3.1: Respect for Diversity

Chapter Eight Objectives

- Understand cultural humility as an approach to diversity
- Identify and define dimensions of diversity
- Appreciate the complexity of identity
- Identify important cultural considerations for working within diverse communities

Respect for diversity has been established as a core value for Community Psychology, as indicated in Chapter 1 (Jason, Glantsman, O'Brien, & Ramian, 2019). Appreciating diversity in communities includes understanding dimensions of diversity and how to work within diverse community contexts, but also includes a consideration of how to work within
systems of inequality. Community psychologists must be mindful of diverse perspectives and experiences when conducting research and designing interventions, as well as working to combat oppression and promote justice and equality. By working within a framework of cultural humility, this chapter attempts to provide a basic understanding of the dimensions of diversity that are most common in Community Psychology research and practice. Further, we explore how these dimensions contribute to complex identities and considerations for community practice.

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**CULTURAL HUMILITY**

context of social identity, history, and individual and community experiences with prejudice and discrimination. It is also important to acknowledge that our understanding of cultural differences evolves through an ongoing learning process (Tervalon & Murray-Garcia, 1998).

Cultural competence is generally defined as possessing the skills and knowledge of a culture in order to effectively work with individual members of the culture. This definition includes an appreciation of cultural differences and the ability to effectively work with individuals. The assumption that any individual can gain enough knowledge or competence to understand the experiences of members of any culture, however, is problematic. Gaining expertise in cultural competence as traditionally defined seems unattainable, as it involves the need for knowledge and mastery. Instead, true cultural competence requires engaging in an ongoing process of learning about the experiences of other cultures.
Cultural humility is the ability to remain open to learning about other cultures while acknowledging one’s own lack of competence and recognizing power dynamics that impact the relationship. Within cultural humility it is important to engage in continuous self-reflection, recognize the impact of power dynamics on individuals and communities, embrace “not knowing”, and commit to lifelong learning. This approach to diversity encourages a curious spirit and the ability to openly engage with others in the process of learning about a different culture. As a result, it is important to address power imbalances and develop meaningful relationships with community members in order to create positive change. A guide to cultural humility is offered by Culturally Connected.

DIMENSIONS OF DIVERSITY

intersectionality, which will be touched upon throughout this chapter, and the process of cultural humility in understanding diversity.

Culture

Culture is an important dimension of diversity for community psychologists to examine. In general, culture has been challenging to define, with modern definitions viewing culture as a dynamic concept that changes both individuals and
societies together over time. Further, culture in today’s society refers to more than just cultural and ethnic groups but also includes racial groups, religious groups, sexual minority groups, socioeconomic groups, nation-states, and corporations. While numerous definitions for culture are available, there are key defining components, such as shared meanings and shared experiences by individuals in a group that are passed down over time with each generation. That is, cultures have shared beliefs, values, practices, definitions, and other elements that are expressed through family socialization, formal schooling, shared language, social roles, and norms for feeling, thinking, and acting (Cohen, 2009).

Race

race has been defined using observable physical or biological criteria, such as skin color, hair color or texture, facial features, etc. However, these biological assumptions of race have been determined to be inaccurate and harmful by biologists, anthropologists, psychologists, and other scientists. Research has proven no biological foundations to race and that human racial groups are more alike than different; in fact, most genetic variation exists within racial groups rather than between groups. Therefore, racial differences in areas such as academics or intelligence are not based on biological differences but are instead related to economic, historical, and social factors (Betancourt & Lopez, 1993).

Case Study 8.1
Is Race a Selected Identity?
Ethnicity refers to one’s social identity based on the culture of origin, ancestry, or affiliation with a cultural group (Pinderhughes, 1989). Ethnicity is not the same as nationality, which is a person’s status of belonging to a specific nation by birth or citizenship (e.g., an individual can be of Japanese ethnicity but British nationality because they were born in the United Kingdom). Ethnicity is defined by aspects of subjective culture such as customs, language, and social ties (Resnicow, Braithwaite, Ahluwalia, & Baranowski, 1999).
Gender

Gender refers to the socially constructed perceptions of what it means to be male or female in our society and how those genders may be reflected and interpreted by society. Gender is different from sex, which is a biological descriptor involving chromosomes and internal/external reproductive organs. As a socially constructed concept, gender has magnified the perceived differences between females and males leading to limitations in attitudes, roles, and how social institutions are organized. For example, how do gender norms influence types of jobs viewed as appropriate or not appropriate for women or men? How are household or parenting responsibilities divided between men and women?

Nicole Maines challenging her elementary school’s restroom policy, which resulted in a victory when the Maine Supreme Judicial Court ruled that she had been excluded from the restroom because of her transgender identity. While community psychologists are making efforts to conduct more research on the various gender identities on the gender spectrum, more research needs to continue in this area.

Age

Aging, or the developmental changes and transitions that come with being a child, adolescent, or adult. Power dynamics, relationships, physical and psychological health concerns, community participation, life satisfaction, and so forth can all vary for these different age groups (Cheng & Heller, 2009). Although the field has started to include aging issues in research, Cheng and Heller (2009) searched for publications on older adults in major Community Psychology journals and found that this segment of the population has been neglected. Although the skills, values, and training of community psychologists would likely make a difference in the lives of older adults, the attitudes within our profession and society are current barriers.
Social Class

Social class is socially constructed and can affect our choices and opportunities. This dimension can include a person’s income or material wealth, educational status, and/or occupational status. It can include assumptions about where a person belongs in society and indicate differences in power, privilege, economic opportunities and resources, and social capital. Social class and culture can also shape a person’s worldview or understanding of the world; influencing how they feel, act, and fit in; and impacting the types of schools they attend, access to health care, or jobs they work at throughout life. The differences in norms, values, and practices between lower and upper social classes can also have impacts on well-being and health outcomes (Cohen, 2009). Social class and its intersection with other components of one’s identity are important for community psychologists to understand. Unnatural Causes: Is Inequality Making Us Sick? is a seven-part documentary that focuses on the connection between social class, racism, and health.

Sexual Orientation

Sexual orientation refers to a person’s emotional, romantic, erotic, and spiritual attractions toward another in relation to their own sex or gender. The definition focuses on feelings rather than behaviors since individuals who identify with a minority sexual orientation experience significant stigma and oppression in our society (Flanders, Robinson, Legge, & Tarasoff, 2016). Sexual orientation exists on a continuum or multiple continuums and crosses all dimensions of diversity (e.g., race, ethnicity, social class, ability, religion, etc.). Sexual orientation is different from gender identity or gender expression. Over time, gay, lesbian, asexual, and bisexual identities have extended to other sexual orientations such...
as pansexual, polysexual, and fluid, and increasingly more research is being conducted on these populations within the field of Community Psychology (Kosciw et al., 2015). As a historically marginalized and oppressed group with inadequate representation in the literature, sexual minority groups face a variety of problems and issues that necessitate further research. The empowering and participatory approaches and methods used in Community Psychology can be beneficial for research with sexual minority groups.

### Ability/Disability

Disabilities refer to visible or hidden and temporary or permanent conditions that provide barriers or challenges, and impact individuals of every age and social group. Traditional views of disability follow a medical model, primarily explaining diagnoses and treatment models from a pathological perspective (Goodley & Lawthom, 2010). In this traditional approach, individuals diagnosed with a disability are often discussed as objects of study instead of complex individuals impacted by their environment. Community Psychology, however, follows a social model of ability in which diagnoses are viewed from a social and environmental perspective and consider multiple ecological levels. The experiences of individuals are strongly valued, and community-based participatory research is a valuable way to explore experiences while empowering members of a community with varying levels of ability/disability. Learn more by watching the Employment Choice for People with Severe Physical Disabilities video.

have impacted the diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorders in different countries. Further, diagnoses or symptoms can be culturally-specific, and culture may influence how symptoms are communicated. The experience of culture can significantly impact lived experience for individuals diagnosed with a disability.

a number of indicators of educational performance, leading to more substantial disparities later in life.

### Case Study 8.2

How Flawed Research Can Lead to More Stigma
religion, most of which typically include shared systems of beliefs and values, symbols, feelings, actions, experiences, and a source of community unity (Cohen, 2009). Religion emphasizes beliefs and practices, relationships with the divine, and faith, all of which differentiate it from common definitions of culture. Further, religion is an important predictor for well-being, satisfaction, and other life outcomes (Tarakeshwar, Stanton, & Pargament, 2003). While religion has been neglected in psychological research, it has been included in Community Psychology’s conceptualization of diversity since the beginning of the field.

spirituality typically focus on relationships with a higher power and a quest for meaning. The differentiation between religion and spirituality has become more relevant recently as many individuals consider themselves more spiritual than they are religious. Community Psychology has long considered religion as a dimension of diversity, but the importance of spirituality in our understanding of community has been a more recent development.
racial/ethnic and sexual minority men will experience more health disparities than white and/or heterosexual men. Community psychologists recognize the significance of intersectionality, but published research in this area is still lacking compared to other disciplines. “The urgency of intersectionality” video can help you learn more about intersectionality.

Privilege, or the unearned advantages that individuals have based on membership in a dominant group (e.g., race, gender, social class, sexual orientation, ability), contribute to the systems of oppression for non-privileged individuals and groups. While privilege can come in multiple forms and individuals can have multiple privileges; white privilege, or the advantages that white people have in society, are important for psychologists to examine more extensively to understand how white people participate in systems of oppression for racial minority groups in the US (Todd, McConnell, & Suffin, 2014). For example, white experiences and perspectives tend to be pervasive in curriculum, policy, pedagogy, and practices (Suyemoto & Fox Tree, 2006) at the exclusion of work and research by people of color.

Diversity in Practice

18 foundational principles of Community Psychology practice, and defines it as “the ability to value, integrate, and bridge multiple worldviews, cultures, and identities.” SCRA expands upon the importance of recognizing multiple contexts to integrate elements of cultural humility in practice settings. Prior to working in communities, it is important to examine one’s own worldview and consider how it interacts with the community through culture and power dynamics. It is important to recognize and articulate dynamics related to culture and power differentials with the communities in which community psychologists work. Due to the complexity of these dynamics, respecting diversity in practice may require the formation of relationships with various members of a community who may be able to serve as a guide for working with the community in culturally valid ways.
Diversity in Research

DESIGNING CULTURALLY-SITUATED COMMUNITY PROGRAMS

Case Study 8.3
Water Boiling in a Peruvian Town

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SUMMING UP

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Critical Thought Questions

1. How would you explain the differences between cultural humility and cultural competence? Why is cultural humility more beneficial for understanding diversity?

2. How do race and ethnicity differ? How is race socially constructed?

3. What gender norms are present in today’s society? Would you say these gender norms are beneficial or not? Why?

4. Why is it important to focus more research on the spectrum of sexual identities?

5. Although disability involves a physical/biological reality, it is also a social construction. How is disability a social construction?

6. What is intersectionality and how does it impact a person’s experiences?

7. Why should the culture of a community be considered before designing community programs?

Take the Chapter 8 Quiz

View the Chapter 8 Lecture Slides

REFERENCES


Suyemoto, K. L., & Fox Tree, C. A. (2006). Building bridges across differences to meet social action goals: Being and


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