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ORIGINAL PAPER

Integrating Cultural Community Psychology: Activity Settings and the Shared Meanings of Intersubjectivity

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Abstract Cultural and community psychology share a common emphasis on context, yet their leading journals rarely cite each other's articles. Greater integration of the concepts of culture and community within and across their disciplines would enrich and facilitate the viability of cultural community psychology. The contextual theory of activity settings is proposed as one means to integrate the concepts of culture and community in cultural community psychology. Through shared activities, participants develop common experiences that affect their psychological being, including their cognitions, emotions, and behavioral development. The psychological result of these experiences is intersubjectivity. Culture is defined as the shared meanings that people develop through their common historic, linguistic, social, economic, and political experiences. The shared meanings of culture arise through the intersubjectivity developed in activity settings. Cultural community psychology presents formidable epistemological challenges, but overcoming these challenges could contribute to the transformation and advancement of community psychology.

Keywords Culture · Community · Activity setting · Intersubjectivity · Shared meaning

Community psychology has developed from its origin in Swampscott in 1965 to become an international discipline with over half of community psychologists now living outside of the United States (Perkins 2009; Reich et al. 2007; Toro 2005). Based in the key value of diversity, where the context of diversity is cultural (Trickett 1996), a cultural community psychology is evolving from the research and practice of community psychologists around the World (O'Donnell 2006; Tebes 2010). This evolution began with a focus on ethnic minority groups in community psychology. An analysis of the content of articles in community journals through 1985 showed that 11% were on ethnic minority groups in the United States and 2% on international cultural groups (Loo et al. 1988). Through the years since, many have advocated a greater emphasis on the cultural diversity of ethnic minority and international groups in psychology (e.g., Gergen et al. 1996; Marsella 1998; Padilla 2006; Snowden 1987, 2005; Sue 1999, 2006, 2009; Trimble and Mohatt 2006, among many others).

Recently, Cohen (2010) suggested that a culture of cross-disciplinarity is needed in psychology and Reich and Reich (2006) proposed a method for cultural competence in interdisciplinary collaborations. In an excellent example of possible interdisciplinary collaboration for community psychology, Mankowski et al. (2011) reviewed the interdisciplinary linkage between community and cross-cultural psychology. They concluded that each discipline would benefit from a greater integration of their concepts and research that would contribute to the rich potential of an interdisciplinary cultural community psychology.

The need for greater integration is apparent in the relative lack of citation across these disciplines. Their leading journals rarely refer to each other's articles. For example, since 1980 only 1% of the articles in the American Journal of Community Psychology (AJCP) cited articles in the Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology (JCCP) (SpringerLink 2010a). Correspondingly, only 2.6% of the articles in

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JCCP cited articles in AJCP (Sage Journals Online 2010). Also, despite the interest in cultural diversity and ethnic minorities, less than 2% of the articles in AJCP cited articles in Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology since its publication began in 1995 (SpringerLink 2010b). If a cultural community psychology is to develop its full potential, greater cross-disciplinary awareness and understanding of the research of each discipline is needed.

Greater cross-disciplinary awareness and understanding in research could be facilitated through the integration of core concepts. The purpose of this article is to contribute to the development of an interdisciplinary cultural community psychology by suggesting a means to integrate the concepts of culture and community. The diverse nature of culture and community allows many possible paths of integration and we hope our efforts will challenge others to advance their methods of integration. Lively discussion of the multiple ways of integration will accelerate the viability of cultural community psychology.

Cultural and community psychology share a common emphasis on the importance of context. In community psychology, this emphasis is expressed in one of the goals of community psychology by its professional organization, the Society for Community Research and Action (SCRA): "to promote theory development and research that increases our understanding of human behavior in context" (SCRA 2010). (For an analysis of the relationship of community science to contextualism, see Tebes 2005). An emphasis on context has long influenced theory and methodology (e.g., Barker 1960, 1968; Bronfenbrenner 1979; Cronbach 1975; Jaeger and Rosnow 1988; Sarbin 1977), and action research in psychology (Lewin 1946).

To show how a contextual theory could contribute to the integration of cultural community psychology, we must first consider what we mean by culture. As Cohen (2009) discussed, culture can take many forms and there are many definitions of culture (for a review of 164 definitions, see Kroeber and Kluckhohn 1952). In these definitions, culture is formed and continues to evolve through the contexts of history, geography, human development, and social, political, and economic systems (Cohen 2009; Cole 1996). Culture is expressed in language, speech patterns, artifacts, music, values, and behavioral norms. Different cultural patterns can be considered variations displaying arrays of human characteristics (Tharp 2007–2008). "Culture, then, is not about groups of people… Rather, the focus should be on the implicit and explicit patterns of meanings, practices, and artifacts distributed throughout the contexts in which people participate, and on how people are engaged,… or changed" (Markus and Hamedani 2007, pp. 11–12). Cultural communities, of course, are not static and shared meanings evolve with changes in history and social, political, and economic systems.

People with common experiences, who live, work, and communicate with each other, develop a shared view of the world. As succinctly stated by Barker (2000, p. 8): "culture is concerned with questions of shared *social* meanings, that is, the various ways we make sense of the world." Through shared meanings the psychological and cultural become mutually constituted:

> (1) Individuals are not separate from social contexts, and (2) social contexts do not exist apart from or outside of people. Instead, contexts are the products of human activity: They are repositories of previous psychological activity, and they afford psychological activity. As a consequence, social contexts do more than what psychology typically labels "influence". Instead, they "constitute," as in create, make up, or establish, these psychological tendencies (Markus and Hamedani 2007, p. 6).

Therefore, the definition of culture used in this article is shared meanings of people, developed through their history and activities (cf., Zaff et al. 2002). Defining culture as shared meaning that develops over time in the common activities of people facilitates the integration of the concepts of culture and community. As Rosnow and Georgoudi (1986) noted, human activity is "situated within a sociohistorical and cultural context of meanings and relationships" (p. 4). If the focus is the research and action of people in context then, by definition, the unit of analysis can be considered shared activity, i.e., activity settings. The concept of activity setting was advanced by Vygotsky (1981) to show that cognitive development originates in activities with others and has been highly influential in developmental psychology (Rogoff 1982) and education (Tharp and Gallimore 1988; Yamauchi 2005). O'Donnell and Tharp (1990) expanded the scope of the activity setting concept to all of human behavior and experience, and proposed the theory as a guide for community strategies for change.

Through shared activities, participants develop common experiences that affect their cognitions, emotions, behavioral development, and social networks. If we define community by shared activity and culture by shared meanings, the basis for a theoretical integration of the concepts of community and culture into cultural community psychology becomes apparent. The key concept needed for such integration is one that can show how shared meanings develop from shared activities. That key concept is intersubjectivity.

In this formulation, intersubjectivity develops in activity settings during joint productive activity, facilitates the activity, and becomes the shared meanings of culture through semiotic processes (largely linguistic) that accompany the members' shared activity. Intersubjectivity

results from the shared experiences among people engaged in collaborative interaction: their history, values, thoughts, emotions, and interpretations of their world. Intersubjectivity is the psychological commonality that provides meaning in their lives. As intersubjectivity is developed, their activities are facilitated and culture propagated (Cole 1985; O'Donnell and Tharp 1990; Vygotsky 1981).

> It is important to note that intersubjectivity does not imply uniformity. Diversity may be a shared value, agreement about process may allow frequent conflict, and there will always be differences among people in their skills, thoughts, experience, and emotions. In addition, activity settings are dynamic; their characteristics are in flux and, therefore, the intersubjectivity of their participants change over time (O'Donnell et al. 1993, p. 507).

The subjective focus of activity settings distinguishes them from the behavior settings developed by Barker (1960, 1968). In behavior settings, the focus is on objective molar behavior specified by time and place. Behaviors are defined by the roles or positions of people in the setting and activity is used to coordinate their behaviors. Suggestions have been made to alter behavior setting theory to include a wider range of individual behaviors, cognitions, and interventions in the setting (e.g., Luke et al. 1991; Schoggen 1989; Wicker 1987). In contrast, activity setting theory unifies the objective and subjective by showing how activity is influenced and intersubjectivity developed. Rather than a collection of individual behaviors and cognitions, intersubjectivity develops as a setting characteristic that becomes the shared meanings of culture and provides the basis for cultural community psychology.

Intersubjectivity is related to the concept of sense of community (Fisher et al. 2002; Sarason 1974). Intersubjectivity facilitates effective communication. The higher the level of intersubjectivity, the greater is the likelihood of feelings of belonging or sense of community to the activity settings where the intersubjectivity developed. However, people can feel a belonging to a school, team, or neighborhood without a high degree of intersubjecivity. They may feel a sense of community even without engaging in activities with other members of the community. Intersubjectivity, however, can only develop through activities with other members.

Intersubjectivity is also related to the concept of social networks. Social networks are formed in activity settings with partially overlapping memberships. These networks often introduce people to new settings, so people may begin a new activity knowing people from previous interactions or experience in similar activities. In these situations, some intersubjectivity may be present from the beginning. In addition, of course, the more experiences people have in common, including language and cultural traditions, the easier and more likely it will be for them to develop intersubjectivity (Cronick 2002). However, members of a social network rarely share all of the same activity settings. Indeed, many members may not have any contact or even know each other, as when family and work members of one's social network do not interact with each other. Therefore, it is rare for intersubjectivity to be high among all members of a social network. Intersubjectivity can only be high among members who participate in common activity settings.

In this formulation, cultural and community psychology share not only the emphasis on context, but also the same unit of analysis: activity settings. Individual development and cultural communities arise from the collaborative interactions that occur in the cognitive, social, and emotional processes of activity settings. Activity settings and the shared meanings of intersubjectivity are proposed as a means to contribute to the integration of cultural community psychology.

The integration of cultural community psychology can facilitate our understanding of how communities change, whether it is the planned change of prevention and intervention common in SCRA action research or the evolution of cultural communities over time. As illustrated next, both types of change occur with changes in activity settings.

Activity Settings and Change

The design of the activity is particularly important for the people in the setting. Any change must affect the human interaction that is the heart of an activity setting for the change to occur. Human interaction is the source of the activity and affects the social networks and psychological development of the participants. Most importantly, human interaction affects the degree of intersubjectivity developed in the setting and, ultimately, the activity itself. Intervention that does not affect human interaction in the setting cannot lead to sustained change. Low levels of intersubjectivity suggest a possible need for change; high levels indicate well-functioning and productive activity settings.

Of course activities that are not harmful to their members or others outside of their settings are desired, but harmful activities, such as those in some criminal gangs, terrorist groups, or hate organizations, can also be well-functioning and productive. In these settings, intersubjectivity may be high within the group, but a change strategy would be needed to reduce the harm to others. In other settings, intersubjectivity could be high within subgroups, but low between them, creating the potential for conflict. An example is a project where psychologists were invited to assess concerns about the development of youth gangs in

a small rural community of about 8,000 people, almost all Native American (Tharp and O'Donnell 1994). Interviews were conducted with the adults in the community in positions with youth contact, including school officials, teachers, athletic directors, youth program directors, political officeholders, a judge, and a juvenile division police officer.

The consensus of the adults was that the youth were rapidly changing from previous generations (for the worse) because of the influence of forces outside of the community, particularly the media and modern communication. Literally, every adult attributed the primary cause as boredom and the solution as increased activities for youth. From their perspective, some youth engaged in delinquent activities with friends because of boredom and lack of organized activities. These peer networks congregated at an abandoned house, covered with graffiti, on the outskirts of town. The "gang problem" was an adult interpretation of these friendship networks and the house was the symbol they saw on every trip to and from town. The remarkable consensus among the adults indicated a high degree of intersubjectivity.

When interviews were conducted with a sample of youth, both boys and girls from different schools, a different pattern emerged. Among the students, not one mentioned a lack of activities or a need for more. The delinquent activities mentioned were almost all minor and not considered a problem (indeed most of the offenses reported to police were juvenile status offenses). Instead, the youth reported that the excessive alcohol consumption and frequent sexual abuse by the adults were the major problems. Furthermore, because they lived in a small community where many families were interrelated, they did not trust adults. Youth who tried to discuss these problems with an adult were told to "just forget it".

The consensus among the youth also indicated a high degree of intersubjectivity among themselves, but extraordinarily low intersubjectivity with adults. The youth consensus was then shared with a sample of adults who were interviewed a second time. Remarkably, most of the adults confirmed the problems reported by the students, often with great emotion, sometimes breaking into tears. Some even confessed their own efforts to overcome personal problems.

The interview results and discussions with adult leaders informed the development of a strategy of change. The strategy was based on the creation of new and modified activity settings to: (1) bring youth and respected elders (from the grandparent generation) together to share the history and traditional role of elders in the community, discuss current community events, and allow the elders to be available for council and assist in the mediation of conflicts, (2) sponsor alcohol-free events at celebrations and community events, (3) form a task-force of teachers, staff, and students, to review school rules and recommend changes, (4) create a project with the collaboration of the local hospital and high schools to reduce unwanted teen pregnancy, (5) create a community committee to coordinate agencies and programs for children and youth, and (6) restore or destroy the abandoned house that had become a symbol for "youth gangs."

The purpose of this strategy was to affect the interaction of students and responsible adults by creating joint activities that addressed the concerns of each group and potentially fostered changes in intersubjectivity. The goal was to increase the degree of intersubjectivity between youth and adults. This example illustrates how activity settings can be assessed and used to develop a strategy for change at a community level. This strategy is quite different from one originally proposed by the adults to develop a youth gang prevention project and shows how an assessment of activity settings can lead to different types of intervention.

Planned changes based on activity settings have been developed in community, education, youth mentoring, and child development projects (O'Donnell and Yamauchi 2005). In an extensive community project, Roberts (2005) analyzed how activity settings are created with community participants with different cultural backgrounds to design and implement the project. Activity settings were first created to form a common purpose for the project and then to meet the different needs of researchers, program staff, and the families the program was designed to serve. In education, Tharp and Gallimore (1988) redesigned classroom activities in a school for Native Hawaiian children based on their analysis of activity settings in the student's homes. Classroom activity settings were altered to be more compatible with the cultural values of the Native Hawaiian children. The changes, which allowed peer assistance and the organization of classroom preparation each day, as occurred during caretaking of siblings at home, raised student academic performance to national norms.

Cultural communities of youth are also formed by activities. Shared meanings are developed in youth activity settings and expressed in music, style of dress, language expressions, and common interests. For most youth, intersubjectivity is developed with pro-social peers (Allen and Antonishak 2008), while other youth are placed in contact with anti-social peers through school tracking systems, suspensions, and detention, and those who are neglected or abused at home often find relationships with similar youth. Neighborhoods that offer activities centered on drugs, guns, and crime, provide the settings for some peer networks of youth gangs and juvenile delinquents. Several means to alter these networks are suggested by activity setting theory, such as creating alternative neighborhood activities that are supervised by responsible adults,

promoting relationships with pro-social youth through cooperative learning techniques in the classroom, and using mentoring programs to disrupt relationships with high-risk peers (O'Donnell 2005). Social networks are formed in activities with others, so activity settings provide the means to both alter potentially harmful networks and to facilitate positive relationships in the cultural communities of youth, as well as adults.

Cultural community psychology also can be helpful to understand how cultural communities evolve over time. Maynard (2005) analyzed how socioeconomic changes affect activity settings to show how one change created others and affected child development. In her work with Zinacantec families in Mexico, as tourism changed the economy, weaving became a source of income and changed the value of what was considered "women's work." Activity settings changed to market the woven products. When some children then went to school, their interactions at home with younger siblings changed. They talked with them and provided explanations more than children who had not attended school. Verbal activities learned in school settings changed sibling activity settings at home.

Sometimes changes are rapid due to clashes and displacement of people from one cultural community to another. For example, the psychological traumas often reported by refugees and immigrants may be understood by the rapid cultural changes in shared meaning, when activity settings, related social networks, and daily routines are disrupted (Tharp 2007–2008).

It is worth noting that although all of the examples in this section were with different ethnic groups (a Native American tribe, Native Hawaiians, Zinacantec families), juvenile delinquents, refugees, and immigrants, the focus was on their activity settings, not their ethnicity or social category. Ethnicity and social categories can be useful markers of some shared experience, but typically are too heterogeneous to be cultural communities (Cohen 2010; O'Donnell 2006; Markus and Hamedani 2007). As individuals, we represent many cultural communities as defined by interests, networks, and activities, as well as ethnicity, gender, minority status, generation, etc. (cf., Okazaki and Saw 2011).

A more accurate understanding of our experience can be found in the shared meanings developed through our history and activities. In the first example in this section, although the youth and adults were both members of the same Native American tribe, the differences in their history and activities led to their lack of intersubjectivity with each other. The six parts of the strategy for change were all based on the creation of new activity settings and only one, using the traditional role of elders, also was based on their common ethnicity.

In the example of the school for Native Hawaiian children, the activity settings of the school were culturally unfamiliar to the young students leading to the successful intervention to redesign classroom activities to be more similar to those the children experienced at home. In this example, although the children were members of the same ethnic group, it was a specific activity, the care of siblings at home, that was of particular importance. In the example with Zinacantec families, changes in sibling activities at home were best understood in relation to the activities of the older siblings in school settings. All of these examples show how a focus on activity settings can lead to different forms of assessment, intervention, and understanding, and contribute to cultural community psychology.

A cultural community psychology would address the need for greater emphasis on culture in community psychology that several community psychologists have noted (e.g., Bhawuk and Mrazek 2005; Jackson and Kim 2009; Kral et al. 2011; Mankowski et al. 2011; O'Donnell 2006). The benefits of a cultural community psychology were discussed in a review of an interdisciplinary linkage with cross-cultural psychology:

> Cross-cultural psychology offers community psychology well developed theories and concepts to guide the study of culture and cultural diversity, knowledge about how to form internationally or culturally diverse teams of researchers, and useful concepts for understanding cultural values, processes and practices in research with diverse communities. On the other hand, community psychology offers to cross-cultural psychology a set of values and conceptual frameworks useful for studying the relationship between social problems and individual functioning in diverse communities, strategies for conducting social systems intervention and change, and research methods useful for evaluating these efforts. These similarities and differences produce a tension rich with creative possibility. (Mankowski et al. 2011, pp. 127–128).

This potential for the rich development of cultural community psychology, well beyond the possibilities of cultural and community psychology alone, would be facilitated by concepts that integrate the disciplines. The concept of activity settings, with the shared meanings of intersubjectivity of central importance, is suggested as a basis for an integration that expands the possibilities for community psychologists to collaborate in, assess, and understand the cultural aspects of community settings.

A better understanding of the cultural aspects of community settings would enhance the design of our theories, methods, and strategies of change, to better

understand human experience. A cultural community psychology would enrich our theories, such as the psychological sense of community (Fisher et al. 2002; Sarason 1974; Townley et al. 2011) and conservation of resources (Corlew 2009; Hobfoll 2001; Hobfoll and Lilly 1993). Both theories would benefit from an examination of the activity settings, in which a psychological sense of community develops or people come to value the conservation of their resources. Which activities facilitate or inhibit the intersubjectivity of feeling a sense of community or the desire to conserve resources? In cultural communities, what are the shared meanings of a sense of community or the conservation of resources? How can the activities be changed to increase a sense of community? How does the conservation of resources vary with changes in activities? These are examples of the type of questions that would benefit from a cultural community psychology.

Inevitably, culturally collaborative relationships will lead to new forms of prevention, influence, and strategies of change. An excellent example of a culturally effective project that illustrates the process of developing a change strategy based on shared meanings, in partnership with participants, is one on sobriety with Alaska Natives (Mohatt et al. 2004). In this participatory action project, participants became full research partners from design to interpretation. The focus on sobriety, instead of alcoholism, a focus advocated by the Alaska Native partners, contributed to the collaborative relations and the success of the project.

This example illustrates how cultural community psychology could benefit action research in the field. While partnerships are important throughout community psychology, they are essential for the design, methods, and implementation of projects in other cultural communities (Reich and Reich 2006; Trimble and Mohatt 2006; Wexler 2011). Rapport and mutual trust are the keys to forming these collaborative relationships and, ultimately, to the success of the project. Respect for the cultural communities of the participants, expressed through collaboration, helps to establish rapport and mutual trust, and to avoid considering differences as deficits.

Culture, in its many forms, is embedded in all communities. Therefore, all of the theories, research, and action projects of community psychology potentially could benefit from cultural community psychology. Concepts that integrate culture and community are needed for this potential to be realized and to be the basis for a viable cultural community psychology. The concept of activity setting, with the shared meaning of intersubjectivity, is offered as one means for integration. We invite others to contribute their concepts for an integration of cultural community psychology.

Any means used for integration will have methodological implications and present interdisciplinary challenges (Kral et al. 2011; Mankowski et al. 2011; Maton et al. 2006). Both are discussed next.

Methodological Implications and Challenges

Cultural community psychology will entail a wider use of interdisciplinary methods (cf., D'Aunno et al. 1985; Seidman et al. 1993; Shinn and Toohey 2003). Luke (2005) reviewed AJCP articles and concluded that most of the methods used did not capture context well. He suggested a greater use of methods, such as "multilevel modeling, geographic information systems (GIS), social network analysis, and cluster analysis" (p. 185). Hawe et al. (2009) suggested interventions as events in the history of a system that change networks, activities, and shared meanings. They concluded that studying the pre-intervention context and tracking changes in networks and activities, with network analysis and ethnography as especially important methods, could lead to a science and practice of "context evaluation".

In addition to these excellent suggestions, several other methods would be valuable to assess intersubjectivity and shared meanings. Both concepts develop and change over time, so knowledge of the history of activity settings in a community can be essential for the success of an intervention (Messinger 2006). With a few notable exceptions, (e.g., Gergen 1973; Levine and Levine 1970), historiography (Breisach 2007) has been a little used method in psychology; it could have a more prominent place in cultural community psychology. The shared meanings of cultural communities can be learned not only through activity settings, but also through archives. Therefore, archival analysis would be useful in understanding the cultural history of a community (Blouin and Rosenberg 2007).

Meaning is central in cultural community psychology, so semiotics (Manning 1987) can be useful to study the symbols in activity settings to assess and understand intersubjectivity. Interpretation is key to assess meaning, so the analysis of discourse (Wood and Kroger 2000), content (Packer 1985), concepts (Trochim 1989), and narratives (Polkinghome 1988) also can be useful.

The potential benefits of cultural community psychology are not without formidable challenges. The time to develop collaborative relationships, especially with partners with important cultural differences, the use of less familiar methods and roles, and the resolution of ethical dilemmas can increase the complexity of any project exponentially (see Mohatt et al. 2004). Publishing pressures, grant cycles, and securing the understanding of institutional review boards and grant agencies, add to the challenges. Fundamental to the challenges of cultural community psychology

is the change required in the traditional epistemology of psychology with the decline of logical empiricism (Kral 2007–2008; Tebes 2005). Traditionally, psychologists have taken pride in objectivity and the scientific method of the experimental model. By definition, shared meanings and intersubjectivity are subjective and the methods to assess them less familiar to psychology. Context is interdisciplinary. Challenges indeed!

Overcoming these challenges, however, can contribute to the transformation and advancement of community psychology. Stokes (1997) traced the modern history of our distinction between basic and applied science. After offering examples of scientific advances by applied researchers, such as Pasteur, he suggested that basic and applied science be combined in the same pursuit. Price and Behrens (2003, p. 222) advocated this model for community psychology: "where no action step is contemplated without questioning about its theoretical significance and no speculation about underlying processes occurs without asking about its action implications." This is insightful advice for cultural community researchers and practitioners as they integrate research and practice to develop culturally compatible projects through collaborative relationships with participants.

The potential and promise of cultural community psychology is to advance science and practice by researchers and practitioners working collaboratively in context with participants. This potential and promise has been noted by both those in cultural studies who understand culture "as an autonomous set of meanings and practices with its own logic. This logic is paralleled by the transformation of culture as a concept from the margins of the humanities and social sciences to one at its very heart" (Barker 2000, p. 65), and in community psychology:

> Just as community is the context in which psychological processes and individual psychologies come to be, so community psychology is the context in which a true psychology can be constructed. Not always in the center of the mother discipline, community psychology is squarely at the point of the larger domain of contemporary thought. Not only is it positioned to act for the amelioration of social problems, but also for the advancement of the intellectual life of all social science (O'Donnell et al. 1993, pp. 517–518).

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