Throughout this volume, we have emphasized the need to consider carefully the role of ethnicity and culture in the etiology and prevention of youth violence in the United States. As we have discussed, in many cases factors that increase or decrease risk for youth violence are shared across ethnic groups; however, the life circumstances of ethnic minority youth can increase the likelihood that risk factors will occur. In other cases, the minority experience (when shared by ethnic groups linked together by oppression and racism) may foster feelings of isolation, resentment, and anger that can contribute as well to violence. In still other cases, we must consider the unique life circumstances and historical experiences of individuals from particular ethnic groups as well as the important variations within these ethnic groups. These similarities and differences have clear implications for youth violence prevention in a multicultural society such as the United States. In summary, we address implications in six areas and their relevance to future research and practice: (a) ethnicity as a marker for culture, (b) ethnicity and disadvantage, (c) ethnicity and gangs, (d) levels
of culture, (e) prevention in a multicultural setting, and (f) strength-based cultural competence.

ETHNICITY AS A MARKER FOR CULTURE

An understanding of the link between ethnicity, culture, and youth violence prevention first requires consensus on the meaning of ethnicity and culture and their relevance to development, behavior, and prevention. As discussed throughout this volume, ethnicity has been defined as group membership based on a perceived shared heritage typically derived from a sense of ancestry or geography. Culture represents a collection of social norms, roles, beliefs, and values that are learned and change over time. These belief systems and value orientations provide a way to understand the world and include guidelines for acceptable and appropriate behavior and "scripts" for routine social interactions. Thus, culture provides both a worldview and a way of living guided by multiple social forces in the environment.

To the extent that individuals from a common ethnic heritage view the world through a shared lens, ethnicity can serve as a marker for culture. Still, it can be a rather crude marker. In many cases, values, beliefs, and norms depend on a range of factors beyond ethnicity, including region (e.g., urban vs. suburban, north vs. south), generation, immigration status, country of origin, gender, and income (e.g., Nisbett & Cohen, 1996). As such, there is often a great deal of intracultural variation, meaning that individuals from a common ethnic background do not necessarily stand together on attitudes, beliefs, and values relevant to specific behaviors or actions.

For instance, as Mark, Revilla, Tsutsumoto, and Mayeda (chap. 5, this volume) point out, Asian and Pacific Islanders, often referred to as an "ethnic" group, actually represent individuals from Asia or the Indian subcontinent (for example, Cambodia, China, India, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Pakistan, the Philippine Islands, Thailand, and Vietnam) as well as the Pacific Islands (including Hawaii, Guam, Samoa, Tonga, Fiji, Micronesia, or other Pacific Islands). Although this ethnic tradition is often associated with "model minority" status, the minority experience actually is quite varied within this ethnic group. Similarly, as Mirabal-Colén and Velez (chap. 4, this volume) illustrate, although Latinos have some shared cultural beliefs such as colectivismo (collectivism), familismo (family-centered), respeto (respect), simpatia (patriotism), personalismo (person as a whole), and religiosidad (religiosity), they are a diverse group with many nonshared experiences related to country of origin, immigration status, generation status, income, and region of residence in the United States.

The "level of analysis" to be considered in understanding both the etiology of a behavior such as violence and appropriate interventions requires attention to issues of culture broadly defined as well as specific characteristics of the multiple "subcultures" that also define social interactions. As discussed throughout this volume, it is clear that each ethnic group shares commonalities with all other ethnic groups, commonalities with other ethnic minorities based on the minority experience in the United States, unique characteristics related to a specific historical and contemporary niche in society, and within-group variation. Hence, an important first step for future research and practice in youth violence prevention is to identify relevant subcultures and assess specific factors connected to etiology and prevention within these groups.

Hudley and Taylor (chap. 10, this volume) discuss the importance of understanding the cultural and ecological contexts in which people live out their daily lives, or their ecocultural niche. In some sense, the ecocultural niche may be the relevant level of analysis in understanding links between culture and behavior. However, a focus on subcultures related to within-group variation (or ecocultural niches) linking ethnicity with other markers of culture must be done with restraint, lest one identify an unlimited number of groups that vary by microlevel characteristics (e.g., third-generation, lower-class children, of Mexican descent, living in the southwestern United States, who speak Spanish). Still, a focus on culture broadly defined solely on the basis of ethnicity can mask relevant intracultural variations and lead to overgeneralization of attitudes, values, and behaviors based on ethnic heritage. It can also lead to negative labeling of entire ethnic groups based on these overgeneralizations. This is also complicated by the fact that in a multicultural and diverse society, individuals increasingly come from mixed ethnic heritage and may identify with one or several ethnic groups.

The researchers' challenge becomes one of identifying characteristics of relevance to a specific behavior such as violence and including these characteristics in preventive efforts. For instance, although rates of youth violence arrest are higher among African Americans, this is largely because of the social and economic circumstances of many African Americans rather than any specific aspect of ethnic heritage. As discussed by Guerra and Williams (chap. 1, this volume) and Smith and Hasbrouck (chap. 7, this volume), elevated risk for violence is associated with living in economically isolated and disadvantaged communities, with few jobs, and concentrated poverty. These characteristics, not ethnicity, are most closely linked to violence. However, because of historical, social, and political forces, African Americans (and other ethnic minorities) are more likely to live in these communities in the United States at this time.

As this suggests, the appropriate level of analysis for understanding culture in relation to youth violence may not be ethnicity per se, but...
rather subgroups defined by ethnicity in combination with other relevant environmental factors. Furthermore, even within these subgroups, patterns of adaptation are not homogeneous. For example, Anderson (1999) described the "code of the streets" that emerged in inner-city African American communities as an informal set of rules for social interactions, particularly among males, and often including prescriptions for revenge and retaliation. Yet, even in settings where the code of the streets is evident, violence is most often the exception and not the rule. Regardless of circumstances, most people live in relative harmony and do not use violence.

ETHNICITY AND DISADVANTAGE

As discussed earlier, ethnicity is often a proxy for a particular ecocultural niche in the United States marked by high levels of community disadvantage. The history of the United States has been a history of differential opportunities based, in part, on one's ethnic heritage. Indeed, disadvantage often weighs more heavily on individuals from certain ethnic groups or from certain countries. Individuals from the specific ethnic groups discussed in this volume have been particularly vulnerable to economic hardship. Latinos, certain Asian Pacific Islander groups, Native Americans, and African Americans have all experienced high levels of poverty when compared with Whites.

In some cases, this hardship is linked to the challenges of recent immigration. As discussed by Boutakidis, Guerra, and Soriano (chap. 3, this volume), new immigrants to the United States are less well off than those born in the United States. Although entry into the United States was often a ticket to improved economic status, in recent years, globalization and deindustrialization have placed constraints on the economy with fewer opportunities for upward mobility. Given that a large percentage of Asian and Latino families are recent immigrants, these ethnic groups are more likely to be poor and have fewer resources available.

In other cases, economic disadvantage is linked both to historical treatment of individuals from a particular ethnic group as well as changes in the economic structure of the United States during the latter part of the 20th century from a manufacturing economy to a service/information economy. This shift has been accompanied by an exodus of businesses and jobs to areas with low costs and a skilled workforce, often in other countries. As such, jobs have simply disappeared from many communities in the United States. The loss of jobs also resulted in a loss of related services and businesses and a general decline in the standard of living. As Guerra and Williams note (chap. 1, this volume) these transformations have created ecological niches for ethnic minorities that are scarred by multiple forms of disadvantage, inequality, and segregation of classes. In particular, African Americans living in large cities have experienced the most severe consequences.

However, as discussed by Parker and Tuthill (chap. 8, this volume), economic inequalities are not limited to ethnic minority youth and families. During the past few decades, many working-class Whites also have suffered a decline in economic status and an accompanying decline in "cultural prestige" associated with economic prosperity. Although Whites of all classes still have higher incomes, lower unemployment, and better access to health care than most ethnic minorities, it is still the case that many poorly educated and low-skilled White ethnics have suffered a decline in their standard of living. It is also the case that this perception of declining status as a result of the influx and favorable treatment of ethnic minorities has contributed to organizations of individuals that rally around their "Whiteness" as a cause to be promoted and defended at all costs, including violence.

Overall, economic disadvantage is associated with higher rates of violence. Comparing countries, homicide rates are significantly higher in countries with lower per capita incomes versus countries with higher per capita incomes (World Health Organization, 2002). Inequality also contributes to the violence, with higher inequality associated with higher rates of violence (Buvinic, Morrison, & Shifter, 1999). As the case of White ethnic violence suggests, it is not only absolute disadvantage but perceived disadvantage (or a decline in status) that contributes to violence, particularly hate crimes and other acts of violence targeted toward a particular group of individuals.

Structural differences in communities plagued by economic disadvantage have also been linked to higher rates of violence. These structural differences are more likely to be found in poor, urban neighborhoods where many ethnic minority children and families live. Thus, the link between ethnicity and violence is best understood as a link between ethnicity, disadvantage, and violence. Indeed, when disadvantage and related factors are held constant, differences in violence rates between ethnic groups tend to disappear (e.g., Sampson, Morenoff, & Raudenbush, 2005). This leads to the conclusion that it is structural differences among communities rather than ethnicity that produces heightened rates of violence.

Efforts to prevent or reduce levels of youth violence in disadvantaged settings must simultaneously attend to the impact of these structural differences through community-level interventions. For instance, in neighborhoods marked by high levels of crime and an ecology of danger, community policing and other locally based law enforcement approaches are needed. Similarly, concentrated disadvantage can be reduced via housing policies that create mixed-income communities rather than high-density, low-income housing developments. A responsive service delivery system hinges...
on viable and regular funding streams, connectedness to local resident needs, and knowledge of barriers to accessibility that may limit or enhance use of services.

Future prevention efforts must also address the effects of disadvantage and other structural factors on the children’s development from birth through adolescence. In some cases, these factors can interfere with the accomplishment of developmental tasks (social, emotional, physical, or cognitive) and compromise healthy adjustment. In addition, disadvantage may create real or perceived “injustices” that can motivate individuals or groups of individuals to retaliate against other groups. In this fashion, ethnicity can serve as a symbol of group identity, and ingroup/outgroup differences can be identified based on ethnic ties. A word of caution about the positive and negative aspects of such group identity was discussed by French, Kim, and Pillado (chap. 2, this volume). Perhaps the clearest example of this in relation to youth violence is seen in the increasing significance of gangs in the etiology of youth violence and the role of ethnicity in determining gang affiliations.

ETHNICITY AND GANGS

As noted in several chapters in this volume, the prevalence of gangs and associated crime and violence is cause for concern. Gangs are found in all large cities and in most medium-sized cities. According to recent estimates, there are almost 25,000 known gangs in the United States. Gangs are largely formed around ethnic affiliations, with Latinos and African Americans accounting for the majority of gang members (National Youth Gang Center, 2002). In many cases, ethnic gangs have a long history in the United States. For instance, as discussed by Mirabal-Colon and Velasquez (chap. 4, this volume) many youth involved in Latino gangs in the Southwest have parents and grandparents who were in the same gang. In other cases, gangs are a more recent and growing phenomenon and less is known about patterns of engagement. For example, as noted by Mark, Revilla, Tsutsumoto, and Mayeda (chap. 5, this volume), although prevalence estimates show a growing gang problem among Asian Pacific Islander youth, there are few scholarly studies and prevention efforts among this population.

Studies that have been conducted on gang involvement among ethnic minority youth point to a common set of risk factors. These include a sense of hopelessness, alienation, a need to belong, reaction against a negative ethnic identity, search for a positive identity, lack of family support and other family problems, peer pressure, as well as fun, recreation, protection, and economic gain. Although these factors seem to play out in some degree across ethnic groups, their relative salience is linked to the particular circumstances confronted by different generations of youth from different ethnic groups.

For example, as discussed by Mark, Revilla, Tsutsumoto, and Mayeda (chap. 5, this volume), Vietnamese youth caught up in a rapid acculturation process often feel alienated from mainstream institutions and turn to gangs as a place of refuge and support. Their less acculturated parents may also have difficulty understanding their children’s needs in a new cultural context, contributing to increased family discord. In other instances, for example with Chinese youth, gang involvement may be linked more closely to the negative identities of American-born Chinese that brought them into direct conflict with recent immigrant youth and led to the formation of early Chinatown gangs in the 1960s. One Native American youth, as discussed by Hunt and Laird (chap. 6, this volume), gang involvement was more likely to provide a refuge from troubled families and a remedy for the sense of hopelessness that often characterized life on Indian reservations.

Clearly, gangs would not be so ubiquitous if they were not meeting at least some real needs of youth in certain settings. The appeal of gangs to ethnic minority youth suggests that these youth face the greatest difficulties in meeting basic developmental needs, such as affiliation, support, protection, identity, and a sense of future. These needs may vary slightly across ethnic groups in relation to historical conditions, but also reflect many common themes.

The challenge for prevention is to design and evaluate interventions that address these common underpinnings while simultaneously acknowledging the different histories of youth from distinct ethnic groups as well as differences in their current life circumstances. Otherwise put, interventions need to emerge from an understanding of the shared elements that contribute to gang involvement, but also be sensitive to how these play out differently in relation to the particular ecocultural niches of ethnic youth.

LEVELS OF CULTURE

Wright and Zimmerman (chap. 9, this volume) discuss the complexity of defining and operationalizing cultural sensitivity. They highlight an important distinction, based on the work of Resnicow and colleagues (Resnicow, Baranowski, Ahluwalia, & Butler, 1999; Resnicow, Soler, Baranowski, Ahluwalia, & Butler, 2002) between two levels of culture: surface structure versus deep structure. As they discuss, surface structure emphasizes the shared external characteristics of a culture such as food, language, and music. In contrast, deep structure reflects a more meaningful understanding of the experience of individuals within a culture and how this experience is colored by specific cultural, social, psychological, environmental, and historical
influences. Surface structure increases the receptivity or feasibility of messages. Deep structure addresses the meaning attached to these messages and how they are delivered.

Although the distinction between levels of culture has not been used widely in the field of prevention, we believe that it holds much promise. As Hudley and Taylor (chap. 10, this volume) point out, effectiveness in multicultural settings requires both explicit knowledge of a group's practices (i.e., surface structure) as well as an understanding and appreciation of the economic, social, and political pressures present in the group's unique ecocultural niche (i.e., deep structure). Although a shared ethnic heritage may facilitate greater awareness of specific practices, it does not necessarily translate to an understanding of deep structure issues, particularly for individuals who have not shared that experience. For instance, middle-class or upper-class African American teachers may actually have little understanding of the ecological niche of inner-city African American children, although they share a common ethnic heritage.

Much of what has been labeled cultural sensitivity or cultural competence, to date, has focused on surface-structure characteristics such as language (e.g., translating materials into Spanish or other languages), sharing ethnic food at family or community celebrations, or integrating holiday and other traditions into prevention programming. In many cases, hiring teachers, counselors, or caseworkers from the same ethnic background is used as a proxy for cultural sensitivity. Yet, as discussed above, cultural sensitivity also requires an understanding of the meaning of an individual's experience in a specific ecocultural niche and how that shapes their worldviews.

This is not to say that prevention programs have neglected deep structure issues. Indeed, many of the chapters in this volume provide examples of efforts to address these issues. For example, Mark, Revilla, Tsutsumoto, and Mayeda (chap. 5, this volume) review several native Hawaiian culture-based programs, including Ho'omohala I Na Pua and Hui Malama o ke Kai. These programs place significant emphasis on incorporating Hawaiian values including spirituality, self-identification, cooperation, and care for and preservation of the land and ocean into broad social development and skill-building programs.

Similarly, Hunt and Laird (chap. 6, this volume) discuss the Tribal Youth Program, which was designed to engage Native American communities in the resolution of their unique social problems. This effort built on both the spiritual and cultural aspect of specific Native American traditions by fostering values such as consensus and family-support versus individualism and individual choice (traditionally Western values that may be obstacles to change for Native American youth). Many of the Rites of Passage programs for enhancing ethnic identity among African Americans also build on traditional cultural values and seek to build ethnic pride. However, there are very few well-designed evaluations of these programs vis-à-vis their impact on youth violence prevention. Hence, a challenge for future prevention efforts is to incorporate both surface structure and deep structure aspects of culture simultaneously in specific programs and to conduct systematic evaluations of these culturally sensitive efforts.

PREVENTION IN A MULTICULTURAL SETTING

In designing culturally sensitive prevention programs, one of the biggest challenges is how to attend to both surface structure and deep structure factors when programs are implemented in a multicultural setting. For instance, in ethnically segregated schools, programs can be designed that incorporate language, customs, and worldviews of a specific ethnic group. However, in schools with children from many different ethnic groups, it is difficult, if not impossible, to incorporate a meaningful understanding of these multiple cultural perspectives in preventive efforts designed to reach all children. As Wright and Zimmerman (chap. 9, this volume) discuss, in many cases violence prevention programs recruit and serve youth from many different ethnic groups. This presents a challenge in trying to integrate cultural dimensions into programming. For instance, should programs develop specific programs for each group or subgroup of youth within a particular setting, such as African Americans, Latino immigrants, Latino first generation students, and so on?

They suggest that interventions in multicultural settings can also become culturally sensitive by addressing issues of culture as part of the intervention. Culture becomes an asset to be enhanced, although the specific mechanisms for enhancement can still be rooted in an individual's unique cultural heritage. For instance, in a multicultural classroom, students could be encouraged to learn more about their native ethnic cultures, make presentations on accomplishments of individuals from their culture, and participate in activities designed to enhance and build pride in their culture. Learning about one's culture is not simply a means to deliver a message but the message itself. As Hudley and Taylor (chap. 10, this volume) also point out, it is important to incorporate an affirming attitude toward each one's culture as well as the culture of other groups.

At another level, not only is the United States composed of individuals from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds, but there are also other cultural imperatives that bear on youth violence. Some chapters in this volume have mentioned the impact of "youth culture" in the United States as well as the impact of the individualistic, achievement-oriented, and often violent "culture" of the United States in general. In many ways, violence
has played a prominent role in American culture and history, whether against indigenous populations or through glorification of violence in media and popular culture. Even the justice system is predicated on violence as the ultimate punishment, in some cases extending the death penalty to youth. The penetration of violence in American society clearly presents challenges for prevention that must be addressed at the national level.

STRENGTH-BASED CULTURAL COMPETENCE

Against this backdrop of violence, a slightly different approach to cultural sensitivity emphasizes building on attitudes, beliefs, and values from different ethnic groups that foster harmony and cooperation and integrating these core values into mainstream programming. Rather than viewing ethnic minorities as disadvantaged groups needing help and services, prevention efforts can build on the strengths of each culture and develop strategies for enhancing and extending these strengths. Indeed, the findings discussed by Boutakidis, Guerra, and Soriano (chap. 3, this volume) showing that acculturation to the United States portends higher rates of youth violence for immigrant groups suggests that the U.S. culture itself may be fostering violence.

At a broad level, cultural classification systems have been used to distinguish cultures on key dimensions, such as individualism-collectivism. Individualistic cultures stress individual rights, autonomy, achievements, and independence. Collectivistic cultures emphasize group welfare, group harmony, and the importance of group needs. In the United States, higher violence rates have been attributed, in part, to an emphasis on individualism, as compared with collectivist cultures that tend to have lower crime and violence rates. Thus, principals of collectivist cultures are likely to be useful tools in broad-based violence prevention efforts that seek to infuse principles such as harmony and group welfare into systems, institutions, and programs.

However, branding the United States as an individualistic culture does little to acknowledge the existence and impact of multiple cultures and subcultures. As has been highlighted throughout this volume, many ethnic minority groups embrace values and goals that are in line with collectivistic than individualistic cultures. Consider again the emphasis on respeto (respect), amanencia (harmony), and personalismo (importance of interpersonal relationships) in the Latino culture. Similarly, African American culture is based on a number of core values that should serve as protective mechanisms against youth violence, including harmony, interrelatedness, communalism, mutuality, reciprocity, and spirituality. Although Native American culture is quite complex because of the many different tribal entities and language differences, there are still a number of common world views antithetical to violence, including harmony, noninterference, generosity, and noncompetition. Among Asian Pacific Islanders, core values also emphasize pazifism, harmony, and interconnectedness.

CONCLUSION

Perhaps the most pressing challenge for future prevention programs is to reintegrate these cultural strengths into programs for ethnic youth, and to extend this programming beyond specific ethnic enclaves to benefit all youth. Cultural socialization and bicultural competence may help youth adjust to the multiple demands of their ethnic culture and mainstream culture, so that these cultural strengths do not preclude youth from navigating the larger social world. However, building these cultural strengths based on interconnectedness and harmony may, over time, also have a larger impact on preventing violence in mainstream U.S. culture as well.

REFERENCES


FUTURE DIRECTIONS