

Experimental Social Innovation and Dissemination: The Promise and Its Delivery

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This paper describes the origin of the Experimental Social Innovation and Dissemination model and its contribution to and intersection with community psychology. It also discusses the challenges presented to ESID by community psychology's growing emphasis on cultural diversity and participatory approaches to research and intervention. It concludes with an overview of the papers presented in the special issue.

KEY WORDS: community psychology; experimental methods; program evaluation; participatory research.

The late 1960s and early 1970s were some troubling times for America. The Great Society's promise of transforming social programs was met with disappointing sustainable outcomes, and the role of psychologists in addressing societal challenges was put into question. It was a time when several psychologists (Cowen, 1973; Kelly, 1987; Munoz, Snowden, & Kelly, 1979; Sarasan, 1976; Smith, 1973) espoused an idealistic vision for how psychology could contribute to the larger society, thus providing the foundation for the new field of community psychology.

Experimental Social Innovation and Dissemination (ESID) exemplifies the ideals advanced by some of the early community psychology scholars. The term, experimental social innovation (ESI), emerged from the work of Fairweather (1967) whose idealism led him to frame an approach to community psychology that champions innovative strategies for social change. Similar to Anansi's bright light (Brookins, 2003), ESI soon drew the attention of community psychologists who were looking for a new model of intervention and social change. Fairweather's

humanistic–scientific system required the experimental evaluation of social innovations, a practice that was uncommon at the time but is more the norm today. The “D” was added as it became increasingly evident that simply creating an effective innovation was not sufficient without active dissemination (Fairweather, Sanders, & Tornatzky, 1974). Each of the terms—experimental, social innovation, and dissemination—conveys the foci of practice for today's community psychology.

The promise of the ESID framework was to advance research that leads to innovative solutions to social problems that have a humanitarian value and problem-oriented framework, rather than a discipline oriented stance. ESID is an action-oriented, multistep process for systematically introducing change in social systems that is grounded in scientific evidence of effectiveness. Similar to Anansi's children working together to help their father out of his predicament, the social scientist plays an active, collaborative role—from the selection and understanding of the targeted problem, to the development, implementation, evaluation, and dissemination of the innovative solution—committing him/herself to finding effective solutions.

Since 1969, the ESID approach, having been cast to the universe, served as the basis of training at Michigan State University (and elsewhere as students graduated and moved on to their own academic appointments) for the development of engaged,

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action-oriented, ecological-community psychologists. Students were trained to work in naturalistic settings and to address social problems by creating social innovations that could be proven to be effective through experimental research. The importance and value of this striking departure from traditional PhD programs in psychology was described in the *American Psychologist* (Tornatzky, Fairweather, & O'Kelly, 1970) with a tone of dire urgency. Six years later, an update of the PhD program revealed that indeed graduate students had demonstrated that they could conduct longitudinal field experiments (Tornatzky, 1976). However, there was great skepticism about how academic psychology would support such training, and some plausible alternative settings for this type of work were proposed. The training program continued to produce both Master's and PhD level ecological-community psychologists, many of whom continue to practice or champion ESID principles. Thirty years later, the question is whether the promise of ESID has been met. Is ESID a viable model for community research and action today?

THE ROLE OF THE ESID RESEARCHER

In his genesis of a humanistic–scientific system for survival, Fairweather (1972) described the role of the social scientist as centered within a humanitarian values orientation. These values require the social scientist to be a social activist who takes a problem focus rather than a disciplinary focus. Social scientists must work collaboratively⁴ with those most affected by the social problem to design and evaluate innovative solutions. Although Fairweather didn't specifically address the nature of the innovation, his work exemplifies humanitarian values and the importance of democratic participation. His focus on creating settings in which people with mental illness have control over the decisions and resources that most affect their lives was a precursor to community psychology's emphasis on empowerment.

In a later publication, Fairweather and Tornatzky (1977) argued that innovative social solutions require the social scientist to work collaboratively across disciplinary boundaries to address the complexity of most social problems. Although mostly evident today, the ESID focus on collaborative or *democratic* decision making at all stages of the action research

was highly innovative and required community psychologist trained in this model to move beyond disciplinary understandings of social problems. Further, grounding the research in the naturalistic setting was a major departure from that of the distant, laboratory research role characteristic of the time. Thus, training and practice is often situated in the community, rather than in the office, classroom, or laboratory. Much of community psychologists' training and work today is community-based; however, the field is still bound by disciplinary strings.

More recently, Maton (2000) has reiterated the necessity of approaching social issues from a multidisciplinary perspective where community psychologists join with allied disciplines to work on social transformation. The introduction of new PhD programs in community psychology that are not housed in departments of psychology, do not have "psychology" in their title, and are composed of faculty from multiple disciplines is a positive indication that community psychology may indeed be moving beyond its disciplinary womb.

SOCIAL INNOVATION

The need for innovation has been widely interpreted, from implementing slight changes from the status quo (e.g., first-order change) to major shifts from ongoing practices, or "second-order change" (Watzlawick, Weakland, & Fisch, 1974). Social innovation as a concept receives tremendous support in the community psychology literature, but in practice it proves to be difficult to implement. Fairweather (1972) recognized that "the greatest obstacle to creating needed change in technological societies are the very values and social organizations that man himself has created . . . The major goal of his institutions has been to maintain the practices that daily become more outmoded and maladaptive" (p. 1). According to Fairweather (1972), the adoption of any innovation requires society's dissatisfaction with its current practices and the perception that the innovation can fulfill a basic need. Yet, social innovations are difficult for a society to adopt because they often require radical changes in accepted role behaviors or the social structure of existing social organizations. Social change that challenges the status quo has long been recognized as the primary goal of community psychology (Kidder & Fine, 1986; Ryan, 1976, 1994), because many of today's social problems are structurally based rather than individually located.

⁴Fairweather spoke of the need for democratic participation, particularly of people from the target population.

The importance of developing social innovations with humanitarian values challenges community psychologists to do their work with “compassion, caring, and a deep sense of shared humanity” (Maton, 2000, p. 49). The humanitarian stance of the ESID approach requires a thorough understanding of the social problem from the viewpoints of the people most affected by the problem and the professionals who come into daily contact with them. Once again, the researcher must move beyond the comfort of the distant observer to engage with members of the community. Humanitarian values further incorporate the recognition that people have the right to love self and others, the right to human dignity and worth, justice, individuality, and to live in a cooperative society (Fairweather, 1972). More recently, Prileltensky (1997) reiterated the importance of humanitarian values, promoting the importance of self-determination, collaboration, human diversity, and distributive justice in the practice of psychology.

Davidson, Redner, and Saul (1983) argue for the need to understand social innovations in their social contexts through a hybrid model that includes a multilevel assessment that goes into the “black box of social programs.” Similarly, Maton (2000) asserts that social transformations must take place across ecological levels and must become the “center of our consciousness as a field” (p. 48). Unlike most applied research, the ESID model emphasizes an action-oriented approach to social problems, requiring the “active manipulation” of structural variables and social processes through the design and implementation of alternative social models in community settings (Fairweather, Fergus, Cook, & Shippee, 1981). This action-oriented, problem-focused approach to social innovation requires a broader view of the processes and structures that contribute to the social problem. Consequently, the ESID approach is grounded within an ecological framework. According to Fairweather and Davidson (1986) the outcome of any social innovation is “a function of the participants and the internal and external social situation processes operative at that time” (p. 40). Thus, it is imperative that the understanding of a social problem, its potential solution, and the evaluation of any social innovation include multiple indicators of participant characteristics as well as characteristics of the organization (e.g., leadership, composition, size, reinforcement system, etc.) and the community or environment in which it operates (e.g., socioeconomic indicators, geography, culture, relationships to other organizations, etc.).

It is this emphasis on the social regularities (Seidman, 1988) as the focus of interventions that puts ESID in the forefront of community psychology’s understanding of social change. The ESID researcher recognizes the dynamic nature of society and how a solution at one point in time may no longer be effective at another point in time or in a different situation. As depicted in the opening story (Brookins, 2003), structural factors, represented by the fish in the river and then a “big ‘ol bird,” hampered Anansi’s effort to share the bright ball of light with his children. His children’s continued collaborative problem solving, as early success (releasing Anansi from the fish) led to another problem (Anansi being swooped up by the bird), eventually resulted in the release of Anansi and the ball of light. Within ESID, perseverance, continuous research, and repeated experimental replications of the innovative model are required across time and settings to create effective social change—for the moon to wax full in the universe.

EXPERIMENTAL EVALUATION OF SOCIAL INNOVATIONS

The ESID approach requires the action researcher to develop and test the innovative social model on a small-scale in a naturalistic setting; a lesson learned from negative results of widespread dissemination of programs designed with good intentions and ideas but without scientific evaluation. A longitudinal, outcome-based approach to the evaluation research addresses the challenge that short-term outcomes may disappear over time, leading to a false view of the effectiveness of an intervention. Taking a longitudinal perspective of measuring and tracking outcomes has provided results that have significant application for the development of social policies as exemplified in the papers in this special issue.

Using experiments for testing the effectiveness of social innovations is no longer disputed as it was in the early 1970s (Tornatzky et al., 1970; Weiss, 1972). Indeed, randomized studies have become more common and are more vigorously supported by federal funding agencies, like the National Institutes of Mental Health, than ever before as the preferred (if not the only) design acceptable for evaluating social models. Today, numerous intervention studies that utilize experimental methodology have demonstrated the power of the design for providing unequivocal results with significant implications for public policy and social program design.

However, the experiences of researchers who have conducted experiments in the field reveal that the implementation of the experimental method is not without major challenges. Lipsey and Cordray (2000) describe the challenges and progress made in the use of experimental methods and provide strategies to address some of the problems, such as statistical models that are able to provide information about individual-level change, correlates of change, and program effects in an integrated fashion. Cook and Shadish (1994) have also described challenges of conducting experiments in field settings, such as maintenance of randomized assignment and limiting selection bias due to subject attrition. Further, variance in treatment fidelity (the extent to which participants actually received the treatment for the planned duration) and variance in fidelity to the model or theory from which the intervention was designed pose significant problems to the interpretation of the results. Clearly, the ESID approach requires the researcher to be an effective advocate for the scientific method, a stickler for details, as well as a competent communicator to maintain effective collaborative relationships with the host setting as the intervention is implemented and evaluated.

DISSEMINATION

Despite good intentions and empirical evidence of effectiveness, many innovative programs never move beyond demonstration status. Those that are absorbed by existing systems often struggle to maintain the elements and procedures that made them effective in the first place (Schorr, 1997; Schorr & Schorr, 1988). Fairweather's original community lodge model, a social innovation designed to support and empower people with serious psychiatric disabilities to live in the community (Fairweather, Sanders, Maynard, & Chessler, 1969), was never "routinized" by the host institution, pointing to the limitation of demonstration projects. Robert Calsyn (2003) provides a further example of the downfalls of social innovation in settings that are not supportive of innovation. It is hard to make a difference when promising programs are developed in settings where they are not supported (Maton, 2000) and thus never achieve organizational legitimacy (Tornatzky, Fergus, Avellar, & Fairweather, 1980).

The literature is full of examples of successes as well as failed dissemination or routinization efforts (Havelock, 1973; Rogers 1983; Schorr, 1997), pointing

to the difficulties associated with innovation adoption. One of the early examples of the discouraging phenomena of communities not readily accepting innovations was evidenced in multiple experimental studies of the dissemination of the community lodge for people with mental illness (Fairweather et al., 1974; Tornatzky et al., 1980). The need to disseminate innovative solutions (beyond publication in prestigious journals) once the model is determined to be beneficial is critical. Intervention research results that are relevant to the general public need to be utilized and not simply stored in scholarly journals or kept within the confines of the scholarly community; thus, the importance of the D in ESID.

In the ESID model, the social scientist plays the role of advocate on behalf of the innovative model that has been developed and tested, once again utilizing experimental methods to evaluate the effectiveness of multiple advocacy strategies within diverse settings. Dissemination research involves four phases: approach, persuasion, activation, and diffusion (Fairweather & Davidson, 1986). Early efforts at dissemination research involved manipulations of various methods of approach (e.g., mail flyers, advertisement, phone, or personal contacts), persuasion (e.g., videos, on-site visits to model program, pamphlets), and activation (e.g. technical assistance provided by manuals, phone, or personal contacts) to evaluate their effect on model adoption and subsequent implementation (Fairweather et al., 1974; Fergus, 1973; Stevens & Tornatzky, 1979; Taylor, 1975; Tornatzky et al., 1980).

More recent dissemination literature (Mayer & Davidson, 2000) has focused on the conundrums of activation and diffusion, often centered around the *fidelity versus adaptation* debate (Blakely, Mayer, Gottschalk, Davidson, Schmitt et al., 1987), and problems associated with routinization (or the lack thereof). Once an innovation has been adopted, the fidelity of the innovation has been a major concern, especially in the psychiatric rehabilitation field (Bond, Becker, Drake, & Vogler, 1997; Bond, Fekete, & Salyers, 1996). The need to maintain core parts of a social innovation and curb the human need to reinvent the model in ways that compromise outcomes, such as reduced dosage, becomes critical when large-scale dissemination of models is considered. Emshoff, Blakely, Gray, Jakes, Brounstein et al. (2003) argue for the importance of dissemination research as a source of scientific replication of the effectiveness of innovative models, especially given the human propensity toward adaptation.

The dissemination of the Fairweather Lodge provides a good example of how the program has been adapted and reinvented over time (Onaga, 1994). In one instance, reinvention proved to be helpful. Forty members of the Lodge in Minneapolis were able to move from part-time employment to full-time work and get off Supplemental Social Security Income (Onaga & Smith, 2000). Yet, the literature (Schorr, 1997) is also full of examples of ineffective adaptations or the loss of program integrity as the innovation becomes routinized into the system. This highlights of the importance of maintaining fidelity over time, especially core program components of the original model.

There is also a middle ground in the fidelity/adaptation debate. Findings from a large scale study of nationwide dissemination of education and criminal justice innovations (Mayer & Davidson, 2000) indicated that fidelity to the original model was often the norm, and that both fidelity and "addition" reinvention were positively related to program effectiveness. In other words, adaptation that maintains the core components of the model while adding to the model in ways that better meet the needs of the setting can result in increased model effectiveness.

THE PROMISE OF ESID AND TODAY'S REALITIES

The emphasis on ESID in community psychology has waxed and waned over the years. Although the work over the past 30 years has shown that experiments in naturalistic settings can be done and dissemination of innovations is a logical process in social change, there continues to be a need for innovative solutions. Seidman (1983) challenged researchers to reexamine how they approach social problem solving, and to question their role in perpetuating the status quo. Those involved in community research and action continue to need to reflect upon and discover their biases and cultural lenses that influence the design of research, social innovations, and evaluation strategies. The ESID research is similarly challenged to incorporate new ways of asking and answering questions that were not even considered when the approach was formulated. The more recent emphasis on the use of qualitative methods (Banyard & Miller, 1998; Hughes, Seidman, & Williams, 1993; Patton, 1990), the examination of contextually relevant variables (Dumka, Gonzales, Wood, & Formoso, 1998), empowerment evaluation (Fetterman, Kaftarian, & Wandersman, 1996; Guba &

Lincoln, 1989), and participatory approaches (Hazel & Mohatt, 2001; Whitmore, 1994) show promise in advancing the field toward the development of culturally sensitive research and social action strategies that challenge the status quo.

Increased interest in Participatory Action Research (PAR) reflects and enhances the values embedded in the ESID approach. PAR has become a defined area in community psychology and program evaluation that champions the inclusion of "subjects" in the innovation and research process (Dugan, 1996; Papineau & Kiely, 1994). Engaging and collaborating with participants in the intervention and evaluation process promotes greater understanding of a variety of differences and uniquenesses (e.g., culture, class, geographic region, setting) that in the past have not been well addressed in research, intervention, or social change efforts. Interventions become "culturally relevant," and research becomes more "culturally anchored" (Hughes et al., 1993; Mohatt, Hazel, Allen, Stachelrodt, Hensel et al., in press) as our work embraces and exemplifies the emic perspective rather than the etic. Although community psychologists honor this paradigm shift and have put forward approaches to increase the visibility of diverse communities in our membership and scholarship, our research and action practices have lagged behind our rhetoric (Hughes et al., 1993; Trickett, Watts, & Birman, 1993).

Participatory approaches challenge community psychologists and ESID researchers alike because they change the relationship between the scientist and community stakeholders from the distant, removed researcher observing or acting on behalf of disempowered groups and communities to an engaged and open partnership between equals. This change in role challenges the action researcher to work in vastly different ways than the dominant paradigm has often trained them. No longer the sole decision maker, the action researcher who works from a participatory model is constantly challenged to reevaluate their role and their actions to ensure that their work remains "true" to the community (Mohatt et al., in press). Yet it is this participatory approach that is most congruent with the values of community psychology. Participatory approaches are empowerment oriented (Linney & Wandersman, 1996). Participants' voices are no longer silent. They play an active role in the decision making of the research and intervention process, play a central role in the analysis and interpretation of the results, are coauthors in the documentation and dissemination process, and learn

valuable skills that can be utilized in future social change efforts.

Participatory approaches present a significant challenge to the ESID researcher. The emphasis on experimental design, on the surface, appears to be counter to full community participation. Fairweather advocated using stakeholders to help the ESID researcher understand the social problem and develop the intervention model, but he never advocated involving community members in the “science” of evaluating the program’s effectiveness. Many ESID researchers would steadfastly argue against making midstream changes in methodology, as is often the case in participatory approaches. Involving community members in data collection, analysis and interpretation is also not a consideration. However, the ESID model can benefit from opening the “science” to the community and allowing the community to maintain ownership of the intervention process. In addition to culturally anchoring the research methods (measures as well as procedures), incorporating methodologies that are most often used in participatory approaches (e.g., narratives and in-depth qualitative methods) enhances the interpretation of findings. In addition, Tsemberis, Moran, Shinn, Asmussen, and Shern (2003) argue that including qualitative evidence enhances the marketability of those findings. Further, involving community stakeholders in the entire process may enhance utilization of the innovation after the demonstration has ended, a problem that continues to plague ESID researchers (Calysn, 2003; Tsemberis et al., 2003).

ESID researchers are not alone in this challenge. Though the goal of creating culturally relevant solutions in naturalistic settings is obviously furthered by participatory approaches, community psychology’s rhetoric has far outpaced the practice. Training programs in psychology, as well as our published literature, still emphasize researcher defined topics, the use of data collection strategies that are rarely culturally anchored or relevant, and results interpretation and documentation processes that are divorced from the participants’ world view and voices. Increasingly, communities are demanding partnership practices (Alaska Native Science Commission, 2001; Council of National Psychological Associations, 2000) and are challenging researchers and social interventionists to learn new ways of working, both methodologically and procedurally. Our training programs need to meet this challenge by providing training in participatory and empowerment approaches to the conduct of research and intervention to continue

to reflect and champion the values of community psychology.

DELIVERING THE PROMISE

Experimental evaluation of social programs is increasingly becoming the norm; numerous examples of such have emerged over the years. Along with the increase in community-based experimental evaluation, issues have arisen regarding the major challenges of maintaining research integrity and the active and committed role the ESID researcher needs to play. Similarly, dissemination research has become more common, also yielding methodological challenges, such as fidelity of innovation and the generalizability of results across settings. The need for social innovation continues, but the contextual circumstances that permit and support innovation remain a challenge. Training programs in community psychology continue to produce students who have skills in multiple research methodologies and the desire to create change, yet are for the most part discipline bounded. The greatest challenge is to encourage and train creative social innovators who can work across disciplines and in collaboration with their community partners. These skills go beyond the basics of applied community research and are not as commonplace as they should be. The promise is yet to be delivered. The path remains challenging; but not without hope. Perhaps the vision of ESID, that of an applied science with a heart and commitment to the betterment of community, endures. As one of the first graduates of Michigan State’s ESID training program, Harris (1997) described “[ESID] provided not only a methodology, but a philosophy guided by principles of morality, humanity, and scientific integrity. [It gave me] a ‘rational passion’.”

OVERVIEW OF THE SPECIAL ISSUE

The papers in this special edition of the *American Journal of Community Psychology* review the growth and development of ESID in the context of scholarly work in community psychology. The papers selected for this issue exemplify and expand upon the original vision as well as discuss successes and challenges encountered in the application of ESID principles and practices. As such, the papers reveal a wide variation in the application of ESID principles in addressing community issues. The authors discuss implications

for the future of ESID as a research approach for community psychologists and for guiding the education of future scholars. The papers raise many issues that need further attention among community psychologists interested in creating social change through scientific methods.

Sullivan (2003) describes how she utilized the ESID approach in addressing domestic violence by training paraprofessionals as advocates to help and support women in violent relationships. Her story highlights the importance of the collaborative process in designing the intervention as well as the longitudinal, experimental evaluation. The intervention's focus on advocating with and for women at both the individual and system level illustrates the importance and effectiveness of the ecological framework.

Tsemberis et al. (2003) describe the development and implementation of two programs for homeless people in New York City that emphasize consumer choice, drawing parallels between the Lodge model, and detailing the use of ESID methods and principles. Similar to the Lodge, a humanitarian framework resulted in an emphasis on changing the social regularities surrounding homelessness for people with mental illness; from professional-driven services and hospital-based rehabilitation to community and home-based rehabilitation, consumer-driven decision making, and accessible housing built upon the "belief that housing is a basic right for all people" (p. 310). Their supported housing intervention stands as a model for how social innovations can be developed with an empowerment and social justice value stance. On a more sobering note, the authors describe the difficulties they experienced with a service system that is reluctant to adopt the innovation, despite its demonstrated success in maintaining stable housing. They argue that social interventionists in order to better market their product, need to expand the scientific method to include qualitative evidence to provide moving narratives that reach the hearts as well as the heads of the decision makers.

Calsyn (2003), working with a similar population in St. Louis, Missouri, also laments over the failure of agencies to adopt an innovative program beyond its demonstration phase. He describes the process by which he and his colleagues developed and tested three innovative Assertive Community Treatment programs, grounded in the ESID paradigm, for people with mental illness, who are homeless and have a substance abuse problem. His experience with the dismantlement of the program with the advent of a new administration highlights the importance of

dissemination and the engagement of local authorities in the intervention process so that they "buy in," see the benefits, feel some ownership, and therefore keep it operational.

In the area of health issues (AIDS and HIV prevention in particular) the ESID approach has led to very fruitful interventions. Some of the most innovative work that has occurred over the past 10 years is reviewed and synthesized by Fernandez et al. (2003). From the beginning, AIDS and HIV prevention efforts have focused on changing risk behavior. Yet, the mechanisms for how to go about creating behavior change in hard to reach populations have not been readily understood. Building upon reasoned action theory (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980), Jeff Kelly and colleagues developed a model for changing the perceived norm in a community by identifying and training opinion leaders to advocate the use of safer sex practices. Fernandez et al. (2003) describe how ESID was applied in the development, implementation, and evaluation of the prevention effort that included a planned effort at scientific replication/dissemination. They further describe the difficulties, from a scientific stance, that were encountered due to unplanned diffusion of the intervention. The use of the internet and other information technologies, which didn't exist when ESID was developed, create unique challenges and opportunities for social change efforts and dissemination research in particular. Current work by Jeff Kelly and the Centers for Disease Control, which are not described in this paper, include action-oriented dissemination research to understand the process by which model AIDS and HIV prevention efforts can best be disseminated and passive approaches to model dissemination using web-based technology.

The previous papers exemplify and illustrate the importance and relevance of ESI, but, in general, do not systematically integrate dissemination into the research efforts. Emshoff et al. (2003) focus explicitly on dissemination, provide an historical framework for understanding the importance of dissemination and its associated fidelity/adaptation debate, and describe their efforts at evaluating replication/dissemination efforts at the national level. In so doing, the authors argue the importance of cross-project replication and evaluation to identify programs that work across settings and populations, lower "up-front" costs, and provide more rigorous results that ultimately can improve the quality and effectiveness of interventions. In recognition of the inconsistency between technological and social intervention processes, they remark that "no other industry would put so much effort into

the development of models without mass producing and marketing some of the resulting technologies” (p. 355). As shown in their study, wide spread dissemination with model program fidelity leading to effective outcomes can occur, resulting in decreased costs associated with program start up.

Trends noted at the federal level are encouraging. Identification of “model” programs and active dissemination by federal agencies such as the Centers for Disease Control and the Center for Substance Abuse Prevention through funding that encourages widespread adoption/replication of these model programs has provided ample opportunity to conduct cross-site evaluations of the effectiveness of programs. The benefits of this dissemination research process over time will not only advance scientific understanding of prevention theory and program design and implementation, helping to tease out the issues pertaining the fidelity/adaptation debate, but also lead to progressive social change as more and more innovative programs are adopted.

Despite the clear consistencies between dissemination and the social change mandate of community psychology, Gray, Jakes, Emshoff, & Blakely (2003) find that dissemination practice and research receive very little attention in the literature or in our training programs. The relative invisibility and lack of current knowledge of the D, as compared to the ESI, in community psychology was made even more evident in a recent SCRA-L listserv discussion that is described in the paper. Community psychologists and others are developing innovative social change and prevention strategies at a phenomenal rate. However, few are ever implemented beyond the initial demonstration site, and few training programs provide sufficient training in dissemination technologies or research. Although many community psychologists recognize the importance of marketing their innovations, few systematically do so. Clearly, if community psychology is to move beyond developing and testing innovative models implemented as demonstration projects to influencing social problems on a larger scale, dissemination practice and research needs to become an integral component of our training programs and our literature.

Seidman (2003), a long time advocate of Fairweather’s ESID model, concludes this special issue with a call for community psychologists to realize the promise of the ESID approach by engaging in active dissemination practice and research in addition to developing and testing social innovations that seek to influence the social regularities that impede

empowerment and wellness. He reminds us of Fairweather’s emphasis on long-term commitment of the ESID researcher to the process of social change. The community action researcher needs to persevere over time against the many forces that impede social change and be heedful of the maxim that today’s solutions become tomorrow’s problems. Seidman also reminds us of Fairweather’s caution: the social change agent role can be lonely. Because social change, by definition, defies the status quo, the community psychologist who chooses the ESID approach must be comfortable with his/her resultant marginality.

Community psychology has a history of coming to terms with its marginal, but somehow influential place in the psychology profession. Today, prevention and empowerment have become buzz words as well as accepted practices and models for intervention within psychology and allied disciplines. Experimental evaluation of innovative practices is the norm rather than the exception. Collaborative research, as exemplified in the growing emphasis on and use of participatory action research and empowerment evaluation strategies within community psychology, promises to provide the field with deeper and more valid understandings of social problems and their solutions. Yet, ecologically oriented interventions that focus change on the social regularities that maintain the status quo are still few in number in comparison with change strategies focused on individuals. Dissemination of model programs is the exception rather than the rule. The promise of ESID is yet to be fully realized. The question for the future is whether we want ESID to wax or to wane.

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