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Beyond Diversity: Toward a Cultural Community Psychology[1]

Clifford R. O'Donnell[2,3]

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We are increasingly considering culture as the context of diversity and, in the process, becoming a cultural community psychology. Our recent progress is discussed and a suggestion to accelerate our progress through greater collaboration with cultural psychology[4] is offered. The development of a cultural community psychology has implications for the traditional distinction between basic and applied psychology, our understanding of context, partnerships between academicians and practitioners, and the place of community psychology within the discipline of psychology. These implications are presented and discussed.

KEY WORDS: diversity; cultural; community; IACCP; ethnicity; intersubjectivity.

Welcome to the 10th Biennial Conference: 40 Years Post-Swampscott: Community Psychology in Global Perspective! Forty years since Swampscott: Wow! As we look ahead to the coming years in community psychology, the point of my talk is that slowly, but surely, we are becoming a cultural community psychology. There are several important markers along our path, including the special issue of the American Journal of Community Psychology (AJCP) on culturally anchored methodology (Seidman, Hughes, & Williams, 1993) and Ed Trickett's Distinguished Contributions to Theory and Research Award Address (Trickett, 1996). Trickett suggested that diversity be considered in context and that we needed to integrate culture and context. Today, I will discuss our recent progress in considering culture as the context of diversity and, in the process, becoming a cultural community psychology. I will then offer suggestions to accelerate our progress and discuss the implications of a cultural community psychology.

To begin, let us consider the answer to almost all questions in human psychology. Before you open your notepads or laptop computers to write down all of these answers, or worry that I will take up the entire conference time with these answers, be assured that all of these questions have the same answer. Moreover, the answer is only of two words: It depends. The answer may depend on age, gender, socioeconomic class, sexual orientation, education, ethnicity, culture, generation, geographical location, time in history, etc. In other words, the answers depend on the context.

The recognition that people have different contexts, and therefore must be represented at all levels of our organizations and considered in our research and community projects, to create an accurate and just psychology, is the basis for a key value of community psychology: Diversity. The value of diversity is well-represented in our work. In a recent content analysis of AJCP, 25% of the articles

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[2] Department of Psychology, University of Hawai'i, 2430 Campus Rd., Honolulu, Hawai'i 96822.

[3] To whom correspondence should be addressed at Department of Psychology, University of Hawai'i, 2430 Campus Rd., Honolulu, Hawai'i 96822; e-mail: cliffo@hawaii.edu.

[4] The term cultural psychology is also used in this article to refer to cross-cultural psychology.

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were on diversity (Martin, Lounsbury, & Davidson, 2004). In many of these articles, diversity is expressed in terms of race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, SES, age, and religion. These terms are also used on our SCRA application forms and in membership surveys. As Paul Toro reported in his Presidential Address last year (Toro, 2005), 23% of Division 27 members identify themselves as ethnic minorities compared to only about 6% in APA.

However, there are social forces that are increasingly making us think, as Ed Trickett expressed it, of the cultural context of diversity. One of those forces is the Millennium that, in a very real sense, began on 9/11/2001. Another force is globalization and the resistance to it. These social forces are creating a global community psychology with Western psychology being only one of many psychologies (Marsella, 1998). With these developments, the context for the diversity of psychology becomes necessarily cultural.

Community psychology has contributed to the development of a global community psychology over the last 40 years, e.g., in liberation psychology (Watts & Serrano-Garcia, 2003) and community social psychology (Montero, 2002). Community psychology is represented in much of the World and over half of the members of community psychology organizations live outside the United States (Toro, 2005). Now it is time to take out your notepads and laptop computers and note that the First International Conference on Community Psychology will be in Puerto Rico in June, 2006.

COMMUNITY PSYCHOLOGY AND CULTURAL PSYCHOLOGY LINK

As community psychology becomes international, our history becomes increasingly parallel with cultural psychology. Cultural psychology is inherently international. Both community and cultural psychology are concerned with understanding human diversity in context and appreciate that the context of diversity is cultural (Revenson & Seidman, 2002; Trickett, 1996). Both recognize that knowledge is never neutral and objective (Barker, 2000), have often focused on subordinated groups and are often concerned about differential power among groups (Segall, Lonner, & Berry, 1998).

As we celebrate at this Conference, community psychology traces its modern history to Swampscott in 1965; cultural psychology to its newsletter and directory in 1966 through 1968. Community psychology became a Division of APA in 1967; the International Association for Cross-Cultural Psychology (IACCP) was organized in 1972. The Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology began in 1970; AJCP in 1973. At its 25th anniversary meeting in 1997, the IACCP had 500 psychologists from 60 countries (Segall et al., 1998); at this, our 40th anniversary Conference, we estimate participation of 500–600 psychologists.

Historically, both community and cultural psychology have often been missing, or just mentioned in passing, in introductory psychology undergraduate textbooks (Blazek, Lucas, Raley, & Washington, 2004; Segall et al., 1998). In the last few years, some cultural psychologists have discussed the potential application of their work to public policy (Segall et al., 1998), a concern of community psychology from the beginning. Cultural psychology seeks to transcend disciplinary barriers (Cooper & Denner, 1998; Saraswathi & Dasen, 1997; Super & Harkness, 1997). Community psychology has also reached out to other disciplines, notably the Society for Applied Anthropology.

The word culture is thought to have come from the idea of cultivating crops and then led to the cultivation of the person (Barker, 2000). Now, in anthropology, culture is often used to refer to people with shared meanings, i.e., people with similar experiences and understanding of life. Often these groups have shared historic, linguistic, social, and political contexts, with a common label, such as an ethnicity or nationality (Barker, 2000).

If culture refers to people with shared experiences and shared meanings to understand life, then, of course, it is inaccurate to lump many different cultures into the shorthand categories we often use, such as Hispanic, Asian, or one of the worst, Asians and Pacific Islanders. Given that there are about 1000 different cultures among Pacific Islanders alone (Oliver, 1989), what meaning does the category of Asians and Pacific Islanders have, beyond referring to a large geographical area of the world? At best, these categories may be useful for racial and ethnic studies, but can lead to much misunderstanding and inaccuracy if used alone in cultural studies (Bhawuk & Mrazek, 2005; Sasao, 2005; Vega, 1992). Using the terms the people we are working with use and assessing the strength of their cultural identification is an important step forward but, to be more accurate, we need to know their shared meanings, experiences, and understandings of social roles and norms for behavior.

TOWARD A CULTURAL COMMUNITY PSYCHOLOGY

My awareness of the potential of a cultural community psychology came from my experiences in some of my projects. One series of studies, conducted with my students, examined high-crime settings in Honolulu (Lydgate, 1986; O'Donnell & Lydgate, 1980; Schropfer-Kiyota, 1986). The series began with an examination of all of the crimes reported to the Honolulu Police Department in each police beat area over the preceding 12 months. The police beats in Waikiki were found to have the highest rates of property crimes and the Downtown area, the highest rate of violent crimes. Each address in the 20-block area of Downtown was visited and the addresses categorized by type of business, organization, or residence. These categories were used to analyze their association with the addresses of the crime reports. In addition, behavioral observations were recorded at various locations in both Downtown and Waikiki, at different times during the day and night, weekends and weekdays.

These data showed the differences in the demographic characteristics and behaviors of people in high- and low-crime locations, property and violent crime locations, and low- and high-crime times. In the Downtown area, these data revealed a marked pattern of high rates of violent crimes with the combination of commercial sex businesses and consumption of alcohol.

However, it was the qualitative data that helped us to understand these results. Conversations with employees at some of the businesses, police beat officers, and street people informed us of the locations of some of the gambling operations, how they were designed to protect the gamblers from raids, the protection money paid by some legitimate businesses, the dual roles of drug dealers and pimps, and some of the locations where they managed their operations. We learned why one bar and grill was at the center of reported violent crimes and why the rate of those crimes in the surrounding area dropped dramatically, when it burned to the ground at 2 A.M. one morning. It served as the gathering place for the pimps/drug dealers and prostitutes. It was a dramatic case that supported the link of commercial sex businesses, alcohol, and drugs with high rates of violent crime. While much of these qualitative data were not reported in our studies, informally they contributed much to our understanding and interpretation, and convinced me of the value of qualitative data. This experience demonstrated the importance of systematically gathering, analyzing, and reporting qualitative data. There is much information that can only be obtained from the people who live and work in the settings of the community, and it is necessary to spend time with them in their settings and develop the trust needed for discussion. Often, knowledge of other cultures is needed to be successful.

In another project, conducted in Micronesia with several colleagues, narratives were used to train Peace Corps Volunteers (PCVs), assess the needs of rural villages, and develop projects in partnership with the PCVs and the villagers to address these needs (Mercil, O'Donnell, Wilson, & Tharp, 1989; O'Donnell, Tharp, & Wilson, 1993). During training, the PCVs and their Micronesian co-workers were placed in separate groups and asked to make a list of sayings that reflected their culture, the values represented by these sayings, and the behavior expectations they expressed. These lists were converted to narratives, which each group used to make oral presentations to the other groups.

Village needs were assessed by interviewing people in their villages using keyword prompts, instead of questions. The information they obtained was used to construct a narrative for each person interviewed and these narratives were analyzed to interpret village needs. These data clearly showed youth development as the major priority throughout Micronesia (Pohnape, Yap, and Palau) and formed the basis for village youth projects that served to develop common activities to improve village conditions and, in the process, improve communication between youth and elders. Narratives can be powerful expressions of culture and useful to understand a community, train community workers in the culture of the community, and form partnerships to design community intervention projects.

In a third project, conducted with my colleague Roland Tharp, the adults in a small Native-American community (population 8000) were concerned with the emergence of youth gangs (Tharp & O'Donnell, 1994). The adults sought advice from Tharp, who had consulted with them over several years on their educational system. Tharp invited me to join him to explore their concerns. We spent several days interviewing virtually all of the adults who were in an official position involving contact with youth. The adults were unanimous in their concern: Some youth of high-school age were involved with gangs and using drugs. An abandoned building on the edge of town was their hang-out and people were afraid to walk by. Several incidents of violence were reported.

When a focus group of high-school youth was conducted, an opposite picture emerged: There were no youth gangs, just the usual cliques, drug use was primarily limited to marijuana, the abandoned building was a source of graffiti and youth smoking, and only one incident of violence was serious, a stabbing for which the offender was sent to a youth correctional facility. Furthermore, the major problem was excessive adult alcohol consumption and related incidents of abuse. In this small-town community, adults knew each other well, were often related, and conversed often. Not one youth thought they could discuss their concerns with an adult in confidence.

We then returned to several of the adults we had interviewed and sought their reactions to the themes the youth had expressed. To our surprise, the adults, often with great emotion, agreed with the youth's views of adults in the community. With the trust and cultural knowledge Tharp had acquired in his years of work in the community, we were able to construct some culturally compatible recommendations to address the concerns of both the adults and the youth.

Community groups, especially those in different generations, often participate in different settings and social networks. In these circumstances, it is essential, of course, to cross-check data and interpretations with groups that might offer a different perspective. Cultural knowledge can facilitate access to the settings and networks of these groups, assist in forming partnerships with community members, and increase the cultural compatibility of any recommendations or interventions.

These experiences illustrated the importance of qualitative methods to work with people from different cultures and their potential for the development of a cultural community psychology. The awareness of the importance of qualitative methods for community psychology (Banyard & Miller, 1998; Langhout, 2003; Stein & Mankowski, 2004; Stewart, 2000), their use in participatory community research (Contos, 2000; Jason, Keys, Suarez-Balcazar, Taylor, & Davis, 2004), and the recent increase of their use in community psychology (Martin et al., 2004) is encouraging.

Evidence that we are making progress is also apparent from the number of excellent cultural-community research projects reported recently. For example, Fisher and Ball (2003), in a tribal participatory research project with American Indian and Alaska Native communities, discussed the inadequacy of the categories of American Indian and Alaska Native, when there are over 550 tribes, speaking over 200 languages, among the people in these categories. Therefore, they worked at the level of the individual tribe, formed collaborative relationships with tribal members, and used culturally specific assessment and intervention methods.

Mohatt et al. (2004) developed a culturally anchored participatory action research project on sobriety with Alaska Natives. They also created a collaborative relationship with community representatives that shared the entire research process. In their conclusion, they noted that "we needed to become more aware of alternative ways of thinking about and perceiving the world" (p. 272). That is advice we can all take to the heart.

In another example, Tharp and his colleagues (Tharp et al., 1999) described the sociohistorical context of Native American education, then systematically described and analyzed the obstacles to reform in one tribal community, and the conditions needed for successfully overcoming these obstacles. The detail they provided and the power of their analysis was made possible by the cultural knowledge, trusting relationships, and partnership they developed during their long collaboration with the tribal community.

To face the challenge of understanding diverse cultures, we can read ethnographies, consider the use of narratives and participatory research methods, form partnerships with community members, and always check our interpretations with members of the culture. We can also accelerate our progress by collaborating with colleagues in cultural psychology. We have much to learn from them and they from us. We do not need to become anthropologists or even cultural psychologists, but to more fully realize the potential of our value of diversity we need to understand the context of diversity (Trickett, 1996). We can only understand the context of diversity by using cultural methods and knowledge (Trimble & Fisher, 2005). Through collaboration with IACCP members, we can learn much about cultural differences in the milestone events of birth, education, marriage, and death; differences in time orientation, gender roles, types of concepts, world-views, use of quantitative methods, and learning and communication styles; and differences in intercultural communication, such as in the appropriateness of inquiry and self-disclosure, face-saving, and the use of intermediaries, to name a few.

This knowledge will assist us in forming collaborative relationships, developing more effective projects, and informing our research. Collaboration with those in cultural psychology will also aid in our understanding of how cultures change through contact with other cultures, economic changes, globalization, pressures from within, and external forces, such as war, UN treaties, and sanctions. In developing this collaboration, I do not suggest that community psychologists embark on a journey to study other cultures. The use of cultural methods and knowledge is not just for those who study exotic cultures or for those who study cultures other than their own; these methods and this knowledge is important in the study of any culture. Given that all people belong to a culture, i.e., have shared meanings, the use of cultural methods and knowledge is important in every project in community psychology.

In forming collaboration with cultural psychology, we have much to offer. We can contribute our long and rich experience of community research and program development on social issues. Our cultural colleagues appreciate the importance and relevance of their work (Segall et al., 1998), and many are likely to be receptive to collaboration with us (Cooper & Denner, 1998; Saraswathi & Dasen, 1997; Super & Harkness, 1997).

IMPLICATIONS

Over the last 40 years in psychology, we have come to understand that the search in general psychology for basic human processes is illusory. Research in cognitive, developmental, social, cultural, and community psychology shows that all human psychological processes are imbedded and co-constructed in their social and cultural context. Cognition, for example, requires contextual symbols for understanding, interpretation, and behavior. Vygotskian theorists assert that cognition develops through the use of symbols, primarily language, during shared activities (e.g., Rogoff, 1990; Rogoff & Lave, 1984). The attempt to understand the processes of human psychology by studying people outside of their context, in effect considering context as error variance, has led to limited and, sometimes, distorted and inaccurate knowledge (O'Donnell et al., 1993; Shweder, 1995). In addition, separating people from the context of their everyday lives, as in clinical and correctional institutions, is often ineffective and sometimes harmful.

If a context-free human psychology does not exist, then the distinction between basic and applied psychology is dated and limited, at best. An important implication for community psychology is that knowledge in human psychology is contextual and best obtained in the everyday settings of communities (cf. Price & Behrens, 2003; Stokes, 1997). If the context of diversity is cultural, then a cultural community psychology can contribute to both knowledge and effective programs, while remaining true to our values (e.g., Maynard, 2005; Maynard & Martini, 2005; O'Donnell & Yamauchi, 2005; Tharp, 1994; Tharp & Gallimore, 1988).

If a context-free person does not make sense, neither does a person-free context. Context, of course, is not "out there"; it is most importantly within each of us. While our environments have many objective features, our understanding, interpretation, and use of them is subjective. When we engage in activities with others in common settings, we share our understandings of our context and these shared experiences become intersubjective. These intersubjectivities are the shared meanings of culture. They bind people and context within shared settings and social networks (O'Donnell & Tharp, 1990; O'Donnell & Yamauchi, 2005). To try to separate one from the other is to alter and, sometimes, destroy the human psychological process we are trying to understand. The historical attempt to separate people and context too often led the discipline of general psychology to go astray.

From this perspective, another implication for community psychology is that academicians and practitioners are engaged in the same enterprise (Wandersman, 2003; Wandersman, Kloos, Linney, & Shinn, 2005). Both require an understanding of human context to be effective. An appreciation of our common purpose and our common destiny can create advancements in our knowledge and in our programs. These advancements could help us to better contribute, with our like-minded colleagues in related disciplines, to address the World of Trouble that has gathered force since 9/11, and now threatens to spiral out of control. Let us assert that a contextual psychology, such as that found in cultural and community psychology, is necessary to construct a discipline that can truly understand human experience and behavior and can use that understanding for the benefit of all.

If context lies at the heart of human psychology, then the disciplines that best understand context, such as cultural and community psychology, belong at the forefront of psychology (O'Donnell et al., 1993). If the advancement of psychological knowledge requires study in everyday settings, then those who study and work in context, such as cultural and community psychologists, should not be hesitant in their quest for resources, including graduate programs, community and faculty positions, community partnerships, grants, program development, and the support of community organizations. Our pursuit of valid knowledge and effective social programs and, ultimately, the success of psychology are at stake. Our position is strong and we should not be reluctant to assert it: Let us point out that knowledge in human psychology, depends.

A future of the cultural community psychology we are becoming is exciting and welcome. Let us envision a community psychology that builds on the last 40 years and takes us further on the path of our noble journey.

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