology and Disability Studies, Societal Psychology and Qualitative Methods. Together these courses offer challenges to psychology curricula which serves narrow professional interests, rather than those of students or of ordinary people.

### **The Staff story: (Rebecca Lawthom)**

I'm talking this morning on behalf of the whole student group, the other members of the teaching team and the absent community partners. I'm going to contextualise the teaching provision of psychology within the department so you have an understanding of where the students are coming from, with their first exposé of community psychology. At Manchester Metropolitan University, in common with psychology departments up and down the country, the structure of the degree is largely predetermined by our professional body, the British Psychological Society. We aim to give students an understanding of basic frameworks in psychology which will equip them to go on and become chartered psychologists should they so wish to do so. Even though at most 10% of students will ever become professional psychologists, the curriculum is dominated by the requirements of the profession. As a staff team we have always been concerned to help students situate core psychology curricula in their biopsychological, historical and social contexts.

From the outset, therefore, students are exposed to the blurring of the discipline boundaries. Of relevance to community psychology, for example, is a first year course, Societal Psychology, which explores the interface between psychology and anthropology, economics, sociology and history and the application of psychological understanding to issues such as class, culture, social institutions, race, gender, disability, social change, and so on. The critical perspectives of Societal Psychology and further explored in second year core courses in Individual and Social Psychology, and reflected in a number of final year optional courses. These developments accompany the development of interest and expertise in the Department in a range of 'new' research methods in psychology, especially those in the non-positivist, qualitative field (see Banister, Burman, Parker, Taylor and Tindall 1994). From the outset, then, students are presented with some of the tensions within the discipline

between different types of psychologies. Even so, due to the constraints of the professional body, the curriculum is largely traditional, mainstream dominant (empiricist) paradigm psychology.

When students learn about psychopathology, for example, they learn to about categorising people according to DSM criteria; they learn to measure their psychological attributes and capabilities; they learn that to extract them from their natural environments and medicating them or subjecting them to other psychological treatments, including shock treatments, is acceptable. They learn to control extraneous variables so as the better to isolate variables of interest and study their relationships to stimuli or each other. By the time they enter their final year, they have learnt about how psychology removes people from their contexts, and subjects them to the interpretations of other (objective) researchers or practitioners.

By the start of their final year students have done enough of the traditional psychology to satisfy the British Psychological Society. Their final year is entirely optional and they have more scope for exploring alternative approaches to psychology. And we have more scope for teaching alternative approaches to psychology. Students can choose a traditional path if they so wish to do. On the other hand there are also then a range of other courses which might be termed as alternatives to the dominant paradigm courses, including courses such as Community Psychology, Psychology and Women and Psychology and Disability.. They also undertake an empirical research project of their own choosing. Community Psychology has historically been offered at the postgraduate level, but last year for the first time we offered it at an undergraduate level, and it was taken up.

The way that we run the Community Psychology course is via live projects in the community. Students work on a change project in the community and we organise the teaching around issues arising from these projects. Throughout, we blend theory and practice, along with critical reflection of ourselves in practice. Students are assessed via verbal presentations and a written portfolio combining theoretical understanding with evidence of the development of skills and evaluation. Whilst introducing students to the principles and values of Community Psychology, we are trying to get them to work on an issue, document that change and its implications, and assess any ramifications along with the tensions of working in a Community Psychological way.

This year, all the students have been working with the same residents' association on an overspill housing estate some 15 miles from Manchester. Prior to the students' involvement, some of the staff had been working with a Womens' Action group which had been the precursor of the residents' association. Due to the relationships and trust already built up, it was possible to negotiate some involvement of students.

### **The student Story: Natalie Holloway**

Working within a Community Psychology orientation involves working with people in their homes at their places of work, in their neighbourhoods and within their natural social networks. In common with qualitative research, community psychology goes into the streets, round the corner, and into people's homes, steering clear of the

laboratory. The community setting in which we are based is a neglected council estate situated in otherwise an affluent environment. The change project, on which we as a student body are working alongside our community partners, came into place from the concerns which were expressed by them. The work includes the development of a health pack, on which two of the students are working in parallel and will eventually become part of a larger welfare resource pack. Our community partners expressed their lack of knowledge regarding the various issues surrounding health from birth to death within their community. The health package will bring together information about relevant issues which may be encountered by all throughout this community. It will provide a valuable wealth of information which will be kept in the community house.

Our community partners expressed a concern regarding education, in particular regarding the levels of literacy and possibility of undiagnosed dyslexia amongst residents. Two of the students are involved in an awareness raising campaign throughout the estate. One of these students has dyslexia himself, which enables him to produce leaflets and information which those with dyslexia may be able to understand. Moreover due to his experience of having dyslexia he can empathise and create a rapport with those who do not yet have an understanding. Following the awareness campaign, they aim to develop some literacy programmes on the estate, run by local adult literacy projects that will still be there when we have gone.

I am personally producing a welfare resource leaflet, which I felt was necessary after listening to the concerns and experiences of the community partners. It will be a step by step guide to the.. survival guide to their environment and that of British society as a whole, producing information from how to fill in forms to how to access benefits. This is being produced by myself through collaborating with the community partners, other students, and well established agencies, such as the citizens advice bureau. The hope of the community partners is that this will promote self-help and empowerment through increased knowledge.

Some students are working on a project with older adults. One is working in the field at the micro-level, participating with an existing group helping to develop and extend a voluntary gardening project.. Another student will work at the meso-level, linking residents with another community within the same municipal authority, and within which she is helping to develop a lively project for local elders.. She will pass relevant information from her project back to those from the more neglected estate - this will be both information that she has access to but is unavailable on the estate about funding and other initiatives, and will include establishing good links between community activists from the two estates.

Across all these projects we students will be considering issues from micro- to macro levels and will work in ways which encourage the development of self-help throughout the community. Now Karen will discuss how community psychology should be celebrated as an applied discipline in its own right and how it differs from traditional mainstream psychology.

### The student story: Karen Dunne

When we were preparing this talk, we discussed it with the whole community psychology student group. We asked ourselves “What is Community Psychology?” and came to the conclusion after many arguments, that it could be defined, from our perspective, as a *practice for liberation with responsibilities*. We compared this approach to mainstream psychology where we had learnt about scientific rigor, and the need to work within a tight controlled experimental environment. We had acquired these core skills, that can be seen to be quite rigid and disciplined, and are now faced with this very new applied subject that gives the researcher more room to manoeuvre. Community Psychology emphasises grass roots initiatives, in that it helps those who have little access to social power to develop positive strategies to strive towards the goal of self-support. As community psychologists, we, ourselves, have been empowered to operate within a transient and fluid framework that creates the space for purposeful enquiry. Our enquiry is reciprocal and the relationships between us, as action researchers, and the community collective with whom we work is mutually productive and ever-changing. We see our tasks as contributing to both our own and other people’s liberation, both personal and political.

For most of the first two years of our degree we were required to filter out all subjectivity and endorse objectivity. Community Psychology is liberating as it removes the shackles of traditional psychology and gives practitioner-researchers the freedom to facilitate, and evaluate social change through collective action. It tries to reconcile the divorce between theory and practice. We see that Community Psychology lends, shares and networks with many areas in the psychological arena, whilst being less rigid than the more dominant strands of traditional psychology. Community Psychology and alternative critical psychologies remove the power differentials between participant and researcher and incorporate negotiation, teamwork and group thinking as the core modes of operation. The term co-researchers is well documented within feminist psychology, and within disability research. We find it of use within Community Psychology, as it reflects the dual exploration that develops when working with community partners. The mechanisms of community psychology are the development of rapport, the exploration and development of relationships with partners, the building of trust, and always supporting but never controlling. As such it make different demands on us as students than differ considerable from those of our previous training in psychology.

To work with people, on their concerns, requires interpersonal skills that include flexibility, metacognition and leadership in general, but we have learnt that as Community Psychologists, we should share our expertise, not use it to be in charge. This is very difficult to achieve and complex is very much an understatement. When working in the community you’re interacting with lots of people in many different settings. A community psychologist must be totally fluid have the ability to think on their feet organise, plan, show leadership qualities under pressure without acting in charge or taking control. It is crucial to constantly encourage negotiation and direction towards self-support so that it is the community partners that are taking things forward, and promoting their own personal growth. Community Psychology bridges the gap between the psyche and the social; the private and the public. It



encourages the sharing of psychology as a skill to empower those oppressed and disadvantaged to develop strategies to promote future self-development and to cope with their stressful and oppressive environments. This task to facilitate positive social change is certainly not for the feint-hearted, it reflects similar demands to those who works in sectors of health and social care. It is rewarding, exhausting and at times demanding, but yet very illuminating.

Emotions and cognitions run high in any community setting regardless of the age and background of the group, and we have found some of the experiences of our community partners in their setting are repeated amongst us, as students, in our setting.

### **The Staff story: Kath Knowles, Rebecca Lawthom and Carolyn Kagan**

We have a few words to say in conclusion. Rebecca spoke to you about how this course is positioned in the MMU Psychology Department and how we try to give the students the opportunity to work from a Community Psychology perspective and some of the problems and tensions that we as tutors and the students have encountered. Natalie has described the change project that they are actually involved in, out on the overspill estate very clearly indeed. Karen has just told you about some of the issues from her point of view and how she sees the differences between community psychology and the other psychologies she has encountered..

It has been quite a difficult journey for students, but also for staff. Working to other people's agendas and trying to balance this with the requirements of the assessments within the degree programme has been tricky. It has taken a lot of mediation by staff to enable the balance of meeting both the students' and community partners' interests to be met. We have all been working in an environment over which we have had little control. We have had to work through tensions and conflicts within the community group and within the student group, and be open to learning about what kinds of additional supports students need when undertaking a course of this sort. We are lucky to have gained access to such a community setting, where the students could all work together, and experience at first hand some of the tensions, issues and problems of working with a real group, as a real group.. Furthermore our community partners have been delighted with the work the students are doing, whilst at times feeling frustrated they cannot do more. Members of the community have attended the student presentations, some setting foot in a University for the first time.

One of the interesting things about working as Community Psychologists in the UK, is that we work without the professional passports that other psychologists have. We cannot go into a setting saying we are allowed to be there because we are social workers, clinical psychologists, occupational psychologists etc.. We are allowed to be there because we are community psychologists. We negotiate access, and our students have to negotiate their access because they are not even on vocational training courses. So what is their license for even being involved? The license is the invitation by local people, and that again, requires a whole set of skills and resources that have to be drawn on, to be able do that.

We appreciate being able to work as a teaching team and to be based in a Department with a critical mass of supportive staff (or at least staff who will not sabotage our project). This, in itself is not luck or circumstance. We believe it has come about as a result of a great deal of effort and tenacity over a long period of time. It has involved the employment of deliberate tactics and strategies over time and across different domains of Departmental activity. Whilst we know our position within psychology in the UK is a fragile one, there are a number of overlapping interests within the Department, including collaborative research projects, publishing projects (we are the editorial home of an International Journal, *Community, Work and Family*), international links and courses that lead us to entertain the idea that we have created a counter-hegemonic bloc within the psychology curriculum - at least in Manchester. But that is another story!

We would like to thank all the students, and especially Natalie and Karen who have demonstrated one of the key components of what Alinsky (1971) talked about in manual used by community activists, namely the ability to be able to communicate appropriately to the audience.

**Questions: What difference has doing this course made to the students about their options and plans they had for following on after their degree? How, do you see yourselves continuing to be involved in this sort of community role?**

**Karen:** Well I think to start off with I think it's absolutely changed our plans and direction in psychology. Doing Community Psychology has reminded us of the importance of embracing the past the present and the future throughout our work, and our careers. Personally I think that after doing this Community Psychology course ,I don't think I will ever only look back, and will always look forward at the same time.

**Natalie:** I just think, I just feel it is extremely liberating to go from being told that everything has got to be so controlled to going and working in a real environment. It is so very different from sitting in a lecture theatre, taking notes and doing essays, to actually working in the field. It has improved my confidence a great deal and it is the type of thing I'd like to go into in the future definitely.

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## **The Primary Prevention of Community Psychology<sup>ii</sup>** **David Fryer, University of Stirling**

### **Introduction**

Community psychology is difficult enough even in optimal circumstances, but in this paper I describe some experiences of my work in community psychology being made even harder than necessary. However, my intention here is not catharsis through personal disclosure but a wish to stimulate collective reappraisal and support. Effectively I am inviting readers who are also trying to work 'community psychologically' to look beyond troublesome personal events to see if some of our experiences, rather than being treated as individual misfortunes, are usefully reappraised as indicators of collective disempowerment.

### **Community Psychology and Professional Organisations**

The British Psychological Society (below BPS or the Society) has played and continues to play a number of valuable roles in relation to community psychology. For example the Society made a submission about the links between unemployment and mental health to the Employment Select Committee of the House of Commons, thereby – a cynic might say - taking disturbing research findings to people who could ignore them at the very highest level! As a C.S.Myers Lecturer at a BPS Annual Conference, I had another valuable opportunity to give a community psychological perspective on the social causation of mental health problems by unemployment. The BPS recently funded a UK visit by Donata Francescato, Professor of Community Psychology at the University of La Sapienza, Rome, as a BPS Visiting Fellow and has also kindly agreed to fund a UK visit by Julian Rappaport, Professor of Community Psychology at the University of Urban-Champaign Illinois, in 2001, again as a BPS Visiting Fellow. I have recently recorded for the BPS archives an interview with Professor Marie Jahoda, who I regard as being the quintessential and most admirable of community psychologists. The BPS supported a series of community meetings around unemployment and the Scottish Branch of the BPS recently financially supported the 1999 Meeting of the European Network of Community Psychology (ENCP) with published accounts appearing in *The Psychologist* and *The Bulletin*.

In all these, and other, ways the BPS has been supportive of community psychology - increasingly so of late. It might therefore seem churlish to be critical here of the BPS in relation to community psychology. However, at a deeper level than that of the welcome facilitation of scholarly and research activities, there seems a fundamental incompatibility between the BPS and community psychology. The BPS is in part a protectionist organisation seeking to develop a closed shop for people with BPS

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<sup>ii</sup> This title (and the contents of this paper) have been edited and amended from that delivered at the Community Psychology conference. In the conference paper I took more risks in front of an audience, which I assumed to be fundamentally supportive, than I feel safe doing in a written paper, which will also reach more hostile readers. Nevertheless, in their different ways, both papers say much the same thing.

accredited degrees. The justification for this closed shop is presented in terms of 'protection of the public' in recent and current debates about the statutory registration of psychologists. Such moves result in a restriction of entry to the profession; and, of course, restriction of the earnings, status, power and privilege that goes with being a psychologist to those who have been through a BPS credentialising process. Like all higher and professional education this is disproportionately the prerogative of the better off.

To be more specific, a BPS document ("Answers to questions raised by academic psychologists about the consequences of a bill to register psychologists by statute" written in 1996 by the (then) Executive Secretary, Colin Newman), written in 1996 as a consultation paper, presented the issue as follows:

"The case for registration is based on the argument that members of the public have a right to statutory guarantees if they approach people called 'psychologists' for a consultation, the people concerned are properly qualified and accountable to a Registration Council, from whose register they can be struck off if they abuse their clients and are found guilty of professional misconduct." (page 3).

This paper expresses the view that

"the public will be best protected by a system of statutory registration similar to that of other major professions" (page 4)

and describes an attempt to find a way, which

"closes the profession effectively" (page 4).

Throughout this BPS document, this idea of closing the profession and restricting entry to people with BPS accredited qualifications, and thereby the possibility of offering 'psychological services' (defined as "*any services derived from the application of psychological knowledge*" with a caveat exempting "*knowledge about psychology for academic purposes*"!), becomes clearer and clearer. The Society and its Parliamentary lawyer came up with the following clause defining what would become an offence if and when a proposed bill became an Act of Parliament. I quote from the document

"Any person who, in the course of providing or offering or agreeing to provide services which are or are described as psychological services, describes himself (sic) as a psychologist, is guilty of an offence unless he is a fully registered psychologist" (page 3).

"*Fully registered psychologist*" effectively means having satisfied the "Graduate Basis for Registration" with the BPS i.e. graduated from a BPS approved degree, which provides "*broadly based training in psychology*" (page 11). What 'broadly based' means is clarified elsewhere:

"nobody wants graduates to go forward into training as, for example, clinical psychologists who have no knowledge of the biological basis of behaviour or individual differences, and this is the rationale for the Graduate Basis for Registration" (page 11).

However, from a community psychology perspective this requirement seems very narrow: there is no suggestion that graduates should be required to know about groups, family systems, organisational processes or the socio-structural, economic and cultural constitutive contexts of experience and action. The BPS document further asserts that psychology “*began and remains a scientific discipline*” (page 2) but from a community psychological perspective, much of BPS accredited psychology appears scientific rather than scientific, largely dominated by a naïve quantitativism which has failed to learn the lessons of history of science and the sociology of scientific knowledge and still clings to a philosophy of science which most other sciences abandoned long ago. As a community psychologist I want a scientific community psychology but a science which is appropriate to a discipline whose explicanda are socially embedded moral agents upon whom the social world impinges largely via their subjective experience.

More generally, the procedures of clinical and other professional psychologies are, by most accounts, only modestly effective and, as most community psychologists are aware research has shown that para-professionals and non-professionals are generally as, or more effective than, trained professionals in dealing with mental health promotion and reduction of mental health difficulties (Durlak, 1979). If this research is correct, restricting the provision of psychological services to BPS accredited graduates would exclude the vast majority of the most effective practitioners from practice.

The BPS document claims that “*psychological techniques are powerful and can cause harm if they are mis-applied*” (page 3), so argues, therefore, that the public must be protected from such rogue psychologists. Looking at recent publications in which psychologists describe the provision of versions of cognitive behaviour therapy to jobless people as a way of dealing with mass unemployment, it is difficult not to agree with this statement but with a rather different target group of psychologists in mind. The BPS document is also concerned that “*charlatans might misappropriate the term ‘experimental psychologist’ and practise under this title*” (page 8) unless prevented through legal means.

However what is likely to worry community psychologists is that those experimental psychologists who are licensed to practice under BPS training requirements may be the very people who are really the bigger danger to the public. For example, experimental cognitive psychologists who do research with worrying civil liberties and military implications; occupational psychologists who spend their time intensifying work in industrial settings; clinical psychologists who collude with victim blaming by looking for intra-psychic causes and solutions of socially caused mental health problems. Community psychologist might argue that the very people that the BPS finds no difficulty registering are more dangerous to the public than those they are seeking to exclude.

In brief, though the BPS can, and sometimes valuably does, support the scholarly activities of community psychologists, we need to ask whether the BPS as it is currently characterised with its scientism, protectionism, accreditation and privileging of largely middle class professionals, its legitimation and promotion of professionals who for many people in communities are part of the problem rather than part of the