

Jason, L. A., & Glenwick, D. S. (Eds.). (2012). *Methodological approaches to community-based research*. 260 pages. ISBN 978-1-4338-1115-9

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It is two decades since a comparable volume (edited by Tolan, Keys, Chertok, & Jason, 1990) on community psychological methodology was published. This volume is a welcome update. Reflecting on the burgeoning scope and extent of community psychology, the editors have sought to expand the range of conceptualisations in the field and correspondingly, the range of methodologies. While emphasising the ecological approach, Jason and Glenwick stress the importance of broad and wide ranging methodologies.

The book consists of four sections which reflect the structure and purpose of the book. The first section deals with pluralism and mixed methods in community psychology. This section begins with a treatment of the philosophical foundations of mixed methods and provides some fundamental understandings about the nature of contextualised research. Two other chapters, in this section deal with methodological pluralism and integrating qualitative and quantitative approaches. In keeping with the innovative approach, the subsequent three sections deal with a diversity of methodologies. For example, in section 2 there are three chapters dealing with clustering, meta-analysis and idiographic research. This last chapter re-examines the nomothetic and idiographic approaches in psychology and reflects on the importance of dealing with individual cases. Section 3 has two chapters that deal with time series analyses and survival analyses. The final section deals with methods that can directly

address contextual factors such as multilevel modelling, epidemiology, Geographic Information Systems (GIS) and economic cost analyses.

Taken as a whole, this volume represents a welcome attempt to identify a broad range of methodologies that may be appropriate for community psychological research. The book does what it sets out to do and that is to present methodologies that reflect what Kelly (2003) suggestion that community psychology needs to be less constrained by orthodoxy in its research strategies. The structure of the book is good in that the case for methodological pluralism is argued at both a conceptual and practical level and then we are presented with a variety of approaches that can be used in particular circumstances. I would see the key theme to this as being that community psychological research does not need to be mired in traditional methodology but can invoke a wide range of alternatives. Importantly, this provides researchers with opportunities to examine questions that may have seemed outside the domain of community science.

Having argued that this is an excellent community psychological methodology book I also need to point out that there are some fundamental conceptual flaws. The very notion that it is plausible to write on methodology in the absence of context is questionable in psychology and very dubious in community psychology. A not so obvious consequence of community psychology's rejection of traditional individualistic treatment of people with mental health problems by clinical psychologists is the separation of methodology from the domains from which research questions can be seen as flawed. This argument goes to the very nature of community psychology. It is very common to see methodology books that are devoid of contexts in mainstream psychology. This is consistent with the individualistic and decontextualised nature of traditional psychology. It assumes universalism and a

transparency of context. Just as mainstream clinical psychology assumed that mental health issues can be dealt with by treating the person in isolation of their social and physical context, outcomes of research conducted on one set of individuals in one location was thought to be appropriate for others elsewhere. What is important in the research process, other than the theories being tested, is the design of the research. The research design was unquestioningly assumed to be pan-cultural, as were the nature of the participants of research and the psychological theories.

The notion that mental health problems could be reduced to pan-cultural intrapsychic phenomena was anathema to the assumptions of ecological theory, prevention and empowerment. The subject domain of community psychology is 'people in context.' People cannot be thought of, or dealt with, in the absence of consideration of the context. Others have argued that that community psychology really goes beyond the consideration of people and context to considering people as context. In further divorcing community psychology from mainstream psychological conceptualising the notion of 'people as context' is based on the assumption that people are not separate entities and cannot be considered in a mechanistic way (Altman & Rogoff, 1984). In this conceptualisation of people as context, people and context are seen in holistic terms where the context is the beginning and end of the conceptual domain. By this it is meant that a contextualist perspective does not allow for the consideration of individuals as individuals, per se, but as part of dynamic and ever-shifting social structure. The issue is more one of figure and ground, one more of perspective than any physical or social reality. A corollary of this holistic approach is that methodology cannot be divorced from the nature of the research domain. This is a step beyond the social psychological questioning of methodology in which the

values of the researcher are seen as influencing the nature of the research that is done, and the questions that are asked. In this criticism of social psychology, the researcher is seen as separate from the field of study. Implicit within community psychology is the notion that researchers are part of the social system and as such their actions reflect ongoing social dynamics.

As participants in an ongoing social action, researchers are not separate from the social context in which they apply their trades. It follows that methodology is not simply an expression of the context but is part and parcel of it. The process of drawing together a set of abstract principles about research methodologies then is questionable. If methodologies are context-dependent then what sense does a volume dedicated to methodology make? The answer to this question is as obvious as it is complex. It is obvious because this is what methodologists do. It is complex because this is also what methodologists do. If we recognise that methodologists are merely players within the broader social scene then for them to stand and observe the ongoing context around them makes sense. Unfortunately it is arguable that the process of deriving abstracted methodologies leads to a compartmentalisation of the dynamic and ongoing social systems. It is not just that this means that methodology restricts the nature of the questions that are addressed (Danziger, 2002; Gigerenzer, 2010) but leads to a construction of our world consists of a series of little boxes that are determined by the nature of the methodology that is used to observe them.

This book is illustrative of the ongoing implications of the immense steps committee psychologists talk in forging new approaches to psychology. It is as valuable for what it is implicit as what is made explicit. It serves to provide the discipline with further avenues to explore what a contextualise science really means.

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