As we enter a new millennium in which rapid demographic changes in the United States are predicted to dramatically change the face of “mainstream” America, it is essential that researchers, practitioners, and policymakers come to grips with mental health disparities through culturally competent research and community-based practice. This introduction to the special issue outlines the rationale for this volume and briefly describes the main underlying themes across this set of articles. The purpose of this special issue is twofold: (a) to present studies which serve as illustrative examples of empirical research focusing on the needs and characteristics of diverse populations within various contexts in the community and also point to implications for culturally sensitive intervention/prevention; and (b) to provide directions for future research in this area of culturally competent mental health services and treatment. Implications for future research, practice, and policy are discussed. © 2006 Wiley Periodicals, Inc.
bers are projected to comprise nearly half of the U.S. population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2001). To provide the most effective mental health services to all those who enter the mental health service delivery system, it is crucial that researchers and practitioners are informed of the most up-to-date mental health conditions and mental health needs of diverse populations in their respective communities, as recommended by the U.S. Surgeon General (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2001). Moreover, it is important to identify and disseminate culturally competent intervention and prevention practices most suitable to specific ethnic and cultural groups so that mental health disparities in diverse populations may be reduced, if not eliminated.

Thus, the purpose of this special issue is twofold: first, to present studies which serve as illustrative examples of empirical research focusing on the needs and characteristics of diverse populations within various contexts in the community and also point to implications for culturally sensitive intervention and prevention; second, to provide directions for future research in this area of culturally competent mental health services and treatment. The mental health of ethnically and culturally diverse groups (e.g., African Americans, Asian Americans, Hispanic Americans, Native Americans) will be examined in a variety of contexts within the community, including the family, workplace, and schools, and will sample from both adult and child populations. Woven into these studies and commentaries will be the connecting theme of how the larger context of community plays a role in influencing either the mental health conditions of these diverse groups or the implementation of culturally competent intervention/prevention practices. Moreover, the specific values, social norms, and roles (Katz & Kahn, 1978) found in various “social, intracultural, and intercultural niches” (Cohen, 2001) will be highlighted throughout this volume.

The special issue begins with an article by Guillermo Bernal and Emily Sáez-Santiago (pp. 121–132), which presents a theoretical framework for conceptualizing eight critical dimensions of culturally centered psychosocial interventions. These eight elements include language, persons, metaphors, content, concepts, goals, methods, and context. While Bernal and Sáez-Santiago have applied this framework to Latino populations, it can be utilized with various ethnic minority groups. The authors set the stage for examining the next article by Melanie Domenech Rodríguez and her colleagues on “Observed Parenting Practices of First-Generation Latino Families” (pp. 133-148). In their study, we can observe the elements of language, persons, metaphors, content, concepts, methods, and context all playing a role through the examination of parenting practices of first-generation Latino parents and their young children.

Next, Irene J. Kim and her colleagues (pp. 149–165) offer a contextual analysis of significant indigenous cultural values in the Korean immigrant community as a way to develop cultural competence. These indigenous cultural values include haan (suppressed anger), jeong (strong feeling of kinship), and noon-chi (ability to evaluate social situations through implicit cues). These values are defined not only at the individual level, but are situated within the context of family and community networks, and the dynamic interplay across and within these levels of analysis are highlighted. In an empirical study of Korean, Chinese, and Japanese American parents and their adolescent children, Su Yeong Kim and colleagues (pp. 167–182) then explore how acculturation level, and specifically marginality, affects the psychosocial adjustment of Asian American family members.

Les Whitbeck (pp. 183–192) offers a set of guiding assumptions for prevention research partnerships with Native American communities and a theoretical model for developing culturally specific interventions with Native American people. Teresa LaFromboise and colleagues (pp. 193–209) also use a prevention approach in examining
predictors of resilience among American Indian adolescents from the upper Midwest. They identified protective factors from multiple contexts, including the family, community, and culture.

The next set of articles examines well-being and mental health disparities in broader community contexts. Noemi Enchautegui-de-Jesús and her colleagues (pp. 211–223) studied the well-being of African American and Latina and Latino workers in the context of their workplace, specifically examining how the racial and ethnic composition of co-workers affect psychological functioning. Lonnie Snowden and colleagues (pp. 225–235) evaluated the effectiveness of a state-wide system of mental health services in California in terms of strategies used to outreach to ethnic minority clients and penetration rates of ethnic minorities into treatment.

Finally, the special issue concludes with an article by Stanley Sue (pp. 237–245) that synthesizes the multiple meanings of cultural competency in terms of philosophical roots, research, and practice. Sue presents essential ingredients of cultural competency as general processes, as well as concrete strategies, that can be learned and applied to multiple contexts across diverse populations. Thus, with this collection of theoretical and empirical papers, this special issue aims to continue the dialogue that was sparked by the Surgeon General’s Report on Culture, Race, and Ethnicity (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2001). In this process, we hope to stimulate further research in this area of mental health disparities and cultural competence with diverse populations so that prevention and intervention efforts, as well as future policy, can be better informed and culturally sensitive to the needs of the populations being served.

REFERENCES


