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Culture and Community Interactions: Essentials for understanding in a globalised world

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Introduction to the issue

CULTURE AND COMMUNITY INTERACTIONS: ESSENTIALS FOR UNDERSTANDING IN A GLOBALIZED WORLD

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Globalization typically refers to the idea that the world has become an increasingly interconnected place – spurred on by technological innovations, the flow of global capital, affordable travel, and the pervasiveness of mass media and internet communication technologies. It has been noted across disciplines and areas of study that such interconnection has led to increasing levels of intercultural contact involving cultural exchange, and the development of new cultural forms through the process of hybridization (see Bhabha, 1994). This moving and mixing of cultures has highlighted culture and cultural matters in everyday life in countries around the world. To this end, *Community Psychology in Global Perspective's* inaugural issue aims to make explicit the ways in which culture acts as a framework for organizing and guiding our experiences. The Journal, and specifically this issue, seeks to utilise and develop ecological, critical and constructionist perspectives to enhance our understanding and promotion of individual and community well-being, and advance work aimed at the creation of positive social change and social justice. This special issue focuses on the centrality of culture for understanding psychological and social processes in community settings. Culture involves implicit shared beliefs, attitudes, and values that serve as frames that organize and underpin the identity, the experience, knowledge, and conduct of individuals, groups, and communities. This issue is, in fact, devoted to exploring how culture (in its various definitions, either as core societal values, set of adaptive tools, or interrelationships of individuals and contexts, as well as individual and social-group processes) in many and subtle ways, informs interpersonal, intergroup and institutional relationships, as well as collective processes across all community settings.

You will find in this special issue fascinating representations of these concepts in the form of

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one theoretical paper, two commentaries, and five research articles. The introductory paper by Shelly Harrell "Culture, wellness, and world peace: Introduction to the person-environment-and-culture emergence theoretical perspective" offers a wide framework for exploring the complexity and the multi-faceted nature of culture. She briefly analyzes the most used definitions of culture and their implications for psychological and social interventions. Culture is discussed in terms of its varied definitions across disciplines, its functions for individuals and groups, and the different approaches and related challenges in studying it. Harrell underlines the risk of culture being considered merely as an additional variable for data analysis, arguing that culture impacts the entire research process at its very core. In her view, individual and social histories play an important role in shaping feelings, behaviours, and organizational dimensions. By emphasizing how culture also manifests as multiple organizing systems, and that we all belong and are influenced by multiple macro- and micro-collectivities within which systems of culture exist, Harrell brings to the fore the notion of *intersectionality* and, connected with it, the dynamics of *power* that emerge from interactions between multiple, co-occurring oppressed statuses. In the same vein, Michelle Fine, in her commentary "Glocal provocations: Critical reflections on community based research and intervention designed at the (glocal) intersections of the global dynamics and local cultures", recalls the multiplicities and intersectionalities that interact within community. From a critical perspective, she links these notions to community work across cultures and, again, to the issues of power and privilege that cut across participatory research processes, and the relationships of community members and researchers.

In "Considering culture and context when supporting the development of communities", André-Anne Parent and colleagues present an innovative health promotion strategy underway in Quebec, Canada, and discuss it from an ethnographic perspective. The authors "advocate for a culturally sensitive strategy that focuses on the contexts where the action takes place and considers the culture of place as a central element when wanting to improve population health and health equity" (p. 16). The notion of *culture of place*, which includes language, meaning, experience, and subjectivity, stands out as the pivotal concept of analysis, and also as the key factor for designing and implementing effective and socially just health policies. Another author from Canada, Joel Badali, offers a critical view on the well known *contact hypothesis*, through the analysis of an intergroup experience involving indigenous and non-indigenous youth. The article, titled "Decolonising the contact hypothesis: A critical interpretation of settler youths' experiences of immersion in indigenous communities in Canada", presents this experience in the wider historical context of the colonization perpetrated against the Aboriginal people, thus presenting the contact hypothesis from a unique, critical post-colonial emancipatory perspective. Badali's adoption of this perspective is important because it focuses on the dynamics of power in research and practice by questioning basic assumptions about whose voices are included, on whose terms are findings evaluated, and how those processes that have taken for granted contributed to ongoing oppression of indigenous groups. The paper points to the importance of this paradigm in rethinking and reworking established concepts and approaches. The paper illustrates how these tools, such as deconstruction, can be used to make visible the unwitting reproduction of oppression in settler narratives, but also to identify possibilities of building relationships to work toward liberation.

In "A reflection on the impact of culture on campus-community partnerships to build evaluation capacity in rural Pennsylvania and urban Cairo" Carrie Forden and Amy Carrillo introduce the readers to a self-reflective use of Evaluation Capacity Building (ECB) and appreciative inquiry both in a U.S. rural community and in Cairo, Egypt. This cross-cultural comparison aims to shed light on some of the difficulties in a health and wellbeing evaluation

project encountered by researchers who do not belong to the community under study. Among the variety of cultural processes that affect the implementation of ECB initiatives, the crucial power-culture issue is raised again. The authors acknowledge that systems of power are embedded in culture and offer a critical view of their own privileged position in community work and research. In exploring how these issues occur in both international and local contexts, they also direct our attention to the fact that cultural differences exist on both the large and obvious, as well as the small and subtle scale, and remind us that cultural divides are something that we all traverse on a daily basis. Indirectly, they also acknowledge that a critical understanding of how culture operates in a specific context can explain resistance to change, lack of reciprocal trust, and difficulties in community building.

Finally, in the last research article by Stefano Tartaglia and Monica Rossi, titled "The local identity functions in the age of globalization: A study on a local culture", culture and cultural identity are framed in light of what Fine refers to as the glocalization process, and viewed as a potential source of uncertainty and self-fragmentation. At the crossroads of different disciplines including psychology, anthropology, sociology, and cultural studies, this study integrates the theoretical framework of Social Identity Theory and Dialogical Self Theory with the theories of globalization. Set in a culturally unique territorial community that extends over three European countries, the study highlights different identity-building strategies adopted by differently positioned people in the community, and elaborates on the different functions served by local identities in a globalized world. The authors highlight notions of place, history, and memory in the construction of local identities in a globalizing context.

The collection of articles of this inaugural issue touches on research, theory, and practice. Taken together, the articles offer a wide geographic and theoretical range, and a variety of quantitative and qualitative research approaches. Together they also highlight the role of community researchers in social intervention, and research as intervention, and the need for situated, multi-disciplinary approaches to research and action. That is, the papers emphasize the need for taking into account the subjective aspects of communities and groups, the specificity of context, and the impact of research practices on research and community outcomes. Culture-based social interventions that are situated, produced in partnership, and mutually reinforcing of relations between people and culture, will be more effective in meeting people's needs. Further, these papers show how culture-based interventions enable different social actors (including community psychologists) to promote awareness about the needs of diverse groups, to mobilize resources, and to create opportunities for people to voice their aspirations, wishes, and perspectives. Through the application of this critical "cultural sensitivity", scholars, activists, psychologists, social scientists, and interventionists involved in social planning can achieve more respectful and empowering community outcomes. Given this, the aims, the tools, and the methodologies of community psychology can be especially helpful in addressing and supporting community needs.

This inaugural journal issue brings together work from a variety of cultural locations and perspectives, including different stakeholders who are both committed to community organizations and scholars of theory and practice. The authors use theories and concepts of social psychology (i.e., contact theory, intergroup relationships, social identity theory, dialogical self), community psychology (i.e., sense of community), sociology (e.g., globalization, multi culture) along with processes/practices and goals of health promotion, community development, and intercultural dialogue. The articles also draw on interpretive and critical approaches to inquiry such as participatory research and appreciative inquiry, thereby showing the power and potential of culturally attuned research and intervention to foster inclusion. The contributions, as a whole,

offer an opportunity to reflect on the implications and effects of culture in social and psychological interactions, and in the research process. Collectively, the articles embody the first attempt of this journal to voice, support, and encourage a global perspective in community studies.

References

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