

# CULTURE, WELLNESS, AND WORLD “PEaCE”: AN INTRODUCTION TO PERSON-ENVIRONMENT-AND-CULTURE- EMERGENCE THEORY

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*Human experience cannot be separated from culture. Yet, distance remains between psychology’s acknowledgement of the importance of culture, and its consistent integration into psychological theory, research, and practice. Person-Environment-and-Culture-Emergence (PEaCE) Theory, an integrative, complex systems approach, is introduced to facilitate conceptualization of individual and collective wellness outcomes. It draws primarily upon cultural and community psychologies in the context of a broad humanistic orientation that holds the dignity, humanity, and interconnectedness of all persons of the world as its core value. The “Being-in-Culture-in-the-World” Transactional Field represents the infinite and complex interrelationships between multidimensional biopsychorelational (person), socioecological (environment), and cultural systems that are in ongoing and dynamic transaction. Positive (e.g., thriving, well-being) and negative (e.g., dysfunction, disease) wellness outcomes are conceptualized as emergent properties of the activity of the transactional field. PEaCE Theory is informed by a large and diverse body of conceptual and empirical literature, both within and outside of psychology (e.g., public health, cultural studies), that converge in their insistence on the critical role of culture and context for understanding human experience and improving the health of persons, relationships, communities, and nations. PEaCE Theory will require ongoing testing and refinement towards its aim of transdisciplinary and global relevance.*

**Keywords:** community psychology, complex systems, culture, human diversity, wellness

## 1. Introduction

*“No clear boundaries indicate where the mind stops and the cultural ecology of the situation starts. Mind and culture mutually constitute each other.”*

-Barrett, Mesquita, & Smith (2010, p. 9)

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“My humanity is bound up in yours for we can only be human together.”  
-Bishop Desmond Tutu

Immigration, refugee displacement and relocation, educational visas, and the expansion of transportation, media, and communication technologies have increasingly brought “the world” to the front door of a mainstream psychology whose home has largely been in the United States and parts of Western Europe. As a consequence of these dynamics of globalization, the field is being confronted with a demand to become less insular and homogenous (Marsella, 2009; Stevens & Gielen, 2007; van de Vijver, 2013). Hermans and Kempen (1998) suggested that the increasing contact between nations challenges the dichotomizing tendencies of psychological science and encourages greater understanding of cultural “contact zones” and attention to the complexities of self and identity. Marsella (1998), in his proposal for a global-community psychology, stated that “human survival and well-being is now embedded in a complex interdependent global web of economic, political, social, technical, and environmental events, forces, and changes” (p. 1282), and more recently noted that “psychology as a science and profession is unprepared to function at global levels because of its ethnocentric biases and orientation” (Marsella, 2012, p. 467).

Several authors have observed that globalization has contributed to the Euro-American brand of psychology becoming increasingly utilized in diverse countries around the world. At the same time, psychological contributions from Africa, Latin America, Asia, and the Middle East are marginalized (Adair, Coelho & Luna, 2002; Gergen, Gulerce, Lock & Misra, 1996; Mays, Rubin, Sabourin & Walder, 1996). Globalization has had both positive and negative effects on psychology’s orientation to cultural diversity. On the one hand, it has provided increased exposure to global human suffering and has broadened psychological conceptions of optimal functioning and well-being (Constantine & Sue, 2006; Delle Fave & Bassi, 2009; Prilleltensky, 2012). On the other hand, it has opened up the exportation and adoption of psychological approaches rooted in Euro-American cultural contexts to settings where the methods and constructs, and the deeper ontologies and epistemologies, may not be culturally congruent, and in some cases, cause harm (Church & Katigbak, 2002; Gergen, Gulerce, Lock & Misra, 1996; Hill, Lau & Sue, 2010; Maracek, 2012; Marsella, 2012; Prilleltensky, 2012). In a discussion of the need for more representation of the African experience in the psychological literature, Mpofo (2002) expresses concern regarding the “extensive marketing of the Western cultural heritage around the globe” (p. 179). The launch of this new journal, *Community Psychology in Global Perspective*, is a welcome addition to the field as it provides a forum for publication from diverse cultural contexts and perspectives.

The significance of culture for psychological science and practice has been widely stated (American Psychological Association, 2003; Cauce, 2011; Gurung, 2013; Hall, 2014; Kim, Yang & Hwang, 2006; Kirshner & Martin, 2010; Kitayama & Cohen, 2007; Massimi & Delle Fave, 2000; Misra & Gergen, 1993). However, there is a gap between the stated importance of culture and the practice of incorporating culture into theory-building, empirical research, and intervention efforts (Cheung, 2012; Gone, 2011a; Simich, Maiter, Moorlag & Ochocka, 2009). Within the area of community psychology, human diversity is considered to be a core value (Kloos, Hill, Thomas, Wandersman, Elias & Dalton, 2011; Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2010; Rappaport, 1977; Trickett, 2009) and suggestions regarding its integration into the work of community psychologists have been offered (Bernal & Saez-Santiago, 2006; Harrell & Bond, 2006; Kral, Garcia, Aber, Masood, Dutta & Todd, 2011; Mankowski, Galvez & Glass, 2011; O’Donnell, 2006; Trickett, Watts & Birman, 1993). Community-based research and intervention

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efforts often target culturally diverse, marginalized and historically oppressed communities; however, there is great variability in how meaningfully and in what depth culture is considered. Voices from critical, feminist and liberation psychologies have brought greater analysis of power asymmetries, structural violence, colonialism, and oppression to community psychology (Angelique & Mulvey, 2012; Hook & Howarth, 2005; Moane, 2010; Prilleltensky, 2008; Reyes Cruz & Sonn, 2011; Sonn, 2005; Watts, 2004; Watts & Serrano-Garcia, 2003). These issues are critical to a full analysis of the dynamics of human diversity and are played out in the meeting of diverse cultural worldviews in various societal and community contexts. Several scholars have contributed, over time, to a more nuanced and complex understanding of culture in community psychology research and action (Balcazar, Suarez-Balcazar & Taylor-Ritzler, 2009; Brodsky & Faryal, 2006; Gone, 2011b; Hazel & Mohatt, 2001; Lykes & Sibley, 2013; Mattis, 2002; Reyes Cruz & Sonn, 2011; Sonn, 2012; Trickett, 2011). Their efforts, among others, have facilitated movement forward in the quest for an increasingly meaningful role of culture in community psychology.

*Person-Environment-and-Culture-Emergence (PEaCE)* Theory is introduced here as a way of conceptualizing the transactional and co-created nature of human experience. Its primary aim is to bring culture and context more explicitly into a transdisciplinary framework for the study of individual and collective wellness outcomes. PEaCE Theory is an intentional integration of cultural and community psychologies within a broad humanistic orientation that holds the dignity and humanity of all persons of the world as its core value. The humanistic influence is described beautifully by Comas-Diaz (2012a) in her discussion of the convergence of multicultural and humanistic psychology around issues of holism, contextualism, human dignity, liberation, and transformation.

## 2. Conceptualizing Culture

Multiple definitions of culture appear in the psychological literature (e.g., Betancourt & Lopez, 1993; Chao & Kesebir, 2013; Gone, 2011a; Kim, 2001; Matsumoto, 2007; Misra & Gergen, 1993; Nobles, 2006). More broadly, the book *Redefining Culture* (Baldwin, Faulkner, Hecht & Lindsley, 2006) presents over 300 definitions of culture across disciplines ranging from anthropology to political science. An integrative conceptualization of culture is offered here in an attempt to capture commonly discussed elements. The present conceptualization attempts to avoid: (1) the assumption that people belong to a singular, homogenous “culture”, (2) utilization of the word culture for the purpose of categorization, and (3) the conflation of culture and nationality (e.g., her culture is Nigerian). Culture is conceptualized here as *the multiple historical, sociopolitically-situated, and organizing systems of meaning, knowledge, and daily living that involve **patterns of being, believing, bonding, belonging, behaving, and becoming** which provide foundational frames for developing worldview, interpreting reality, and acting in the world for a group of people who share common ancestry, social location, group identity, or defining experiential context; but for whom, as individuals or intersectional subgroups, particular elements of a cultural system may be embraced, internalized, and expressed differently. Cultural systems emerge and transform over time through cumulative and adaptation-oriented person-environment transactions, and are maintained and transmitted through collective memory, narrative, and socialization processes.* Cultural systems are dynamic

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while simultaneously being *embedded* in social and institutional contexts, *internalized* as patterns of meaning and identity, *expressed* through actions and relationships, and *interactive* with co-existing cultural systems that reflect the multiple dimensions of human diversity that carry culture.

The various aspects of this conceptualization warrant further elaboration. First, culture is understood as the *multiple historical, socio-politically-situated, and organizing systems of meaning, knowledge and daily living*. Cultural systems must be understood within the larger historical and sociopolitical contexts within which they have evolved, inform human action, and are maintained and transmitted (Okasaki, David & Abelman, 2008; Reyes Cruz & Sonn, 2011). As a systemic process, culture is characterized by having multiple interconnected elements. Elements of cultural systems include material, social, symbolic, and ideological products and expressions that organize ways of living successfully in a particular context. There are multiple, co-existing cultural systems that operate simultaneously, including those rooted in identity-related categories such as nationality, ethnicity, and religion, as well as those that have developed from defining experiential contexts (e.g., occupational, institutional). Specific cultural systems may be dominant within a society such that all persons are to some degree socialized within that system (e.g., national culture). Other cultural systems function within particular social contexts (e.g., religious culture), and socialization is specific to those who are exposed to its elements. The dynamics of power and privilege in a society influence which cultural systems are deemed “normal”, that is acceptable, desirable, and healthy.

It is less essentializing to conceptualize culture as systems of interwoven patterns of meaning, knowledge, and daily living that emerge and become manifested in particular group contexts, rather than as the group of people themselves (Adams & Markus, 2001; Okasaki, David & Abelman, 2008; Reyes Cruz & Sonn, 2011). Cultural systems are understood as consisting of *patterns of being, believing, bonding, belonging, behaving, and becoming* that are carried in networks of knowledge, meanings, symbolic representations, values, and beliefs; and manifested through language, communication styles, emotional expression, interpersonal behaviors, social roles, health and healing practices, institutional structures, organizational policies and practices, ideologies, aesthetics, customs and normative behaviors, rituals, symbols, and physical artifacts. This conceptualization draws from Nobles’ notion of persons as “belonging, being, and becoming” entities (Nobles, 1998), Piper-Mandy & Rowe’s description of the path of the human spirit (before, beginning, belonging, being, becoming, beholding, and beyond), and Saroglou’s four dimensions of cultural variability in religious orientations-- believing, bonding, behaving, belonging (Saroglou, 2011),

One of the most significant functions of culture relevant to psychological theory and practice is that it provides the *foundational frames for developing worldviews, interpreting reality, and acting in the world*. As such, understanding cultural systems is critical for transforming and optimizing human experience. Meaning and culture are inseparable phenomenon (Chao & Kesebir, 2013) which has implications for the significance of the meaning-making function of culture in psychological and preventive interventions (Mattis, 2002). The emergence of human agency, acting in the world with intentionality and flexibility (Bandura, 2002), is also culturally-embedded. Since many psychologically-based interventions target meanings and/or behaviors, the effectiveness of change efforts can be increased when the role of culture in the generation and expression of these meanings and behaviors is considered.

Cultural systems develop among groups *who share common ancestry, social location, group identity, and/or defining experiential contexts*. These collective entities can be

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conceptualized as “carrying” culture. They reflect dimensions of human diversity, function within the sociopolitical dynamics of a society, and are transmitted within multiple socioecological contexts. Primary macrocultural systems are deeply embedded in the functioning of persons and contexts. They are transmitted within family and community socialization processes from an early age and in most cases will include the intersecting diversity dimensions of nationality, ethnicity, religion, gender, socioeconomic status, and the sociopolitical construct of race. Elements of privileged macrocultural systems are woven into the dominant cultural narrative of a society (e.g., generational trends, heteronormativity, white superiority) to which nearly all persons are exposed. There are also microcultural communities where exposure often occurs after childhood and outside of the family socialization context. Microcultural systems function within particular sociocultural communities, and can reflect (1) various group identities such as sexual minority status (e.g., gay male culture) and disability status (e.g., deaf culture), (2) social entities such as occupation/vocation (e.g., police officer, artist, clergy) or institutional/organizational affiliations (e.g., the military, a political party), and (3) shared, defining life experiences (e.g., Alcoholics Anonymous, prison). While exposure may happen later in life and immersion in some microcultural communities is voluntary, they can nonetheless exert a powerful influence on ways of “being, believing, bonding, belonging, behaving, and becoming”.

It is important to emphasize that all people are exposed to multiple macro- and micro- cultural contexts which intersect and interact in unique ways. We are all *multicultural* beings with various diversity dimensions being differentially salient depending on our life experiences, social environments, statuses on intersectional dimensions of diversity, our social locations and their accompanying power and privilege dynamics, as well as the immediate situational context. No single dimension of human diversity ever exists in isolation. In addition, cultural socialization (enculturation) processes do not necessarily result in every individual adopting or expressing the entire system of cultural patterns. Thus, while a group of people may share exposure to the same cultural system, *particular elements of any cultural system may be embraced, internalized, and expressed differently*. Intragroup variability is an inevitable result of the numerous contextual and individual influences on human behavior. It is important to specify relevant dimensions to facilitate analysis, identify interactions, and describe the origins and qualities of particular cultural expressions; however, culture is always expressed intersectionally.

The concept of intersectionality has important implications for understanding culture. Intersectionality refers to the co-existence and complex interplay between multiple interwoven systems of oppression. Intersectionality theory emphasizes the dynamics of power and privilege, and of difference and sameness, that emerge from interactions between multiple, co-occurring oppressed statuses and play out in a variety of contexts (e.g., economic, legal, community, health, interpersonal). Writings about intersectionality were initially applied to the multiple oppressions of African American women and emphasized the intersection of race, class, and gender (Cho, Crenshaw & McCall, 2013; Collins, 1986). However, the ideas have developed extensively over the past three decades across disciplines and globally to include additional social location categories where inequalities exist and privilege is held by a dominant group (e.g., sexual orientation, age) (Bose, 2012; Cole, 2009; Hancock, 2007; Hulko, 2009; McCall, 2005; Walby, 2011). Intersectionality has become a central theme in multicultural psychology (David, Okasaki & Giroux, 2014), as well as an important theme in feminist community psychology (Angelique & Mulvey, 2012).

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Finally, cultural systems *emerge and transform over time through cumulative, adaptation-oriented person-environment interactions* and are thus not static, but rather are dynamic processes where potentials for cultural shifts and transformations are continually present. Cultural patterns and ways of being evolve as adaptations to the opportunities, demands, threats, and constraints inherent in shared person-environment transactions. Culture is *maintained and transmitted through collective memory, narrative, and socialization processes*. Material, social, symbolic, and ideological elements of culture are transmitted in a variety of contexts including familial, community, and societal institutions. Collective memory is an important aspect of co-constructed cultural transmission that both reflects and influences identity, interpersonal and intergroup relationships, institutional practices, sociopolitical processes, and the dynamics of difference, power, and oppression (Cicourel, 2014; Hirst & Manier, 2008; Wang, 2008; Wertsch & Roediger, 2008; Wilson, 2005).

### 3. Conceptualizing Wellness

PEaCE Theory is a theory of wellness, an effort to provide a culturally-inclusive framework for understanding health and well-being. Wellness promotion has long been an emphasis in community psychology as represented in the work of Emory Cowen (Cowen, 1991, 1994), Isaac Prilleltensky (Prilleltensky, 2005, 2008, 2012; Prilleltensky & Nelson, 2000), and others (Davidson & Cotter, 1991; Kelly, 2000; Schueller, 2009). The enhancement of wellness has been identified as an important goal of community psychology (Kloos et al., 2011). A strengths-based perspective is similarly emphasized in multicultural psychology (Bowman, 2006; Constantine & Sue, 2006; Harrell, 2014; Vera & Shin, 2006) where it counters the deficit-oriented, pathologizing, difference-as-deviance proclivities present throughout the history of psychology. The promotion of wellness has been linked to the pursuit of social justice with an emphasis on collective well-being in both the community and multicultural psychology literatures (Prilleltensky, 2008; Vera & Speight, 2003; Watts, 2004). From a public health perspective, Stokols (2000) offers a social ecological model of wellness that highlights the role of the sociocultural and sociopolitical environment in health promotion. His emphasis on the development of health-promotive environments is quite consistent with community and multicultural psychologies.

Wellness goes beyond reducing impairment and preventing disease to achieving higher states of health (Breslow, 2000). The *World Health Organization (WHO)* defines wellness as “the optimal state of health of individuals and groups” and identifies two focal concerns. First, wellness involves “the realization of the fullest potential of an individual physically, psychologically, socially, spiritually and economically”; and second, “wellness includes the fulfillment of one’s role expectations in the family, community, place of worship, workplace and other settings” (Smith, Tang & Nutbeam, 2006, p. 343). According to the *National Wellness Institute (NWI)*, “wellness is an active, positive, and affirming process through which people become aware of, and make choices toward, a more successful existence... a conscious, self-directed and evolving process of achieving full potential.” The NWI describes wellness as multidimensional and holistic, involving lifestyle, psychological, spiritual, and environmental aspects (National Wellness Institute, n.d.). Within PEaCE Theory, wellness is conceptualized as culturally-syntonic processes and expressions that indicate, or are moving toward, greater

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resilience, well-being, thriving, optimal functioning and fulfillment of highest potentialities in multiple contexts of living. Five wellness contexts have been articulated by Harrell (2014): physical, psychological, relational, collective, and transcendent. PEaCE Theory is particularly interested in culturally-embedded expressions of wellness across these contexts and as manifested at multiple levels of analysis from the individual to the global.

#### **4. PEaCE Theory: Foundations of an Integrative Perspective**

A transdisciplinary theoretical framework for wellness that meaningfully integrates both context and culture is needed. Both multicultural and community psychology have called for greater integration of the two fields (David, Okasaki & Giroux, 2014; Suarez-Balcazar, Balcazar, Garcia-Ramirez & Taylor-Ritzler, 2014). *Person-Environment-and-Culture-Emergence (PEaCE) Theory* is offered as a launching point toward this integration. PEaCE Theory draws upon complex systems thinking to conceptualize how diverse wellness outcomes emerge from the ongoing transactions between and within interconnected person, environmental, and cultural systems. It aims for transdisciplinary relevance in an effort to reflect common ground among those concerned with human diversity, culture, social justice, and wellness (Christens & Perkins, 2008; Maclachlan, 2014; Stokols, 2006; Stoner, 2013). While its disciplinary home is psychology, theory and research from other disciplines spanning the human, social, and health sciences, as well as the humanities, have provided inspiration and support for the approach (e.g., anthropology, sociology, public health, cultural studies). Cultural studies is an important contributor to the development of the PEaCE perspective as it brings the rich and textured analysis of the humanities. A powerful example of the relevance of cultural studies is the work of Gloria Anzaldúa on cultural borderlands, the process of *conocimientos* (critical awareness), social justice, and spiritual activism (Anzaldúa, 2002; Cantu, 2011; Keating, 2008).

Within the broad discipline of psychology, theory and empirical research from various sub-fields support the contextualizing emphasis of PEaCE Theory. Barsalou, Wilson and Hasenkamp (2010) speak to the “importance of context across diverse literatures, including genetics, neuroscience, perception, action, cognition, emotion, social interaction, and culture” (p. 334). Eleven areas of psychology have made specific conceptual and empirical contributions to understanding the pivotal role of context in the study of human behavior, and have particularly influenced the development of PEaCE Theory.

- (1) The *Psychology of Cognition and Emotion* is increasingly moving away from essentialism and the nominalization of mental and affective processes toward an understanding of how all “psychological phenomena (from genes to personhood) of interest emerge from the interaction between mind and context” (Barrett, Mesquita & Smith, 2010, p. 14). Barrett, Mesquita and Smith provide convincing evidence from multiple disciplines for the significance of context in understanding psychological processes. According to Barsalou, Wilson and Hasenkamp (2010), “the ubiquity of context effects” suggest that “dynamic, context-sensitive processes constitute central mechanisms in natural organisms” (p. 344).
- (2) *Gestalt Psychology* has contributed the foundational idea that “the whole is greater than the sum of its parts” (Wheeler, 2005) and has had far reaching influence across many areas of psychology encouraging an anti-reductionistic orientation that is holistic and

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integrated.

- (3) In *Social Psychology*, Kurt Lewin's Field Theory and formula indicate that human behavior is a function of person and environment interaction ( $B=f(P,E)$ ) (Lewin, 1951, 1960). This work, as well as his contributions in the areas of action research and intergroup relations, are relevant to PEaCE Theory and have been profoundly influential across sub-disciplines of psychology (Bronfenbrenner, 1977; Burnes, 2004).
- (4) *Organizational Psychology* has extended Lewin's ideas related to the concept of person-environment fit (Edwards, Caplan & Harrison, 1998; Jansen & Kristof-Brown, 2006) and models of organizational change. A systemic perspective is common in research and applications involving persons within organizational contexts and conceptualizing organizations as complex systems is a recent trend in the field (Cilliers, 2000; Stevenson, 2012).
- (5) *Developmental Psychology* has been particularly influential through the seminal contributions of Urie Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Theory of Human Development (aka Ecological Systems Theory) (Bronfenbrenner, 1989; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). Bronfenbrenner (influenced by Lewin) suggested that development occurs within nested systems (microsystems, mesosystems, exosystems, macrosystems, chronosystems), an idea that has significantly impacted the trajectory of developmental psychology (Cicchetti & Valentino, 2013), as well as the multiple levels of analysis perspective of community psychology (Kloos et al., 2011).
- (6) *Systems Psychology*, the application of systems thinking to the study of human behavior, has been promoted most strongly in family psychology (Smith-Acuna, 2010; Stanton, 2009) and community psychology (Fuks, 1998; Kelly, 2007). This perspective has stimulated a large amount of theory and research supporting the idea that human beings are interactively interconnected with each other and with external systems. Systemic analysis focus on the nature of interrelationships within and between systems (e.g., families, groups, communities, organizations, social institutions) and is increasingly being applied in health promotion and health care (Leischow, Best, Trochim, Clark, Gallagher, Marcus & Matthews, 2008; Norman, 2009).
- (7) *Health Psychology's* central theoretical grounding is biopsychosocial theory and the field is increasingly moving toward an expanded multiple levels of analysis perspective (Suls & Rothman, 2004). In addition, Lazarus' mediational theory of stress as a function of person-environment transactions is a frequently utilized model in the field (Lazarus, 1999).
- (8) *Cultural, Feminist, Critical, and Liberation Psychologies* share the centering of oppression, power, privilege, and social justice in conceptualizing and transforming human experience in the context of cultural diversity (Church & Katigbak, 2002; James & Prilleltensky, 2002; Martin-Baro, 1994; Angelique & Mulvey, 2012; Moane, 2010; Mpofu, 2002; Reyes Cruz & Sonn, 2011; Shi-xu, 2002; Sinha, 1998; Watkins & Shulman, 2008). The sociopolitical context is a critical factor in the uneven distribution of wellness in the world and an important consideration in developing applications of PEaCE Theory.
- (9) *Constructivist Psychology* focuses on the co-construction of experience as a function of social location such as gender, race, and social class. Meanings and lived experience emerge from socially constructed narratives (stories) that are tied to our personal, social, temporal, political, and cultural contexts. These meanings influence identity and



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memory, shape our understanding and interactions with others and in the world (Bhatia, 2011; Bruner 1990; Gergen, 2009; Hammack, 2008; Rappaport, 1995), and reflect a contextualized understanding of the human mind.

- (10) *Humanistic psychology* has expanded from its self-focused expressive individualism to connect more meaningfully with the larger implications of humanism for social justice. This is exemplified in Carl Rogers' efforts in international peace work (Lago, 2013). Recent humanistic thought includes implications of existential thinking for social justice and meaning in the context of oppression, as well as greater exploration of what being "fully human" means in diverse cultural contexts (Comas-Diaz, 2012a; Harrell, Coleman & Adams, 2014; O'Hara, 2007).
- (11) *Peace Psychology* is concerned with peacebuilding and violence reduction. It is inherently relational and international, focuses on systemic and cultural causes and expressions, and emphasizes peace education, building cultures of peace, the reduction of direct and structural violence, and the promotion of dialogue as a pathway to peace (Christie, 2006; Danesh, 2008; Galtung, 1996; Vernooij & Noldus, 2012).

The collective bodies of work across these areas of psychology converge to provide a loud and consistent message: ***the various manifestations, explanations, and transformations of human mental, emotional and behavioral processes cannot be understood apart from the larger relational, cultural, ecological, sociopolitical, global, and historical contexts within which they evolve and are expressed.***

PEaCE Theory, evolving since 2010, has been presented by this author at several professional conferences during its various stages of development. It is inspired by the work of many scholars who have been similarly concerned with the substantive inclusion of culture into an integrative conceptual approach that has a strong foundation in socioecological and systems perspectives. These include: Falicov's Multidimensional-Ecosystemic-Comparative Approach (MECA; Falicov, 1995), Nobles' Culturecology (Nobles, Goddard & Gilbert, 2009), Spencer's Phenomenological Variant of Ecological Systems Theory (PVEST; Spencer, Dupree & Hartmann, 1997), Marsella's global-community psychology (1998), O'Donnell's cultural-community psychology (2006), Markus and Hamedani's sociocultural psychology (2007), Oishi & Graham's socioecological psychology (2010), Thommen & Wettstein's cultural co-evolutionary perspective on person-environment relationships (2010); and Kirschner & Martin's discussion of the "sociocultural turn" in psychology (2010). In addition, this author's psychoecocultural perspective serves as a precursor of PEaCE theory in its framing of an integrative approach to human behavior that includes psychological, ecological, and cultural processes (Harrell, 2014).

A defining contribution and central feature of PEaCE Theory is the identification of cultural influences and processes at all levels of analysis. As Marsella (2009) has suggested, all psychological theory emerges from a particular cultural context. More broadly, Gergen, Gulerce, Lock and Misra (1996) have argued strongly that all knowledge is a product of culture. It is therefore important to be transparent regarding the salient cultural contexts of the author, which have inevitably influenced the content and assumptions of the PEaCE framework.

I am an African-American woman who was born and raised in Detroit, Michigan in the early 1960's. My parents' immediate roots were in the coal-mining hills of West Virginia, where I spent a great deal of my childhood. I attended college outside of Boston, Massachusetts in the late 1970's and early 1980's where racial tensions around the issue of bussing were quite intense. The Civil Rights Movement was part of the landscape of my childhood, including "riots" in the

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late 1960's that resulted in a strong military presence in my neighborhood. Central in my consciousness during my young adult years were the struggles of South Africa and a growing understanding of the interlocking oppressions of racism, sexism, classism, and heterosexism. As such, a felt connection with the intersectional dynamics of my womanhood and my African ancestry has intensified over the course of my life. Many additional factors, including personal experiences of racism and sexism, witnessing neighborhood violence in my childhood, my spiritual journey, and a family legacy of highly educated African Americans, have significantly impacted the lenses through which I see the world. PEaCE Theory was seeded in these experiences and has developed concurrently with my professional evolution as a community-clinical psychologist in the United States with areas of expertise in racism-related stress, culture and diversity in psychological and community interventions, and African-American mental health. Finally, two encompassing ideas, the ethic of Ubuntu and contemporary womanist thinking, have been particularly influential with respect to the spirit of PEaCE Theory in its underlying humanistic orientation and central theme of interconnectedness.

Ubuntu is a South African Zulu principle which defines the essence of being human as a spiritually-infused interconnectedness and interdependence such that the foundation for living optimally and manifesting our highest humanity comes from the nature of our relationships with others in the context of being in community (Edwards, Makunga, Ngcobo & Dhlomo, 2004; Ramantzi, Lebeko, Mafojane, Masondo, Ntshokolsha & Tiha; 2002). Ubuntu is the relational nature of our humanness. The application of an Ubuntu worldview within psychology has been most clearly developed in the writings of African psychologists, as well as African-centered psychologists in the United States. African-centered psychology is an orientation which places African understandings of a spiritually generated and communally manifested interconnectedness at the center of the analysis of human experience (Akbar, 2003; Grills, 2009; Myers, 1988; Nobles, 2006; Rowe & Webb-Msemaji, 2004). The broader scholarly literature contains a variety of applications of an Ubuntu worldview that include providing a moral compass (Metz & Gaie, 2010), informing processes of social and restorative justice (Elechi, Morris & Schauer, 2010; Jones, 2006), conceptualizing leadership and organizations (Luchien & Illa, 2005; Malunga, 2009), influencing education and pedagogy (Samkange & Samkange, 2013; Waghid & Smeyers, 2012), informing participatory research methods (Muwanga-Zake, 2009), and guiding the practice of psychotherapy (van Dyk & Matoane, 2010; Washington, 2010).

The wellness enhancement implications of linking PEaCE theory to an Ubuntu consciousness are two-fold. First, an appreciation of the interdependent nature of all living systems must inform how wellness is defined and promoted. Oppression and exploitation in any system signifies severe relational dysfunction and threatens the wellness of all human, ecological, and institutional systems. Second, the most basic and necessary conditions for optimal health and well-being lie in the harmoniousness of our relationships with others, with community, with nature, and with the transcendent. The fundamental spiritual power of Ubuntu is strengthened through an understanding of our fundamental interconnectedness as expressed in communal and interpersonal relationships. Healthy communal and relational functioning is viewed as necessary for the optimal functioning of society.

Another significant influence that emerges from the author's cultural context and theoretical leanings is contemporary womanist theory (Coleman, 2008; Maparyan, 2012). Inspired by Alice Walker's 1983 offering of a four-part conceptualization of "womanist" as a representation of the lived experience of Black women, womanist theory simultaneously considers the multiple oppressions of racism, sexism, classism, and heterosexism. Womanist theory has used Walker's

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conceptualization as a foundation for expanding its scope across multiple disciplines, while emphasizing relationality within a community-centered and collectivist sensibility that stands in defiance of oppression in any form. Westfield (2006) speaks of womanist theory as “an epistemology of hope” and suggests that it “is grounded in the notion that change-- reframing, re-thinking, re-imagining, re-naming, re-structuring, re-conceiving—birthing anew, is not only possible but necessary” (Location 2769). The womanist perspective, with its transformative potential, is an important voice in movement toward the optimal well-being of individuals, relationships, communities, and humanity (Harrell, Coleman & Adams, 2014).

The Ubuntu ethic and womanist thought suggest a larger meaning of the acronym “PEaCE”. It is generally agreed that the term *peace* refers to a relational condition with two dimensions, violence (negative peace) and harmony (positive peace), that are manifested at multiple levels of analysis from intra-individual to global (Christie, 2006; Royce, 2004). For the purposes of PEaCE theory, peace is understood as harmonious interconnectedness *within and between* persons, communities, and nations that is informed by a multicultural worldview. According to Harrell and Gallardo (2008):

A multicultural worldview requires (a) a central consciousness of diversity and global citizenship; (b) an attitude of inclusion; (c) an assumption that difference is not deviance but is to be valued, honored, and affirmed; (d) a view of people of all cultures as fully human with dignity and a right to self-determination; (e) an awareness of social and economic asymmetries that confer privilege based on social location; and (f) a belief in the power of the interdependencies and interconnectedness across cultures. (pp. 115-116)

Thus, from a Person-Environment-and-Culture-Emergence perspective, the promotion of wellness is fundamentally concerned with facilitating movement toward harmonious interconnectedness that is grounded in a multicultural worldview and expressed at intrapersonal, relational, communal, societal, and global levels of analysis.

#### **4.1. *The Complexity of PEaCE***

PEaCE Theory is informed by recent applications of complexity thinking and dynamic systems theory in psychology and health care (Byrne & Callaghan, 2014; deVillers & Cilliers, 2004; Higginbotham, Albrecht & Connor, 2001; Keenan, 2010; Kriz, 2013; Mahoney & Marquis, 2002; Norman, 2009; Porter, Bothne & Jason, 2008; Tenbensen, 2013; Thelen, 2005; Wheeler, 2005). *The PEaCE Transactional Wellness Model* (see Figure 1) indicates that individual and collective wellness outcomes are emergent properties of the holistic *Being-in-Culture-in-the-World Transactional Field*, which itself emerges from continuous interactions among three interrelated systems: the *Person* (a multidimensional biopsychorelational system), the *Environment* (a multilevel socioecological system), and *Culture* (systems of meaning, knowledge, and daily living). The model provides a visual structure for conceptualizing system elements and their interactions. However, the transactional nature of the field is characterized by continuous, fluid, and dynamic activity that cannot be captured in a static image. Thus, the visual model is not intended as an exact representation of the activity of the field; it is rather an attempt

to provide a snapshot of the primary elements and their general interrelationships with each other in order to stimulate the development of research questions and to inform intervention approaches.



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**Figure 1. The Person-Environment-and-Culture-Emergence (PEaCE) Transactional Wellness Model**

PEaCE Theory brings together the emphasis on culture from the cultural psychologies and the emphasis on context from community and socioecological psychologies, within a broader transdisciplinary orientation and underlying humanistic (Ubuntu) worldview, in order to enhance a holistic conceptualization of individual and collective wellness outcomes. The PEaCE Transactional Wellness Model can be summarized as follows: *Individual and collective wellness outcomes emerge from ongoing activity in the “Being-in-Culture-in-the-World” Transactional Field where person, environment, and culture systems are in dynamic and reciprocal transaction such that the continuous interactions within and between culturally-infused biopsychorelational dimensions of the person, culturally-infused socioecological systems of the environment, and the psychocultural and sociocultural processes of cultural systems (carried by multiple intersecting social groups and structures), operate in complex ways to create human lived*

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*experience, influence how we construct ourselves, others, and the world, as well as create the potential for the emergence of human agency.*

PEaCE Theory extends the person-environment interaction foundations of field theory (Lewin) and bioecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner) to explicitly include culture. PEaCE theory is based on the proposition that all of human experience occurs at the intersection of persons, environments, and culture, and that culture is infused into all subsystems of both persons and environments. Culture both arises from, and links together, persons and environments in dynamic interaction. The theory suggests that descriptions of human experience and behavior must incorporate consideration of the whole Being-in-Culture-in-the-World transactional field in order to fully capture the dynamic process of the individual as a living multi-system that is embedded in and interdependent with multiple cultural and ecological systems. Underlying these ideas is the theoretical assumption of the nonexistence of a decontextualized “self”. From Ubuntu (African-centered) and womanist perspectives, the essence of human existence is “in relationship” (to others, to community, to place, to nature, to transcendent experience). From a global perspective, many indigenous groups understand the person as inherently relational including Mestizo/Latinos (Arredondo, Aviles, Zalaquett, Grazios, Bordes, Hita & Lopez, 2006), Native Hawaiians (McCubbin & Marsella, 2009), Asian Indians (Sinha, 1998), and the Maori people of New Zealand (Gregory, 2001), among many others. Interestingly, this orientation appears to be more prevalent among humankind than the separate and individualistic concept of the person that underlies most of psychological science to date.

Consistent with recent systems theories in psychology and health sciences (Higginbotham, Albrecht & Connor, 2001; Keenan, 2010; Mahoney & Marquis, 2002; Porter, Bothne & Jason, 2008; Tenbenschel, 2013; Thelen, 2005; Wheeler, 2005), the PEaCE approach draws upon the principles of dynamic systems theory and complexity thinking. Complexity is an increasingly utilized paradigm in the natural and social sciences which seeks to describe historical, open systems that interact with their environment and are characterized by processes of mutual and reciprocal interaction, non-linear relationships, self-organization, continuous feedback loops, and the emergence of phenomena not reducible to its component parts (Byrne & Callaghan, 2014; Cilliers, 1998; Cilliers & Preiser, 2010; Gatrell, 2005; Rickles, Hawe & Shiell, 2007). Complexity theory rejects the mechanistic and deterministic views of traditional science and simple linear models of psychological phenomena in favor of a view that complex phenomenon (such as health and wellness) are not static, do not exist in states of equilibrium, and can never be completely predicted because of the multiple interacting systems simultaneously at play and their self-organizing and emergent properties.

Complexity theory has been applied in multiple areas of research and practice relevant to the promotion of health, well-being, and social justice. These include applications for health care (Higginbotham, Albrecht, & Connor 2001; Norman, 2009; Tenbenschel, 2013; Tremblay & Richard, 2014), education (Keshavarz, Nutbeam, Rowling & Khavarpour, 2010), personality and social psychology (Carver & Scheier, 2002f), human development (Thelen, 2005), self and identity (deVillers & Cilliers, 2004) stress and resilience (Keenan, 2010), psychotherapy (Mahoney & Marquis, 2002; Wheeler, 2005), interpersonal neurobiology (Siegel, 2006; 2012), social inequalities (Walby, 2007), and participatory action research (BeLue, Carmack, Myers, Weinreb-Welch & Lengerich, 2010). It has also been noted that the complexity paradigm is particularly compatible with a transdisciplinary orientation (Cilliers & Nicolescu, 2012;

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Higginbotham, Albrecht & Connor, 2001). Interestingly, Burnes (2004) has suggested linkages between Lewin's original Field Theory and the characteristics of complexity theory.

Complexity thinking challenges the fundamental assumptions of experimental research in psychology related to the goal of isolating independent variables to assess their separate influence on a specified dependent variable. Methods that embrace the "maxmincon" principle (maximize experimental variance, minimize error variance, and control extraneous variance) and assume linear relationships between psychological variables have historically treated cultural variability as problematic. Marsella (2009) has discussed extensively the potential abuses of psychology's methods and practices in the context of cultural diversity. Complexity thinking challenges several of the traditional aims of a positivist-empiricist psychology including the discovery of universals of human behavior, and the ability to predict and control the behavior of "acultural and decontextualized others" (Misra & Gergen, 1993, p. 225). Inherent in the complexity paradigm is the recognition that, even if it were possible to identify all system elements operating at a particular point in time (and operationalize them with appropriate measurements), the behavior of the system would still not be fully predictable. With respect to PEaCE theory and its embracing of cultural diversity with a global consciousness, the primary concern is not whether an isolated human behavior can be predicted with precision, controlled, or identified as universal. Rather, the primary concern is with developing an ever-increasing holistic and complex understanding of the interconnected elements of interacting systems within and between persons, environments and culture that can provide direction toward creating a world that optimizes both individual and collective wellness.

## **5. The Five Core PEaCE Concepts**

Each of the five core PEaCE concepts will be presented. These include: (1) Being-in-Culture-in-the-World, (2) the Person, (3) the Environment, (4) Culture, and (5) Wellness. Being-in-Culture-in-the-World will be discussed first because understanding the functioning of the "whole" is necessary before examining its component parts. This intentional approach is to facilitate an appreciation of the dynamic context in which the elements of the system (person, environment, and culture) function toward the emergence of wellness outcomes.

### **5.1. *The Being-in-Culture-in-The-World Transactional Field***

The PEaCE Transactional Wellness Model centers the "*Being-in-Culture-in-the-World*" *Transactional Field* as the life space where the complex dynamics of persons, environments, and cultures come together to influence the emergence of individual and collective wellness outcomes. It is in the multiple interrelationships of person, environment, and culture where lived experience is created and human agency is activated. It is in this field where person, environment, and culture can be understood as mutually constituting the other. The term, Being-in-Culture-in-the-World, expands the existential and phenomenological concept of "Being-in-the-World" to explicitly name culture as a core dimension of our co-constituted being in the world. The idea of a field is informed by Lewin's field theory (Lewin, 1951, 1960), as well as by the field-relational theory of contemporary Gestalt Psychology (Wheeler, 2005). The co-created

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Being-in-Culture-in-the-World Transactional Field can be thought of as a “whole” that evolves out of the exchange of energy and information in the interactions of three open systems (person, environment, and culture). It is the synergistic activity within the field, irreducible to its separate parts, that produces emergent wellness outcomes.

Being-in-Culture-in-the-World *transactions* include the infinite array of possible arrangements, relational patterns, and interactions between elements of the biopsychorelational, socioecological and multicultural systems. The Being-in-Culture-in-the-World Transactional Field is considered a complex adaptive system as it is characterized by multiple interconnected elements, nonlinearity, self-organization, dynamic interactions and feedback processes, and emergent properties and behaviors (Cilliers, 1998; Rickles, Hawe & Shiell, 2007). In complexity thinking it is not the individual elements that determine outcomes, but rather the ways in which they interact. As applied to PEaCE Theory, the ongoing and dynamic Being-in-Culture-in-the-World transactions impact wellness outcomes, but also affect the processes operating within the living system of the person, the socioecological system of the environment, and the diverse systems of culture. Lived experience and human agency are conceptualized as emergent properties of the activity of the field through the continuous flow and exchange of energy and information within and between person, environment and cultural systems.

Being-in-Culture-in-the-World transactions can be broadly characterized as wellness-promoting, pathogenic, or neutral. Another way of thinking of these transactions is the concept of person-environment fit (Edwards, Caplan & Harrison, 1998; Hutz, Martin & Beitel, 2007; Jansen & Kristof-Brown, 2006; Swartz-Kulstad & Martin, 2000). Swartz-Kulstad and Martin (2000) emphasized the important role of culture in their research on person-environment fit. Within PEaCE Theory, the term “person-culture-environment fit” is used to refer to the degree to which transactions reflect congruence, complementarity, and/or growth-oriented challenge in the interrelating aspects of the person, culture, and environment. Many transactions are relatively neutral and occur as we go about our daily lives. *Pathogenic transactions* reflect compromised person-culture-environment fit and can be harmful, threatening, constrictive, exploitive, and/or oppressive. The loss of a job for a single, low-income mother of three, or the death of an 18 year-old beloved family pet are examples of pathogenic transactions. *Wellness-promoting transactions* indicate good person-culture-environment fit and can be affirming, healing, growth-inducing, empowering, and/or liberating. Examples of wellness-promoting transactions include receiving a promotion at work, writing a poem, helping someone in need, or participating in community efforts toward social change. It is the occurrence of a high frequency of wellness-promoting transactions and a low frequency of pathogenic transactions that increases the likelihood that the positive wellness outcomes of resilience, well-being, thriving, and optimal functioning will emerge. Conversely, a low occurrence of wellness-promoting transactions and a high occurrence of pathogenic transactions confer greater risk for the negative wellness outcomes of distress, dysfunction, disorder and disease.

Building from the work of Evans, Hanlin and Prilleltensky (2007), there are three primary forms of wellness-promoting transactions: ameliorative, protective, and transformative. *Ameliorative wellness processes* function to reduce suffering, distress, and disconnectedness. *Protective wellness processes* function to create, nurture and enhance internal and external strengths, assets, and resources. *Transformative wellness processes* function to facilitate growth, optimal functioning, and positive change at multiple levels of analysis. These Ameliorative, Protective, and Transformative (APT) Wellness Processes include infinite transactions between

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biopsychorelational, socioecological, and multicultural systems that create movement toward resilience, well-being, thriving, and optimal functioning. Disease prevention and health promotion are optimized through minimizing pathogenic transactions and simultaneously identifying, creating, and nurturing wellness-promoting transactions that are ameliorative, protective, and/or transformative.

At any given point in time, neutral, wellness-promoting and pathogenic transactions are occurring simultaneously. Moreover, Being-in-Culture-in-the-World transactions do not occur in isolation from other each other such that overall impact depends on the dynamics of co-occurring transactions. Specific point-in-time wellness outcomes thus emerge from simultaneously occurring Being-in-Culture-in-the-World transactions that combine in unique ways to be broadly pathogenic or wellness-promoting. Several hypotheses emerge from this discussion. First, it can be hypothesized that particular transactions function differently depending on what other transactions are simultaneously occurring. Second, it can be hypothesized that co-occurring transactions that combine to be predominantly wellness-promoting, reflect good person-culture-environment fit and will likely result in the emergence of positive wellness outcomes. Finally, it can be hypothesized that a predominance of pathogenic transaction combinations (e.g., the dynamics of oppression), representing compromised person-culture-environment fit and will likely result in the emergence of negative wellness outcomes.

## 5.2. *The Person: A Culturally-Infused, Biopsychorelational Living System*

The concept of the “Person” in PEaCE theory is strongly influenced by an inclusive, multicultural perspective on the “self” (Markus & Hamedani, 2007; Shweder, 1999) and an understanding of a person as a “relational being” (Gergen, 2009). Other influences include Seeman (1989) who proposed a human-systems framework in which the person is comprised of multiple behavioral subsystems (i.e., biochemical, physiological, perceptual, cognitive, and interpersonal), Akbar’s notion of the “community of self” (Akbar, 1985), and Nobles’ concept of the “extended self” (Nobles, 2006). Shoda (2007) described a “quiet paradigm shift” in psychology that views “human behaviors as reflecting systems, intraindividual as well as interpersonal”, rather than persons as independent organisms with a set of stable internal characteristics that can be generalized across situations. A person, from a PEaCE perspective, is conceptualized as a complex, culturally-infused, contextualized living system comprised of multiple interconnected biopsychorelational processes. The term “biopsychorelational” was chosen intentionally to convey the inseparability of biological, psychological, and relational phenomena drawing particularly on theory and research emerging from the interdisciplinary field of interpersonal neurobiology (Siegel, 2006; 2012).

Eight interacting aspects of human experience are identified that are important to understanding and enhancing wellness. These interacting biopsychorelational processes, reflecting multiple *Dimensions of Personhood*, include: (1) *neurobiological* (patterns of neural connectivity, biochemical processes, organ functioning), (2) *somatic* (physiology, sensation), (3) *affective* (emotion, motivation), (4) *mental* (cognition, memory), (5) *existential* (meaning and purpose), (6) *identity* (personal identity, self-concept), (7) *relational* (attachment, social group affiliation), and (8) *transcendent* (spirituality). Each is conceptualized as culturally-infused which means that cultural systems influence how the different processes are experienced and



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expressed. The addition of the relational and transcendent domains of analysis, reflecting the communal and spiritual aspects of personhood central to the worldview of many ethnocultural groups, provides for a more inclusive concept of a “person”. Identification of specific constructs to include in topical research and targeted interventions can be chosen from selected biopsychorelational processes that are most relevant to the particular project at hand (e.g., existential processes in grief work). However, the relationship of specific processes to each other and to the activity of the whole “Being-in-Culture-in-the-World” Transactional Field should always be kept in mind. The overarching purpose of conceptualizing the person in this way is to be inclusive of diverse cultural perspectives and move beyond the constraints and limitations of psychology’s reductionistic tendencies.

### 5.3. *The “Environment”: Multiple Culturally-Infused Socioecological Systems*

The “Environment” is conceptualized as consisting of the multiple interconnected and culturally-infused socioecological systemic processes within which persons live, develop, and transform. Bronfenbrenner’s bioecological theory of human development and community psychology’s multiple ecological levels of analysis provide the foundation for conceptualizing the environment at eight *Levels of Contextualization* that are in ongoing, dynamic interaction with each other. They include: (1) *physical environment* (natural and built), (2) *interpersonal* (dyadic interactions), (3) *microsystemic* (small group), (4) *organizational* (structured units), (5) *communal* (communities, identity groups), (6) *macrosystemic* (sociopolitical processes, societal institutions), (7) *geopolitical* (global and international dynamics), and (8) *temporal* (historical and generational). As with the biopsychorelational systemic processes, every level of the socioecological system is culturally-infused such that patterns of meaning and living become characteristic of a particular socioecological context (e.g., wine as symbolic of the blood of Christ in the Catholic Communion ritual).

The environment in PEaCE Theory is an expansion of the multiple ecological levels of analysis (Kloos et al., 2011) to explicitly include the physical environmental context, the interpersonal context, the geopolitical context, and the temporal context. The levels were expanded in order to facilitate more comprehensive analysis of contextual processes that impact the human experience. As illustrated in the PEaCE Transactional Wellness Model (Figure 1), the socioecological environment emerges from ongoing transactions in the Being-in-Culture-in-World Transactional Field, as well as interacts with the two other major systems operating in the field (person and culture) to influence the emergence of lived experience and human agency. An important characteristic of the environment hypothesized in PEaCE theory is that the levels of analysis are not conceptualized as necessarily nested as in Bronfenbrenner’s model. Consistent with complexity thinking and dynamic systems theory, these contexts and conditions are overlapping, networked, and operate concurrently in ongoing interaction with each other (Neal & Neal, 2013).

### 5.4. *Culture in PEaCE Theory*

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Consistent with the conceptualization presented earlier, culture includes the multiple organizing systems of meaning, knowledge, and daily living for a group of people who share one or more dimensions of human diversity. In PEaCE theory, cultural systems are conceptualized as emerging from activity in the “Being-in-Culture-in-the-World” transactional field over time for a group of people. Culture is infused into all dimensions of the biopsychorelational person system and all levels of the socioecological system. The interconnected dimensions of personhood develop and are expressed through culture such that human functioning cannot be understood outside of its embeddedness in culture. In Figure 1, these person-culture interactions are referred to as *psychocultural processes*. For example, to understand the role of the somatic dimension of personhood, it would be important to explore the cultural meanings of different parts of the body. Similarly, culture is embedded in the structure and functioning of all levels of the socioecological system; and all systems of the environment are created and manifested through culture. These environment-culture interactions are referred to as *sociocultural processes*. As an example, policies and practices of an organization reflect patterns of cultural norms and values expressed in that particular organizational context and may affect wellness outcomes differently for different groups. In PEaCE Theory, cultural systems are conceptualized as being so intertwined with persons and environments that their functioning is inseparable from culture.

### **5.5. Individual and Collective Wellness Outcomes**

Referring to the visual PEaCE Transactional Wellness Model in Figure 1, wellness outcomes are conceptualized as being emergent properties that arise from patterns of Being-in-Culture-in-the-World transactions. They are indicators of functioning and health at a particular point in time. In addition, these point-in-time wellness outcomes cycle back to affect the biopsychorelational systems of persons and the socioecological systems of environments. Positive (resilience, well-being, thriving, and optimal functioning) and negative (distress, dysfunction, disorder, and disease) outcomes can be observed in individuals, relationships, communities, and structural entities. Examples of positive wellness outcomes that could be the focus of research or intervention include collective resilience in a community struck by a hurricane, transcendent well-being experienced in a church congregation, thriving among gay men with HIV/AIDS, or optimal relational functioning among interreligious couples. Negative wellness outcome examples include individual transcendent/spiritual distress after receiving a terminal illness diagnosis, relational dysfunction in an interracial supervision dyad, or collective trauma following the kidnapping of several girls in a small town. As part of a complex adaptive system, point-in-time expressions of wellness outcomes are considered emergent because (1) they evolve through a network of interactions between and within multiple systems, subsystems, and system elements, (2) particular wellness outcomes and processes can manifest through diverse interactive pathways within and between systems, and (3) they are not reducible to (or completely predictable from) the characteristics of individual system elements.

## **6. Culture, Context, and Wellness: Next Steps in the Development of PEaCE Theory, Research, and Practice**

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Four potentially significant contributions of PEaCE theory are relevant to a more globally-conscious community psychology. First, the theory addresses the call within the field of psychology for more substantial incorporation of culture and continued reduction of ethnocentric biases in its research and practices. Second, PEaCE Theory has the potential to provide a framework for research and practice that explicitly incorporates culture and has implications for testing hypotheses relevant to the nature of particular Being-in-Culture-in-the-World transactions and their effects on wellness outcomes. Third, as it draws from multiple disciplines, PEaCE Theory has relevance to the overarching goal of the field to collaborate across disciplines in the service of enhancing wellness and promoting social justice. Fourth, the application of complexity thinking provides a systems-centered approach consistent with theories across disciplines and is in line with efforts to bring the transdisciplinary potential of complex dynamic systems theory to community psychology (Porter, Bothne & Jason, 2008).

Incorporating PEaCE Theory into research and practice requires the intentional consideration of culture. Three general approaches to the consideration of culture can be identified: cultural categorization, cultural comparison, and cultural infusion. The *cultural categorization* approach seeks to include diverse participants in research and practice but does not make any methodological modifications. This approach reduces and distorts the consideration of culture to the mere inclusion of physical bodies categorized into separate groups along a single dimension of diversity (e.g., race, ethnicity, nationality) as representing “culture”. This approach often misunderstands the construct of “culture” as being equivalent to the group of people themselves. The *cultural comparison* approach, characteristic of cross-cultural psychology, is a research and analytic orientation that compares groups (most commonly countries) on generic constructs in order to inform an understanding of universal and culture-bound dimensions of human behavior. Cultural comparison methods can yield valuable data but are limited by the conflation of culture and nationality, the lack of consideration of cultural intersectionality, as well as the risk of assuming a normative standard against which diverse cultural groups are compared.

The third approach, *cultural infusion*, is more consistent with PEaCE Theory. This approach understands culture as interwoven into all of human experience. As such, it utilizes theoretical frameworks (such as PEaCE) that incorporate culture into the foundational conceptualization of human behavior and experience. Cultural processes are infused into multiple aspects of the research or intervention process. Culturally-related constructs (e.g., acculturative stress, racial socialization) are consistently included in the research questions or intervention objectives of a project. For example, in a study of the effectiveness of a trauma intervention on levels of distress, the cultural infusion approach might include the construct of ethnocultural historical trauma in conceptualizing the research and developing the intervention.

There are two forms of cultural infusion that are used in research and practice. The most common is the *cultural adaptation* strategy which involves utilizing a presumably universal conceptual model, construct, program or intervention strategy and modifying it to be a better fit with the particular cultural context in which it is being applied. Superficial adaptations that do not consider culture as involving patterns of meaning, knowledge, and daily living manifested materially, socially, symbolically, and ideologically would **not** be considered a cultural adaptation strategy (e.g., the literal translation of a measure without attention to cultural equivalence and meanings). Cultural adaptation involves more substantial modifications that reflect a deep understanding of cultural values, expressions, and nuances. The second form of the cultural infusion approach is the *cultural specificity* (or culturally-centered) strategy. This

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approach *starts* with the cultural context and focuses attention on a particular culture-carrying group or ecological niche/intersectionality (e.g., African Americans in the southern United States, Maori adolescents in New Zealand) utilizing theory, constructs, and practices grounded in the specific contexts and ways of being and living of that group. Indigenous psychologies and group-specific interventions are examples of this approach. Sinha (1998) describes the indigenization of psychology in India that has moved toward inclusion of ancient cultural constructs such as *dharma* in conceptualizing research studies. Optimal psychology (Myers, 1988), testimony therapy (Akinyela, 2005), the Ntu approach to health and healing (Gregory & Harper, 2001), and Ubuntu Psychology (Washington, 2010) are examples of culturally-specific applications from an African-centered perspective.

Several wellness-related concepts consistent with multicultural and community psychologies are of particular interest for research and practice informed by PEaCE Theory. These include *strengths* (Bowman, 2006; Vera & Shin, 2006), *well-being* (Harrell, 2014; Knoop & Delle Fave, 2013), *resilience* (Brodsky & Cattaneo, 2013; Cicchetti, 2010; Norris, Stevens, Pfefferbaum, Wyche & Pfefferbaum, 2007; Ungar, 2013), *thriving* (Blankenship, 1998; Poorman, 2002; Ford & Smith, 2011), *empowerment* (Cattaneo & Chapman, 2010; Christens, 2012; Grabe, 2012; Rappaport, 1995; Zimmerman, 1995), *health promotion* (Smith, Tang & Nutbeam, 2006; Stokols, 2000), *human agency* (Bandura, 2006), *collective efficacy* (Bandura, 2000; 2002), *critical consciousness* (Diemer, Kauffman, Koenig, Trahan & Hsieh, 2006; Freire, 1970; Montero, 2009; Watts, Abdul-Adil & Pratt, 2002; Watts, Diemer & Voight, 2011), *liberation* (Comas-Diaz, Lykes & Alarcon, 1998; Duran, Firehammer & Gonzalez, 2008; Hernandez, 2009; Lykes, 2000; Moane, 2010; Varas-Diaz & Serrano-Garcia, 2003), *sense of community* (Brodsky, 2009; Brodsky & Marx, 2001; Chavis & Pretty, 1999; Chigeza, Roos & Puren, 2013), *social support and social capital* (Almedom, 2005; Pooley, Cohen & Pike, 2005; Thoits, 2011), *identity* (Loseke, 2007; McNamara, Stevenson & Muldoon, 2013; Sonn & Fisher, 2003), *spirituality* (Comas-Diaz, 2012b; Hill, 2000; Mattis & Jagers, 2001), and of course, *peace* (Adams, 2000; Christie, Tint, Wagner & Winter, 2008; Danesh, 2008; Droždek, 2010).

With respect to intervention, the development of a *PEaCE-Informed Psychological and Preventive Practices* (PIPPP) approach is proposed as a starting point for developing wellness promotion applications. While specific interventions may place relatively more emphasis on one of the three systems (i.e., person, environment, or culture), PEaCE-informed interventions should ultimately be concerned with improving person-environment-culture fit in the context of the superordinate valuing of human dignity, interconnectedness, and social justice. Seven intervention principles, reflecting elements and underlying assumptions of PEaCE theory, are offered to guide PIPPP intervention development and implementation. These include: (1) culturally-syntonic engagement, (2) complexity and contextualization, (3) affirmative humanization, (4) relational interconnectedness, (5) existential-diunital thinking, (6) empowerment and liberation, and (7) creative transformation. The PIPPP approach is inclusive of ameliorative, protective, and transformative interventions that target individual, relational, communal, societal, and/or global wellness processes. This author has begun piloting a culturally-adaptable wellness enhancement/stress management group intervention that is informed by PEaCE Theory.

Fundamentally, PEaCE is an integrative theory of interconnectedness and inclusiveness toward an ideal of global wellness and world peace. Wellness and peace are threatened by multiple oppressions (racism, sexism, classism, heterosexism, etc.) and all forms of violence (structural, cultural, interpersonal), each of which are intolerant of human diversity, perpetuate

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social asymmetries, and compromise the freedom of persons to live with dignity and self-determination (Galtung, 1996; Prilleltensky, 2008, 2012). Thus, the promotion of personal, relational, and collective wellness requires a culture- and context- conscious psychology. Person-Environment-and-Culture-Emergence Theory has been offered as a response to the challenge of more fully incorporating the contextualized and culturally-embedded nature of human experience in theory, research, and practice. The substantive integration of culture into the analysis of human experience, behavior, and transformation can facilitate the identification of constructs, methods, and strategies that may enhance the effectiveness and cultural congruence of wellness-promotion and social justice work in diverse cultural contexts. The foundations of the PEaCE Theory are interdisciplinary and informed by strong conceptual contributions and empirical research. However, continued development will require ongoing critique, testing, and refinement. Diverse methodologies and inquiry strategies from diverse disciplines and epistemologies are welcome in the service of the broader aspiration of developing toward transdisciplinary and global applications.

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