Toward a Culturally Anchored Ecological Framework of Research in Ethnic-Cultural Communities[1]

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Proposed a research framework (the "cube" model) in which community psychologists working in ethnic-cultural communities can make appropriate decisions on conceptual and methodological issues from a culturally anchored, ecological-contextualist perspective. The intent of the model is to articulate ethnic-cultural heterogeneity in community research by elucidating three metamethodological issues: (a) definition of an ethnic-cultural community, (b) applicability of cross-cultural theories and methods to ethnic-cultural community research, and (c) geographical or ecological stability of an ethnic-cultural community. The model posits that ethnic-cultural community research can be conceptualized as a three-dimensional structure that represents an interaction among research questions, methods, and cultural complexity (referring to the extent to which an ethnic-cultural group is defined in a larger ecological context or community both at the individual and collective levels). Future directions for research were discussed in terms of the utility and the limitations of the proposed research model.

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The promotion of cultural relativism and diversity has always been encouraged in community psychology research and practice since the field's inception at the Swampscott conference in 1965 (e.g., Bennett et al., 1966; Rappaport, 1977; Trickett, Watts, & Birman, 1992). Ethnic-cultural heterogeneity is indeed increasing, given high rates of interethnic or intercultural marriage, immigration, and intergroup conflicts especially in large metropolitan areas. Community psychologists working with ethnic-cultural communities face a multitude of methodological and conceptual challenges, because they are compelled to work with the "vicissitudes of putting the etic to work" in their investigations (Trimble, 1988). Unfortunately, as evidenced by the relatively slow progress of research in ethnic-cultural communities (cf. Betancourt & Lopez, 1993; Loo, Fong, & Iwamasa, 1988; Speer et al., 1992; Trickett, 1990), efforts to incorporate values of ethnic-cultural heterogeneity into community research have been less than optimal (Sue, 1991; Vega, 1992).

Given the lack of methodological guidelines for conducting ethnic-cultural community research (cf. Milburn, Gary, Booth, & Brown, 1991), it is important to focus on improving existing methods and/or devising innovative methods that match research questions at appropriate levels of conceptualization for ethnic-cultural communities to the extent that both external and internal validity would be enhanced (cf. Cook & Campbell, 1979; Seidman, 1988; Shinn, 1990). Nonetheless, above and beyond various methodological issues to be resolved (e.g., procuring representative samples, reducing measurement bias, gaining community entry, increasing respondent compliance, etc.), more fundamental *metamethodological* issues have not been given adequate attention in past research efforts involving ethnic-cultural communities. Specifically, because of psychology's traditional focus on logical positivism, an epistemological perspective that entails the natural-scientific cannons of reductionism, experimentation, explanation, operationalization, quantification, and objectivity (Barzun & Graff, 1985), community researchers have been shortsighted in the understanding and articulation of ethnic-cultural diversity and its implications for community research while failing to meet the needs and concerns of local ethnic-cultural communities. For example, there has been no clear-cut discussion on what constitutes an "ethnic-cultural community." Is it a geographical or relational entity? Provided that ethnic-cultural individuals or groups are socially embedded within a larger societal context (Szapocznik & Kurtines, 1993), it is imperative to investigate the *entire* ecological context where a target ethnic-cultural group (e.g., Cuban Americans) *and* other relevant ethnic-cultural groups (e.g., African Americans, Korean Americans) exist.

Also, there is a need for culturally anchored guidelines to suggest appropriate methods in addressing a phenomenon of interest to community

psychologists as well as the local community. Without elucidating these and other issues in a research framework, ethnic-cultural community research becomes only fragmented, and continues to harbor tensions among researchers, local community infrastructures, and policy planners (cf. Bengtson, Grigsby, Corry, & Hruby, 1977; Chavis, Stucky, & Wanderman, 1983; Milburn et al., 1992; Sue, Ito, & Bradshaw, 1982).

PURPOSE AND OVERVIEW

The purpose of this article is to provide a conceptual and methodological framework in which community researchers working in various ethnic-cultural or multiethnic communities can make appropriate decisions on conceptual and methodological issues from a culturally anchored, ecological-contextualist perspective. To accomplish this broad goal, the article begins with a critical appraisal of problems or common assumptions often made in ethnic-cultural community research. The problems include the arbitrary definition of an ethnic-cultural community leading to the paucity of a "community" focus in research, the questionable application of cross-cultural methods and concepts to research in ethnic-cultural communities, and geographical or ecological stability of an ethnic-cultural community across time. Then a framework for conducting research in ethnic-cultural communities will be described in which an examination of culturally anchored ecological contexts is stressed by introducing the concept of *cultural complexity*. Finally, several directions for future research are discussed in terms of the utility of the proposed model as well as the limitations of the model.

ASSUMPTIONS IN ETHNIC-CULTURAL COMMUNITY RESEARCH

Amid the increasing ethnic-cultural heterogeneity in our society, it is safe to conclude that more and more research involving ethnic-cultural groups will be conducted in the years to come. At least three interrelated metamethodological assumptions require immediate attention as ethnic-cultural community research progresses.

Defining An Ethnic-Cultural Community

One prevalent assumption in research with ethnic-cultural communities concerns a definition of ethnic-cultural community as it is used by re-

searchers. While defining boundaries of a community, be it geographical or relational, has been a major issue of interest within community psychology itself (Chavis & Newbrough, 1986; Chavis et al., 1983; Newbrough, 1992), the concept of a community, as used in much of the research involving ethnic-cultural groups, has often been equated with a group of individuals (research participants) who possess certain ethnic-cultural markers (e.g., cultural or racial characteristics such as languages and skin color, and distinct cultural practices). Furthermore, the concept has rarely implied a direct reflection of social, historical, and cultural experiences and values of such ethnic-cultural individuals in community contexts (see a series of bibliographies on the scope and nature of ethnic-cultural group research published by the American Psychological Association: Evans & Whitfield, 1988; Hall, Evans, & Selice, 1989; Leong & Whitfield, 1992; Olmedo & Walker, 1990). The majority of community-based ethnic-cultural research that has appeared in the empirical literature usually addressed substantive issues (e.g., depression, substance abuse, HIV infection, gang violence, youth gang, and delinquency) by simply classifying ethnic-cultural populations into broad ethnic glosses (e.g., African Americans, Asian Americans, Hispanics), thus providing research on ethnic or cultural differences. Even when specific ethnic subgroups (e.g., Caribbean Hispanics, Chinese Americans, Mexican Americans, Hmong) can be identified and studied with samples large enough for acceptable statistical power, research findings are often limited in generalizability to other contexts because large numbers of participants are often recruited, via systematic or captive sampling in intact ethnic groups such as churches, professional associations, or ethnic studies classes on college campus. To obtain larger samples for research, the selection criteria are usually based on race, surname, or physiognomic factors per se (e.g., being a African American), but there has not been any reference to ecological contexts where the participants reside, work, or study. Therefore, past research has not adequately defined an ethnic-cultural community in a way that captures experiences of ethnic-cultural individuals *in context.*

With the growing promise of an ecological-contextualist epistemology in community psychology (e.g., Berger & Luckman, 1966; Felner, Phillips, DuBois, & Lease, 1991; Kingry-Westergaard & Kelly, 1990; Maton, 1989; Tolan, Chertok, Keys, & Jason, 1990; Trickett, 1990; Watts, 1992), community psychologists must begin defining an ethnic-cultural community within a larger societal context in relation to other relevant ethnic-cultural categories or groups. This is true even when studying a single ethnic-cultural group or category (e.g., African Americans). Otherwise, ethnic-cultural community research is likely to perpetuate an illusion that any ethnic-cultural group automatically forms a community itself by virtue of its ascribed or assumed ethnic or cultural attributes. For example, it is tac-

itly assumed that once individuals can be identified as belonging to a certain ethnic-cultural group, they share a common understanding of their own ethnicity or culture, and identification with the ethnic-cultural group. There is mounting evidence to suggest, however, that the *population homogeneity assumption* in any ethnic-cultural group may not be valid (Trimble, 1988). Members within a particular group exhibit considerable individual differences on a number of variables such as acculturation, language skills, generational status, immigration or refugee history, and ethnic self-identification (cf. Phinney, 1991). For instance, a third-generation Mexican American is likely to be very different from a first-generation Mexican immigrant, due not simply to developmental differences in socialization but also to current developments in interethnic relations in the United States and/or changes in global or international political situations. In addition, an American-born Mexican individual may also be a member of many different "communities" including ethnic-national, religious-spiritual, occupational, recreational, and political groups. Therefore, defining an ethnic-cultural community entails more than classification based on simple "ethnic glosses," but requires a closer examination of multiple social categories relevant to the individual as well as the community.

As another example, in a high school drug abuse survey conducted in predominantly Chinese, Vietnamese, and Mexican multicultural communities of Southern California (Sasao, 1992a), approximately 20% of the Chinese students indicated their primary cultural identification was Mexican. Although the self-perceived ethnicity of these Chinese youth was Chinese, their cultural identification was Mexican because these Chinese youths lived and played in the predominantly Mexican American community. Moreover, a pattern of such cultural identification was significantly associated with the perception of campus interracial climate. The Chinese students whose cultural identification was more Mexican than Chinese felt that the campus climate was more congenial than those who felt otherwise. Subsequent face-to-face interviews with selected students of Chinese or Mexican background revealed that both shared many similarities such as immigration status and difficulties in mixing with the general student population. Therefore, an ethnic-cultural community must be viewed more as a social-cognitive-cultural-historical-contextual entity than as the one based on physiognomic attributes and/or geographical boundaries per se (cf. Szapocnik & Kurtines, 1993). It is often the case that an ethnic-cultural community encompasses more than a single dimension of community attributes such as geographical, spiritual, or relational (Liu, 1980). This type of definition is consistent with the current thinking of a theory of community in the postmodern world's community psychology (cf. Newbrough, 1992). By defining an ethnic-cultural community being in a larger ecological-contextual framework, com-

munity psychologists should be able to address "true" community phenomena of interest that focus on an interaction among significant social units or entities (Seidman, 1988), such as interethnic climate in work or school settings (e.g., Green, Adams, & Turner, 1988; Sasao, 1992a).

Applicability of Cross-Cultural Research Methods and Concepts to Ethnic-Cultural Community Research

A further related but uncontested assumption in ethnic-cultural community research is the applicability of cross-cultural (or cross-national) theories and methods to research in ethnic-cultural communities (cf. Berry, Poortinga, Segall, & Dasen, 1992; Brislin, Lonner, & Thorndike, 1973; Triandis, 1992; Triandis & Lambert, 1980). Oftentimes, studies comparing different ethnic-cultural groups in the United States are not equivalent to studies involving the comparisons between different national groups. Social groups including ethnic-cultural groups in the U.S. often share the same ecological contexts or settings (e.g., schools, neighborhoods, public facilities) where they do interact with each other by default. Comparisons between these groups must take into account not only intracultural or intercultural differences but also differences in the dynamics of social interactions between the groups (e.g., the experience of prejudice and discrimination by some groups) in ecological contexts or settings. For example, comparisons between Chinese in China and whites in the U.S. are not comparable to those between Chinese Americans and whites in the U.S. Although Chinese Americans may well maintain some of the cultural values seen in China, they have also had years of interacting with white Americans and other Americans of different backgrounds. Moreover, another layer of complexity can be added to the experience of Chinese Americans which includes animosities based upon current and past historical events between China and the United States, which also influences the "texture" of the Chinese American community. This interaction means that while cross-cultural research can study different groups as independent variables, ethnic-cultural groups within the same context interact and are *not* independent; thus, in investigating issues of concern in ethnic-cultural communities, research methods must accommodate both historical and international relations, besides geographical and relational components.

In addition, some methodological issues are applicable to both cross-cultural psychology research *and* ethnic-cultural community research. They are typically expressed in terms of the *etic–emic* distinction (Sue, 1991), discussed later in the present article, which involves issues such as adequacy of sampling procedures, cultural response sets, and conceptual equivalence of

measures for different groups. However, unlike cross-cultural research, ethnic-cultural community research has been conducted in an increasingly larger and ethnically diverse societal context where more than one single ethnic-cultural community usually coexists. Thus, methods or analytic strategies for investigating phenomena relevant to ethnic-cultural communities must be tempered by the ecological concerns for these communities such as immediate neighborhoods and school climate. Unfortunately, while the contextualist perspective allows an examination of ecological-contextual factors in community psychology research, there is no methodological provision for incorporating the notion of "an ethnic-cultural group in context" into community psychology research. Such a provision would provide guiding research principles that integrate ethnicity/culture-specific issues, contextual issues, and the dynamics of community infrastructures — for example, local community leaders and community residents (cf. Milburn et al., 1991; Watts, 1992).

Previous methodological research efforts have focused exclusively on improving psychometric properties of measures for ethnic-cultural groups, assuring conceptual equivalence across different groups, procuring adequate representative samples, finding appropriate control or comparison groups in intervention-oriented research, enhancing community support for scientifically viable research, gaining community entry, selecting qualitative versus quantitative methods, deciding on information dissemination methods, and improving academic researcher–community relations (e.g., Cervantes & Acosta, 1992; Liu, 1980; Marin & Marin, 1991; Milburn et al., 1991; Sue & Morishima, 1982). However, while these issues have been discussed with respect to population-specific groups identified by broad ethnic categories such as African Americans, Asian Americans, Hispanic Americans (cf. Marin & Marin, 1991; Rogler, 1989; Sue & Morishima, 1982), the growing diversity and heterogeneity of each population requires these population-specific methodological issues to be considered *in the larger societal context or ecological setting.* For instance, there have been few methodological advances in addressing issues and defining a community with mixed heritage individuals such as Amerasians, the growing but largely hidden and ignored population in many parts of the United States (Root, 1992). Many basic questions remain unanswered, including: Is it appropriate or possible to define a multicultural or mixed-race community for research? Or, does it warrant a separate community-based research for this often neglected group of individuals?

Geographical or Ecological Stability of An Ethnic-Cultural Community

A third problem behind community psychology's struggles in translating diversity issues into research is that once a target community is iden-

tified in a larger ecological context or community where it is embedded along with other groups, the ethnic-cultural community remains stable from one such community to another (e.g, an African American community in Los Angeles is comparable to another in Detroit or Baltimore). However, there is enough evidence to show that ecological factors make huge differences when explaining certain community phenomena from one location to another. For example, alcohol researchers are cautious in generalizing research findings on alcohol use among Japanese Americans in Hawaii to other Japanese Americans in the mainland United States because of different ecological contexts such as interethnic relations (Johnson & Nagoshi, 1989). In the past, community-based research has generated controversy and consternation because of divergent views on research issues and methods as represented by the researcher and the local community. While this concern has led to the development of empowerment and sense-of-ownership notions in community research (Rappaport, 1987), it has been restricted to promoting empowerment within an ethnic-cultural group (e.g., empowerment in the Mexican American community in East Los Angeles), but it has rarely extended across groups or to multicultural groups within a larger ecological context or setting. Thus, community research needs to be conducted with due considerations given to the intricate community process that represents different epistemological orientations of constituents including community residents, leaders, and politicians of a target ethnic-cultural group *and* other relevant groups in a specific ecological context or community (cf. "paradoxes in community research," Rappaport, 1987). Also, particularly important for ethnic-cultural communities are generational differences within an ethnic or cultural group. For example, while the local community leadership in the Japanese American community is primarily held by second or later generations of Japanese Americans (*Nisei* or *Sansei*), the business leadership in the same community is often controlled by the first-generation Japan-born individuals (*Shin-Issei*). Such generational differences may lead to a different set of local community needs, thereby resulting in divergent views or conflicts on community priorities.

Metamethodological Issues

The foregoing discussion indicated that research in ethnic-cultural communities is often fraught with methodological and conceptual issues. These issues not only stem from purely validity and reliability concerns from the traditional research standpoint but also are often metamethodological in nature. The metamethodological issues are concerned with relative inattention to ecological contexts where demographics are con-

stantly and rapidly changing, as well as relative negligence of complex sociopolitical climates in which various stakeholders represent ethnic-cultural communities. This further suggests that basic concepts in community psychology such as community and race-ethnicity-culture need to be reexamined in order to guide and promote future research in ethnic-cultural communities. Ethnic-cultural community research should *not* dwell on surface or external social categories such as skin color or language; however, it should focus on community phenomena represented by a transaction of various units or entities that constitutes a social system or setting, or what Seidman (1987, 1988) calls "social regularities" which are "larger than the family or between settings or systems (p. 93)" (cf. Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Szapocnik & Kurtines, 1993). Instead of focusing research exclusively on microsystem levels (such as dyadic or marital relations) in ethnic-cultural community research, it is important to generate social regularities (as opposed to individual-based phenomena) for ethnic-cultural or multicultural communities. These regularities can lead to a body of knowledge useful for culturally anchored community prevention and treatment interventions. In addition, a trade-off between methodological and substantive significance of research must be negotiated or balanced with such concerns as ethnic-cultural diversity and the needs associated with local communities.

ETHNIC-CULTURAL DIVERSITY AND COMMUNITY: A DOUBLE-TIERED PHENOMENON

At its simplest level, the concept of ethnic-cultural diversity can be defined as a double-tiered social phenomenon. First, the *within-group diversity* refers to heterogeneity due to changing or diversifying patterns of social attributes or relations in the family, the neighborhood, and/or local communities within ethnic-cultural groups including broadly defined groups or subgroups, (e.g., African Americans–Caribbean blacks; Hispanic Americans–Mexican Americans, Puerto Ricans, Central Americans; Asian Americans–Korean Americans, Japanese Americans; and American Indians/Alaskan Natives–Navajo Indians: cf. Office for Substance Abuse Prevention, 1991). The within-group diversity is further compounded by other social boundaries or orientations such as gay/lesbian issues, women's issues, and political or religious orientations. Also, there are increasing numbers of intergroup (e.g., racial, ethnic, religious) marriages within many ethnic-cultural communities, a phenomenon that influences many social interactions across groups as well. As noted earlier, generational differences in various ethnic-cultural communities tend to exacerbate the level of heterogeneity within a particular group. Even among non-Hispanic whites, so-

ciologist Alba (1990) argued that ethnicity has regained interest because with the demise of many communist countries and changing world politics, United States white ethnics began to realize the appropriateness and relevance of national-ethnic identity (e.g., German, Irish, Scots, French, Swede, or Finn). Therefore, the within-group diversity can be conceptualized either at the micro- or mesosystem level while being further influenced by the higher order exo- or macrosystem level.

Second, the other type of diversity is conceptualized as the *across- or between-group diversity,* a reflection of increasing complexities brought about by growing intergroup tensions between various social groups in work, school, or everyday situations (e.g., Lambert & Taylor, 1990; Los Angeles Times, 1992). Although such diversity situations are explicitly more evident in major urban areas (e.g., Los Angeles, New York, Detroit, or Chicago), the across-diversity phenomenon has become of increasing concern on many college campuses and work settings where demographic and social changes have been rather slow until recently. Policy changes due to such across-group diversity have become apparent on student admission or affirmative action employment procedures. For example, the population trends in the U.S., when examined from 1980 to 1990, show an obvious example of across-group heterogeneity. Particularly, there are phenomenal growth rates among ethnic minority populations (e.g., 127% increase for Asian/Pacific Islanders, 69.2% increase for nonwhite Hispanic origin) and the "Other Race" category when compared to non-Hispanic white populations (66.7% increase). An increase in the Other Race category implies increasing within-group diversity simultaneously because there is a substantial number of mixed heritage individuals across the United States who cannot identity themselves with any of the census-based ethnic-cultural categories (Root, 1992).

The importance of ethnic-cultural diversity or heterogeneity for ethnic-cultural community research is that it creates a serious dilemma for those who conduct research in ethnic-cultural communities (Sue, 1991; Zane & Sue, 1986). Community psychologists working with ethnic-cultural groups are often forced into the defensive position of having to demonstrate that the etic model does not constitute a universal and that cultural differences (the emic) do make a difference. This, itself, becomes a problem because ethnic-cultural issues are, by their very nature, paradoxical (Rappaport, 1981). Such issues involve two equally valid but contradictory viewpoints, one emphasizing the importance of differences between cultures and the other stressing the significance of their commonalities. Consequently, it is important to not become too one-sided; otherwise, one perspective dominates to the detriment of the other.

In another important way, ethnic-cultural heterogeneity challenges the traditional notion of a community, as discussed earlier. It is not entirely clear when and how individuals who are externally or physiognomically defined members of a certain ethnic-cultural group perceive themselves to be part of that community. Because there are few communities whose members are ethnically or culturally homogeneous, "true" community research must define an ethnic-cultural community according to criteria other than racial–ethnic–cultural categories per se, as well as include criteria such as those proposed by McMillan and Chavis (1986): perceived membership, a sense of influence, integration and fulfillment of needs, and shared emotional connection. For members of ethnic-cultural groups in the United States, we should note the possibility that some of these individuals can fluctuate in their actual and perceived group membership depending on various developmental stages, and/or diverse behavior settings such as school classrooms or work situations. Thus, the fluid nature of an ethnic-cultural community needs to be recognized. In a multicultural society such as the United States, research issues pertinent to ethnic-cultural communities need to be addressed in a way that balances solutions to the paradoxes of various ethnic-cultural and mainstream perspectives within and across groups in a "fluid" ecological context or community.

TOWARD A CULTURALLY ANCHORED ECOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK OF RESEARCH IN ETHNIC-CULTURAL COMMUNITIES

Ethnic-cultural community research calls for a research framework that provides an integration of methodology and conceptualization that addresses questions relevant to each ethnic-cultural community. It is important that an ethnic-cultural community needs to be understood in the larger context of the society where the community of interest is defined and embedded.

The Cube Model

The intent of this model is to articulate ethnic-cultural diversity in community psychology research by incorporating the concept of "cultural complexity" (based on social psychological theories of group behaviors: social identity theory, Tajfel & Turner, 1986; self-categorization theory, Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987; and "social representations," Moscovici, 1984) into the study of community phenomena rele-

vant to ethnic-cultural groups in community contexts. More specifically, the
model attempts to elucidate issues related to three metamethodological is-
sues discussed earlier: (a) definition of an ethnic-cultural community; (b)
applicability of cross-cultural theories and methods to ethnic-cultural com-
munity research; and (c) geographical or ecological stability of an ethnic-
cultural community. As shown in Figure 1, ethnic-cultural community
research can be conceptualized as a three-dimensional figure that repre-
sents a transaction among type of research questions being asked, selection
of methods, and cultural complexity (referring to the extent to which an
ethnic-cultural group is defined in a larger ecological context or community
both at the individual and collective levels). It is argued that in designing
and conducting research in ethnic, cultural communities, these three ele-
ments interact to determine the design of a study as well as outcomes;
therefore, they must be examined simultaneously and weighed against one
another to obtain scientifically valid research, albeit constraints due to in-
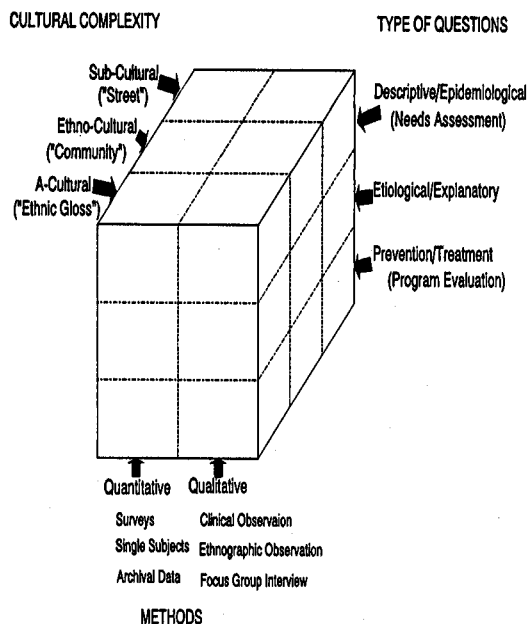creasing diversity as discussed earlier.

Fig. 1. Toward a culturally anchored ecological framework
of research in ethnic-cultural communities.

Research Questions

Given the needs of local ethnic-cultural communities and researchers' interests, three types of research questions are typically generated. *Descriptive or epidemiological* questions are the first step in any community-based research, usually in the context of community needs assessment. These questions include: What is the prevalence of alcohol and other drug use among Asian Pacific Americans or African American communities (e.g., Sasao, 1992b)? What kind of mental health needs exist among the low income Hispanic community? What patterns of high-risk sexual activities exist among young urban African American males? These questions are not only of interest to community psychologists but also they attract the attention of many community-based organizations for local and federal lobbying and funding purposes.

In addition to epidemiological information, community research also focuses on *etiological or explanatory* issues. Typical questions include: What is the etiology of drug abuse and early teenage pregnancy among African female youth living in a housing project? Is the lack of life skills (e.g., Botvin, 1986; Schinke, Botvin, & Orlandi, 1992) a major explanation for poor academic achievement and low self-esteem among Cambodian refugee children and parents? Are theories of alcohol expectancy (e.g., Goldman, Brown, & Christiansen, 1987) applicable to both male and female in the Korean American community? Another question might be: What are some risk factors for drug abuse for urban African American adolescents (Farrell, Danish, & Howard, 1992). In one study, theoretical models were developed to explain social integration and social support among Mexican Americans and non-Hispanic whites (Golding & Baezconde-Garbanati, 1990).

Finally, *prevention/treatment intervention* questions are of greater importance especially to community-based service providers and program evaluators, as well as to federal or other funding agencies especially in view of a tightening economy. For example, the effectiveness of a street-based AIDS prevention and health education program for intravenous drug users in San Francisco's multiethnic communities was investigated (Watters et al., 1990). Other questions include: What prevention or treatment modalities (e.g., life skills training, stress management, peer support, detoxification, and residential programs) would be most effective with new immigrant youths?

In order to approach some or a combination of these questions, the next obvious step concerns the choice of methods for investigation.

Methods

For ethnic-cultural community researchers, a range of traditional quantitative and qualitative methods (shown in Figure 1) is available in answering the above questions. Although these methods are familiar to social scientists, the applicability of these methods in ethnic-cultural communities needs to be determined based on multiple perspectives on research and the type of research questions asked in a specific ecological context or setting. For instance, although qualitative methods such as ethnographic observation and focus group methods are often viewed with some skepticism because of the lack of systematic standards in reliability and validity, certain contexts in which ethnic-cultural groups reside or work call for such qualitative methods because other quantitative methods are perceived "not culturally appropriate," or local communities tend to distrust quantitative methodology arguing that such research have not taken into historical or global considerations of ethnic-cultural communities. Therefore, merely knowing what questions are being asked and which methods are available and appropriate are not sufficient to conduct community research in ethnic-cultural groups. Although efforts to integrate and systematize qualitative methods are encouraged (cf. Miles & Huberman, 1984) so that they may become amenable to quantitative analysis, it can be argued that the choice of methods in certain ecological contexts is often contingent on the nature of ecological contexts as well as perspectives represented in such contexts.

Cultural Complexity

In this model, the concept of cultural complexity is introduced to allow the identification and assessment of community phenomena or social regularities (Seidman, 1990) in culturally anchored ecological settings. The concept "cultural complexity" can be defined at two levels. First, it is defined, *at the individual level,* as the degree to which an individual is defined not only by his/her racial–ethnic–cultural category but also by his/her own affective, behavioral, and cognitive representation of that social category (which is defined as one's *social identity* in the social psychological literature; Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Second, it is conceptualized *at the larger, collective level of a context or setting* (e.g., community, neighborhood, or school) where individual members are located or embedded. In fact, past community psychology research should have concerned itself with this *extraindividual* level of community phenomena (cf. Felton & Shinn, 1992; Seidman, 1990); however, most ethnic-cultural community research found in the lit-

erature has focused exclusively on personality or motivation, and interpersonal or family dynamics (cf. Snowden, 1987). At the collective (as opposed to individual) level, the concept of cultural complexity is defined as the extent to which a relevant group entity (such as a predominantly Chinese community or neighborhood, Hispanic gay/lesbian community) is defined by themselves or others vis-à-vis other existing relevant social categories (e.g., an ethnic Vietnamese-Chinese community) within the same ecological setting. The concept here is closely related to "social representations" in social psychology (Moscovici, 1984) or "representations collectives" in classical sociology (Durkheim, 1898) in that cultural complexity at this level refers to the actual or perceived degree of identification as a group or community at the macrosystem's level (cf. Bronfenbrenner, 1979), *not* at the individual or microsystem's level.

In Figure 1, depending upon complexity at these two levels, three layers of cultural complexity can be examined. The first level of cultural complexity can be most appropriately described as *a-cultural complexity* because researchers collect data based on such physical markers as ethnic glosses or physical characteristics, without regard to the ecological context of the research setting, and analyze data using ethnicity/culture as a categorical variable. Also, the individual members' social identity is blatantly ignored in collecting and interpreting such data. Unfortunately, the majority of the so-called ethnic-cultural community research falls into this category. In some cases in which this type of ethnic-cultural community research is inevitable, especially when examining archival data collected by other investigators, an extensive analysis must be performed in which both mediating and moderating variables relevant to identified culturally anchored social contexts (e.g., SES, crime rates in neighborhood obtained from the police) are examined by additional data collection and analysis.

The second layer of cultural complexity is called *ethno-cultural complexity,* in which the community or group being studied must be defined by members of the community or group, not only by the ethnic group of interest but by members of other ethnic-cultural groups as well within the same ecological context. In this clearly identified community, community psychologists are required to assess the community members' perception of group identification and cohesion vis-à-vis other relevant social categories in order to establish the definition of a target community. This notion of cultural complexity is perhaps most common in community research with ethnic-cultural groups; however, the focus is usually on one single population such as Hispanic residents in an inner-city housing project.

In research involving illegal or hidden populations within certain ethnic-cultural groups such as youth gangs or drug abusers, the next layer of cultural complexity in Figure 1 is important. In the *subcultural context,* in-

dividual members are no longer defined according to imposed social categories such as race/ethnicity per se, but sources for the definition of their own sub-culture and individual members' social identity in that subculture or "street" culture stem from a combination of various cultural elements or categories. For instance, in a Vietnamese gang subculture, heavy substance abuse has been observed by community workers (Sasao, 1992b). Factors related to more than one single culture (i.e., Vietnamese culture) must be examined in this setting because Vietnamese youth were found to be involved with the Hispanic or Filipino youth gangs initially, and therefore, an explanation for Vietnamese gang-related and drug-related behaviors can be best understood as a combination of multiple cultural elements enmeshed at the street, subcultural context (e.g., Vietnamese family structures, cultural elements learned from Hispanic or Filipino gang activities, or interethnic discrimination experiences).

Thus, the model presented implies that in order to identify and address culturally anchored social regularities, a community needs to be defined more clearly incorporating the concept of cultural complexity in the research design such as self-perceived identification with an ethnic/racial category or acculturation status (cf. Trimble, 1988, 1990–1991), or how their community or neighborhood is viewed or defined in the context of other relevant social categories. In defining an ethnic-cultural community for research, we need to go one step further, beyond external or imposed definition of individuals or groups based on physical characteristics such as skin color, physical attributes, or geographical dispersion, and view the concept of community as a social–cognitive–contextual entity. The real task for community psychologists would be to integrate data stemmed from both levels of cultural complexity, that is, the individual and the community, in identifying an ethnic-cultural community.

It is also important to note that decisions on which question is answered by what methods in what contexts are determined by multiple perspectives represented in a particular research project. In each of these different cultural-complexity contexts, some methods are more feasible and preferable than others. Although a carefully conducted sample survey (a quantitative approach) may yield greater generalizability to other settings, survey techniques could be inappropriate to use with youth gang members in the subcultural, street ecological context. In sampling "hidden and rare" populations such as the homeless mentally ill (Koegel, Burnam, & Farr, 1986) or intravenous drug users living on skid rows, appropriate qualitative methods such as a key informant survey, a focus group, or participant observation may be used to obtain proxy epidemiological data. Although these methods do not provide entirely accurate estimates, they are helpful in gen-

erating initial exploratory hypotheses about these populations, and also are complementary to more traditional quantitative methods.

By examining how three dimensions (type of research questions, methods, and cultural complexity) transact with each other, potential solutions to some of the overarching issues discussed previously may be obtained. For instance, most of the claims or social stereotypes or sources of misunderstanding regarding the low alcohol and drug use among Asians (Zane & Sasao, 1992) appear to be based on either inadequate methodology or inappropriate cultural contexts where research was conducted, or a combination of both. Because Asian alcohol and drug users are usually hidden in Asian ethnic communities (Sasao, 1992b), using a traditional survey method in an ethnic-cultural community would not provide an accurate estimate of alcohol and drug use in a certain Asian community. For example, we might begin identifying and defining certain social regularities or contexts in which Asian alcohol and drug users find themselves likely to use alcohol and other drugs (e.g., when alone, when with other male friends, or on cultural festive occasions), and then conduct an extensive ethnographic study to generate hypotheses prior to investigating epidemiological questions.

Furthermore, the use of multiple methods is desired, whenever possible, because using multiple methods not only leads to validation of findings but also pushes for ecological validation as an ongoing process of testing assumptions about a certain phenomenon in different culturally anchored ecological contexts of research. Similarly, Trickett et al. (1992) argue that an ecological approach needs to serve as a heuristic as we integrate diversity issues into community psychology research, and also that the reemergence of the social constructionist and contextualist philosophy of science, as an alternative to logical positivism, can be seen as a societal recognition that ethnic-cultural diversity has become an issue that must be incorporated into our community-based research.

IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The model presented in this article suggests some courses of action for future research in ethnic-cultural communities.

1. In conceptualizing and designing research projects, researchers working in ethnic-cultural communities should be guided consciously by a consideration of interrelated factors, such as those identified in the cube model involving cultural complexity, methodology, and type of questions being addressed. The model also provides some directions in the course of research. For example, in the case of ethnic-cultural groups in which little

research has been conducted, it may be wise for investigators to initially focus on descriptive questions, use more qualitative methods, and examine the groups using lower levels of cultural complexity. Such research may help to establish a baseline of knowledge, identify relevant parameters and variables prior to more intensive study, and gain insight into the appropriate methodologies and instruments to use.

2. Future investigations of a target ethnic-cultural group should begin collaborating with other ethnic-cultural groups because any one ethnic-cultural community does not exist by itself in the everyday, ecological context or setting but it exists amid other groups whose presence does influence social regularities of interest to community psychologists. For instance, in studying interethnic relationships between Asian Americans and whites, one should not ignore the impact of African Americans and other groups in the relationships. Kitano (1985) has argued that to understand the status of Asian Americans, the stratification between African Americans and whites is also important to study because he conceives of Asian Americans as a "middleman" minority — a buffer between dominant and subordinated groups.

3. Because of the practical problems involved in ethnic-cultural group research (e.g., difficulties in finding adequate samples), it may not be possible to appropriately study various levels of cultural complexity for ethnic-cultural groups. For example, research on urban American Indians can be directed to the group as an aggregate, to members of certain tribes, or to people who live in certain areas of a city. As the group is further divided on the basis of subcultural units of cultural complexity, it may be increasingly difficult to find adequate sample sizes. This is one reason why simple rather than more complex levels of cultural complexity have been studied most frequently; however, in such research contexts, qualitative methods such as participant observation and focus group approaches can be used. The model can provide a practical means of categorizing research contributions and of demonstrating the state of knowledge. What levels of cultural complexity have guided our knowledge of ethnic-cultural groups? What research questions and methods have primarily been used to address which questions? Where are the most important gaps in the cube model for a particular group? Thus, the model provides a context for understanding the state of the research for conducting ethnic-cultural community research.

4. Because the proposed model implies ecological flexibility or fluidity of one's ethnic identification and an ethnic-cultural community to which he or she belongs, future research on ethnic identity and acculturation may take new directions. For example, although past research has focused on the development of ethnic identification or accculturation scales for differ-

ent ethnic-cultural individuals (e.g., Burnam, Telles, Hough, & Escobar, 1987; Suinn, Richard-Figueroa, Lew, & Vigil, 1987), there is now a clear need for including specific contexts in which the level of acculturation is measured (e.g., school, home, public versus private places, or work settings) because the effect of acculturation may differ in various contexts (e.g., Ethier & Deaux, 1990). Another consideration for research on ethnic identification and acculturation is the developmental or historical implications of the concepts. Most of the identity or acculturation measures have been developed to measure the concepts *at one particular point in time.* However, the idea of cultural complexity in the cube model clearly suggests that ethnic identification and acculturation both at the individual and the community levels can be conceptualized as having stability, duration, and permanence (cf. Deaux, 1993). The static concepts of ethnic identification and acculturation must be reevaluated or replaced to accommodate changes due to passage of time and significant events (e.g., 1992 Los Angeles Riots). A third factor in reconceptualizing ethnic identification and acculturation is a recognition that the behavioral focus of the measures must be juxtaposed with other dimensions or domains such as affective or cognitive aspects of ethnic identity and acculturation. For instance, it is possible that an individual "behaviorally" uses English almost all the time (which most acculturation measures indicate the attainment of high acculturation); however, it could be a reflection that he or she simply spends more time in the English-speaking contexts, and rather wishes to use his/her native language more often. Thus, the individual's affective level of language use needs to be assessed to obtain a more comprehensive picture of an individual's acculturation.

5. Finally, the cube model can serve as a convenient way to identify limitations in a study. Researchers who apply research findings derived from the a-cultural to the subcultural level are ignoring individual differences, while those who conduct research at the subcultural level and draw implications to the a-cultural level may be overgeneralizing. In essence, the cube model serves a heuristic and conceptual purpose in helping to define what kinds of research have been conducted, the appropriateness of conclusions, and gaps in our knowledge.

Limitations of the Model

The proposed conceptual-methodological model has limitations. First, it is not intended to be the only appropriate model. Indeed, many other variables and dimensions can be identified as being important. We have presented this model only to illustrate how ethnic-cultural community re-

search in the past has typically been based on inappropriate metamethodological assumptions including ambiguous definitions of an ethnic-cultural community. Although such research has been valuable, ethnic-cultural research has evolved to the point where issues of heterogeneity and different ethnic "senses" of community should now be addressed.

Second, the model cannot intrinsically offer insights into the best research questions to ask, methods to use, or cultural complexities to examine. Descriptive or explanatory research each has certain merits; qualitative research is not necessarily less sophisticated than, or an earlier stage of, quantitative research; and a-cultural research can be as valuable as subcultural research. Human judgment and experience is needed to render such insights. The model offers a means of organizing and conceptualizing ethnic-cultural research endeavors, so that the types of research, research problems, and the implications from findings are more explicitly conceptualized and approached.

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