

Listening to Diversity Stories: Principles for Practice in Community Research and Action

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Abstract Three broad *Diversity Principles for Community Research and Action* are described and offered as community psychology's contribution to the growing literature on multicultural competence in psychology. The principles are applicable to multiple dimensions of diversity including race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, religion, disability, and social class. The diversity principles are illustrated with examples from the twenty-two diversity stories in the *AJCP* Special Issue on Diversity Stories in Community Research and Action. Each of the three diversity principles (Community Culture, Community Context, and Self-in-Community) are associated with a fundamental assumption, a process emphasis (descriptive, analytic, and reflective), a core question to engage, an orienting stance (informed compassion, contextualized understanding, and empowered humility), and three areas of focus. Taken together, the principles suggest the value of the overarching stance of *connected disruption*. It is suggested that applying the principles to community work in diverse settings will facilitate the process of bridging differences and enhance the relevance and effectiveness of our work.

Keywords Diversity · Community psychology · Multicultural · Differences

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Introduction

The multicultural movement within psychology has gained greater momentum during the past couple of decades (Hall, 1997; Sue et al., 1999). There has been increased attention to cultural diversity issues in published research and theory, including the development of a journal, *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology*, associated with Division 45 (Society for the Psychological Study of Ethnic Minorities) of the American Psychological Association (APA, 2000). Numerous journals have published special issues that have focused on a multicultural topic areas (for example, see *Professional Psychology: Theory and Practice*, *Journal of Counseling and Development*, *Journal of Prevention and Intervention in the Community*, *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, *The Counseling Psychologist*, and the *American Journal of Community Psychology*). Additional indicators include: the biannual APA National Multicultural Conference and Summit that began in 1999, growing attention to diversity in the teaching of psychology and in graduate training programs (Simoni et al., 1999; Tori & Ducker, 2004), APA's publication of *Guidelines for research in ethnic minority communities* (Council of National Psychological Associations for the Advancement of Ethnic Minority Interests, 2000), and the comprehensive *Mental Health: Culture, Race, and Ethnicity* document published by the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS, 2001). Attention to diversity issues is included in the 2002 revision of the Ethical Principles for Psychologists (APA, 2002), as well as being central to the Domain D accreditation criteria (Cultural and Individual Differences and Diversity) for doctoral programs in psychology (APA, 1995).

One of the primary areas of emphasis has also been progress towards the establishment of competencies to serve as guidelines for psychological practice with diverse groups.

Guidelines have been offered relevant to racial/ethnic groups (APA, 1993), work with women and girls (APA, 2005), people with disabilities (Olkin, 1999) and sexual orientation (Division 44, 2000) that emphasize primarily counseling and clinical applications. The comprehensive 2003 APA Multicultural Guidelines (APA, 2003) includes attention to research and organizational applications as well. Trickett, Watts, and Birman (1994) offer an overarching framework for conceptualizing diversity in the work of psychologists that takes a contextualized and social constructionist orientation characteristic of community psychology. However, diversity guidelines specific to community-based research and intervention have not been formally articulated.

Therefore, one of the primary goals of gathering the collection of diversity stories for this special issue was to initiate a process of developing a set of diversity principles for community psychology grounded in the experiences of those immersed in community research and action with diverse groups (see Bond & Harrell, 2006). We chose the strategy of collecting narratives from those involved in community research and action in order to give voice to the challenges and complexities of working with diversity. The use of narratives in community psychology action research has been suggested as an important process that can enhance and deepen our work (Primavera & Brodsky, 2004).

Our guiding question began as “What can be learned from the stories?” The twenty-two diversity stories created a rich qualitative data base that illuminated and affirmed common issues and dynamics related to work with diverse communities. We sought to discover how the stories of diversity dilemmas could inform and enhance both what we do and how we do it. Our analysis sought to identify broad, cross-cutting themes that could be relevant to multiple dimensions of diversity. These dimensions include, but are not limited to: race, ethnicity, sex, sexual orientation, social class, religion, disability status, and age. We follow Trickett, Watts, and Birman (1994) in the intentional use of the term *diversity* to make clear our inclusion of multiple social locations and identities. The places where these social locations intersect and interact create ecological niches (Falicov, 1995). It is this convergence of multiple diversities in an ecological niche that contributes to the formation of a multidimensional social identity and creates places where a sense of community can emerge. Artificial separation of these diversity dimensions risks overgeneralization and oversimplification of individual and collective identity and a limited understanding of the nuanced nature of personal and community experience.

As we read and re-read the twenty-two stories, numerous lessons and considerations appeared consistently. After much reflection and discussion, these reduced nicely into three organizing mega-themes that we have transformed into a set of three principles to guide practice in community research and action with diverse groups. A principle can be

thought of as a comprehensive and fundamental assumption to guide behavior. Each principle suggested here stimulates a set of descriptive, analytic, and reflective processes and questions to be engaged and explored before, during, and after any research or action project. The lessons that emerged in the diversity stories suggest that attention to these principles will enhance multicultural practice in community research and action. In addition, the stories suggest that ongoing consideration of these principles will facilitate the uncovering of assumptions and blind-spots so that their impact is lessened, as well as increase the sensitivity, relevance, and effectiveness of diversity work in community settings.

Each diversity principle is also associated with an *orienting stance*, a specific attitude that provides grounding and facilitates the process of applying the principles. The stances describe a particular orientation to community research and action which we suggest can optimize the impact and effectiveness of our work. We have identified three stances: informed compassion, contextualized understanding, and empowered humility. These orienting stances collectively embody a stance of connected disruption, and can facilitate successful entry and participation in communities as they reflect attitudes that can be felt by the community but may not be explicitly articulated by project staff.

In the discussion that follows, we use the term “diversity work” to refer to all activities, from preparation through implementation and evaluation, involved in research and action with diverse *communities*, diversity *issues*, as well as diverse *collaborators and team members*. Our use of the term “community” is inclusive of groups defined by geography (e.g., neighborhood, city), identity (e.g., ethnicity, sexual orientation), common interest (e.g., club, occupational group, political party), setting (e.g., school, church, workplace), or task/function (e.g., labor union, advocacy group). Table 1 presents a summary of the three diversity principles and their characteristics.

Diversity Principle #1: The Principle of Community Culture

The fundamental assumption of the first principle is that *every community has multilayered cultural characteristics and diversity dynamics*. Application of this principle emphasizes a *descriptive process*. Observation and information-gathering are used to gain a comprehensive understanding of the composition of the community, the rhythms of life in the community, as well as the significant intergroup and intragroup dynamics in the community. This textured understanding of a community is a prerequisite for diversity work that is relevant, responsive, and appropriate. The core question to be explored is: *How do dimensions of diversity and their intersections currently affect this community?*

Table 1 An overview of diversity principles for community research and action

	The principle of community culture	The principle of community context	The principle of self-in-community
Fundamental assumption	Every community has multilayered cultural characteristics and diversity dynamics	Historical, sociopolitical, and institutional forces impact diversity and its dynamics within a community	One's own values, cultural lenses, and identities impact all stages of work with diverse individuals, groups, and communities
Process emphasis	Descriptive	Analytic	Reflective
Core question	How do dimensions of diversity and their intersections currently affect this community?	What past and present contextual forces affect diversity dynamics in this community?	How do my multiple social locations and the dynamics of power and privilege affect my work with this community?
Orienting stance	Informed compassion	Contextualized understanding	Empowered humility
Focus areas	(a) Dimensions of diversity in the community (b) Rhythms of life in the community (c) Groups in relation to each other	(a) Historical events and patterns of change (b) Sociopolitical context and the local setting (c) Institutional structures	(a) Cultural socialization, identity & social location (b) Dynamics of power and privilege (c) Biases, alliances & isms

Application of this principle is facilitated from an orienting stance of *informed compassion*. Informed compassion refers to a connectedness with the community that is based neither on an exclusively distanced intellectual position nor on an emotion-driven over-identified position. It is a balanced integration of head and heart. An orienting stance of informed compassion means approaching the community and seeking knowledge and awareness from a place of caring, respect, and openness.

Diversity Principle #2: The Principle of Community Context

The fundamental assumption of the second principle holds that there are important historical, sociopolitical, and institutional forces that impact diversity and its dynamics within a community. Engaging this principle is primarily an analytic process that goes beyond simply describing diversity issues in our work. It is important to make the link between the structure and functioning of a community and the forces that have shaped it and maintain it over time. The effectiveness of intervention efforts in a community can be maximized by an adequate analysis of relevant contextual forces. Similarly, effectiveness can be compromised when significant contextual factors are not identified or are ignored. The core question to be explored for this principle is: What past and present contextual forces affect diversity and its dynamics in this community? Application of the Diversity Principle of Community in Context is facilitated by an orienting stance of contextualized understanding, which refers to examining diversity issues from multiple levels of analysis in order to provide a richer and more comprehensive understanding. A decontextualized approach to diversity and multicultural issues risks superficial conclusions and inappropriate inter-

ventions. The orienting stance of contextualized understanding is ultimately a commitment to an ecological analysis of diversity issues grounded within a community psychology framework.

Diversity Principle #3: The Principle of Self-in-Community

The fundamental assumption underlying the third principle is that one's own values, cultural lenses, and identity statuses impact all stages of work with diverse individuals, groups, and communities. It holds that it is impossible to separate who we are from the work that we do. Application of this principle requires a primarily reflective process. Diversity work is enhanced when there is a keen self-awareness and consciousness of one's identity, values, and perceptions in relationship to the community. This principle is particularly important for the identification of biases and blind-spots. The diversity principle of Self-in-Community is concerned with the core question of: "How do my multiple social locations and the dynamics of power and privilege affect my work with this community?" Putting this principle into practice is enhanced by an orienting stance of empowered humility. Empowered humility involves a humble sensibility with respect to the breadth and depth of our knowledge and sensitivity of our actions. Regardless of shared demographics (e.g., same ethnicity as the community), years of professional experience with similar communities, fondness for the community, academic content mastery, or familiarity with cultural expressions in the community, it is important to acknowledge one's limitations. However, rather than being associated with passivity or inaction, empowered humility means proactive engagement that is grounded in a deep respect for the community's right to self-determination and a full understanding

of the multiple contextual forces that impact diverse cultural expressions.

Diversity principles in practice: Reflections from diversity stories

The *Diversity Principles for Community Research and Action* are reflected wonderfully in the diversity stories presented in this special issue. The diversity stories are rich with examples that bring each principle to life.

The Diversity Principle of Community Culture

The central application implication of the Diversity Principle of Community Culture is the development of a solid understanding of the composition, characteristics, functioning and interactions within the community. It is critical to understand the unique and contextualized manifestation of cultural expression and diversity dynamics within the specific target community. Ideally, this should happen through ethnographic work prior to beginning a project or intervention. Exploring the manifestations of community culture can help to minimize working from assumptions and overgeneralizations, as well as prevent exclusive reliance on literature or an experience in a similar community. It is, of course, important to be informed by previous research and applied experience. However, each community has its own unique cultural expressions that emerge from the intersections of multiple dimensions of diversity such as ethnicity, sex, religion, and class.

The stance of informed compassion

Grounding oneself in a stance of *informed compassion* facilitates the process of learning about a community in a way that is open, respectful, and caring. This stance will likely increase the quality, reliability, and depth of the information gained. Community members may be wary of being exploited, pitied, or pathologized by researchers and others attempting entry. When the community senses condescension, entitlement, assumptions of deviance, or self-absorbed career ambition, entry into the community may provide only a limited and superficial view of the community's culture. In particular, historically oppressed and stigmatized groups are often accustomed to presenting a less than authentic face to outsiders as a means of self-protection.

Many of the diversity story authors naturally came to their work from a place of informed compassion. For example, Paxton actively acknowledged the limits to her understanding of transgendered communities before she began, yet she approached the work with a sincere interest and openness to learning from her collaborators and the community. Coppens, Page, and Thou (2006) not only worked hard to help

one another understand the different values and assumptions they each brought to the research endeavor, but Coppens also advocated that the funding body increase sensitivity to the culture of the Cambodian youth while Thou helped the staff, youth, and their families to appreciate the "culture" of the research endeavor. Vasquez (2006) utilized his understanding of the intersections of race, class, and gender privilege to generate compassion for a white working class male who aggressively challenged the training team in a diversity workshop that utilized the film *The Color of Fear*.

Focus areas

Three focus areas within the Diversity Principle of Community Culture will be discussed:

1. dimensions of diversity in the community;
2. rhythms of life in the community; and
3. groups in relation to each other.

Dimensions of diversity in the community

Understanding the composition of the community prompts a comprehensive examination of multiple dimensions of diversity yet involves more than simply collecting statistics. Typically, race/ethnicity, sex, and social class composition are identified. This is a good place to start as these may be the most available and visible diversity dimensions. It is important to uncover the particular dimensions of diversity that are most salient in the setting. Ideally, this would happen during the planning stages.

However, it is not unusual for unanticipated dimensions of diversity to become activated once a program or project has begun. For example, Chronister (2006) describes career development groups for women in a domestic violence shelter where she organized groups around the commonality of experience based on gender and the history of violence. However, social class and racial dynamics that emerged within the groups presented major challenges to the cohesiveness and bonding of group members. Ross (2006) tells the story of an urban youth center where race and ethnicity were the most visible markers of diversity, yet social class and age also became central diversity dimensions as events unfolded.

Diversity dimensions can also be masked or inactive, particularly to an outsider. A comprehensive picture of community composition requires attention to marginalized and isolated groups within the setting. Sometimes settings find ways of organizing themselves around difficult diversity issues such that the sleeping lion is not awakened. An intervention or research study can awaken the lion and present unanticipated challenges. Suyemoto and Fox-Tree (2006) describe the tensions that had lain dormant until they tried to expand the focus of their school-based project to include

multiple ethnic/racial groups. Vasquez (2006) describes troubling group dynamics that were triggered when issues of privilege were added to the discussion of marginalized groups while offering training to education professionals.

Almost all of the diversity stories illustrate the importance of identifying diversity dimensions that can become activated when members of different identity communities come together to work on a common task. The stories suggest that the explicit naming of differences early – as well as sensitivity to dimensions that emerge in the process – may promote necessary dialogue that can prevent these differences from sabotaging or being barriers to the success or effectiveness of a project or program.

Natural rhythms of life in the community

Exploring how the community functions and operates – including customs, norms, and varieties of cultural expressions – will facilitate the development of interventions that are consistent with the values and natural rhythms of living within the community. Such understanding can help to avoid the paternalistic assumption that the professional knows what's best or is there as the community's savior. Community psychology has an explicit value on emphasizing the strengths of individuals, groups, and communities. Because of the stigmatization, stereotypes, and negative media portrayals of marginalized groups, there is a greater risk for assuming problems and deviance with these groups. Understanding how a community defines itself, its strengths, its problems, and its needs is critical to working with diversity from a community psychology perspective. This requires seeking out and listening carefully to the multiple voices within a community, recognizing that some may have been previously silenced and others particularly amplified. Eliciting and understanding the role of existing community narratives is a powerful process that can inform the development of empowerment-focused interventions relevant to oppressed and marginalized groups (Rappaport, 1995).

The stories include an abundance of examples of the importance of understanding the natural rhythms of community life—particularly in diverse communities. Brodsky and Faryal (2006) describe the cultural function of secrets both within RAWA (Revolutionary Association of Women of Afghanistan) and Afghan culture in general, and explain the profound effect the culture of secrets had on their work together. In Berryhill and Linney (2006) the fact that the different racial/ethnic groups tended to inhabit different sides of the housing complex was a pattern important for understanding the politics of collaborative neighborhood efforts. Based on his experiences doing research with an American Indian community on a reservation, Gone (2006) does a beautiful job of illustrating how culturally-syntonic interventions must incorporate an understanding of natural patterns of help-

seeking within a community in addition to a knowledge of cultural rituals. Finally, Small, Tiwari and Huser (2006) retrospectively analyze how a deeper understanding of cultural values and role relationships in the Hmong culture informed their conceptualization of the significant staff turnover challenges in retaining Hmong women on their evaluation staff.

Groups in relation to each other

Intergroup dynamics refer to relations and interactions between different groups along a particular dimension of diversity within a community and provide critical information regarding how a community functions. Intragroup dynamics refer to relations and interactions among subgroups of a larger diversity group within a community. Intragroup issues are often not as obvious and are sometimes kept hidden as a “family secret” but can also play a powerful role in diversity work. Knowledge of both inter- and intra-group relations provides important data in the development and implementation of any project or program. For example, a community is comprised of both women and men. Intergroup dynamics would focus on the overall cross-gender relationships, the nature of interaction and relational dynamics between women and men. However, within a group of women there are differences along dimensions such as immigration status, age, race/ethnicity, and sexual orientation. Intragroup dynamics would attend to issues between immigrant and native born women, younger and older women, white women and women of color, or lesbian and heterosexual women. Intragroup dynamics get at the heart of multiple identities and the intersections among different dimensions of diversity.

This focus area encourages examination of where groups and subgroups are in relationship to each other. Issues of power, inclusion, and stigmatization are relevant to this focus area as revealed in the conflicting perspectives of the African Americans and other staff of color in the story by Suyemoto and Fox-Tree (2006). Paxton et al. (2006) describe powerful within-group dynamics between male-to-female and female-to-male transgender individuals. Levine's (2006) story about promoting religious tolerance illustrates how frequency, duration, and opportunities for intergroup contact are important to understand within a community. It is also important to understand existing physical boundaries, proscribed role relationships, and interactional norms between groups, as well as the consequences of crossing boundaries and violating norms (e.g., Borg's (2006) description of tensions between newer and more established Chinese immigrants; and Small, Tiwari, and Huser's (2006) experience negotiating the cultural divide between Hmong staff members and academic researchers). This focus area can be applied to multiple diversities within a community. In one project it may be most important to focus attention on the intergroup dynamics between straight and gay

community members while in another project the intraethnic dynamic of colorism may be more central. Comprehensive identification of patterns of intergroup and intragroup interactions is a central feature of understanding the culture of a community.

The Diversity Principle of Community Context

People-in-context is the defining orientation of community psychology such that the behavior of individuals and groups is inseparable from the context in which that behavior occurs (Dalton, Elias, & Wandersman, 2000; Kelly, Ryan, Altman, & Stelzner, 2000). Exploring this ecological perspective on human behavior and human diversity requires addressing multiple levels of analysis. From microsystems such as classrooms and families, to organizations such as treatment settings, schools, and churches, all the way to macrosystems such as cultures, political systems, and economic systems, the context of diversity has an impact on its expression. The specific locality and its characteristics is another important level of analysis. The immediate environmental context, the larger social context, as well as the historical context such as migration and residential shifts can have significant effects on diversity and its dynamics. Engaging this principle facilitates an understanding of how and why things happen in the target community.

The stance of contextualized understanding

Engaging the Diversity Principle of Community Context means thinking like a community psychologist and applying that thinking to multicultural and diversity issues. Human behavior cannot be understood apart from its context, and the effectiveness of our work is likely to be strongly related to the degree to which we consider multiple levels of analysis in our efforts to understand diversity issues. This issue is evident in the vast majority of the stories in one shape or form but it is particularly striking in Brodsky and Faryal's (2006) chronicle of research in Afghanistan, Berryhill and Linney's (2006) portrayal of a multiethnic community, D'Augelli's (2006) university-community organizing on behalf of gay men, and Gone's foray into research with his own tribal community.

Focus areas

Three areas of focus within the Diversity Principle of Community Context will be further explored:

- (1) historical events and patterns of change;
- (2) sociopolitical context and the local setting; and
- (3) institutional structures.

Historical events and patterns of change

The first focus area within the Diversity Principle of Community Context involves an examination of the historical context and changes over time that impact a community. This requires understanding a community as a dynamic system that has transformed and evolved over time. A community research or action project occurs at some point in the continuum of a community's development from past to present and into the future. Issues to consider include group-based historical traumas, immigration and migration patterns, economic and other demographic changes within the community, local historical events, shifts in political dynamics, as well as the history of intergroup relations. Critical incidents in the history of a community can have a tremendous impact on current manifestations of diversity dynamics. It is often the case that intergroup and intragroup interactions, as well as interactions between the community and the research or intervention team can be better understood in the context of relevant historical factors.

Messinger's (2006) paper chronicling the difficulties in planning an anti-poverty program in a southern community provides a thoughtful and detailed analysis of how the history of race relations in the community determined the story line for the present endeavor. The issues described by Suyemoto and Fox-Tree (2006) cannot be fully appreciated without understanding the history of segregated communities that led to busing inner city children of color into schools in predominantly white suburban communities. The historical legacy of South African apartheid was a powerful influence that shaped the tense relationships among the women from different ethnic, linguistic, and political backgrounds within Daniels' (2006) community intervention efforts. Gone's (2006) understanding of how the historical trauma of Manifest Destiny continues to reverberate in the collective consciousness of the Native American population was critical to an analysis of his research challenges. These aspects of history can in no way be divorced from the current expressions of diversity within these communities.

Sociopolitical climate and the local setting

While the previous focus area places emphasis on an analysis of how historical factors have shaped the structure and functioning of the community, this focus area emphasizes the role of current sociopolitical dynamics in the manifestation of diversity dynamics. Attending to this focus area first requires identification of the unique forces within the local setting that shape what resources are available and who has access to them. Political realities and the dominant societal narratives on issues such as immigration, crime, and affirmative action can exert an influence on an oppressed or stigmatized community's sense of safety and inclusion. Current sociopolitical

dynamics can also effect how a community perceives and engages with researchers or other “outsiders” that may represent oppressive dynamics present in larger society. The distribution and use of power, as well as the existence of power asymmetries, within a community are important elements to assess in order to facilitate a better understanding of behaviors within the community.

For example, the politics that surround immigration in this country and the dangers associated with illegal status permeate several of the stories and exert a powerful influence on the intergroup possibilities. The difference in circumstances of immigration is an issue that divides the newer and older immigrants in Borg’s (2006) paper. Legal status is an invisible but potentially powerful cloud that probably affected the involvement of Latino residents in Berryhill and Linney’s (2006) work and hampered Martorell and Martorell’s (2006) efforts to reach some Latino/a parents of children with Down Syndrome. Lee and Calvin (2006) share their understanding of how an intergroup relations initiative was impacted by the sociopolitical dynamics of a community where there were 30–40 countries represented among immigrant groups and where over 100 languages were spoken in the schools.

Institutional structures

Community members live and interact within a variety of institutional structures that include schools, places of worship, health care delivery settings, businesses, service agencies, courts, and job settings. These settings can function as resources for community and individual development, or they can function in ways that exploit communities. Understanding the influence of various institutional structures within a community can shed light on the distribution of resources and opportunities within that community. In addition, the organizational culture of these local settings can affect the relationship between the institution and the community.

In Borg’s story, tensions among church members were shaped by the power structure and opportunities for gaining prestige within the parish. Miller et al. (2006) and D’Augelli (2006) both describe ways that their university structures presented roadblocks to their work. For Miller and colleagues, the priority their Institutional Review Board placed on obtaining parental permission was in conflict with their own assessment of research risks. In the research team’s view, a teen’s participation in the research was of less risk than the potentially damaging repercussions if parents learned their child is gay. This institutionalized value judgment placed an insurmountable barrier to their work with teens in the community. D’Augelli (2006) felt his work would not be successful without promoting a more accepting university climate and focused significant organizing efforts on getting policies and procedures that would protect gays and lesbians from discrimination on campus.

The Diversity Principle of Self-in-Community

Through asking the authors to describe their work in a narrative voice and to speak from their experience, we found varying degrees of personal disclosure across the stories. We noticed a pattern wherein the stories we initially evaluated as strongest were those in which the authors’ self-critical analyses of the roles they played in their work were very clear. A shared assumption we brought to this process was a value on personal exploration in the context of social location, culture, identity, and privilege. As we encouraged all authors to write more about their identity, biases, etc., we saw the stories become richer and more nuanced. The description of lessons learned were less prescriptive and provided a more textured understanding of the complexity of diversity challenges in comparison to the more distanced analysis of traditional scholarship. In essence, we were asking our authors to address the question of who am I in relationship to this community. In this process, we observed that incorporating awareness of one’s own social location into diversity work is extremely challenging and out of the comfort zone of many academic and consulting psychologists. However, we suggest that it is a necessary task if our diversity work is to be responsive, relevant, and effective.

Applying the Diversity Principle of Self-in-Community requires attention to how one’s social location and multicultural identities are personally experienced and expressed, as well as how they are manifested in diversity work. Managing difference is the core challenge of diversity work (Rosenberg & Travis, 2003). Harrell’s *5 D’s of Difference* provides a framework for how people deal with the internal experiences (e.g., tension, confusion, frustration, rejection, anger) that can arise with the challenge of bridging differences (Harrell, 1995). Denial, defensiveness, devaluing, distancing, and discovery are five common strategies that are manifested in everyday interactions in the service of managing the various internal experiences associated with difference.

The *denial* strategy involves a selective focus on sameness that minimizes the existence or significance of differences and allows dimensions of diversity to be overlooked. The *defensiveness* strategy involves externalizing negative actions and feelings in order to maintain one’s sense of self as an ally of marginalized or stigmatized communities. The *devaluing* strategy involves the often unacknowledged dynamics of power and privilege and functions to maintain the status quo with respect to normality, superiority, and status hierarchies. The *distancing* strategy involves physical, intellectual, and/or emotional separation from diverse communities and can provide protection from meaningful connection to the experiences of oppressed groups. Ultimately, these first four approaches to difference are disempowering for individuals and communities because they define *for*

others what is acceptable or important enough to consider. Finally, the *discovery* strategy involves embracing diversity challenges and approaching them as opportunities for learning and growth. Differences are seen, acknowledged, and explored in relationship to self and to the larger sociopolitical context.

All of these difference dynamics are expressed in the diversity stories as each of the authors took up the challenge of examining themselves and their work. While our authors engaged in this process retrospectively, we suggest that an exploration of self-in-community both before and during a project can yield information that can optimize the effectiveness of our work. The primary tasks of applying the Diversity Principle of Self-in-Community are, first, focused reflection on how difference is managed in relationship to issues of identity, social location, biases, and privilege, and, second, addressing how the often unintentional and automatic responses to differences affect our diversity work. Given that most of our work is done in teams and partnerships, it is also important to consider the expanded idea of “self-in-team-in-partnership-in-community.” We suggest that it is important to examine the multiple levels at which issues of identity, difference, and privilege are manifested not only with the target community, but also in the context of our project teams and partnerships organizations.

The stance of empowered humility

Empowered humility refers to an orientation to our work that recognizes the strengthening of connection and positive growth potential that comes from a healthy humility in relation to communities where we are outsiders. Acknowledging what we do *not* know frees us to be open to new and unanticipated learning. The stance of empowered humility involves shedding the expert role and adopting a more collaborative role with communities. The reflexivity characteristic of the stance of empowered humility requires a willingness to identify limitations, to experience feelings of vulnerability, and tolerate the ambiguity of “not knowing.” This vulnerability is in the service of gaining greater awareness, insight, and understanding. To connect, to learn, and to understand are empowering experiences that build confidence to walk in unfamiliar terrain and meet diversity challenges head on. Our diversity stories authors demonstrated this vulnerability in their work and in their analysis. This is particularly true for Langhout’s (2006) willingness to take seriously the critical perceptions of an African American student, Shpungin and Lyubansky’s (2006) efforts to retrospectively explore how dynamics of social class privilege effected interactions with staff and residents in a homeless shelter, and Ceballo, Ramirez, and Maltese’s (2006) open exploration of their assumptions regarding a bilingual group for children exposed to community violence.

Focus areas

Engaging the Diversity Principle of Self-in-Community centers around the process of reflexivity, a process of continuous exploration of the ways that one’s individual characteristics and social locations influence behavior, perception, and relationships. Reflexivity in the application of this principle can be divided into three major domains:

- (1) cultural socialization, identity and social location;
- (2) power and privilege; and
- (3) biases, alliances, and isms.

These domains comprise the three focus areas for the Diversity Principle of Self-in-Community.

Cultural socialization, identity, and social location

Within the reflexive domain of identity and social location, the emphasis is on exploring one’s own cultural socialization, intersecting identity statuses, as well as a heightened awareness of social location. Living within a given community increases the likelihood of exposure to a particular set of life experiences that contribute to the formation of worldview. For example, life in a racially homogenous small town provides a view of the world from the windows of cultural socialization opportunities and life experiences available to that community. The view will likely be quite different for those from a large culturally diverse urban neighborhood who will come to see the world through the window of opportunities for cultural socialization and life experiences available to them. An important part of the reflective process of the self-in-community principle is exploring one’s own cultural socialization and the ways in which it may be similar to or different from the cultural socialization experiences of the target community. Cultural socialization influences values, beliefs, behavioral norms, role relationships, ways of thinking, exposure to diversity, and other relevant dimensions of culture. Culture is internalized and lived, and is not typically easily articulated. Assumptions about what is healthy, what is normal, or what is appropriate are shaped by the cultural socialization process. Identifying one’s own cultural lens (or lenses) opens space to allow consideration of different cultural ways of being.

A central question to be addressed within this focus area is “How does this community experience me in the context of my social identities and locations, and what does this mean for my work in this community context?” The community’s history of experience with outsiders may influence perception and responses to the project and staff. Understanding the stimuli that one presents, in the context of the community’s history and ongoing dynamics, is an important awareness.

Exploring cultural socialization provides an opportunity to engage the question of “who am I?” Identity is

multidimensional and multidetermined. It is inseparable from our social locations relevant to race, ethnicity, gender, class, sexual orientation, disability, and religion (Tatum, 2000). The salience of different dimensions of identity for individuals and communities is influenced by the status of social locations. There is usually a stronger connection to aspects of identity on dimensions of diversity reflecting non-dominant group status. Privilege allows dominant group members to pay less attention to those dimensions of identity. The dominant group establishes the norm and these identities are socially acceptable and not met with resistance. Dominant group identities (e.g., male gender, white race, heterosexual) are less likely to have been comprehensively explored because it is not necessary for social survival and these identities do not typically impact the availability of opportunities. An understanding of privilege is necessary to facilitate the task of exploring dominant group identities.

In a very powerful story, Langhout recounts her experience as a white female graduate student in conflict with an African American female undergraduate. This conflict prompted significant self-exploration of her own identity statuses and critique of ways that these impacted her work with a group of African American women in a community gardening project. As Langhout (2006) examined her own social locations and identities, she was able to discover how the meanings of her social identities changed based on involvement in different settings. She also highlighted the ways that issues of privilege must be included in exploration of social location and identity statuses.

Dynamics of power and privilege

The reflexive domain of power requires an understanding of the dynamics of privilege and acknowledgement of one's own privilege in society. Privilege emerges from power asymmetries and grants members of dominant status groups opportunities and freedoms that are not automatically available to members of less dominant groups (Fine, Weis, Powell, & Wong, 1997). Power asymmetries create differential access to valued societal resources such as opportunities, information, safety, tangible goods, security, freedom of movement, and public esteem. Privilege occurs across multiple dimensions of diversity and allows members of the dominant group to take aspects of their daily lives for granted while simultaneously providing them the freedom to ignore how asymmetries have negative consequences for members of oppressed and stigmatized groups. The freedom to *not* notice the societal manifestations of power asymmetries (without potentially negative personal consequences) is a hallmark of privilege.

An important aspect of reflexivity in diversity work is owning up to one's own privilege and exploring how that privilege is manifested in one's thoughts and action in di-

verse contexts. Having privilege along one dimension of diversity does not mean that privilege exists on all dimensions. For example, a white, heterosexual, female is privileged with respect to her race and sexual orientation, but not in the context of gender. Sometimes it is more difficult to see how we are privileged along one dimension (e.g., educational status) if we do not benefit from privilege on other dimensions. In addition, resistance to personal exploration of privilege may be common among community researchers and practitioners with a social justice orientation who view themselves as working against vs. colluding with oppression. Another risk for academics and other professionals is the intellectualization of the concept of privilege without personal exploration. Shprungin and Lyubansky's (2006) story of work in a homeless shelter provides an insightful example here. The authors describe the process of deepening awareness of unacknowledged privilege and how it can impact decisions and actions in community research.

Biases, alliances, and "isms"

The biases and assumptions reflexive domain encourages a critical perspective that seeks to uncover the stereotypes, prejudices, blind spots, triggers and hot buttons, alliances, and internalized "isms" that are activated in diversity work. This focus area within the self-in-community diversity principle is rooted in the idea that the development of positive and negative biases is inevitable in human experience. Stereotypes and prejudices emerge as we attempt to process external stimuli cognitively and emotionally. They are both the products and building blocks of racism, classism, sexism, heterosexism, and other forms of oppression (Harrell, 2000). Bias can be expressed in thought, behavior, or interaction.

Engaging the Diversity Principle of Self-in-Community requires an examination of the biases that are stimulated in the context of the particular community research or action project, including diversity issues relevant to staff interactions, community partners, and participants. Researchers and practitioners are encouraged to ask themselves questions such as: "Who am I identified with?", "Do I feel an alliance with a particular subgroup of the community?", "Are there ways that I am colluding with the maintenance of power asymmetries or isms?", "Are there any diversity issues where I can feel myself being triggered emotionally?", "Have I projected any expectations on community members?" and "Have any stereotypes or prejudices been activated in my work?". It is critical for various biases to be identified and explored for their potential influence in the development and implementation of community research and action projects. As an example, Suarez-Balcazar and Kinney's (2006) story described how issues of safety were managed in a program conducted in a low-income African American neighborhood. By exploring assumptions about the community and

community members, they were able to gain valuable insight into ways to enhance their understanding of and work with this community.

Concluding remarks and future directions

There was tremendous richness in each of the diversity stories. A more comprehensive and systematic qualitative analysis would likely yield additional themes, questions, and focus areas. However, the analysis conducted for this paper affirms the value of utilizing narratives to more deeply understand complex phenomena such as diversity. We hope that the stories will inform the development of change efforts that can empower community researchers and practitioners in their diversity work. As Rappaport (1995) suggests, narratives play a potentially powerful role in both personal and social change. The *Diversity Principles for Community Research and Action* are informed by the twenty-two stories of diversity challenges and have implications for changing, individually and collectively, how we think about and incorporate attention to diversity in our work.

The three Diversity Principles offered here bring the voice of community psychology into the dialogue and literature on multicultural competence. The principles reflect several of community psychology's core values including collaboration and community strengths, social justice, empowerment and citizen participation, and respect for human diversity (Dalton, Elias, & Wandersman, 2000). As such, application of the diversity principles is consistent with the priorities, emphases, and interventions characteristic of community psychology.

We suggest that our diversity work will increase in effectiveness to the extent that we explicitly apply the principles to each unique community. The nature of the project, the community, the composition of the project staff, and the specific characteristics of the setting will differ from project to project and thus the specific application of the diversity principles will differ from project to project as well. Nevertheless, the three broad-based diversity principles provide an organizing framework for illuminating issues that are central to the work of bridging differences in ways that emphasize mutuality and empowerment.

On a more conceptual level, the twenty-two diversity stories provide some insight into what bridging differences is and what it is NOT. Bridging differences does not mean looking for agreement or approval. It does not mean minimization or denial of differences (e.g., "colorblindness") or similarities. It is not a neutral compromise that eliminates individual or community distinctiveness. The work of bridging differences cannot ignore the realities of oppression and privilege. Bridging differences cannot happen when there is a resistance to moving out of our comfort zones or when messages

encourage differences to remain hidden and unexpressed in order to smooth the crossing.

Instead, bridging differences must incorporate appreciation for a deep shared humanity while also confronting historical and cultural legacies that maintain differential privilege and access to resources. A useful concept here is that of *connected disruption*, which emphasizes actively disrupting arrangements that preclude meaningful involvement across gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and disability, yet doing so while staying in relationship with others (Bond, 1999). Each of the stances embedded in the three Diversity Principles—informed compassion, contextualized understanding, and empowered humility—incorporate a combination of respect and challenge, and they synergistically fold into a stance of *connected disruption*. This overarching attitude involves managing the tension involved in holding two seemingly contradictory stances simultaneously, one of respectful connection (compassionate, understanding, and full of humility) along side one that is defiant and disruptive of the status quo (information-seeking, looking to the broader context, and empowered to push for change). This stance is relational sensitivity with an analytic and empowered edge.

Bridging differences requires *seeing* the differences, *seeking* a contextualized understanding of the differences, and *examining* one's own identity statuses and social locations in relationship to the differences. Bridging differences is a process, not an outcome. The work of bridging differences is ongoing and dynamic. It involves consistent engagement in the descriptive, analytic, and reflective processes shared by the authors of the diversity stories. It is intentional and requires sustained efforts to view the world through an unfamiliar window that may not be clear. Bridging differences requires recognizing the dynamics of power and privilege that are inseparable from how difference is experienced and expressed across groups. Bridging differences presents an opportunity to expand our views and illuminate the differences and multiple realities that are human diversity.

So, where do we go from here? We offer the *Diversity Principles for Community Research and Action* as a beginning set of guidelines and consider them a work in progress. We hope that they can stimulate additional dialogue on diversity in community psychology. We suggest continuing to provide opportunities, structured and unstructured, to tell our own stories as a community of community psychologists (Kelly, 2002). As we continue to define our field, our work, and ourselves there is much to be gained from listening to our own community narratives and utilizing them to inform our work, as well as to be incorporated in the ongoing shaping of the discipline of community psychology. With respect to diversity-related narratives, there continues to be a need to amplify the voices of those doing diversity work within our

professional community so that these experiences are meaningfully reflected in the identity and development of the field. These diverse voices are vital to a community psychology that is dynamic, inclusive, and empowering.

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