Community Psychology at Orewa Beach: A Complement to Anthropological and Ethnographic Approaches

Catherine M. Ashwood and Robert J. Gregory*

116 Hibiscus Coast Highway, Hilltop, Orewa, Hibiscus Coast, New Zealand
Phone: 09 427-5907; E-mail: catblackalex@hotmail.com
*School of Psychology, Massey University, Palmerston North, New Zealand
Phone: 64 6 350-5799 ext. 2053; E-mail: R.J.Gregory@massey.ac.nz

ABSTRACT Understanding the elements that contribute to a community's wellbeing, and in turn, the development of a sense of community is one of the key tasks in community psychology. Investigating the challenges and opportunities that either contribute or hinder a sense of community and development is an ongoing process. In applied anthropology and community psychology, the people and place are obviously central. Community psychology is concerned with the design and application of intervention strategies, especially those pivotal to enhancing the wellbeing of the community as a whole. Social change and improving the interests of the people is fundamental to the discipline. Applied anthropology, in using ethnography as a tool for investigation and research creates a climate in which intervention is possible, although typically, knowledge is sought for descriptive purposes. To design strategies for intervention, it is necessary to investigate a range of community variables, identify the core issues and problems, and determine where the existing strengths reside within a community. By using the identified strengths, and empowering people toward instigating action, optimal intervention strategies may produce lasting and rewarding results for community members. Likewise, identifying weaknesses has the potential to turn problems into opportunities.

INTRODUCTION

Anthropologists have traditionally used ethnography to describe a place and people at a given time (Agar, 1960; Spradley, 1979; Wolcott, 1999). Community psychologists too, use descriptions of place, people, and time but with a different intent. In addition to simply performing research to discover the people of a place, their culture and their way of life, the community psychologist seeks to uncover possible points for intervention that may bring about social, political or other changes that may benefit the people of a community. Further, community psychologists often carry out such interventions, evaluate the results, and take responsibility for both intended and unintended consequences. This role of the community psychologist has been clear and evident from the early Swampscott conference (1965) and through the writings of key figures such as Rappaport (1977), Rappaport and Seidman (2000) and others. This role parallels the application of anthropology and ethnography within the discipline of applied anthropology, an approach designed to create social change and community development. The information in this article demonstrates the community psychologists methodology in describing a community, and consequently prescribing strategies and intervention techniques in order to benefit the people.

THE ESSENCE OF OREWA

The community under study is the coastal area of Orewa situated in the heart of the Hibiscus Coast of New Zealand. Orewa is part of the greater Rodney district, and is located approximately 20 minutes by motor vehicle north of Auckland's city centers. Historically, Orewa was developed as a retirement area and a holiday and visitor destination for people from Auckland, New Zealand's largest city. At present, increasing numbers of people are drawn to the area for permanent residence because of its life style appeal. The sub-tropical climate and three kilometers of flat, sandy and safe beach, and Orewa's closeness to Auckland and other localities, make the community desirable for people of all ages (Destination Orewa Beach [DOB], n.d.). Two primary schools and a secondary school, six churches of varying denominations, 503 individual businesses, 118 retail shops and two supermarkets can be found in Orewa. Various community support groups are

based within the town center. The beach itself is bordered with parks, reserves, and the local Surf Club. Many shops and restaurants positioned on the main road have the advantage of facing the beach although the highway, which is the main route north, separates both (DOB, n.d.; Rodney District Council [RDC], n.d.).

In community psychology, a community is defined at differing levels: community as a locality, or as a relational group, which is not bound by geographical boundaries, but through interpersonal relationship. The term 'sense of community', refers to the presence of specific elements within a given community: membership, influence, integration and fulfillment of needs, and a shared emotional connection (Dalton, Elias and Wandersman, 2001). Orewa as a community is defined by its geographical location; however, in terms of a sense of community, the definition becomes more complex. As a life-style destination, residents like to feel they live the 'good life', with barbecues in the sun, picnics at the beach and strolls along the sand, all common events at a variety of levels. Even community groups use barbecues as a theme for their various fund raising activities. Through this shared way of life, residents feel satisfied and proud that they live in a beautiful locality and share unique environmental surroundings with the wider group, a life-style that is the envy of outsiders. Their membership therefore, is defined by the locality and the perception of similarity to others, which illustrates one dimension of a sense of community (Brodsky and Marx, 2001; Dalton et al., 2001; Obst, Smith and Zinkiewicz, 2003; Puddifoot, 2003).

Residents are also protective of the community's boundaries and make personal investments to uphold the peace and tranquility associated with coastal life. For example, problem youth from outside the community are scorned more than problem youth from within the community. Residents deal with such issues in ways that uphold the values, rules, and emotional safety of the community, outsider influence is seen as a threat to community values. The nature of the community at this level reflects a "collective power structure" (Dalton et al., 2001, p. 195) and the involvement of the members illustrates another dimension in a sense of community, which correlates with their membership.

Socializing among neighbors is not so common; rather, socialization occurs between non-neighbor friends and within various groups. Once people have met however, by chance or through introductions, interpersonal interaction between them is likely to continue. Often, this type of face-to-face interaction leads to some sharing of resources, which may endure for years. The needs and values of others appear to matter and members are willing to share and exchange resources in order to satisfy another's needs. Dalton, et al. (2001) refers to this as integration and fulfillment of needs, which, according to McMillan and Chavis (1986, cited in Brodsky and Marx, 2001), operates in such a way to reward and reinforce community members for their involvement. It is common for people to share knowledge, advice and other intangible resources, generally, tangible resources, when in abundance, are used to generate supplementary incomes. On a variety of levels, this type of sharing of resources and integration of needs occurs, which highlights another dimension of a sense of community (Brodsky and Marx, 2001; Dalton et al., 2001; Obst et al., 2003; Puddifoot, 2003).

Members accept the structure of the community and serve to sustain it with an underlying desire to protect the safety, security and environment for their own benefit and to project their sense of responsibility to the community and other members, this relates to the value of social justice (Brodsky and Marx, 2001; Dalton et al., 2001). Certain community values are more like unspoken rules. For example, everyone is concerned with issues of child safety and crime prevention, and although neighbors and neighborhoods do not interact with each other, each member takes responsibility in upholding those values for the collective benefit. Neighborhood Watch, a network of local people who report strange happenings to each other and the police, is one example of how this community upholds its values and numerous members 'advertise' this collective responsibility by displaying the appropriate stickers on their letter boxes. Such strategies demonstrate how community members exert their influence over others, pursue their shared ideals, and satisfy certain physical needs (Dalton et al., 2001).

Elements of a shared emotional connection, as Dalton et al. (2001) suggest are difficult to define and this particular community does not

possess an easily recognizable emotional bond. However, emotional bonds between groups are projected to the wider community via the shared historical underpinnings associated with the locality, and the emotional bond to the location, which is recognizable by the members' behavior and ritualistic actions such as barbecues and related activities. Thus, an emotional connection is constructed and strengthened through the shared values of various groups, the community's history and emotional attachment to the locality (Dalton et al., 2001; Puddifoot, 2003).

THE COMMUNITY'S STRENGTHS

Maintaining one's life-style in Orewa can be difficult, property prices and cost of living is high, and income levels are less affluent, the average income is but $14,500, $5000 less than for the whole Rodney District (Statistics New Zealand [SNZ], 2001). This presents specific problems to some residents, especially those from the lowest socioeconomic groups or single people with children who rent or have mortgages. Financial stress can often reach great levels and threatens the values of individual and community wellness. To cope effectively, the community has developed a series of microsystem and organizational structures, in what Brodsky and Marx (2001) describe as sub-communities, which operate to encourage many of the core values attached with a good life and a good community (Dalton et al., 2001).

The spiritual community, which exerts a great deal of influence within and beyond religion, is a prime example of a sub-community. The six churches represent microsystems at a relational level as well as location-based communities. Membership and a sense of belonging are influenced by the face-to-face interaction among the members (Dalton et al., 2001), but the fulfillment of needs and emotional bonds that are formed are not confined to sermons or even a particular church. Rather, people identify with a broad sense of spirituality through the relational aspect of a belief system that possesses a particular set of values and goals. This set of shared values becomes a medium for decent behavior, is projected through positive contact among the members to the wider community, and represents a particular commu-nity strength and a constructive resource in preventive strategies (Dalton et al., 2001).

Many of the volunteers involved in the community are from within the spiritual community and offer supporting roles at various levels. Four of the six churches run a children's playgroup three mornings a week in which participation is not limited to church members (Safer Rodney, 2003). These facilities provide individuals with a sense of meaning and significance in their lives and offer a range of coping resources both inside and outside the religious sphere. The most notable example of a significant contributor to the community is the local Baptist City Mission, which provides a range of family services and help for the needy, including the highly active food bank (DOB, n.d.). Each level of the spiritual community provides different levels of social identity, and fosters mutual influence and integration in different ways, but each level serves to create social structures and develop individual identity, constructing a sense of community where people feel that they belong and can fulfill their needs (Dalton et al., 2001; Gracia and Herrero, 2004).

The local Community House and Childcare Center is another example of an organizational level sub-community offering a wide range of facilities (DOB, n.d.; Safer Rodney, 2003). The Community House is perhaps the most diverse and the most salient in promoting community and individual wellness. For one, the Community House physically accommodates a variety of regular self-help and mutual support group meetings, which draw people together. Similar to the spiritual community, the face-to-face contact generated through these groups binds people together and constructs emotional bonds through shared common goals or tasks. Many become involved in volunteering, thus reciprocating and exchanging resources, and showing loyalty to a location that gives significant meaning to their lives. Secondly, the Community House is an umbrella organization for a range of services. For example, collaboration and communication with mental health support services and Teen Adders assists in the development and provision of prevention programs, upholding such community values as promotion of coping skills, identity development, individual goal attainment, and academic achievement (Dalton et al., 2001; What is the Community House, 1999).

The Community House is a highly respected and highly valued organization in the community;

a fundamental structure in many types of individual or microsystem concerns. As needs have developed, the Community House has expanded its structure and widened its focus toward people of all ages and distinctions (DOB, n.d.; Safer Rodney, 2003). All affiliated groups have a common goal and focus on variables that promote and enhance the well-being of the population (What is the Community House, 1999). The Community House helps sustain the wider community by removing certain elements of social burden; preventive interventions create environments that promote competency and help reduce the prevalence of problems and maladaptive behavior (Dalton et al., 2001). This functions to alter the community setting by enhancing the quality of life at individual and microsystem levels (DOB, n.d.). For example, preventing maladapted parents can help avoid maladjusted children and serve to reduce youth violence, crime, underage drinking, and other related problems, building a better community for all the members (Nietzel et al., 1977).

IDENTIFYING THE KEY ISSUES

The main nucleus of local politics is the Rodney District Council (RDC), the closest level of government to the people. The council is responsible for the community's economy, environment, and social well-being (RDC, n.d.). This hierarchal arrangement is made up of the Mayor and twelve councilors who decide on policies and council activities, and direct funding accordingly. The 300 member staff of the council is in control of implementing council policies to the population. RDC values are firmly entrenched in development and growth, at present the building industry is among the most prolific in Orewa. Interestingly, council buildings are situated at the rear of Orewa seemingly isolated and disconnected from the mainstream community and is, at present, undergoing vast developments itself.

Current and projected growth rates present greater issues to the community in terms of both challenges and opportunities (Vaidyanath, n.d.). Urban and business growth can enhance the economy, increasing the value of land and housing, and expanding trade and services to widen the available selection of goods to the community. However, issues such as security, safety and individual identity are compromised as the community increases in size and capacity. Growth and development reflects a progressive era in Orewa, but the decision-making powers appear to focus little on how this influences and affects the collective community, especially within the bounds of the ecological principles concerning adaptation and interdependence (Dalton et al., 2001).

Interviews with long-time residents reveal that as little as ten years ago, the feeling of community connection was strong in Orewa. Yet, "over ambitious council developments and no body [within the council] listening to us" (J. K. and S. W. personal communications, March 3, 2004), appears to have gradually eroded this community's sense of community. One of these residents went on to describe the council as "just a pack of crooks and robbers" (J.K). A prime example of Orewa's issues is the recent construction of a multi-story apartment block in the town centre, despite strong public opposition. However, in spite of the community's perception, there was a noticeable lack of collective action, either among the people or with council representatives in order to discuss the issue or collaborate. Contributing to this, in part, is the fouled reputation the RDC has created for their organization in the past. Repeatedly, their values and dynamics have gone against public opinion to the point that such public feelings have evolved into mainstream principles. Community members feel that there is no voice for them, that "Council doesn't care" (L.D. personal communication, March 15, 2004). The underlying theme is a lack of empowerment and advocacy for the people at both microsystem and macrosystem levels.

In a council-instigated booklet titled Vision Rodney (RDC, 2003), residents report through written statements that over ambitious levels of development and growth in Orewa compromises the districts sense of community, from the council's perspective however, levels of development are proportionate, constructive, and necessary for economic growth. Local newspapers frequently report on topics such as resource consent for multi-million dollar beachfront hotels, and proposals for a $100,000 monorail, intended to run alongside footpaths (Hyland, 2004). In short, local government envisage a city status for Orewa within the next 20 to 30 years and expect population increases of 50,000 within fourteen years (RDC, n/d).

Examining the information uncovers a recurrent theme – that council developments are destroying Orewa's lifestyle and its calm pace of life (RDC, 2003). At the same time, it evident that this community is reluctant or unmotivated to unite as a collective body, voice opinions and challenge the status quo. The effects of uncontrolled development transmit to the entire target population. Every individual, young or not so young, the well-off, the less affluent, young families, retired people, those with mortgages, those who rent, and even the business community is affected in some way by unrestrained development. For example, increased housing and population levels reduce community safety, force up the level of rates, raise costs of living, cause congestion in the town center, and alienate residents from their environments, their community and from each other.

Existing community action groups such as Destination Orewa, Orewa Residents and Ratepayers Association and Keep Hibiscus Coast Beautiful (Safer Rodney, 2003) also appear to have little motivation or ability to facilitate public participation. Kelly and Steed (2004) outline that communities deal with change by developing coping strategies, and that social support and social networks represent effective coping strategies. In Orewa, this is exhibited through the multifaceted network of sub-communities that have developed. However, the focus within these groups is not on development issues, which continue to take precedence in the community. A more salient focus therefore, would be to investigate macrosystem and organizational variables to examine the process of change and evaluate the impact of change at the microsystem and individual levels.

PRESCRIPTION FOR SOCIAL CHANGE

In general, the community of Orewa has great potential and many strengths; the developed network of sub-community groups presents the population with a rich set of resources in which to expand toward greater participation and empowerment (Dalton, et al. 2001). A potential solution to their problems may be achieved through collaborating and connecting individuals, groups, and organizations, giving this community an opportunity to reveal the specific values and needs that residents have attached to the community, and enhancing those values

through community building. According to Chavis and Pretty (1999), solutions come from the values, relationships, and other assets that keep the people united as a community and are essential for any positive community change. These assets are the cornerstone to the concept of community, without them the notion of 'we' or 'us' cannot exist.

The theory is to encourage this community to use its strengths to inspire increased citizen participation, enhance the community's values and encourage a sense of community at a local level. In this sense, the community can become empowered at a grassroots level toward collective social action, with the capability to exert some influence on future council decisions. Listening to the unheard voices within the community is important; those who are the least heard, often have much to say when given the opportunity. In a similar community study, Cuthill (2002) determined that collaboration and cooperation at local community levels and working in partnership with local government offers a basis for implementing optimal strategies that provide optimal outcomes. Speer and Hughey (1995, cited in Dalton et al., 2001) outline how it is possible to influence socio-political change by encouraging shared support among community members and developing a critical awareness at a grass roots level, a course of action termed "communities organizing for power" (p. 388). Cuthill's study in particular, explored community participation and developmental issues from the perspectives of community citizens and groups, as well as at the local government level.

Applying Moos (cited in Dalton et al., 2001) social climate dimensions, which focuses on ecological concepts such as relationships, personal development, and system maintenance and change within macrosystem and organizational settings, may provide an opportunity to highlight certain aspects of deprived social climates. Investigating social climate dimensions can determine whether the members involved, including leaders, are mutually supportive, are involved in the sharing of resources, are organized, and encourage and welcome innovative thinking. For example, at a macrosystem level, the degree of supportiveness between council staff members, the clarity of the rules that guide council activity, and the autonomy of the members in influencing decisions that affect the wider community may be deficient in one or more areas.

One particularly salient aspect to the social climate concept is the degree to which the members are controlled, and an important role in the path to a sense of community is the presence of a value-added leadership. Inflexible control systems can negatively influence social climates and a significant aspect of Orewa's issues are the tensions between the "one and the many" (Pretty, 1990, p. 356), the micro-macro paradox appears to impinge on, rather than complement one another.

Pretty (1990) argues that visionary, as opposed to revolutionary leaders do not make the mistake of assuming that an established community is one where there is no questioning. Often within organizations, the means of control is confined to higher levels of the hierarchical structure. In this sense, the social climate emerges from the explicit or implicit policies and contingencies within the organization, thus, the macrosystem's viewpoint reflects the likelihood that inflexible, ideologically infused and politically oriented policies focus narrowly on financially favorable outcomes as opposed to the values and needs of the community. Thorough analysis of these systems may reveal certain historical underpinnings and determine what the council's past and present orientations are toward goal achievement. Reformation of the system and re-specification of the roles may help create a more stable organization that endures over time and future planning and goals may better reflect the needs of the community members. For this community to be effective, questioning the fitness of the processes, doubting the ideological ethos and ethical principles, and examining the integrity of the decision-making structures are necessary and important steps in the process of community building and creating a sense of community (Pretty, 1990).

IMPLEMENTING SOCIAL CHANGE

Several strategies have been identified which are crucial to social change within this community. Orewa is home to a diverse range of people with concerns, opinions and ideas, yet, Kaye (2001) explains that an unorganized community may not readily participate. It is not enough to 'install' community psychologists; rather, the community needs to recognize and reorganize its own strengths, the people need to draw on each other for support and initiate change at both social and political levels. This community has a very strong and existing basis for organizational capacity that it can use to build relationships, encourage interdependence and mobilize members into developing a collective vision and plan for action. Providing community members with the opportunity to examine and clarify the issues is to foster shared emotional connections, encourage the sharing of knowledge and resources, and construct strong peer support systems that link with the development of a sense of community.

An organized community is also an empowered community. As Cuthill (2002) puts it, "the rational for success may be achieved through local citizens empowering themselves to take responsibility and action for their own 'backyards'" (p. 79). An extremely salient point of view is that communities and members become more committed to implementing a decision if they contribute. Community empowerment occurs when members band together in a public and visible way, drawing attention to the issues, and involving themselves in defining solutions and strategies. An empowered community has the ability to challenge the status quo and question the reliability of council decisions. Similarly, a community that takes ownership of its issues has the ability to challenge public perceptions of power and control. Keiffer (1984, cited in Dalton et al., 2001) terms this level of mutual support "participatory competence" (p. 351).

Effective empowerment must include a level of critical awareness of the community's values to promote citizen participation. It is constructive for the community to be clear about its values and develop an unambiguous set of principles, or group-based belief system, to direct decisions and action. Specifically, those aspects and needs that bind the community together and promote ownership of citizen's rights are an important focus. Once the community 'owns' the issue, citizens are equipped for collaboration with council members.

Multi-level constructs of empowerment underscore gradual processes of strengthening relationships between the community members; Bond and Keys (1993, cited in Dalton et al., 2001) term this "co-empowerment" (p. 363), a particularly salient form of empowerment, which has the potential to turn problems into opportunities. This demonstrates an effective strategy of bottom-

up community empowerment that indicates a community is psychologically empowered (Dalton et al., 2001). Moreover, an empowered community operates as a tool or instrument of social power and a constructive means to oppose council development. Saul (1977, cited in Cuthill, 2002) argues, "demands for…change are the inherent right and responsibility of citizens in a democracy" (p. 86). Cuthill's (2002) research effectively demonstrated that a cooperative approach between community members and local governments provides clear benefits that result in the creation of lobbying power, networking abilities, sharing of skills and a communal directive to deal with the issues at hand. This approach has long-term advantages for positive change, developing citizen and societal critical consciousness is imperative to the development of a collective power structure and sense of community (Kaye, 2001).

At the macrosystem level, interventions can also turn problems into opportunities, reveal tendencies or recurrent themes in ideological agendas, and pave the way for macrosystem and organizational intervention strategies aimed at social system reformation (Murrell, 1973). In measuring the effectiveness of macrosystem strategies, one needs to look backwards to the historical role of the council, as well as consider the emotional and historical attachment to the community by its members. However, for the purpose of the current intervention strategy, citizen participation and empowerment are elementary to the primary cause of community building and creating a sense of community.

Riger (2001) indicates that community change is incremental, occurring in stages beginning with pre-contemplation of the issues and ideas before moving to contemplation, preparation, action and maintenance. Different processes are appropriate at different stages. Raising awareness or constructing relationships is dependent almost solely on the readiness of the community members. It is apparent that this community is 'at the ready' for intervention and empowerment, all that is required is a plan for implementation and some directive influence, the consensus among the people is that the any intervention that protects their way of life, the environment, and community wellness is welcome and needed. At the time of writing, the RDC chief executive reports in the local paper how growth in Rodney needs to be curbed, and has suggested a moratorium be put in place (Didsbury, 2004). This could be an extremely positive move for the community. The article suggests that council needs to start listening to what the people want and present the community and any methodical process with additional strengths and resources. In the broad context however, collaboration and community building do not occur instantly, intervention programs are long-term and complex. Any prospective researcher or research team must show commitment, willingness, compassion and patience to help this particular community to help itself.

CONCLUSION

Orewa Beach is one interesting place, and the information above addresses the people and place. In addition to examining the community, this article demonstrates how community psychologists seek to identify ideas that might prevent problems from occurring, or address social and structural problems that keep Orewa Beach from becoming all that it potentially could be. Thus, the community serves to illustrate the approaches used by community psychologists, a discipline and profession similar to, but somewhat different from, that of anthropologists.

Community psychology is closely related to anthropology, ethnography, and particularly, applied anthropology and in examination of the literature, such similarities and differences become obvious. Each discipline has much to offer, in so far that they both seek to discover rich and detailed descriptions of communities and people. What differs however is the intent. Typically, community psychologists seek out information about a community and then engage in some form of action in order to create social change; anthropologists on the other hand, are far more likely to conduct research for its own sake. Community psychologists focus on a community, often explicitly, at a 'community' level, examining the organizational structures within that community, in an attempt to find potential pressure points advantageous for social activism. In contrast, the traditional anthropological and ethnographic approach is to focus on kinship, and description of the entire range and way of life, and culture. Awareness of such similarities and differences exemplified in the literature and this case study may encourage some anthropologists to include additional conceptual and practical skills to their approaches. Orewa

Beach serves both as an interesting community, and as a case illustrating the goals, methodologies, and style of community psychology.

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