INTRODUCTION TO SECOND OF THREE
SPECIAL ISSUES ON CROSS-CULTURAL ASPECTS
OF SELF-HELP/MUTUAL AID

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This is the second of three special issues from the special call for papers on the cross-cultural aspects of self-help/mutual aid that solicited manuscripts from a variety of social science listservs and professional associations including ones in anthropology, sociology, public health, social work and community psychology. As noted in the first issue, the blind peer review and revise and resubmit process resulted in ten surviving papers. The authors and research settings are genuinely international: Australia, Canada, Germany, Japan, Malawi (Africa), Norway, Sweden, and the United States.

The conceptual framework is from Benjamin Gidron and Mark Chesler's (1994) paper " Universal and Particular Attributes of Self-Help: A Framework for International and Intranational Analysis" as it is inclusive enough to encompass various cross-cultural and global aspects of self-help/mutual aid. The research on self-help/mutual aid since the 1970s has demonstrated extensive variety, illuminated internal group processes and shown what participants receive from their involvement. Most of this research in English has been from the United States, Canada, and Europe. Yet, the four traditions of self-help/mutual aid research—North American, European, the addictions and the micro-credit— remain relatively separate, gaining little from the insights of other traditions and, perhaps, even an unawareness of them (see the Introduction to the last issue [Borkman 2006-7]). Thus, the systematic, comparative study of self-help/mutual aid in different national, cultural, and welfare contexts which Gidron and Chesler advocate is in its infancy; these three special issues contribute to that research.

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Gidron and Chesler define self-help/mutual aid in broad terms that would apply internationally as: "The recruitment and mobilization of peers in an informal and non-hierarchical setting, and the sharing of their common experiences as the basic building blocks for almost all forms of self-help in all nations and cultures" (1994, p. 3). They distinguish between the *universal* and the *particular* aspects of self-help/mutual aid. The *universal* aspects of self-help/mutual aid are seen as contemporary expressions of a non-geographic form of community which encompass: a setting for the evolution of culture and a sense of identity to develop; social supportive mechanisms especially in times of crisis; and a situation which empowers and emboldens participants to gain skills, and confidence (p. 8). The *particular* aspects of self-help/mutual aid that impinge on its form of organi-zation, the relationship to professionals and to the health and welfare system, are from three sources:

1. the societal context including the social, cultural and economic facets of the nation;
2. cultural or demographic factors within a nation such as gender, social class, age, or racial/ethnic differences; and
3. the problem issue around which the group is organized.

"Different civic/political cultures, different social and economic histories, and different health and welfare systems mean that both communities and self-help groups will develop differently in different nations, in different ethnic, class or demographic groupings within nations, and around different issues" (Gidron & Chesler, 1994, p. 22).

In this issue are two articles about self-help/mutual aid in Japan and one in Scandinavia. The two articles about Japan deal with different problem issues: alcoholism and domestic abuse. Gidron and Chesler's idea that the kind of problem issue is a major *particularistic* factor affecting the nature and shape of self-help/mutual aid is illustrated in the two articles. Alcoholism which has been acknowledged as a social problem in Japanese society for decades had an early and conventional form of self-help group develop which was based on importing ideas about Alcoholics Anonymous from the United States in the 1950s. In contrast, domestic abuse has been unrecognized as a problem on a societal level and remains somewhat hidden and taboo; in response, the self-help mode has been telephone hotlines which can preserve the caller's anonymity, among other things. The articles on the telephone hotlines for Japanese men considers how all three particularistic factors (the societal context of Japan, the demographic factor of gender, and the problem issue of domestic abuse) explain why telephone hotlines for Japanese males dealing with domestic abuse are used for self-help rather than a group format.

The first article in this issue describes Danshukai, a self-help group for alcoholics. Alcoholics, mostly men, in Japan started a self-help/mutual aid group in 1953 inspired somewhat by Alcoholics Anonymous in the United States but

which quickly developed its particular culture and distinctive patterns. Alcoholism recovery in Japan is viewed as a family issue with wives or mothers attending meetings with the recovering alcoholic member; in the United States, in contrast, non-alcoholic spouses and other family members attend the separate 12-step group Al Anon. In this initial research on Danshukai, an Australian anthropologist Richard Chenhall who has studied alcohol recovery among Australian aborigines and the Japanese Professor of social work, Tomofumi Oka, who has extensively studied Japanese self-help groups illuminate this fascinating group. Their article shows the many ways in which the national culture, values, and patterns of Japanese life as well as the perceived nature of the problem issue alcoholism has affected the shape, organization, membership, and activities of Danshukai.

The second article is also about Japanese men but the issue is domestic abuse. Unlike alcoholism which has been an accepted social problem amenable to the formation of self-help groups, domestic abuse has been shrouded in secrecy in Japan. Mika Maruyama and Eric S. Mankowski's article "Telephone Hotlines for Men in Japan," shows how the societal context and the demographic category (Japanese men) affects the kind of help for an emerging and still highly stigmatized social issue that a few men are willing to access. Mika Maruyama, born and raised in Japan, is now a graduate student working with Eric Mankowski, a psychology professor at Portland State University in Oregon, who has extensively studied support systems including self-help groups.

The third article by Magnus Karlsson of Sweden is titled "How Scandinavian publications portray self-help groups in relation to health and welfare systems." Karlsson, a major researcher of self-help/mutual aid in Sweden, has also done cross-cultural comparative work (see Borkman, Karlsson, Munn-Giddings, & Smith, 2005). He reports the findings of a secondary analysis of research monographs on self-help/mutual aid in Scandinavia (Denmark, Norway, and Sweden) arguing that the cultural, social, and economic contexts are similar enough as welfare states and shows how the role of professionals as employees of the welfare state affects the nature and organization of self-help/mutual aid in these countries.

Little cross-cultural research on self-help or mutual aid has been done and methodological issues involved in doing such research have rarely been discussed in the literature (see Borkman et al., 2005, Munn-Giddings et al., 2008; Oka & Borkman, 2005). Noteworthy exceptions are the comparative cross-cultural research of Gidron and Chesler comparing groups in the United States and Israel (e.g., Chesler, Chesney, & Gidron, 1996; Gidron & Chesler, 1994); Makela and 18 colleagues (1996) who studied Alcoholics Anonymous in relation to the health and welfare system in eight countries; and Borkman and colleagues from United Kingdom and Sweden (2005, 2009) who studied mental health self-help organizations in the United States, United Kingdom, and Sweden. Our experiences doing cross-cultural research on self-help/mutual aid have yielded complex methodological challenges as well as satisfying synergies and insights. In working

with Swedish and British researchers on self-help organizations for people with mental health problems, we carefully planned how the research would be done, developed quasi-standardized procedures and instruments that took into account societal differences, and discussed possible complications arising from differences in backgrounds, training, and research experiences. However, we were unprepared for the tensions and difficulties that arose from differences in terminology (especially across English speaking countries), communicating long distance by e-mail, research traditions (especially differences in ethical require-ments of University review boards) and academic backgrounds (Borkman et al., 2005; Munn-Giddings & Borkman, 2008). Despite these challenges, we con-cluded that an especially valuable methodological aid was working as a research team with an insider from the country and an outsider from another culture. The insider knows the language and culture but can be myopic in observing and inter-preting innovative phenomena because of his or her's taken-for-granted assump-tions. The fresh perspective of the outsider can profitably challenge the insider's assumptions in a constructive manner; on the other hand if the outsider incorrectly interprets some novel phenomena due to lack of knowledge of the history and culture of the situation, the insider can provide the requisite information.

In this issue both articles on Japanese self-help were methodologically aided by having an insider and an outsider as the research team. In both cases the outsider knew the content area and the insider knew the culture, language, and historical context. Richard Chenhall, the outsider in the Danshukai article had studied alcoholism treatment and self-help groups in Australia (see Chenhall, 2007) while Tomofumi Oka, the insider, is not only native Japanese but has extensively studied his culture's self-help groups (e.g., Oka, 2003). Similarly, in the article on Telephone Hotlines for Men in Japan, Mika Maruyama, a native Japanese person represents the insider perspective while Eric Mankowski, the outsider is well versed in self-help groups and issues of male support groups (see Mankowski & Silvergleid, 1999-2000).

In conclusion, this special issue expands our cross-cultural knowledge of self-help/mutual aid in Japan and Scandinavia and shows not only how variable self-help/mutual aid can be in different national, cultural, and social contexts but across how problem issues within the same societal context affect the nature and structure of self-help/mutual aid within a society.

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