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ORIGINAL PAPER

Reconcilable Differences? Human Diversity, Cultural Relativity, and Sense of Community

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Abstract Sense of community (SOC) is one of the most widely used and studied constructs in community psychology. As proposed by Sarason in (The Psychological sense of community: prospects for a community psychology, Jossey-Bass, San Francisco, 1974), SOC represents the strength of bonding among community members. It is a valuable component of community life, and it has been linked to positive mental health outcomes, citizen participation, and community connectedness. However, promotion of SOC can become problematic in community psychology praxis when it conflicts with other core values proposed to define the field, namely values of human diversity, cultural relativity, and heterogeneity of experience and perspective. Several commentators have noted that promotion of SOC can conflict with multicultural diversity because it tends to emphasize group member similarity and appears to be higher in homogeneous communities. In this paper, we introduce the idea of a *community-diversity dialectic* as part of praxis and research in community psychology. We argue that systematic consideration of cultural psychology perspectives can guide efforts to address a community-diversity dialectic and revise SOC formulations that ultimately will invigorate community research and action. We provide a working agenda for addressing this dialectic, proposing that systematic consideration of the creative tension between SOC and diversity can be beneficial to community psychology.

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To a greater extent than many of its sibling disciplines, community psychology has sought to make explicit its values and their relationships to research and action. While community psychologists may debate exact formulations and definitions, there is a relative consensus that core values of the field include the value of human diversity and an interest in promoting a sense of community (Dalton et al. 2007; Levine et al. 2005; Nelson and Prillitensky 2010; Orford 2008; Ornelas 2008; Rudkin 2003; Serrano-Garcia et al. 2008; Sonn et al. 2002). One of the defining features of community psychology has been its support for diversity and appreciation of cultural relativity (Rappaport 1977; Ryan 1971). Historically, community psychologists have emphasized how "differences among people and communities may be desirable, and resources of a society should not be allocated based upon a single standard of competence" (Rappaport 1977, p. 3). Similarly, Seymour Sarason articulated the importance of sense of community to community psychology practice, proclaiming, "The psychological sense of community is the overarching criterion by which one judges any community development or plan (1974, p. 158)." These core values appear to position community psychology to promote individual and collective well-being as communities around the world become increasingly more diverse in terms of ethnicity and global perspectives, while also confronting growing concerns about inequalities, isolation, marginalization, and alienation.

What has not been adequately addressed in our field is how we address situations where our core values conflict. The fact that values may conflict is not new, of course.

However, on the cusp of many demographic changes in communities worldwide, there is an increasing need to understand how appropriate interventions may be identified in order to resolve tensions between the core community psychology values of sense of community and human diversity. The thesis of this paper is that the field of community psychology can make important contributions to social change and the reduction of social problems by investigating and addressing a *community-diversity dialectic*. We articulate this dialectic to draw attention to instances where our theory, research, and intervention have fallen short of addressing individual and communities' interests when we have not considered the relationships between a sense of community and the valuing of diversity in our work. We propose a community-diversity dialectic as an enduring dimension of community-based relationships that is affected by contextual factors. Decisions about how to best balance these core values will depend upon improved understanding of the cultural contexts in which we work and live.

Before we advance our argument, we first need to define dialectic and discuss its relevance to community psychology. Dialectical approaches to understanding human experience date back to ancient Greek philosophy, are part of most religious traditions in the East and West, and have a history in contemporary philosophy and social science (Hyman and Walsh 1983; Fox 2005). Central to most dialectical approaches is an observation that social life is composed of opposing forces that appear to be contradictory. The creative tension of the dialectical process uses a dialogue about two opposing statements to look for a synthesis that can resolve the conflict and may lead to greater understanding of human experience. The German philosopher Hegel argued that dialectics are inherent to all things and that understanding the two opposing positions requires an understanding of their relationship in a greater system that is continually evolving (Marcuse 1999; Fox 2005). Hegel and others have argued that a systematic dialectical dialogue is necessary for understanding a social world that is not static. The cost of not recognizing the relationships between opposing forces is to maximize one position (e.g., sense of community) over the other (e.g., diversity) and proposing one-sided solutions to social problems that ignore the relevance of the other position.

For those interested in addressing social/community problems, examining opposing forces in community life is critical for addressing the needs of a whole person and multi-dimensional communities. When paradoxes can be identified, "we will often find that one side or the other has been ignored and its opposite emphasized. … The action part of our job is then to confront the discovered paradoxes by pushing them in the ignored direction" (Rappaport 1981, p. 3). We will argue that a sense of community has been emphasized in much of community psychology at the cost of valuing diversity in human settings. Further, we will argue that divergent solutions are needed to engage a community-diversity dialectic that are appropriate to culture and context rather than trying to integrate the viewpoints in one static solution. Sarason (1978) has observed that most meaningful human problems require continual identification of solutions as no single solution will be relevant across time. We will argue that systematically examining a community-diversity dialectic in our work and our relationships will help avoid the application of one-sided solutions that ignore one dimension while maximizing the other.

The specific aims of this paper are as follows: (1) examine theoretical components of community psychology that emphasize the value of diversity and cultural relativity; (2) review the sense of community construct and empirical findings that appear to conflict with the value of diversity; (3) explore social psychological theories that help to explain why individuals favor homogeneous communities; (4) present examples from our own research that illustrate the community-diversity dialectic; and (5) propose a working agenda to help community psychologists balance the core values of sense of community and diversity.

Two additional clarifications are in order to explain how we approach these issues. First, we use the term 'culture' throughout this paper in the general sense to refer to the myriad social identities that impact, and are impacted by, individual and environmental contexts. These include, but are not limited to, ethnicity, gender, religion, socioeconomic status, geographic region, sexual orientation, and disability status. We consider culture to refer to shared experiences and shared meanings among groups of individuals. We view culture as being both dynamic and stable: although cultural beliefs, values, and traditions change over time, individuals and societies typically change together (Gurung 2006). Second, there is a definitional debate in the literature regarding the terms 'psychological sense of community' (PSOC) and 'sense of community' (SOC). Broadly, SOC is used to identify a group-level experience of community, while PSOC refers to the individual experience of sense of community (Bess et al. 2002). We use the term 'sense of community' and the abbreviation 'SOC' throughout this paper to highlight the conflict between diversity and SOC that exists more saliently at the group level than at the individual level.[1]

[1] However, in remaining true to the existing literature, we use the terms and abbreviations favored by the authors when citing their work. Thus, for, example, when we talk about Brodsky's et al. work with multiple psychological senses of community, we use the term PSOC to honor the meaning it has in their work.

The Value of Diversity and Cultural Relativity in Community Psychology

Community psychology's emphasis on the importance of human diversity can be traced to the 1965 Swampscott Conference and its discussions to organize a community psychology (Trickett et al. 1993). The initial aim of the conference was to prepare psychologists for the emerging field of community mental health and establish guidelines for training. While one of the primary tenets was to engage in interventions that addressed the needs of marginalized groups, such as poor communities of color, there were no members of ethnic minority groups at the conference, and only one female. This lack of diversity in membership of community psychology followed for years after its initial conference (Moore 1977; French and D'Augelli 2002).

In spite of this early history of community psychology and marginalized groups, the value of diversity was a key component to the articulation of community psychology as a new discipline. Rappaport (1977) proposed a systematic framework for community psychology in which cultural relativity, diversity, and ecology of human interaction formed the core. His task for the emerging field was to develop a psychology of person-environment fit. Within this framework, this ecological community psychology paradigm "accepts the value of human diversity and the right of people to choose their own goals and lifestyles while maintaining their fair share of society's material and psychological resources" (Rappaport 1977, p. 3).

A central task in the development of community psychology was to identify concepts and frameworks that challenged the assumption that decisions about competence and distribution of resources are best made using a single standard that was established without consideration of context (Ryan 1971; Sarason 1972). Rather than using middle class expectations for family structure, or assuming that the use of colloquial language of various non-White ethnic groups were reliable indicators of educational achievement, these community psychologists proposed that differences among people and communities may be desirable. Similar to metaphors in biology, their assumption was that diversity in community settings could be a resource for solving social problems, while settings without much human diversity or those that did not value diversity would have difficulty surviving. Using Kelly's ecological metaphor for psychology (1966), a valuing of diversity recognizes the essential interdependence of community members, while an importance of cultural relativity emphasizes the higher adaptive capacity of social systems that have greater diversity.

Numerous theoretical, philosophical, and practical components of the discipline advocate strongly for a value in diversity. First and foremost, the overarching ecological framework of community psychology aims to understand the interdependence of people and their physical and social environments (Trickett 1996, 2009). Accordingly, it is important to understand the ways in which environmental contexts impact all aspects of diversity, including cultural identity development in multi-cultural settings and promotion of tolerance and acceptance of diverse cultural groups. In his Presidential Address presented at the 10th Biennial SCRA Conference in Urbana-Champaign, IL, Clifford O'Donnell noted that we are becoming a cultural community psychology, primarily because both community and cultural psychology are concerned with understanding human diversity within a cultural context (O'Donnell 2006).

Community psychologists organize their work around ideals of social justice, liberation, and empowerment—concepts which have been applied across diverse cultural groups and settings (Nelson and Prillitensky 2010). From the time of the field's conception, community psychologists have attempted to work closely with ethnic minorities, women, gays, and other groups that have been excluded from full participation in social life in the U.S. (French and D'Augelli 2002). This social justice emphasis on diversity has been shared by community psychologists around the world, including work among Puerto Rican women at risk for HIV infection due to gender inequities (Ortiz-Torres et al. 2000); Coloured South African immigrants in Australia who immigrated to escape Apartheid oppression, (Sonn and Fisher 1996); and Lesbian Latinas in Mexico who needed assistance creating safe spaces to unite and show solidarity (Romo-Carmona 1995). Key theoretical principles, such as social justice, liberation, and empowerment, demand that we examine the influence of culture to determine the most appropriate ways to help individuals be and become members of empowered communities.

Community Psychology and the Importance of Sense of Community

The academic study of *community* was an important focus of other disciplines before Sarason's seminal work. One of the most commonly used conceptualiztions of 'community' involves Tonnies' (1925) distinction between *Gemeinschaft*, the communal solidarity of preindustrial village life, and *Gesellschaft*, instrumental relationships formed to pursue individual goals. Chaskin and Richman (1992) defined community as "…a place of reference and belonging…the community includes dimensions of space, place, and sentiment as well as action" (p. 113). According to Wiesenfeld (1996), definitions of community commonly make reference to a community's common component elements (e.g., individuals, physical contexts, activities)

and to the processes (whether psychological, social, or cultural) that occur among those components.

The sense of community construct was developed to reflect the importance of community life and the strength of bonding among community members (Sarason 1974). As defined by McMillan and Chavis (1986), sense of community is "a feeling that members have of belonging, a feeling that members matter to one another and to the group, and a shared faith that members' needs will be met through their commitment to be together" (p. 9). Their definition includes four dimensions of sense of community: membership, influence, integration and fulfillment of needs; and shared emotional connection. Membership refers to the feeling of belonging and identification with the group. Influence refers to the bi-directional need for a group to offer its members a feeling of cohesion and for the members to feel they have a reciprocal influence over what happens in the group. Integration and fulfillment of needs places importance on common needs, goals, and beliefs and refers to the necessity for members to find group membership to be rewarding. Finally, shared emotional connection is based on a sense of shared history and identification with the community and the bonds developed over time between group members (McMillan and Chavis 1986; Obst and White 2005). Sense of community is a valuable component of community life, and it has been linked to increased psychological well-being (Pretty et al. 1996; Prezza et al. 2001), perceptions of belonging and community connectedness (Sonn and Fisher 1996), and participation in the community (Chavis and Wandersman 1990).

Tensions Between a Focus on Sense of Community and a Value of Human Diversity

Although sense of community is generally discussed as a positive outcome and a desirable component of social functioning, one of the primary criticisms of the construct is its tendency to overestimate the importance of uniformity, balance, and regularity in community life (Wiesenfeld 1996; Colombo et al. 2001; Fisher and Sonn 2007). Wiesenfeld articulates the crux of this issue as follows: "Community refers to a homogeneous group of individuals, clearly distinguishable from *others*" (1996, p. 337). In practice, community homogeneity and diversity involve relationships and processes among persons and groups that are difficult to reconcile (Lounsbury and Deneui 1996).

Tellingly, Sarason's definition of SOC begins by stating that the psychological sense of community is "the perception of similarity to others" (1974, p. 157); and McMillan and Chavis emphasized a high degree of uniformity and homogeneity in reference to group values and norms (Colombo et al. 2001). The 'membership' component of sense of community, in particular, is clear in its assertion that communities form boundaries of who can and cannot belong (Fisher and Sonn 2007). A common dynamic of community development is that people seek similar others and safe places to be oneself. In McMillan's words (1996, p. 321): "If one can find people with similar ways of looking, feeling, thinking, and being, then it is assumed that one has found a place where one can safely be oneself" (1996, p. 321).

Despite the potential benefits associated with SOC, the clear emphasis on group similarity in the achievement of a sense of community can counter the core value of diversity. The following empirical findings help to illustrate this tension. In a study of 219 first year university students, Obst and White (2005) found ingroup ties to be the most important predictor of sense of community. Sampson (1991) found ethnic homogeneity to be significantly related to community social cohesion among a national sample of 11,030 residents in over 500 localities in Great Britain. Similarly, Farrell et al. (2004) found that racially and socio-economically homogeneous neighborhoods in Canada showed greater levels of neighboring, which the authors found to be the strongest predictor of sense of community. Finally, Caughy et al. (2003) studied predominantly African American neighborhoods and reported a higher sense of community in racially homogeneous neighborhoods than racially mixed neighborhoods.

Similar findings are seen in cross-cultural research among more collectivistic cultures. Forrest et al. (2002) conducted 15 interviews in three contrasting neighborhoods in Hong Kong in order to explore the extent to which western preoccupations with neighborhood resonate in a high-rise, high density Chinese city. They found sense of community to be strongest among colleagues or schoolmates living in the same areas. Respondents also noted that it was easier to develop relationships with neighbors on a horizontal (similar) level rather than the vertical (different) level.

Garcia et al. (1999) studied a Latin American neighborhood in Caracas that included three founding members of the community. Among the most important findings, shared history was an important part of the homogeneous neighborhood that contributed to a strong sense of community. One participant said, "For me this neighborhood is sacred, because here things occur that are not seen in any other community" (p. 738).

Sonn and Fisher (1996) found similar findings among a group of South African Coloured individuals who had survived Apartheid oppression together and immigrated to Australia. Interview data indicated that people felt most secure with their own racial group: "It was easier to go out and mix with your own kind" (p. 424). Among this Coloured immigrant group, similar dress, language, laws, and

social togetherness were found to foster a strong sense of community.

Frameworks for Beginning to Understand Why the Community-Diversity Dialectic Exists

Several theories in the field of social psychology help to explain the human tendency to value groups and communities that are similar to them.[2] *Self-categorization* and *self-identification* theorists claim that groups create solidarity by encouraging members to identify themselves in terms of their membership in the group (Swann et al. 2004). When people categorize themselves and others into groups, they perceive the group to have entitativity, the property of being a coherent, unified, meaningful object with a high degree of similarity, common fate, and proximity (Fiske 2004). These factors encourage group cohesion and social integration, which further help to give individuals a sense of group membership.

Social identity theory (SIT) helps to further explain the common proclivity to favor similarity in groups, and it proposes that when individuals are strongly aware of their group membership, and it is of strong value and emotional significance to them, they are said to have strong ingroup identification (Obst and White 2005). SIT suggests that people will accentuate the homogeneity within groups and the differences between groups (Fiske 2004). This perceived homogeneity serves to justify designation of (and resultant membership in) separate groups.

Strong ingroup identification appears to encourage ingroup biases that may have deleterious effects on the value of diversity. According to social identity theory, the more strongly individuals identify with their group, the less favorable attitudes they hold toward dissimilar groups (Negy et al. 2003). Group members react negatively toward other groups out of a need to differentiate their own group positively (Verkuyten 2005). *Self-verification theory* proposes that individuals seek groups that are distinguishable from other groups because this makes their own self-views more distinctive and, thus, more verifying (Swann et al. 2004). Additionally, because so much of the group definition comes from shared values and goals, it must logically follow that members of the outgroup are seen as having differing, and at times even interfering, values and goals (Fiske 2004). Research has shown, further, that outgroup members evoke more dislike, distrust, and competition than ingroup members (Swann et al. 2004).

Homogeneous communities have also been linked to greater physical and emotional safety. This appears to work by establishing emotional boundaries that define who belongs and who does not, foster group intimacy, and provide emotional safety for those within the subcommunity (Brodsky and Marx 2001; Sonn and Fisher 1996). In the Latin American study by Garcia et al. (1999), one participant said in relation to her homogeneous neighborhood: "I don't have any problems, so much so that I go to talk with any neighbor and leave the door open, and I don't worry at all. This gives me a feeling of peace and security" (p. 737). In a mixed-methods study by Brodsky and Marx (2001), one participant described the emotional safety provided to her by her student group: "When you come here…once you feel that love and affection, and…get to know people you'll start opening up…because some places are meant for some people" (p. 169).[3]

Living in homogeneous communities may also buffer the damaging effects of racism and oppression. This appeared to be the case in a study aimed at assessing attitudes and factors contributing to survival of First Nation Indian Peoples who endured an oppressive and discriminatory residential school system in Canada. Hanson (2000) reported that individuals created their own community with each other; and their resulting sense of community helped them to develop strengths of autonomy, sharing, respect, acceptance, spirituality, humor, compassion, and cultural pride. Similarly, a participant's words from a qualitative study by Sonn and Fisher (1996) help to illustrate the protective role that racial group membership may serve for victims of Apartheid oppression: "You look for people that you know have gone through the same thing before. It is only natural…that you feel more attracted to that group of people—because there is a lot of things that they can identify with that you can too…" (p. 427). Finally, Tweed et al. (1990) suggested that living in racially homogeneous neighborhoods places residents at lower risk of being exposed to interracial suspicion, hostility, and prejudiced treatment that occurs prevalently in racially mixed neighborhoods.

Evidence of the Need to Address the Community-Diversity Dialectic in Our Own Research

Below, we discuss three research projects from our program of research examining how the social ecology of

[2] Groups and communities are similar yet not identical constructs in social and community psychologies. Although the social psychological theories discussed in this section were developed with group behavior in mind, we assume that the general concepts operate in much the same manner within community contexts.

[3] It is important to note that rather than being seen as divisive, the formation of subcommunities (student groups) was encouraged and viewed as a positive resource by the macrocommunity (a job training and education center). We will explore the critical meaning that membership in multiple communities has in the community-diversity dialectic later in the paper.

settings can affect well-being. Nationality, ethnicity, and disability-status are examples of three different culturally shaped contexts that were investigated in these projects. For each, the importance of a contextually-based understanding of culture and sense of community was paramount to research designs, collaboration with participants, data analysis, and knowledge creation.

Research Among People Displaced by War in Northern Uganda

Our first examination of the community-diversity dialectic comes from sense of community research conducted in northern Uganda. Since the mid-1980s, communities across the north have suffered from direct and structural violence resulting from a civil war between the government and the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA). Of the many ways this conflict has impacted this region, perhaps the most significant has been mass internal displacement. By 2005, nearly two million people had been forced or compelled to leave their homes and adapt to life in overcrowded camps (Otunnu 2006). Fortunately, a tipping point in this conflict was reached in August 2006 when representatives from the government and the LRA signed a historic Cessation of Hostilities Agreement. As a result of the improvement in security that followed—at least in Uganda—more than 60% of the displaced population have returned to villages of origin or resettled in smaller camps closer to home (IASC Working Group 2008).

Considering that relatively little is known about the moderating or mediating effect of the social ecology on the relationship between exposure to political violence and psychosocial outcomes (Ahearn 2000; Rasco and Miller 2004), we set out to explore the applicability of the SOC framework in this setting. Previous studies have explored this construct with immigrant and Diaspora communities (Bathum and Baumann 2007; Malone and Dooley 2006; Fisher and Sonn 2007)—and a similar construct known as multiple psychological sense of community (MPSOC; Brodsky et al. 2002) among Afghan women, men, and children living in Afghanistan and Pakistan, some of whom were refugees and internally displaced persons (Brodsky 2009). The current study complements this work by focusing on SOC among a sample of internally displaced persons in Uganda.

In 2007, during the early phase of return and resettlement, we recruited and trained research assistants who were living in a large internally displaced-persons camp on the border of Gulu and Oyam districts—a soft border between the Acholi and Lango tribes. There is a long history of intermarriage in this area and generally positive relations between tribes. The camp, a former trading center that was a meeting point for people throughout the region, saw its population swell from 1900 in 1987 at the start of the war to more than 20,000 at the peak of displacement in 2004 (Green 2008). Due to the frantic nature of displacement to the camp, geographic communities were fractured; many households living in close proximity to one another in their village of origin were forced to separate upon moving to the camp.

Between 2004 and 2007, more than 4,700 people moved from the camp to nearby settlements, leaving a population of approximately 16,000 in the camp. As part of a larger study (Green 2008) that examined these movement trends, two members of our research team conducted 30–45 min qualitative interviews with adults ($N = 98$) randomly selected from the population of dwellings in the main camp ($n = 18$), two smaller satellite camps ($n = 15$), and 33 villages surrounding the main camp ($n = 65$). Responses to several open-ended interview prompts about community relations informed an analysis of the sense of community construct in these different settings.

Narratives about community life and social relations were initially coded into three categories: positive, neutral, and negative. Overall, the percentage of participants who made positive statements about community and social relations was 31.7% points higher in the villages than in the camps. Corresponding trends were observed for neutral and negative thematic coding—only 4.6% of village participants voiced a negative opinion about community relations compared with two-thirds of main camp residents.

Critical to the current article is participants' understandings of the reason for these perceived differences in social environments. According to survey data on material resources, village and camp residents appeared similar, suggesting that residents of both communities had roughly the same financial *ability* to help their neighbors. Instead, the difference seemed to be in residents' *willingness* to provide support. When village participants provided insight into the nature of this new sense of willingness, the explanations could be framed by McMillan and Chavis's (1986) concept of *Membership*.

As we have discussed, one attribute of membership is boundaries—the criteria for distinguishing members from non-members. In-group membership based on village boundaries was often cited as the causal factor in the renewal of helping behaviors and sense of unity in the villages. For instance, a 25 years-old male resident linked unity and love to the rebuilding of his primary geographic community:

> The ideology of the people in this village is the same. And secondly, we have only those ones who were here before the displacement. For this reason, the community has a high level of unity and love as one people…Here we have people who look at his neighbor's problems as his [own].

The mixing of groups in the camp was also used to explain why camp life was challenging:

> People moved to the camp from different places. Therefore, the way each and everyone handles life from the camp is different. You cannot mix other people's way of doing things with yours when in the camp. Each person does his or her own things unlike here in the village. People [here] live together, share ideas, and help each other with work, things like knives, salt or any other thing which one may request the other (42 years-old male).

According to some, the physical separation of people from different villages has made it easier to raise children properly, as described by this 30 years old male resident:

> Teaching children is easy from the village because they don't mix with other children from other villages. But in the camp, teaching children is difficult because people in the camp moved from different villages and they have different characters.

The findings of this research further reinforce the assumption that homogeneity aids in the achievement of a sense of community. Removed from the 'mixed' living arrangements in the camp, individuals were more willing—and perceived themselves to be more able—to help others and educate children within their own villages. As previous research on SOC and group similarity has shown (e.g., Obst and White 2005; Sampson 1991; Sonn and Fisher 1996), the respondents in this study perceived their village social group as having a high degree of similarity which encouraged group cohesion. As suggested by self-verification theory, respondents emphasized differences between social groups—differences which served to bolster their own in-group identity and reaffirm their own values as better than those of the out-group.

Community Integration Experiences of Individuals with Psychiatric Disabilities

In the U.S., much of our research has involved the investigation of supported housing sites for individuals with serious mental illness (SMI) located across South Carolina. We have studied the impact of neighborhood and housing factors on various indices of well-being and adaptive functioning. Goals of this research include affecting change in supported housing policy and helping to promote participation of individuals with SMI in all facets of community life (Kloos and Shah 2009).

In a study of 424 individuals with SMI, we examined factors which promote sense of community. We found that positive neighbor relations, perceptions of high neighborhood safety, and residential satisfaction significantly predicted sense of community. Of particular relevance to the community-diversity dialectic is the impact of housing site type on SOC. Generally, individuals were living in either congregate sites (i.e., housing in which residents' neighbors also have a mental illness diagnosis) or in non-congregate sites (i.e., housing in mixed settings in which residents' neighbors do not necessarily have a mental illness diagnosis). The congregate housing sites likely afford a richer sense of belonging with others who understand mental health challenges based on common experience with mental illness and some relief from discrimination based on mental health status, while non-congregate sites provide opportunities for inclusion in the broader community and different types of social interactions.

We found that individuals residing in congregate housing sites reported significantly higher sense of community than residents of non-congregate sites ($M = 1.73$ vs. $M = 1.42$, $p < 0.001$). That is, individuals who resided with other persons with SMI reported higher SOC than individuals who lived among neighbors who do not necessarily have a mental illness diagnosis.

Qualitative responses to items pertaining to sense of community help to support and illustrate this finding. Individuals' sense of shared life history—particularly the common experience of mental illness—appears to be a vital aspect of sense of community. The following quotes from three participants in the study help to illustrate this point:

> People in here are in the same condition as I am.
> I like being with people with the same mental illness.
> I am with someone that I knew from the hospital before I moved here.

It is likely that the shared experience of mental illness increases individuals' perceptions of belonging and ability to contribute meaningfully to their neighborhood's social fabric. Cummins and Lau (2003) support this idea and suggest that, as is the case with most people, individuals with disabilities may prefer to live amongst people who are similar to them and who, they believe, will contribute more strongly to their sense of community.

However, the preference for residing near other individuals with similar experiences was not uniform across the sample, as is also illustrated by qualitative responses to items pertaining to sense of community. Some participants spoke of wanting to live in housing that was not intended specifically for individuals with mental illness. For example, one participant said, "I wish the residents were a mixed population with not just mentally ill people living here." Another participant said, "You know, it makes it harder for me to get better when everyone I'm living around is also sick." It may be that individuals who live in congregate housing sites perceive greater segregation and

stigmatization from the broader community. Residents may feel that living among neighbors who do not have a mental illness diagnosis would expose them to more opportunities for "normalized" relationships and community experiences, thus helping to increase their sense of community.

This study helps to illustrate that the community-diversity dialectic must be considered in multiple ways rather than assuming that all members of a particular cultural group will experience the same need for one value (SOC or diversity) over the other, or in equal balance. Specific to this study, we must address and attend to the balance between individuals' needs/preferences for SOC (in this case individuals with SMI experience higher SOC in homogenous settings) and other individuals' preferences for diverse social relationships and community opportunities.

Housing and Neighborhood Experiences of Latino Immigrants

A third project that has relevance to the current paper is the investigation of housing, neighborhood, and community experiences of recent Latino Immigrants living in Columbia, South Carolina. Similar to the SMI study described above, a tension between sense of community and diversity is salient for Latino immigrants due to problems of social exclusion often experienced by marginalized groups. Studies of individuals in Latin America have demonstrated the importance of SOC in community building among residents of Latin American communities (e.g., Garcia et al. 1999). However, to our knowledge, SOC has not been systematically studied among Latino immigrants living in American neighborhoods.

We used three different methods to engage with participants and understand their experience of community life: semi-structured qualitative interviews, conceptual mapping techniques, and a traditional quantitative survey. Responding to items in the Brief Sense of Community Index (BSCI; Long and Perkins 2003), the participants in this study ($n = 41$) reported relatively low sense of community ($M = 22.5$ out of a maximum score of 40, SD = 5.23). Additionally, when asked if they feel a strong sense of community in their neighborhoods (response options ranged from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree), participants reported a mean response of 2.4, suggesting that they do not feel a strong SOC in their neighborhoods. Participants' responses to qualitative prompts help to further unpack the finding:

> I live here but I don't like the neighborhood environment.
> [I] don't' have many friends here, it's not the same here as there [in Mexico].
> I have been living 7 years here, and I don't know anybody. All I say is "hello" to the people who live in front of my house.

Unlike the previous two studies, Latino immigrants living in homogeneous neighborhoods (i.e., predominantly Latino neighborhoods) ($n = 17$, 41.4%) did not report significantly higher levels of sense of community than individuals living in neighborhoods with mixed ethnicities of long standing SC residents ($n = 24$, 58.5%) ($M = 22.88$ vs. $M = 22.28$, $p =$ ns). Quantitative and qualitative findings suggest that individuals residing in predominantly Latino neighborhoods might in fact have a lower sense of community. For example, individuals living in primarily Latino neighborhoods reported significantly lower perceptions of neighborhood safety than residents of mixed neighborhoods ($M = 41.\ 73$ vs. $M = 47.24$, $p = 0.057$). Qualitative responses also reflect the idea that safety is a greater concern in predominantly Latino neighborhoods:

> I don't like my neighborhood… the people living there are problematic
> There are lots of people walking, like bad people, smoking and making noises, so I feel frightened to walk with my children in my neighborhood.

Residents of predominantly Latino neighborhoods also expressed fears of being arrested by immigration police:

> What I don't like of Columbia are the police, well it's not that I don't like them…I am afraid of them…
> I think that the police are racist with the Hispanics.
> I like everything about Columbia. The only thing that we don't like is that they torment us Hispanics with the migra (immigration police).

Concerns such as these may cause people to remain in their homes rather than spending time in the neighborhood engaging with neighbors and developing a sense of community.

Although participants of mixed-ethnicity neighborhoods reported feeling safer than residents of Latino neighborhood, this does not imply that their sense of community is necessarily higher. Numerous factors may make it difficult for Latino immigrants to integrate into mixed neighborhoods and achieve a strong SOC. For example, the language barrier appears to play a significant role in the lack of interaction with others member of the community:

> All I can do is wave because of the language [barrier].
> I am traumatized by the language [barrier]. Being unable to speak English keeps me sick… I feel lonely.

The findings in this study illustrate the importance of examining sense of community uniquely for various

cultural groups in relation to experiences of diversity in the setting. Sense of community and diversity do not operate uniformly across all cultures, political economies, and contexts. We did not find significantly higher SOC in the more homogenous, predominantly Latino neighborhoods in this study, as we did in the study of persons with psychiatric disability living in congregate settings. The fear of harassment based on ethnicity and immigration status likely worked against building a sense of community in these neighborhoods. Another challenge to building sense of community is the cultural diversity among Latino immigrants in South Carolina. In our study, participants came from Mexico, Guatemala, Colombia, Dominican Republic, Panama, Argentina, and El Salvador. They did not necessarily share common experiences, language dialects, or histories.

Results from this study also illustrate the importance of recognizing that sense of community should not be interpreted as a unipolar variable (i.e., present or absent). Rather, it is better conceptualized as a continuum ranging from negative, to neutral, to positive (Brodsky 1996, 2009). One can posit that Latino immigrants in this study found a negative SOC (i.e., not associating with neighbors; not wanting to establish a sense of belonging) to be protective because it may minimize their risk of being identified by police. A negative SOC may also keep them from having to interact with people whom they consider to be unsafe or a bad influence on themselves or their families. This mirrors findings and theory set forth by Brodsky (1996) in which single mothers found a negative psychological sense of community to buffer themselves and their children from neighbors involved in illegal and dangerous activities.

A final potential explanation for the low sense of community reported by this sample could be that some participants were undocumented immigrants. This may interfere with the development of a sense of belonging because individuals do not enjoy equal rights as U.S. citizens and likely have difficulties establishing roots in a new country. As the number of Latino immigrants in the United States in particular continues to increase, the influence of intra-cultural differences and undocumented status will be important avenues of SOC research.

Theories to Help us Promote Balance When Addressing the Community-Diversity Dialectic

Up to this point in the paper, we have emphasized tensions between the core values of sense of community and diversity in order to illustrate the need to incorporate culturally-based theories into the field of community psychology. Below, we review theories from social psychology and cultural psychology that address the importance of diversity and cultural relativity. We draw upon these theories to make suggestions for addressing the community-diversity dialectic in community psychology research and practice.

Drawing on Social Psychology to Guide Dialectical Practice and Inquiry

First *multiculturalism*, or *multicultural theory,* proposes that positive feelings toward one's group—particularly with respect to ethnicity—should contribute to higher levels of acceptance toward dissimilar groups (e.g., Berry 1994; Messick and Mackie 1989; Negy et al. 2003; Phinney 1996). Although a consensus definition of multicultural theory is lacking in the literature (Helms 1992), Pederson (1991) suggests that a multicultural framework explains behavior both in terms of culturally socialized perspectives unique to each culture and also in terms of universal points of view that are shared across different cultures. Ethnic identity development models typically outline an individuals' progress from an unexamined view of their ethnicity, to an immersion or exploration phase in which they become deeply interested in knowing about their own group, and ultimately to a secure sense of their own ethnicity, characterized by having a positive yet realistic view of their ethnic group (Cross 1991; Phinney 1996). Multicultural theory maintains that individuals who have moved to this final stage of ethnic identity (i.e., have a secure sense of their own culture) are more able to have positive attitudes toward other groups, as well as higher self-esteem (Negy et al. 2003).

Multiculturalism has been shown to have positive effects on ethnic group identification and intergroup relations. For example, Verkuyten (2005) found that the more Dutch participants (the dominant group) endorsed multiculturalism, the less likely they tended to identify with their ethnic group and the more likely they evaluated the outgroup positively. Multiculturalism appears to be an encouraging area of research that may have positive effects on reducing the tendency to favor homogeneous communities, particularly for members of dominant ethnic groups. The theory would likely operate differently for members of minority ethnic groups but could be beneficial in allowing individuals to maintain their own culture while also encouraging engagement with and respect from the dominant culture (Verkuyten and Brug 2004). This is in line with Berry's (1994, 2003) acculturation work in which integration (embracing both the dominant culture and culture of origin) is favored over assimilation (accepting dominant culture, rejecting culture of origin), separation (embracing culture of origin, rejecting dominant culture), or marginalization (rejecting both culture of origin and dominant culture).

One way to reconcile the tensions between sense of community and diversity is to create a common in-group identity among diverse individuals. Gaertner and Dovidio's (2000) *common in-group identity model* suggests that when disparate groups are characterized by a common in-group identity, bias is reduced through a process of promoting collective group identity. Rather than only identifying with separate group identities, group members see themselves as belonging to a single, common group with a superordinate group identity. This serves to replace the "us" and "them" dynamics with a common, more inclusive "we" group identity (Gaertner and Dovidio 2000).

The *common in-group identity* theory appears to be particularly useful in fostering a sense of community among diverse populations. Indeed, Cunningham (2005) found that formation of a common in-group identity is possible despite the presence of demographic heterogeneity. If individuals can be made aware of the similarities between themselves and out-group members, it seems likely that they can form a common identity that will, in turn, give them access to more numerous and varied resources.

A potential problem with this model is the risk associated with individual members losing important aspects of their identity in order to form the superordinate in-group identity. In this way, the theory relies too much on "melting pot" principles. Rather than valuing myriad cultural values and histories, the common in-group identity is likely to reflect the ideals of the dominant culture. It seems unlikely that the superordinate group identity would be a completely balanced mix of characteristics from each representative group.

Gaertner et al. (1999) addressed these concerns and noted, "The development of a common in-group identity does not necessarily require each group to forsake its subgroup identities completely" (p. 389). The authors added that it would be both undesirable and impossible for people to abandon their individual group identities. Rather, group members can maintain their original identities and view themselves as members of subgroups who are united under a common identity (Cunningham 2005).

A final way to increase out-group acceptance occurs via the *contact hypothesis*, the idea that contact with another group will lead to more positive attitudes toward members of that group (Allport 1954; Phinney et al. 1997). According to Allport (1954), in order for the contact to be effective, members of groups must have equal status, be working cooperatively toward a common goal, have meaningful personal interactions based upon interdependence, and be supported by the community in which the contact occurs. The contact hypothesis has been used as the basis for many social policy decisions in the United States. For example, racial integration in schools, housing projects, and armed forces came about in large part because of the belief that contact between different ethnicities would result in increased positive race relations. Indeed, DuBois and Hirsch (as cited in Phinney et al. 1997) found that African American and White children who lived in neighborhoods with more other-race children had a greater likelihood of having other-race friends.

Encouraging contact between different types of groups may be a critical mechanism through which a sense of community can be established in diverse communities; however, it is unlikely that mere contact alone will be successful in creating a sustained sense of belonging and common group identity. A strong line of research suggests that the contact hypothesis is flawed due to several factors, including practicality issues (i.e., logistical and financial challenges associated with combining groups) (Amichai-Hamburger and McKenna 2006); anxiety issues (i.e., intergroup interactions can be quite anxiety-provoking which is not an ideal situation for harmonious social relations) (Islam and Hewstone 1993); and problems with generalization (i.e., positive contact with one member of an outgroup is not typically generalized to all members of that outgroup) (Hewstone and Brown 1986). Indeed, the contact hypothesis may actually reinforce stereotypes rather than combat them, particularly when the contact is limited and superficial (e.g., Hamburger 1994; Pettigrew 1998). With these shortcomings in mind, maximizing diversity without attention to its implication for SOC could lead to reinforcing or strengthening stereotypes rather than building a collective sense of purpose and identity. This points to a potential pitfall of attending to one side of the community-diversity dialectic without adequately addressing the other.

Drawing on Cultural Psychology to Guide Dialectical Practice and Inquiry

Theorists from several strands of cultural psychology propose practical and conceptual tools useful for addressing the community-diversity dialectic. Cultural psychology points observation toward meaning and the construction of meaning in context. Shweder and Sullivan (1993) suggest that any psychological phenomenon needs to be understood as being created in a "culturally constructed" world. The meaning of diversity, belonging, bonding, or community will vary in different contexts; a cultural psychology approach would critically examine understanding of these constructs in practice and research. The emphasis on how persons and communities make meaning from their shared experience has been advocated as a critical element of human psychology (Bruner 1990). Ratner (1999) integrative model for cultural psychology begins with the assertion that psychological phenomena are cultural in their essence. The meanings of phenomena are formed in social

life and guide behavior that perpetuates social relationships. Contemporary cultural psychology approaches emphasize the acknowledgement of the heterogeneity of culture (Ratner 1999). Thus, differences both between and also within cultural groups and contexts must be considered when addressing the community-diversity dialectic in our work.

A Working Agenda to Address the Community-Diversity Dialectic in Research and Practice

The question remains: are community psychology's core values of sense of community and diversity reconcilable? We contend that inattention to the tensions inherent in the intersections of sense of community and valuing diversity could threaten community psychology's viability in the emerging multi-cultural contexts of contemporary life. As a field, we need to develop systematic ways to address these core values when they are in conflict. It is likely that there will always be some degree of tension between the values of sense of community and diversity. Therefore, our task is to consider divergent solutions that will advance our understanding of both values as they relate to our work. We outline suggestions for addressing the community-diversity dialectic in the following section, beginning with ideas for incorporating contextually-based elements of culture into SOC research and practice.

Expanding SOC Theory to Make it More Responsive to Values of Diversity

While the theories discussed in the section above do begin to uncover ways of balancing values SOC and diversity, they still depend on identifying similarities among people. This emphasis on the similarities without recognizing and attending to the differences in a community is what Wiesenfeld (1996) called the myth of "we." The myth of "we" implies that communities are homogeneous groups of individuals who share a common set of values and processes, such as membership, inclusion, identity, feeling of belonging, and an emotional bond or sense of community. In many cases, attending only to the similarities among groups comes at the cost of valuing the distinctive differences between and within groups. Ignoring diversity within communities has also been used historically, and continues to be used, for purposes of control and management by members of dominant cultures. For example, Dudgeon et al. (2002) note that the assumption of homogeneity among Aboriginal communities can be used by powerful non-Aboriginal groups to justify their use of one representative of "*the* Aboriginal community" to serve as an expert for the entire group (p. 256). Defining subcommunities in terms of how they are different from the dominant community is equally problematic because it assumes that the dominant culture is the normative group against which all other groups should be classified and compared (Dudgeon et al. 2002).

Wiesenfeld (1996) distinguished between a community's overall shared sense of community, referred to as *macrobelonging*, and the diverse other identities and connections that members have, referred to as *microbelonging*. Referring back to our own research on housing experiences of Latino immigrants to illustrate these concepts, the *macrobelonging* of participants in this study is their shared identity as Latino immigrants. The *microbelonging* consists of the diverse backgrounds and regional identities that operate both between and among members of the broader Latino immigrant population. Sense of community research has focused primarily on the macrobelonging element, and this has served to ignore the importance of heterogeneous group memberships within a single community. Failure to recognize diversity within a community, while at the same time romanticizing sense of community, supports the myth of "we" (Dalton et al. 2007). Similarly, Sonn (2002) remarked, "An idealized and homogenized understanding of ethnic communities can result in a tendency to discount and overlook the multiple other group memberships that impact community and individual functioning" (p. 217).

The individual group memberships, or subcommunities, that exist within the larger community are as important—or more important—to individuals' sense of belonging than the overall common notion of "we" (Wiesenfeld 1996). The multiple psychological senses of community (M-PSOC) that we gain by virtue of belonging to multiple groups have been shown to operate interdependently and impact individual and community outcomes over and above the unipolar experience of sense of community (Brodsky et al. 2002). In order to shift away from the emphasis on the shared components of the larger community, Wiesenfeld (1996) suggests acknowledging that communities are dynamic, complex, and determined by history. The dialectic that emerges between the individual subcommunities, the community, and society as a whole must be recognized as beneficial. In fact, the differences and polarities that exist between the subcommunities can be put to good use in the community as we will discuss later.

Another technique to make the sense of community construct more conducive to diversity and group heterogeneity is to incorporate elements of *social capital* into its structure. Social capital has been characterized as the glue that holds societies together, and Robert Putnam defined the concept as follows: "By 'social capital,' I mean features of social life—networks, norms, and trust—that

enable participants to act together more effectively to pursue shared objectives" (Putnam 1996, p. 56). Social capital is closely related to sense of community (O'Brien 2002; Perkins and Long 2002). A key difference is that, while sense of community emphasizes group homogeneity as paramount to adaptation and functioning, social capital concepts can draw attention to diverse human resources, strengths, and networks.

Two critical concepts in social capital literature are *bridging* and *bonding* (Putnam 2000). Bonding creates and maintains strong ties in fairly homogenized groups in order to increase emotional support, shared identity, and feelings of belonging. Bridging allows for the creation of links between groups or communities, and it aids in the movement of support from one social stratum to another. In distinguishing the two terms, Putnam (2000, p. 22) stated the following:

> "Bonding social capital is good for undergirding specific reciprocity and mobilizing solidarity…. Bridging networks, by contrast are better for linkage to external assets and for information diffusion."

Referring back to our own research on housing environments for individuals with serious mental illness, several participants reported a preference for bridging capital over bonding capital. To these individuals, living near others with mental illnesses (bonding capital) hinders their recovery and makes them more susceptible to community stigma. Living among and interacting with neighbors who do not necessarily have a mental illness diagnosis (bridging capital) is viewed as an opportunity to have normalized relationships outside of the context of the mental health system. This aids in individuals' recovery from mental illness and helps them perceive a greater sense of inclusion with the broader community. As illustrated by this example, application of social capital concepts (particularly bridging and bonding capital) to SOC theory provides a nice heuristic for balancing the need for SOC with the benefits of human diversity.

Expanding Sense of Community Assessment to Capture Contextual Meanings

At this point in community psychology, the call for methodological pluralism (i.e., diversity of both method design and philosophy) is quite widespread. Typically, sense of community has been measured with a quantitative scale, the Sense of Community Index (SCI; Perkins et al. 1990). Although this scale adequately assesses the four dimensions of the McMillan and Chavis (1986) framework and was devised from a fairly diverse participant sample, it may not operate similarly across cultural groups. For this reason, it is important to examine sense of community and create culture-specific measures that have demonstrated validity and reliability for the target groups. Numerous SOC measures have been developed which are specific to individual cultural groups, including gay men (Proescholdbell et al. 2006), Italians (Prezza and Costantini 1998) and individuals with serious mental illness (Townley and Kloos 2009). Continued development of culture-specific SOC scales such as these is warranted.

It is also important to recognize that sense of community—or the term 'community' for that matter—does not hold a uniform meaning across all cultural groups (Brodsky 2009). Indeed, it is seen by some as "just another western concept" imposed by people who are not part of the local community (Dudgeon et al. 2002, p. 250). Use of qualitative methods, as illustrated in work by Brodsky (2009), Rapley and Pretty (1999), and Sonn and Fisher (1996), is suggested in order to capture contextually-based meanings of sense of community for diverse groups. Qualitative methods afford a richer understanding of theoretical concepts, encourage long-term involvement in research settings, allow for the examination of social processes that unfold over time, and facilitate active involvement of participants as co-creators of knowledge (Trickett 1996). We recommend that qualitative and quantitative methods be combined in future SOC community studies in order to triangulate findings across multiple sources of data and provide as rich and culturally specific understanding as possible. Newer methods, including social network analysis (Hughey and Speer 2002) and Geographic Information Systems (GIS) (Lohmann and McMurran 2009; Townley et al. 2009), also provide interesting directions for sense of community research and practice.

Considering Interventions Aimed at Increasing Sense of Community and Diversity

At a practical level, implementing interventions to increase contact and understanding between diverse cultures may help increase sense of community among heterogeneous groups. However, it is important to consider the following questions when planning and implementing such interventions.

First, can a sense of community be fostered among individuals and communities with perceived differences merely by learning about each other? We suggest that it will take more than simply knowing about groups to increase perceptions of similarity. It is likely that interventions will need to plan sustained contact between disparate groups in order to affect lasting changes. Community psychologists can help groups identify and learn about both unique aspects of group membership and also commonalties across groups. Neighborhood block parties, cross-cultural workshops within organizations, and

identification of common community symbols and goals may be effective ways to achieve this objective. Within these interventions, practitioners should also examine the influence of *type* of contact. For instance, positive and intentional contact will most likely be more facilitative of sense of community than negative or incidental contact (McMillan and Chavis 1986). This becomes possible when practitioners adopt an attitude of working *with* communities, not *for* communities. Waiting for communities to ask for collaborative assistance in addressing issues of diversity and sense of community is advisable over "pushing" changes before individuals may be ready to do so.

Second, calling upon social capital concepts how do we help communities shift from an emphasis on bonding principles to bridging principles? As was discussed earlier, bonding creates and maintains strong ties in fairly homogenized groups, whereas bridging allows for the creation of linkages between groups or communities. The primary benefit of bridging capital is that it allows for the sharing of diverse resources across groups (Hughey and Speer 2002). Emphasizing the value of shared resources is a powerful mechanism by which community psychologists can help bridge the gap between disparate groups. Needs and resource assessments can be conducted to identify areas of strengths and deficits within groups. This information can then be used to illustrate to ingroup members ways in which their needs can be met by members of outgroups. The shared resources, increased capacity, and social connections that result from this process may be instrumental in developing SOC among the diverse groups.

A project by Hughey and Speer (2002) aimed at addressing the community issue of substance abuse provides a nice illustration of an intervention aimed at strengthening bridging capital in one community. The authors used social network analysis to build relationships and increase network connections between diverse groups of community members. For instance, they noted a relational gap between the police department and community members. In their setting, they thought it was important to bridge this gap in order for the groups to collaboratively combat substance abuse. Establishing connections between residents and police uncovered shared understandings, which led to cascading network linkages between other police groups and eventually the mayor, who was an important gatekeeper in controlling available resources for community policing. Uncovering fragmented interests between diverse groups led to eventual successes in coalition building, sense of community, and progress toward addressing an important community issue.

Third, what do we risk losing when we "force" values of diversity on sense of community? Most of the imbalance in the community-diversity dialectic has favored SOC at the cost of valuing diversity. However, in some contexts, the imbalance could be reversed (i.e., favoring diversity over SOC). We need to be aware of this possible dynamic and allow members of the specific cultural context in which we are working to negotiate how the dialectic is addressed. For instance, there are cases in which group homogeneity serves a protective role in helping individuals maintain important aspects of their unique cultural traditions. This is particularly true for groups which have historically been marginalized. Emphasizing commonalities between groups may be destructive to the maintenance of a unique ingroup identity. For example, students of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU's) often attend these schools because they wish to immerse themselves in settings that recognize, support, and value their Black identity. Emphasizing and fostering diversity at HBCU's (i.e., increasing enrollment of students and hiring of faculty of other ethnic groups) could negatively impact the shared group identity that plays such a protective role in the lives of students and faculty. The primary suggestion here is that community psychologists should not play a prescriptive role in "forcing" diversity upon groups when doing so could negatively impact established healthy group functioning.

Creating Settings That Address the Community-Diversity Dialectic

Kelly et al. (1994) have criticized the tendency to promote an appreciation for diversity primarily at an individual level of analysis. Individual efforts seldom create opportunities for relationships and sustained interaction that can work through tensions between values. Kelly et al. framework views diversity as an outcome of creating social settings that enable people to value, embrace, and use differences for their collective good (Kelly et al. 1994). They have named their approach *ecological pragmatism* for its recognition of the importance of resources for understanding personal differences and its interest in concrete practices that can facilitate mutual understanding among people. They argue that norms can be created within social settings to promote a sense of interdependence among participants that encourage boundary spanning socialization processes and practices to integrate diverse experiences. Creating settings that enhance an appreciation of diversity needs to be a systematic, intentional process. A detailed discussion of these proposals is beyond the scope of this paper. However, Kelly et al. (1994) advocacy for creating settings and encouraging practices that promote dialogue across personal difference and status in a sustained manner is helpful for our consideration of how a community-diversity dialectic might be addressed in community practice.

Conclusions

In this paper, we have discussed two core principles of community psychology—sense of community and a value of diversity—and examined the manner in which they may be in conflict with each other. Sense of community is a vital aspect of community life, and it provides a mechanism through which individuals can achieve a sense of belonging, influence, needs fulfillment, and emotional connection. However, the establishment of a sense of community is often predicated upon the assumption that individuals are similar to each other. Indeed, research findings converge around the notion that individuals perceive a stronger sense of community in homogeneous groups. While this conflict can be viewed as being problematic, we suggest that it can be addressed constructively as a community-diversity dialectic that is an inherent tension in multicultural societies.

As community psychology seeks to be relevant in contemporary society, it is vital to understand the manner in which individuals function and achieve a sense of community within diverse environments. We suggest that community psychology can take a lead in developing models for how this tension can be used to promote social change. As underscored by this special issue, this is likely best done by examining and understanding the role that context plays in the establishment and operation of cultural identity. This line of thinking has encouraged us to re-examine our own understanding of sense of community in the context of three of our research projects.

As community psychologists, it is important that we challenge ourselves to rethink the manner in which we conceptualize, measure, and promote sense of community. Specifically, implementing multicultural theories, understanding the importance of multiple group memberships, encouraging bridging social capital, utilizing qualitative research methodology, and grappling with difficult cultural issues when conducting community interventions are conceptual tools to resolve some of the tension between sense of community and a value in diversity. Sarason argued that the usefulness of settings can be judged by whether they "create(s) the conditions in which people can experience a sense of community that permits a productive compromise between the needs of individuals and the achievement of group goals" (Sarason 1974, p. 155). We suggest that this criterion be applied to the work of our field. Critical examination of diversity as it relates to sense of community is essential as we move forward as a field working among diverse cultural groups in diverse contexts.

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