

From “Water Boiling in a Peruvian Town” to “Letting them Die”: Culture, Community Intervention, and the Metabolic Balance Between Patience and Zeal

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Abstract While the concept of culture has long been central to community psychology research and intervention, it has most frequently referred to the communities in which such work occurs. The purpose of this paper is to reframe this discussion by viewing community interventions as instances of intercultural contact between the culture of science, reflected in community intervention research, and the culture of the communities in which those interventions occur. Following a brief discussion of the complexities of culture as a concept, two illustrative stories of failed community interventions are provided to highlight the centrality of cultural and contextual understanding as prelude to community intervention. These stories, set 50 years apart, reflect the depth and pervasive influence of both the culture of science and the culture of communities. Next, a series of propositions about the culture of social science as a partial reflection of the broader culture of the United States are offered, and their implications for the conduct of community interventions drawn. The paper concludes with a series of recommendations which, together, provide an ecological mind-set for taking culture seriously in community interventions. Central to this mind set are the importance of focusing on communities rather than programs and emphasizing the intervention goal of choice over change.

Keywords Community intervention · Community culture · Ecology · Culture of science

From its inception, the field of community psychology has attempted to develop conceptual frameworks that highlight local culture and cultural history as central to understanding people in context. Recent events such as the co-sponsorship of the 2007 SCRA Biennial conference with the International Association for Cross-Cultural Psychology reinforce the importance placed on the foundational nature of the culture concept in our work.

The purpose of this paper is to interrogate the concept of culture for the development, implementation, and evaluation of community interventions. Doing so not only shines a spotlight on the concept of culture reflected in the local ecology of communities; it also draws attention to the culture implicit in the kinds of scientific perspectives we bring to our intervention efforts. As the critical theorists tell us, it is important to include the culture of social science in a discussion of culture more broadly because our community intervention efforts may themselves be usefully viewed as cultural acts reflected in how we conduct such work. Thus, the culture of communities, the culture of social science, and the relationship between the two constitute the heart of this paper. Its intent is to provoke discussion and debate about vitally important choices we make when we apply the culture concept to our communities and to our community interventions.

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The Culture Conundrum

Culture as a concept has never been easy to pin down. Indeed, Lonner and Malpass (1994) found over 175 definitions of culture in the scholarly literature. The more

traditional definition of culture is supplied by Geertz (1973) as an “historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men (sic) communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes towards life (p. 89)” (from Trimble 2007, p. 248). From this perspective, culture is a collective concept arising from conditions, shared experiences, and memories that are common to a group of people and transmitted intergenerationally. Here, emphasis is placed on the enduring, the traditional activities and their meanings, the incorporated understandings accumulated over time and passed on through socialization practices, stories, norms, institutions, and celebrations.

However, post modern perspectives on culture have constructed culture with multiple other emphases, many of which posit sociopolitical and structural frames as central organizing concepts (Prilleltensky and Prilleltensky 2006; Bond and Harrell 2006; Watts and Flanagan 2007). Here, issues of race, class, gender, historical oppression, and the distribution and use of power emerge as organizing explanatory concepts and interpretive lenses through which culture is experienced and understood (Merry 2009). Culture is more likely to be viewed as fluid and experienced differentially by individuals depending on context and circumstance, though always within the larger cultural context of power relationships.

Regardless of what specific analytic frame is used to define culture, two of my assumptions need to be outlined. First, culture is a broad concept, community a local one, such that over time and across varying ecologies, the same cultural group living in different ecologies may develop different cultural identities and behaviors (Birman et al. 2005). Understanding local community culture thus involves both a working knowledge of broad historical contexts and a local appreciation of individual and subgroup differences in the expression of culture, whether they are framed in terms of oppressive histories or community celebratory traditions.

Second, as Fiske, the respected anthropologist, reminds us, cultural attitudes, behaviors, and world views are often unconscious and seem “natural” from the inside (Fiske 1995). Fiske likens it to someone from this country being asked to explain to a cultural outsider why we carve faces in pumpkins on Halloween—and why pumpkins rather than watermelons; Why on October 31st? As he puts it: “Could you—or most American informants—give any answer that reflects an articulated understanding of (such) rituals that was in your mind before I asked the questions?” (p. 4). Another small example: After 20 years of marriage I still find myself occasionally whistling in the house, only to be reminded by my wife that such behavior brings on bad luck in her culture of origin and I should cut it out. If you

ask me whether or not I know of this cultural belief, I will tell you “yes”. But I do it anyway out of habit. It comes “naturally” to me.

With respect to the broader culture conundrum, however, one could construct the behaviors and meaning of Halloween as cultural ritual or commodity capitalism,¹ both of which having some merit as partial explanations. However, Fiske’s larger point is the degree to which we become enculturated to a multitude of assumptions, beliefs, roles, and behaviors that seem “natural” and subsequently unexamined, whether they be oppressive sex role relationships or a collectivistic appreciation for the concept of who is included in the term “family”.

The same gradual enculturation process occurs over time in science and among scientists, as Kuhn (1970) and Wittgenstein (1953) have suggested. Kuhn suggests that the practice of science is based on latent paradigm assumptions that only time, exploration within the paradigm, and the accumulation of anomalies can illuminate. Scientists usually incorporate these assumptions into their work as givens that are subsequently incorporated into textbooks as exemplars used to enculturate the next generation of scientists. In like manner, Wittgenstein suggests we incorporate a grammar we learn and within which we act without being able to consciously articulate the rules of the game. We have many examples of how our initial enthusiasm for methods and concepts was later complicated by the realization that the pursuit of knowledge is more diverse and varied than we initially thought. Indeed, the post modern work on the culture concept reflects exactly such a process. Within psychology, for example, recent writings have questioned such assumptions as:

- The Randomized Controlled Trial (RCT) is a gold standard for testing community interventions no matter what the population, issue, or community (Rapkin and Trickett 2005)
- Evidence based practice is necessarily better than local indigenous practice (Miller and Shinn 2005)
- Becoming bicultural is the most adaptive acculturation strategy (Birman 1994)
- Universal preventive interventions decrease rather than increase group disparities (Ceci and Papierno 2005)

In each of these examples—and there are many more—what began as an accepted or received bit of wisdom—and the assumptions underlying that wisdom—has been or is being replaced by a richer, more complex, and less tidy appreciation based on our accumulated knowledge about the great diversity of human experience and our efforts to be useful. In this process of digging deeper, we learn of the

¹ The author wishes to thank an anonymous reviewer for emphasizing the post modern discourse on culture.

limitations of what we had previously taken for granted. Like the culture concept writ large, this process in science and among scientists has been mobile rather than static over time and has moved from self-conscious ideas to unexamined beliefs that are now being re-opened for critical examination.

Thus, the culture of communities and the culture of science frame the subsequent discussion and represent the “heart of the matter” of community intervention. The culture concept has come a long way from being the esoteric province of anthropologists reporting on the mores and traditions of groups in far away places with strange sounding names. It has become concept interrogated by social theorists, interpreted through multiple lenses, and remains alive and well, though contested, as a world view for understanding the communities in which we live. Its importance is reflected in review guidelines at the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) involving inclusion criteria for research studies, special issues of journals and indeed whole journals, and annual multicultural summits convened by American Psychological Association (APA); we see its multiple sociopolitical meanings every night on television in the battle over immigration; it lurks in the insider–outsider debates reflected in who and who can’t use the N word and in what context; we find its celebration in the success of Division 45 of the APA, including its own APA journal, and in conferences such as the SCRA Biennial meetings. The question now is not whether culture is central to our understanding of the human condition, but how it might be conceptualized and how we act, based on those conceptions, to improve community life.

But culture is not only out there “in our communities”; it is reflected in the ways in which we go about trying to understand and be helpful in those communities. The culture of our scientific work thus becomes a topic for interrogation as well, with community intervention representing an intercultural encounter. The stories that follow represent efforts to explicate this basic notion.

One Tale of Two Stories

I want to locate culture in the context of community intervention, as most if not all of the work done in community psychology is either immediately or ultimately intended to improve life in our communities. The vehicles for this task are two case studies of community intervention written 50 years apart: “Water Boiling in a Peruvian Town”, written in 1955 by social anthropologist Ed Wellin, and “Letting them die” (2003), written recently by social psychologist Catherine Campbell. These two studies were selected from the many available options for multiple reasons. First, they represent reports almost 50 years apart

that demonstrate that cultural analyses of community interventions have had a long history but as of yet mixed impact on the paradigms underlying the work.² Second, they provide contrasting views of culture that clarify its constructed nature; the anthropological account of Ed Wellin, more steeped in the traditional concept of culture as tradition, and the account by Campbell more infused with postmodern constructions of culture as reflected in gendered historical oppressive dynamics, gendered relationships, and power dynamics among groups with competing agendas and interests.

“Water Boiling in a Peruvian town” portrays the 3 years ethnographic study of the failure of a well-intentioned public health intervention to get women in the rural Peruvian town of Los Molinas to boil water. It rested on a solid evidence-based practice regarding the health benefits of boiling water and the educational assumption that if people understood these health benefits they would be convinced to boil water. The local risk was high, as most people in the town did not boil water. The intervention was delivered by a health worker, Nelida. Quoting the author: “When Nelida first took up residence in Los Molinos, only a few of 200 households were boiling their drinking water. After 2 years in Los Molinos, she has succeeded in getting 11 more families to boil water. As health professionals see the situation, Nelida has only to prevail on housewives to add a simple habit to the sequence of preexisting water habits, that is, to get them to boil their water sometime before securing and consuming it. Surely this task should not be so difficult. Why, then, have so few been persuaded and so many not?” (p. 72).

Wellin approached this quandary by assessing the ecology of the lives of the local women, focusing on the motives and circumstances of the women who boiled the water and those who did not. His findings shed light on the extent to which the assumptions of the intervention collided with culture and local context in varied ways.

For example, in Los Molinos, boiled water had a specific shared cultural meaning. It was solely used to treat certain health conditions but not for reasons related to the germ theory of disease; rather, it was linked to the local complex system of cultural distinctions between hot and cold. “The basic principle is that many things in nature are hot, cold, or something intermediate, quite apart from actual temperature... Raw water is cold; cooked water is hot” (p. 78). Cooked water in Los Molinos had, over time, become linked with illness, and from earliest childhood children learned to loathe boiled water except under certain medical circumstances.

² There are, of course, counterexamples, such as Mohatt et al. 2004 and Gone (in press), but these are still far more the exception than the rule.

Cultural beliefs about water combined with social stratification to frame how the intervention was perceived and received. For example, one woman who decided to boil water (a success from the intervention perspective) was ostracized for doing so because her decision violated the local meaning of hot and cold water and thus made her a cultural outlaw. But whether violation of this more general cultural belief made a difference in women's lives depended also on the social strata from which they came. Thus, a second woman who decided to boil water was not ostracized for this decision because she was already marginalized by nature of her being part of a disparaged and marginalized group. Her decision simply confirmed in the eyes of others their prior understanding that she was indeed worthy of marginalization.

But the vast majority of women for whom the intervention was not effective fell into two categories: those who would boil but couldn't because of the nature of their daily subsistence routines, and those who could boil but wouldn't because of the long standing traditions and customs surrounding the meaning and use of boiled water. Both these limiting conditions reflected deep cultural beliefs as well as the local ecology of women's lives. These cultural beliefs and local routines collided with and trumped the intervention and its own implicit underlying assumptions about (1) the persuasive value of scientific data and (2) the belief that the women of Los Molinas simply lacked information about this evidence-based practice, and would change their behavior when informed of it.

Wellin's tale also shows that the impact of the intervention was affected not only by specific cultural beliefs and the ecology of women's lives but by the gendered ecology of the town's leadership and its lack of interest in the intervention. As he stated it, "The town's officers, a mayor and town council, are unconcerned either as officials or as men with women's household routines" (p. 97). He concludes "that housewives should boil drinking water and that healthy people should drink it are matters that run the gauntlet of many factors, including the group's ecology, its economy, social differentiations, and cultural convictions and behavior" (p. 101).

A similar tale of culture-intervention interaction is told 50 years later in Catherine's Campbell's book "Letting Them Die", an account of a complex HIV/AIDS intervention in South Africa. The title comes from a grim slogan she heard in Johannesburg: "In the old South Africa we killed people, now we are letting them die (p. 188)".

The project was a well-funded effort to decrease the incidence of STDs in a rural mining area outside of Johannesburg. The intervention relied theoretically on two canons of scientific consensus concerning community interventions in HIV/AIDS: (a) peer education, an

approach often taken in HIV interventions because of peer credibility, ability to access hard-to-reach groups, and as a strategy for increasing local competencies and resources, and (b) inclusion of multiple local stakeholders as collaborative partners in community activities supportive of the peer education efforts. Miners, sex workers, and youth were the targeted at risk groups.

Over a 3 years period the program impact was either small, of no consequence, or negative, depending on the targeted group and the outcome of concern. Peer education was to be reflected in the use of sex workers to educate other sex workers around the importance of condom use and youth peer educators working with other youth in the schools. Here, the impact of sex workers getting clients to use condoms was slightly positive, though there was no impact on condom use with their partners. The potentially empowering notion of having youth lead discussions about sex, a culturally taboo topic to discuss with parents, was not accomplished because school officials rather than youth insisted on assuming the role of group leaders. Miners experienced an increase in some STDs over the 3 years course of the program. In addition, the intention of having stakeholders work together for community betterment was largely unfulfilled.

In assessing the overall intervention and its effects, Campbell began with the question "Why is it that people knowingly engage in sexual behavior that could lead to a slow and premature death?" (p. 1). To frame her story, she developed what she called a "social psychology of participation" (p. 55) that should sound familiar to community psychologists. To quote her: "Social identity, empowerment/critical consciousness, social capital, and power constitute the starting point for a 'social psychology of participation' (p. 55). Her book describes how, in each of these areas, culture and local ecology shaped the meaning of these terms and undermined the effectiveness of the intervention.

For example, efforts to get miners to engage in safe sex confronted the reality of their everyday lives, portrayed as extremely dangerous, socially isolated (most leave families behind in the city to do this work); and living with an ever-present danger of mining accidents. Many saw friends killed or maimed. This daily anticipation of death and high social isolation was reflected in their macho perspective on sexuality and need for what Campbell calls "flesh-to-flesh contact". Such contact represented not only a desire for pleasure and respite from the storm of daily living; culturally, sex was also seen as helping regulate a balanced supply of blood in the body, thus contributing to physical and mental health. For these miners, the notion of safe sex was far down the list of everyday cares; indeed, these miners were already engaging in a life that could lead to premature death. In this context, the question of what

would lead them to adopt the intervention priority of condom use becomes, for Campbell, almost rhetorical, and the intervention did little good.

In like manner, sex workers too faced a set of life options that constrained their ability to protect their bodies as they earned their living. The flesh-to-flesh need of the men, the idea that the customer is always right, and the understanding that any man could take his business elsewhere, were immediate constraints on their ability to negotiate condom usage and, indeed, pitted them against one another. In addition, their marginalized social identity in the community contributed to the multiple layers of disadvantage that made the role of peer educator extremely difficult and conflict-ridden.

Campbell provides similar cultural and contextual analyses of the constraints affecting the youth peer education program and the collaborative partnership among local stakeholders, which fell prey to local power politics, conflicting organizational agendas, power differentials between stakeholders and project employees that disempowered employee voices, and organizational problems of coordination. In all these areas of analysis, she places the fundamental concepts of her “social psychology of participation” in social and cultural context. She reminds us that the notion of social capital needs to be placed in the context of what she calls “anti-social capital”, those social forces that undermine local ability to form social capital through social stratification, scarce resources, social identities, and group histories. But her bottom line, like that of Wellin, was that two formative assumptions underlying the intervention—the value of peer educators and developing a multi-stakeholder collaboration—were not rooted in local culture and context and were simply not feasible.

Wellin and Campbell’s conclusions reflect their differing constructions of culture. Wellin suggested that “The study suggests that detailed knowledge of social and cultural factors of the community is vital to the efficiency of the water boiling program. It also suggests that useful wisdom comes from not simply knowing the scattered items of cultural belief and practice but from the appreciation that they constitute a system in which the individual parts are linked to form a meaningful structure. (p. 102). Campbell framed her conclusion in a Freirian manner, suggesting that “critical consciousness is a precondition for the collective renegotiation of sexual and social identities” (p. 133). She concluded with a question flowing from that perspective. “Can health be improved without eliminating the wide social inequalities that provide the context within which ill-health so often flourishes? (p. 38).

What can we learn from these two accounts about culture and community intervention? Both Wellin and Campbell add richness to the consideration of culture in community interventions. Both underscore the central

conceptual importance of conceiving of community interventions as sociocultural events, as intercultural encounters between intervention and context. Importantly, neither viewed the community intervention within the same paradigm as those who developed it. Had they done so, they, and we, would have missed much if not all of the intervention-context interdependence. Rather, they stood outside and tried to make sense of the intervention as it unfolded.

Beneath each account is a fundamental premise of ecological community psychology not clearly evident in the interventions on which Wellin and Campbell reported: a commitment to invest in learning about the culture of the communities in which we work as prelude to attempting to be useful. How we specifically conceive of culture is an ongoing challenge for the field, and many ongoing voices are currently contributing. Regardless, learning how culture is expressed in local context takes patience. It takes time. And it takes commitment. The challenges of this task may be different for those of us who self-identify with the communities in which we work and those of us who do not, although in the multicultural communities of today, we are all outsiders in some ways. They may be different depending on the specific meaning of culture brought to the task. But if we are to take culture seriously in our community work, we need to adopt a professional life style commensurate with the task. As Fiske (1995) suggests, learning culture involves relating, participating, listening, observing, reflecting, thriving on being out of our comfort zone, and creating time and settings to reflect on our experiences. Such efforts reflect a respect for the local community culture and provide a stance from which to develop locally feasible and meaningful work.

The Culture of Social Science in the U.S.

Let me now make some assumptions about another culture, the culture of social science in the U.S. context, and how it promotes or discourages such patience-based work. For what Wellin and Campbell also point out is that community research and intervention within the social and behavioral sciences has a culture of its own that guides the ways in which work is conducted; that the world views underlying our approaches to community intervention have themselves implicit models of the meaning, importance, and role of culture in the intervention process.

Ghandi was once asked about what he thought of Western civilization. His response was “I think it would be a good idea”. Historically, we in the U.S. have also thought that it would be a good idea, but usually with a specific dominant culture or civilization in mind. It is certainly reasonable to view our culture in sociopolitical terms, and

community psychology has a significant track record on this issue (Watts 1994; Nelson and Prilleltensky 2005). There is no denying the assault of slavery, for example, on the cultural traditions and identity of African-Americans, or historical government efforts to remove Native American children from their families and place them in schools designed to separate them from their culture and language. Nor should we forget the complicity of psychologists using tools of the trade to screen immigrants at Ellis Island a century ago. These issues, as we well know, did not only occur in the past, were not politically neutral, and need to be kept in the forefront of our community psychology consciousness.

But what I want to focus on here are other, perhaps seemingly more mundane, aspects of our culture that are reflected in community interventions and, I believe, constrain our ability to center our work in the culture of diverse communities. Here are my nominations for three cultural influences on the culture of science reflected in our beliefs about community interventions at this historical moment. Such assertions are always partial in their sweep, but are, I hope, heuristically useful today.

(A) *Our culture is eager, hopeful, and pragmatic:* Our cultural history has been one of feeling that we can control our fate; that we can solve problems. We further are deeply pragmatic, both as a people and as community psychologists. Knowledge is supposed to serve a pragmatic function; if it's not useful, what good is it? Or, as my 17 years old son says, "when, really, am I going to use what I know about the political structure of ancient Sparta?" NIMH recognizes this tension between knowledge producers and knowledge consumers in its current focus on translational research, a term semantically built on the understanding that research knowledge is often lost in translation; that different cultures speaking different languages are involved. This is not a new tendency. It was recognized long ago by Freud, who was concerned that should psychoanalysis be transported to the United States, it would too quickly be converted into a therapeutic tool for individual improvement rather than retain its focus as a method for theory development about the human psyche.

One specific implication of this cultural tendency is to go for the quick fix rather than the long haul; to look for "the solution", the magic bullet, the program with wide niche breadth. However, the Wellin and Campbell stories emphasize that social problems are "wicked problems" (Fischer 1993) whose resolutions themselves are multiple, context specific, and ones whose short term solutions may often also perpetuate existing structural inequalities and/or create additional problems. The patience required to fathom this complexity may be of little solace to the school principal who must do something now about school violence, or teen pregnancy, or test scores, but the urgency of

the situation does not necessarily mean that doing something is better than doing nothing. The Wellin and Campbell stories tell us that it is quite difficult to do good, even if you have good intentions and are well-funded. Further, they show that the unintended consequences of efforts to do good compete with the intended ones in terms of community-level impact.

This tension between the perceived need to do something and the understanding that we need to figure out how to anticipate the unintended consequences of our actions represents what Kelly (2006) has called the metabolic balance between patience and zeal. As Kelly puts it: "being really helpful involves cycling of patience for achieving long-term goals with a zeal for pursuing short-term objectives" (p. 109).

My point is NOT that problems should go unattended, that we should throw up our hands in despair of making the world a better place, or that we should all become philosophers. Rather, my point is that this cultural tendency to go for the quick fix can inadvertently push the metabolic balance of patience toward an eager, hopeful, and pragmatic zeal and inadvertently downplay the patience required to learn the culture, as the Wellin and Campbell accounts strongly suggest is necessary.

(B) *Our culture is a capitalist, entrepreneurial culture and so, now, is much of our science of community intervention:* At this historical moment, the old phrase "I'm from the government and I want to help you" is increasingly true of community intervention work, as many community interventionists work for the government in terms of both salary and topic. Discussion of the implications of the union of science and state has a long history. Within our field, Sarason (1976) "Community psychology and the anarchist insight" and, more recently, Rappaport's (2005) "Community psychology is (thank god) more than science" have addressed some of the consequences of this close relationship for sense of community in the university, academic freedom, and the absence of critical social reflection of much of this work.

More generally, the uneasy marriage of state and social science has a long history. Almost 40 years ago, Sanford (1970), in his classic paper "Whatever happened to action research" offered the following assessment: "The funding of project research ought to be abandoned. It has spoiled the academic community, damaged—almost beyond repair—undergraduate education, given status to trivia, created an expensive bureaucracy, and corrupted thousands of investigators. This change will have to come from above for the funding apparatus has no built-in mechanisms for self-correction." One implication of this for community intervention is stated more recently by Altman (1995). "The agenda of researchers is often influenced by the priorities of funders. Indeed, the availability of research

dollars is virtually a guarantee that researchers will develop proposals consistent with the desires of funders. A common dilemma that results from this situation occurs when researchers obtain support for a topic that the community does not see as a priority” (p. 530).

Today, the union of science and state currently reflects the broader cultural value of entrepreneurial activity, with the university increasingly taking on the image of a business and faculty the role of entrepreneurs. External research funding is the figurative and literal coin of the realm. The movement in the more social sciences has been away from a science of understanding toward a science geared toward the development and refining of products. This move is reflected in the vocabulary commonly used to describe important issues in the community intervention process: social marketing, community buy-in, incentives, tailoring interventions, manualizing for dissemination. Collectively, this is the imagery of the entrepreneur whose product, if made locally relevant and marketed, will improve the human condition. This marketing of products perspective seems far removed from George Miller’s (1969) concept of giving psychology away.³

My focus on the entrepreneurial nature of much community intervention should in no way be taken as an effort to diminish the contributions of the many socially committed community interventionists who rely on external funding. This work is predominantly done by deeply committed individuals who have dedicated their lives to engaging in prolonged efforts to solve important social problems. Sometimes, in some places, such efforts represent the best, if not the only, available means of garnering resources for specific populations, as in Jerry Mohatt’s work with the Yup’ik in Alaska (Mohatt et al. 2004). The question here, however, is whether and how this particular union of science and state affects the role of culture in our work.

The worry here is quite simple, though, I believe, quite pervasive in its effect: namely, that culture in the service of product development, implementation, and dissemination is likely to be viewed as a commodity to be understood primarily in the service of carrying out the intervention. Culture becomes something to which a program must be tailored, rather than a local ecology that requires understanding and prolonged engagement BEFORE having a clue about what program if any to even try. In this sense, local community culture is likely to be seen as something to harness in the service of the intervention rather than the other way around. Further, such a perspective inadvertently

pushes toward a culturally homogenizing agenda of spreading both interventions and the cultural assumptions underlying them broadly. Indeed, some Native American communities have recently voiced concern that spread of evidence-based practices represents a kind of “forced acculturation” to the values underlying them (Duran 2008, personal communication).

(C) *We still live in an individualistic scientific culture:* The biggest culture of science constraint remains at the paradigm level, at the level of world view we continue to enact even when we say we know better. The cultural fallout for psychology of our individualistic culture was noted earlier by Ryan (1971) and Sarason (1981), among others. Perhaps more apt for today is the advice provided to Margaret Mead by her mentor William Fielding Ogburn: “Never resort to psychological explanations until every cultural explanation has been tried and discarded”. Community interventions have indeed heeded this cultural call in terms of a focus on diverse groups, concern with culture-appropriate measurement, and involvement of community members in carrying out the work. However, our most recent review of this literature (Trickett, Espino, and Howe, under review) clearly shows that most community interventions ignore culture, even when specific cultural groups are targeted; they rest on social psychological theories addressing interpersonal influences on behavior, not theories of culture and context, choose individual level outcomes, not structural ones, and almost never assess the community level consequences of the intervention over time.

Cultural sensitivity is oft mentioned in individual level interventions in terms of tailoring, measurement, and in who delivers the intervention. But, in many cultural contexts, a culturally sensitive individually based intervention may itself be an oxymoron, as people in many cultures do not see themselves as free-standing autonomous individuals but rather as embedded in numerous familial, clan, community, and historical contexts that affirm their sense of identity and from which their lives—and our intended intervention outcomes of behavior change—derive meaning (Gone 2007). As the Wellin story reminds us, water boiling may be simultaneously seen as both a positive intervention outcomes and a source of cultural ostracization for the woman whose behavior changed as the intervention intended.

Then there are the potential cultural consequences of universalist assumptions about behavior in community intervention research designs and analyses. As a past editor of the AJCP, I reviewed many papers whose participants included smatterings of varied ethnic or racial groups but with no attention to recruiting sufficient numbers to allow meaningful diversity-specific analyses. Indeed, when Durlak and Wells (1997) reported their meta-analysis of

³ An international respected social psychologist recently, and somewhat despairingly, said to one of my colleagues: “We used to get money to do research; now we do research to get money.” While we may legitimately differ in our degree of agreement with this sentiment, it reflects some cultural kernel of truth.

primary prevention programs for children, slightly less than half of the 177 papers they reviewed never even mentioned the race or ethnicity of the participants. How irrelevant can culture get?

Research designs are also not culture neutral. For example, Bruce Rapkin has written about how randomized controlled trials can inadvertently contribute to downplaying or neglecting diversity. “Random assignment is intended to negate the need to attend to potential confounds by creating groups that are equivalent on all factors except the experimental manipulation. Individual and situational differences are not supposed to matter. Each participant is simply a case, supposedly equivalent to any other. Human diversity is noise. Contextual variation in resources is noise” (Rapkin and Trickett 2005, p. 260). While not an inherent consequence of this design, issues of statistical power often make selection of multiple cultural groups pragmatically and financially improbable. In such instances, design often trumps culture; method trumps content.

What do we do? The struggle to make local culture central to our community intervention work has been ongoing for decades within psychology more generally. Let me conclude by offering a few ideas about how community psychology can contribute to our appreciation of culture in our work. The spirit of these ideas flows from issues emerging from the Wellin and Campbell accounts and the assumptions about the culture of science presented earlier. More specifically, the first three ideas address ways of conducting community interventions that emerge in an alternative culture of science that prioritizes the culture of communities, empowerment or choice as an intervention goal, and local wisdom as a resource. They additionally address the metabolic balance of patience and zeal. The last three represent extrapolations of these initial ideas to the broader realm of community interventions involving multicultural contexts, diversity of methods and research designs, and graduate training.

(1) *A community psychology devoted to understanding culture in community context should begin with a focus on communities, not programs:* Community psychology should focus on community understanding, with specific programs emerging from and constructed to serve that goal. If we begin here, our primary task is to learn what that community is like, develop a sense of its history and hopes; its resources, challenges, institutions, its efforts to combat oppression; in short, its culture. Doing so will also mean devoting time to becoming known in the community, developing what Kelly (1971) calls an eco-identity. This emphasis might promote a reframing of some commonly used terms in the community intervention literature. For example, rather than focus primarily on community buy-into the intervention, we might develop a set of criteria that describe researcher buy-into getting to know the community; criteria such as long-term

researcher commitment to the community and activities designed to understand its culture. The goal is to begin with the community, not the intervention.

(2) *A community psychology devoted to understanding culture should prioritize the goal of choice over change.* Thirty-five years ago Chris Argyris (1970), in his book *Intervention Theory and Method*, suggested that interventions, in his case organizational interventions, should be premised on three conditions: valid data about the nature of the issue around which intervention was focused, internal commitment of those engaging in it, and free choice of organizational members about what if anything to do about it. Behind this perspective was the understanding that interventionists, at least most interventionists, are guests in someone else’s house. Valid information rests on how one answers the question “Under what conditions do people tell the truth?” Argyris’ answer lay in the conditions under which the information is gathered and, more specifically, the power relationship between information provider and information gatherer. Both validity of information and internal commitment, he posited, were most likely to be achieved under conditions in which the power to decide what to do lay in the client system; hence, the goal was to develop information about an organizational issue through a process that increased local choice about whether and how to attempt a change. Such choice could be manifested in a decision not to adopt a new evidence-based program if it did not make local sense, or to adopt it if it did.

There are multiple implications of this seemingly straightforward assertion for community intervention work. First, the emphasis on choice over change is one way of reading the empowerment movement in community psychology, but only that part of the movement that has empowerment as an end and not a means to achieve a pre-specified goal defined by outsiders. More specifically, the choice concept in poor and disenfranchised communities so characteristic of where community psychologists work should explicitly be viewed as an empowerment perspective where the goal is to support the creation of locally defined options, or choices, previously lacking. The emphasis on local choice also runs counter to what Miller and Shinn (2005) have termed the “pro-innovation” bias in the intervention industry; the assumption that new programs buttressed by evidence gathered elsewhere are better than what is currently going on locally, without adequately understanding or even attempting to understand what is going on locally. Finally, the culture-relevant implication of adopting choice as an intervention goal reinforces the previous recommendation: it necessitates getting to know what the community hopes are and emphasizes the bedrock nature of relationship development with varied community members and settings. It also conveys respect around the complex issue of whose knowledge to privilege.

(3) *A community psychology devoted to understanding culture in community context should affirm not only that there is nothing so practical as a good theory, but that there is nothing so theoretical as good practice.* With apologies to Kurt Lewin, I doubt he would have disagreed with this turn of his very important phrase on the fundamental interdependence of theory and action. Years ago I recall Tex Garner at Yale talking about how such practical problems as designing panel control systems for pilots during World War II provoked critical theoretical advances in the human factors field, and many have commented on how efforts to aid traumatized World War II veterans propelled the conceptual development of crisis theory. Here the message is both simple and profound: We will learn a considerable amount about culture in community context if we collaborate with local practitioners around problems their communities are expressing. We will learn about local culture if we begin our work with an appreciation of what Green (2006) and Birman et al. (2008) term “practice-based evidence”; the accumulated wisdom that local practitioners have developed in the process of being part of and contributing to their community over time. If we begin with local practice, as Miller and Greene (2005) did in her lovely work on how organizational factors influence program adoption in AIDS organizations, we will learn, *à la* Ogbu (1982), not only the folk theories of how issues and potential cures are framed locally, but how they mesh with our intended efforts to help.

(4) *A community psychology devoted to understanding culture in community context should address the challenges in understanding multicultural groups as well as cultural groups.* Cultural diversity has come a long way in psychology over the past 40 years, and has been reflected in government designations of four heterogeneous underrepresented groups. It has resulted in increasingly sophisticated work on population-specific topics and samples, and has put such topics as cultural competence on the front burner, as well it should be.

Yet there is an alternative cultural reality that needs to be confronted conceptually, in terms of professional training, and in terms of community intervention that is not well suited to a group-specific perspective. More and more communities and institutions are multicultural, involving small numbers of individuals from many different cultural and linguistic backgrounds in the same cultural space. For example, public schools deal with students from multiple cultures who, themselves, are coping with a multicultural context. As migrations occur, as refugees from different countries arrive, the task is no longer solely a bicultural one; it is figuring out how to understand and function in a multicultural context. Conceptually, multicultural contexts become a whole that is different from and more than the sum of its cultural parts. While the concept of cultural

competence is itself a complex notion, the concept of multicultural competence is even more of a mind boggler. The implications of this for intervention are enormous and quite ignored at present.

(5) *A community psychology devoted to understanding culture in community context should support diversity at the level of methods and research designs and develop intervention roles for tracking the intervention as an intercultural encounter.* If the appreciation of cultural diversity has taught us anything, it is that there is no culture-free and context-free gold standard for how to be; indeed, that’s the point!!! But the same metric needs to be applied to research methods and design. Different research strategies are differentially adaptive to answering different questions and in answering different questions with diverse populations. Fortunately, at the level of method, an increase in mixed method designs shows an appreciation for the different kinds of information gathered from quantitative and qualitative approaches (Mercer et al. 2007). And in the area of design, there are multiple efforts to articulate alternatives to the RCTs that address issues of causal inference as well as promote more authentic collaborative relationships among scholars and citizens (Rapkin and Trickett 2005; Wallerstein and Duran 2003). The appreciation of culture in community intervention is well served by this movement toward diversity in the culture of community research.

I would also propose the creation of process roles within community interventions to track the multiple ways in which the cultures of communities and those of science intersect. Thirty years ago I worked with Don Davies at Yale on a project designed to gather information from parents about the kinds of alternative programming they would like to see in their child’s school (Trickett 1976). As part of this project, we created two complementary roles—project historian and community historian—to track the processes involved in issues ranging from interviewer training (parents as interviewers) to meetings with the oversight board to neighborhood safety concerns related to interviewing in homes. These roles provided a running on-the-ground record of the intersection of the culture of science and the community culture. Such documentations would be useful today as heuristics for theory development as well as ongoing monitoring of intervention processes (Trickett 1991; Rapkin and Trickett 2005).

(6) *A community psychology devoted to understanding culture in community context needs to nurture structures for sharing the immense tacit cultural knowledge base accumulated by community researchers and interventionists.* We need a biologist’s equivalent to Woods Hole for discussions of culture in our work. Seasoned community interventionists whose work has involved multiple cultural realities should be provided a sabbatical and a setting where together they

can spend time reflecting, creating their own professional and personal narratives about their work in varied cultural contexts. Within SCRA, a broad and distinguished list could be generated of individuals who have worked long and hard to figure out community culture and how to contribute to it: Tom Wolff, Robin Miller, Bill Berkowitz, Brynton Lykes, Hiro Yoshikawa, Rod Watts, Irma Serrano-Garcia, Jerry Mohatt, Joe Gone, Tony D'Augelli, Joe Trimble, Rhona Weinstein, Linda Garnets, John Peterson, Meg Bond, the list could go on and on, but the structures to take advantage of this knowledge are few and far between. We collectively know a whole lot more than we write about, and we need to nurture mechanisms to mine that knowledge.

(7) Finally, a *community psychology devoted to understanding culture in community context needs to address its implications for graduate training*. Here, the spirit of graduate training would, in short, focus on how to develop intervention possibilities and professional qualities that prioritize understanding of the local context and culture as prelude to research programs and intervention possibilities. It would involve engagement in multiple cultural contexts in the role of learner, with the goal of appreciating the world view of the other at center. It would emphasize a commitment to learning how to listen, in the spirit of the moving Cree poem Joseph Trimble gave us at the SCRA biennial in Las Vegas New Mexico several years ago. And it would focus on understanding the deep distinctions between getting “buy-in” and developing a trust that comes neither easily nor without time and patience; the difference between collaboration as a tactic and as a commitment; and the difference between gathering data in the community and gathering valid knowledge on relevant community concerns.

Twenty-five years ago I had the privilege of being president of this division of the APA. At the time I thought we needed to interrogate the phrase “taking the environment into account” in a more precise conceptual and empirical way. Here I have attempted to make a comparable effort with respect to the culture of communities and the culture of social science. My hope has been to further a paradigm that actively engages the dialectic between the patience needed to learn culture and the zeal needed to continue the good social fights on which community psychology is built.

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