Part VI

Conclusion
Forward-Looking Criticism

Critiques and Enhancements for the Next Generation of the Cultural-Ecological Model

Kevin Michael Foster

I open the concluding section of this volume with a rhetorical question I have asked elsewhere regarding John Ogbu’s work: “Of the many wonderful scholars who have conducted education research, how many have produced grand assessments that have remained relevant and worthy of discussion thirty years after their initial formulation?” (Foster, 2005b, p. 559). This is, of course, a framing question, one that assumes—and perhaps demands—our acknowledgment that whether we agree or disagree with Ogbu’s cultural-ecological model of minority academic achievement, his ideas were powerful, resonant with large numbers and groups of people, and have had a tremendous influence on the last three decades of educational research.

In this closing chapter, I would like to address two interlocking questions: Where should “we”—educational researchers interested in minority student achievement—stand in relation to the cultural-ecological model (CEM)? And where should we go from here? To do this, I will offer an assessment of what I see as the strengths and weaknesses of Ogbu’s overall work and then suggest theoretical interventions that, if incorporated, stand to ensure the future usefulness of the CEM. My argument is threefold: that (a) Ogbu’s general framework is strong and potentially useful; but that (b) it was undermined by specific and correctable problems in his analysis of contemporary and historic data; and finally that (c) the continued relevance of the CEM will be secured by considering and including recent theoretical innovations in cultural anthropology, including reflexivity and more nuanced understandings of culture and cultural process.

Most of the ideas in this chapter are reproduced from my earlier writings (especially Foster, 2004, 2005b, 2005d) that specifically addressed Ogbu’s CEM, as well as another work (Foster, 2005c) that examined academic motivation among high-achieving Black college students, including voluntary and involuntary minorities. Before commenting upon Ogbu’s ideas, however, I will offer some comments regarding collegiality in the field. At first glance this may seem a tangent, but I include this
section because the varied receptions—not just to Ogbu’s work, but to Ogbu himself—speak to our ability to communicate with one another across differences of opinion and hence, to our ability to advance knowledge through a process that includes both fieldwork and mutual, collegial, critical engagement.

Ogbu’s work incited strong reactions, was read in divergent ways by different readers from within and beyond the academy, and occasionally divided classrooms and conference sessions into those who were sympathetic to his ideas and those who were not. Given this, our ability to step back, take stock of the ongoing debates, and push our understanding of minority student achievement forward (regardless of whether we agree or disagree with Ogbu’s work) is a measure of our development as progressive, rigorous, and grounded scholars who should be less concerned with being seen as right at all costs, and more concerned that we are always working to get it right at all costs—even when that means gaining insights from those with whom we generally disagree.

COLLEGIALITY IN THE FIELD

In the few years since John Ogbu’s 2003 passing, I have been impressed with educational researchers’ ongoing consideration of his work. First, the quality of the engagements—the understanding of Ogbu’s work; the seriousness with which his work has been tested, contested, and followed up; and the conclusions drawn with regards to the CEM’s continued efficacy—have been exemplary. In addition to works reprinted for this volume, special issues of Qualitative Studies in Education (Foster, 2005a) and Intercultural Education (Foster & Gobbo, 2004) have continued discussions about the ongoing relevance of Ogbu’s work. Several particularly exciting works have gone beyond the intricacies of the CEM to address more personal and difficult issues, including professional relationships among scholars, how scholars receive one another and one another’s works, and how our writings can be differently read among scholars, public officials, and others who all come to our works by different means and read our works through different lenses.

Two educational anthropologists who have addressed larger issues of reception and consideration of Ogbu’s work are Doug Foley (2005) and Ted Hamann (2004). In “Elusive Prey: John Ogbu and the search for a grand theory of minority academic disengagement,” Foley expressed admiration for Ogbu and wrestled with the mutual hurt feelings that resulted from his failed intellectual engagement with him. In “Lessons from the interpretation/misinterpretation of John Ogbu’s scholarship,” Hamann discussed the implications connected to the appropriations of Ogbu’s work by those within and beyond the academy. A third piece
that addressed relational issues that surpass ideas and texts is Signithia Fordham’s wonderful (2004) piece, “‘Signithia, you can do better than that’: John Ogbu (and me) and the nine lives peoples” (reprinted as Chapter 6, this volume). Fordham considered the ongoing association of two people—joined together first as student and mentor, and then by the production of an influential work (the widely cited 1986 Urban Review piece on “acting White” [Fordham & Ogbu, 2004])—as well as the relational strains and difficulties associated with a professional relationship that spanned decades.

Even beyond texts like those by Foley, Fordham, and Hamann, which invite author and reader reflexivity and include an implicit acknowledgment of the humanity behind scholars and scholarship, the tone of the posthumous debate around Ogbu’s work has been exemplary. The debate has been characterized by collegiality, seriousness, and a lack of animosity that I believe takes all of us to a new level in terms of our ability to engage one another seriously on the controversial topic of minority student achievement.

This stands in contrast to the strongly worded, negative responses to Ogbu’s work at academic conferences in the past. Several colleagues have attested to instances of Ogbu’s defensiveness and dismissiveness, as well as his subsequent difficulty engaging in scholarly debate without feeling personally attacked (Foley, 2005). Yet other colleagues have offered that in settings of collegiality and trust, Ogbu took criticism well. A year or two before John Ogbu’s passing, I asked a mentor and (now) colleague, Angela Valenzuela, about how and whether to try and engage him in a critical dialogue. She had met Ogbu while she was a student at Stanford University, and he had strongly supported her work. Her words echoed those Doug Foley heard about Ogbu from Signithia Fordham in another conversation. “Oh, don’t worry about John,” Angela more or less told me, “He’s a big boy; I think you guys can have a good dialogue.”

I did converse and correspond with Ogbu in 2002 and 2003, and we agreed to come together, but the dialogue was cut off before it truly began. While I wish that there had been more dialogues while Ogbu was alive, I am at least pleased that such a wide range of scholars as has been included in this volume are able to engage Ogbu’s work, and one another, now. I keep in mind that our deepest mission is to serve students through our work. The animosity, mutual hurt feelings, and bitterness that has sometimes characterized past debates dishonor and undermine our ultimate goals. Thus, the recent work around Ogbu’s research has been especially noteworthy because it serves students, families, communities, and schools by providing deep, rich, insightful conversations, and analyses that facilitate reforms in teaching and learning settings, honor strengths in those same settings, and provide new insights into the many and complex facets of education.
Finally, it is worth noting the obvious—that the ongoing engagement of Ogbu’s work has included both considerable praise and considerable criticism. Since Ogbu’s passing, he has not been honored with universal agreement with everything he had to say, but rather with engagement from many intellectual quarters, including popular commentators and the U.S. press (Goleman, 1988; Page, 2003; Rothstein, 2000; Tough, 2004). In the scholarly context, this is much more profound and meaningful than effusive praise, and a much greater honor. In the spirit of forthright critical analysis, the remainder of this chapter will engage key tenets of the CEM, pointing to strengths and weaknesses and to theoretical interventions that will ensure its future relevance.

**FORWARD-LOOKING CRITICISM OF THE CULTURAL-ECOLOGICAL MODEL**

Ogbu’s CEM includes four important layers: (a) the general idea that students’ academic success is impacted by community and system forces; (b) distinctions among voluntary, involuntary, and autonomous minorities; (c) the recognition of universal, primary, and secondary discontinuities between students and the schools they attend; and (d) the idea that involuntary minorities have developed survival strategies—some that facilitate academic success and others that hinder it—including client-ship/Uncle Tomming, collective struggle, hustling, emulation of Whites, and camouflage, while voluntary minorities have developed instrumental approaches to schooling and have proven more adept at successfully negotiating schools in order to realize academic success. The fact that Ogbu repeated these ideas in numerous publications has been greeted with consternation by some, but also has ensured that his ideas have been disseminated to a broad range of academic audiences and that we have a stable and unambiguous record of his thinking.

The sheer number of articles that comment upon, build upon, rely upon, or refute the CEM attests to its importance. The CEM established for countless educational researchers a framework for thinking about minority approaches to schooling. Some insights stand out. For instance, it was the CEM that most succinctly articulated that the historical circumstances in which a group of people comes to its minority status is critical to understanding its approaches to schooling. In addition, the distinction of layers of cultural difference between groups and schools (universal, primary, and secondary) offers one way for researchers to distinguish between cultural traits that students bring with them to school and those that they actively reproduce.

Even as several researchers have applied tenets of the CEM to their own work, many have resisted or refuted Ogbu’s analyses, particularly
his characterizations of involuntary minorities’ norms and behaviors. I contend that while critics correctly have found fault with many of Ogbu’s analyses, the problems are not with his model as much as with his applications of the framework he developed. I turn now to examples of shortcomings in Ogbu’s findings and analyses, before offering theoretical interventions that will account for these shortcomings and that will enrich the CEM and broaden its applications and usefulness.

Few have challenged the usefulness of thinking about involuntary and voluntary minorities, although some have presented circumstances in which the situation ultimately proved more complicated than that initial conception (Hermans, 2004; Kalekin-Fishman, 2004). Rather, challenges to Ogbu’s analyses have addressed such issues as his unintended slippage into culture-of-poverty arguments (Gould, 1999), his failure to recognize the range of normative and status-earning behaviors within the groups of minorities he identified (Chapter 8, this volume; Flores-Gonzalez, 1999; Foster, 2001; Zou & Trueba, 1998), and a body of research and writing that is “overwhelmingly preoccupied with explaining the academic failure of . . . marginal populations” (O’Conner, 1997, p. 597). Others have complicated the meaning and implications of “acting White” (Chapter 10, this volume) or have offered cases in which involuntary minority oppositional culture does not undermine academic success as predicted in Ogbu’s writings (Chapters 9 and 14, this volume).

To those general challenges and complications, I would add five problems with Ogbu’s use of the CEM that we would be well advised to account for if we are to move the model forward in the future. Just as Ogbu’s analyses most frequently relied upon examples from Blacks in the United States, these challenges to his analyses do so as well:

1. Ogbu’s writings do not account for African Americans’ behaviors that are conducive to school success that routinely manifest among large groups of African Americans;
2. Ogbu’s understanding of African Americans’ responses to schooling relies upon a consistent misreading of African American cultural history;
3. Ogbu’s use of data depends upon a myopic reading of contemporary data;
4. Ogbu’s analysis of voluntary minority approaches to schooling fails to account for important facets of their response to schooling, especially the frequent reliance upon looking down upon involuntary minorities as maladapted and deficient;
5. Ogbu’s work relied upon a vision of culture that lacks nuance and complexity, especially given his anthropological training.

These challenges are related not to Ogbu’s CEM as a whole, but to his use
of data to support the ideas he developed within that framework. In other words, while there are significant problems that need to be rooted out before we can make best use of the CEM, these are problems of data collection and analysis, not of the framework itself. Challenge 5 does point to the need for enhancing the framework conceptually, but even here we are talking about introducing nuance, not questioning the frame itself. Below is an elaboration of these five challenges.

1. Ogbu’s writings do not account for behaviors that are both conducive to school success and routinely manifest among large groups of African Americans, past and present (Chapters 9 and 14, this volume). This is important because African Americans are the minority group that Ogbu most often used as an example of the typical norms, values, and behaviors of involuntary minorities. Examples Ogbu missed include race-conscious, African American high achievers, today and in the past, who tie their success to and are driven by a sense of responsibility to their race. To the extent that such individuals, student organizations, and community organizations are noticed (as in the passing awareness of the MAC program documented in the Shaker Heights study [Ogbu, 2003]), they are treated as novel and anomalous instead of manifestations of deeply rooted aspects of Black cultural and intellectual history.

Throughout Ogbu’s work, in fact, there is little room for the existence of involuntary minority high-achievers whose motivations to strive and succeed are rooted in their inculcation and embodiment of norms, values, and practices that were developed within and organic to their involuntary minority community. As an engaged, activist educational anthropologist, I am most concerned with promoting academic success, which means not only examining failure, but also taking just as hard a look at success. Thus, Ogbu’s inability to recognize organically rooted paths to academic success among involuntary minorities is frustrating. Nowhere in his analysis, for instance, is there adequate recognition of racial uplift, a talented tenth, or racial responsibility as community-based concepts that facilitate academic success among African Americans, even though these are deeply rooted forces in the African American community (Banks, 1996; Foster, 1997; Gaines, 1996; Perry, 2003). Therefore, the challenge is not to the conception of the involuntary minority—the moniker applies quite aptly to African Americans. Rather, somehow in his data gathering and analysis, Ogbu missed key aspects of African Americans’ experience and reality as an involuntary minority group.

2. Ogbu’s understanding of African American responses to schooling likewise relies upon an analysis of African American cultural history that is selective, contestable, and occasionally inaccurate. For example, we can point to his contention that in order to experience success, African Americans have avoided “White domains” and instead have focused on areas that were not White dominated (Fordham & Ogbu,
1986, pp. 181–183; Ogbu 1982, p. 302). This characterization lacks nuance and ignores not just individual counter-examples, but modes of conduct for entire groups of African Americans throughout American history. For instance, decades ago, Henry Louis Gates (1987) ably analyzed enslaved and recently freed Africans’ efforts to reclaim their humanity by writing down their life stories in narrative form. In the case of these freedom narratives, enslaved and recently freed Africans participated in the so-called White domain of literate culture so as to demonstrate their humanity and equal worth. Acknowledgment or consideration of such engagement with dominant domains is not included in Ogbu’s analysis of involuntary minority responses to discrimination. Other such examples of a misreading of cultural history include discussions of Black participation in sports, discussions of Black settlement patterns, and a failure to seriously engage the rhetorical traditions and cultural intellectual institutions associated with racial uplift and the talented tenth.

With regards to the sports example, to show how African Americans have entered what he called non-White domains in order to experience success, Ogbu (1982, p. 302) offered sports participation as an “obvious example” of how African Americans historically have chosen to excel in non-White domains. Whereas in the case of Black literacy in historical perspective Ogbu was (apparently) unaware of this important aspect of American cultural history, in the case of his comments regarding African American historic sports participation he was simply wrong. A well-established literature supports the fact that historically, African Americans have promoted Black engagement in the White American sports establishment for a number of reasons, most of which had to do with an understanding of sports as domains where Blacks could compete against Whites on the equal footing of shared, articulated, and equally applied rules, and with the idea that sports offered an arena where African Americans could stand side by side with other (White) Americans to represent the nation in international arenas and thus prove their worth of citizenship (Harris, 1998; McRae 2003; Miller, 1995). So when the Brown Bomber (boxer Joe Louis) or the Say Hey Kid (baseball player Willie Mays) competed successfully against Whites, they stood in for all African Americans in a demonstration of Blacks’ equality with Whites. (Further, this work and impulse came not in the context of a popular mythology of Black athletic superiority—which is more a product of the contemporary popular imagination than is generally understood—but rather in the context of a popular American mythology that described Blacks as both mentally and physically inferior). Likewise, when the Brown Bomber fought the Nazi Stooge, Max Schmeling (who was a German, but not actually a Nazi), and when Jesse Owens won four gold medals in the 1936 Olympics in front of Adolf Hitler, these men were seen as making statements about African Americans as patriots and contributors to the
nation’s life and defense, and again, as worthy of full rights of citizenship. Of course, these are no longer among the prominent reasons for Black youths’ sports participation. I agree with Hoberman’s (1997) analysis that sports are a tremendous distraction to many Black youths today. But today is not yesterday, and here as elsewhere Ogbu projected a contemporary circumstance into his ideas about the past.

3. An additional challenge to Ogbu’s use of data relates to a myopic reading of contemporary data generated during his fieldwork. There are several examples to draw upon, including some that influenced his reading of minority student coping strategies, and others that influenced his conception of the basis for African Americans’ oppositional behaviors. An example of the former is Ogbu’s discussion of the minority survival strategy of “tommimg.” Here, as elsewhere, the CEM holds, but the details of his analysis, and the subsequent category he creates, do not. His discussions of tommming did not include observational data of tommming in action (see Ogbu, 1983, 1990, 1991). Rather, he offered generic descriptions of tommming by Black students, who described it as something that other Blacks do. Ogbu’s data seemed to point to the possibility that tommming may exist less as an identified and practiced strategy for self, and more of a strategy that is attributed to others. Since tommming is generally cast pejoratively, the ascription of tommming behaviors to others in a given community of Black students raises intriguing questions about what critical race theorist Regina Austin (1995) called policing for solidarity among African Americans. Perhaps the use, or threat of use, of this pejorative category to describe some Black students encourages all to avoid whatever behaviors would earn the moniker “Uncle Tom.” Addressing this issue of self-acknowledged identity versus identity as ascribed by others would greatly improve many cultural-ecological analyses.

In other cases, the myopic reading of contemporary data resulted from Ogbu’s insistence on focusing more on community forces than on system forces. As will be developed later in this chapter, Ogbu’s insistence on privileging community forces in his analyses led him to miss important insights regarding the system forces in action, and regarding the dynamic interaction between system forces and community forces.

4. Ogbu’s analysis of voluntary minorities’ approaches to schooling is incomplete, failing to account for important facets of their response to schooling. Most notably, along with an instrumental approach to schools, many voluntary minorities construct themselves as distinct from, or even opposite to, involuntary minorities. Divergent backgrounds are collapsed into new categories that serve to distinguish voluntary minorities from involuntary minorities and to facilitate this distancing from involuntary minorities. In the United States, Black involuntary minorities often become the foil against which Black voluntary minorities construct themselves as
high achievers. Waters (1994) reported similar findings in her work with West Indian Blacks in the United States.

In my work with African immigrants and international students attending U.S. universities, the conception of the voluntary minority holds up well, although the group is more fluid and has much more porous boundaries for inclusion than Ogbu recognized. Differences among Africans of different ethnicities and nationalities were downplayed in a process of inscription and ascription that brought these Black students together under the voluntary minority identity of “African.” Other Black immigrants and international students similarly came together under the multinational identity of Caribbean or West Indian. Ogbu’s descriptions of the success orientation of African voluntary immigrants to the United States concur with my fieldwork findings, and with my ongoing interactions with this “kind” of student, to the extent that most have been highly motivated and have adopted an instrumental approach to their teachers and to the educational resources that have been available to them. What Ogbu did not notice, but has come up repeatedly in my experiences, is the extent to which voluntary minorities actively construct themselves in opposition to involuntary minorities when they construct themselves as high achievers.

The African students in the United States that I have interviewed and observed often possess an active and actively reproduced willingness to look down upon involuntary minorities with pity—as maladjusted and systematic underachievers—but they also draw upon that same group as a resource for providing social and other extracurricular outlets that help them maintain their mental health as they proceed through high school or college. Thus, the success of voluntary minorities sometimes is linked to how they imagine and interact with involuntary minorities. This is an important feature of voluntary minority community forces that Ogbu never noticed.

Finally, in terms of his understanding of voluntary minority’s circumstances, Ogbu did not account for immigrant minorities’ wide range of class, status, and wealth backgrounds. In contrast to Ogbu’s assertion that immigrant minorities generally enter a host society to improve their status, some already hold high status and wealth when they come to another country. Entrance into a country like the United States to pursue advanced degrees and launch careers is often a reflection of privilege, as well as a means by which privilege is more deeply entrenched.

5. Finally, as will be more fully discussed in the next section, Ogbu’s work relied upon a vision of culture that lacked nuance and complexity, especially given his anthropological training. As the discipline of anthropology has progressed—undergoing what Fischer (2004) called a theoretical and methodological retooling in the 1980s and 1990s—Ogbu’s analyses retained a view of culture as singular, bounded, and linearly
produced. To be sure, Ogbu’s analyses are much more sophisticated than those of McWhorter (2001) or D’Souza (1998), but the assessment (such as that of Shanafelt [2004]) that Ogbu’s use of culture was complex and adequately accounted for dynamic interactions among systemic, community, and individual variables, is generous to a fault.

In attempting to come to terms with the shortcomings above, I have identified several areas where the CEM can be further developed such that as a theoretical lens it is more attuned to aspects of social and cultural processes and analyses are less likely to be inaccurate. Two are developed in the following pages. As scholars apply the CEM to minority students’ circumstances in different contexts, we would do well to ensure that we operate with a complex and dynamic notion of culture, both within and among groups, and notice the ongoing and dynamic interplay between community and system forces. An additional consideration would include recognizing the fluidity between such categories as involuntary and voluntary minorities because individual identities are malleable and because some individuals maintain a voluntary minority identity despite being involuntary minorities, and vice versa. A final improvement would be greater researcher reflexivity, acknowledgment of subject positioning, and a wrestling with the ways in which a researcher’s subject positioning influences data collection and analysis. In Ogbu’s case, during his 30 years of work, he begged the question as to how his status as an involuntary minority in a host country impacted what he saw and how he saw it.

**ENHANCEMENT #1: OPERATING WITH A MORE COMPLEX NOTION OF CULTURE**

The CEM emphasizes how historical and contemporary circumstances and contexts influence the norms, values, and behaviors of a group of similarly situated individuals. Thus, it can quite comfortably accommodate a notion of culture as dynamic, constantly negotiated, and shifting over time—in other words, the important notion that culture is always in process. To this extent, the CEM is well positioned to incorporate recent developments in cultural anthropology (Fischer, 2004).

In the many instances in which Ogbu listed the traits of various involuntary or voluntary minority groups, he described culture in terms of bounded and static units of analysis instead of as dynamic, relational, and constantly negotiated and contested. To his credit, Ogbu was true to the concept of what Fischer (2004, p. 3) called the distinct anthropological voice—the aspiration for a cross-culturally comparative, socially grounded, linguistically and culturally attentive perspective. At the same time, his comparisons reduced groups to several characteristics, which he
imbedded in a linear description of different cultural groups’ development and resultant socio-material circumstances. As the late educational anthropologist Henry Trueba (1987) noted years ago, one of the problems with Ogbu’s analyses is that they did not account for the shifting identities of individuals that he classified as involuntary or voluntary minorities—especially those individuals whose affiliations, genealogies, and loyalties made it difficult to place them neatly into one category or another (pp. 9–10). Nor did Ogbu explain how (much less acknowledge that) attitudes, norms, values, and behaviors shift over time among cultural actors.

Fischer (1994) may as well have been writing against Ogbu when he described some scientists’ use of culture as a “fixed variable” and when he argued against such use as “precisely the sort of thing to which anthropological notions of culture cannot be reduced and that lead to the promotion of stereotype thinking and invidious forms of comparative research” (p. 7). To Fischer,

Culture is not a variable; culture is relational, it is elsewhere, it is in passage, it is where meaning is woven and renewed, often through gaps and silences, and forces beyond the conscious control of individuals, and yet the space where individual and institutional social responsibility and ethical struggle take place.

(p. 7)

Moreover, while culture is “configured historically,” it is an ongoing and interactive process that is forged in context. Culture (or the culture of an ideal type group like the voluntary minority) is not a singular entity that, once formed, simply always is the same. Rather, to understand culture and cultural process, we must consider what Weber (1992 [1930], p. 49) referred to as a complex interaction of innumerable different historical factors. Culture is also thoroughly contested and constantly negotiated, from within and without, through inscription and ascription, and in conscious responses and involuntary reactions (Foster, 2003). Thus, it is precisely “the coming into form, the work of maintenance, and the processes of decay, the dynamics of the weaving,” that is the anthropologist’s special purview and interest (Fischer, 2004, p. 8).

Such a dynamic, complex, and even dizzying understanding of culture (and cultural process) disallows the possibility of viewing culture as a fixed variable in analysis. It also allows for the possibility of interesting norm and value permutations, such as those arising from ongoing interactions between voluntary and involuntary minorities. Adopting this approach to culture would reorient and greatly enhance the CEM, as theorists would be less likely to be satisfied with lists of traits to describe this or that minority group and more likely to notice the constant and
never resolved negotiations over which traits will accurately characterize one group or another. Finally, from the standpoint of activist researchers, examining ongoing cultural production provides space for effecting dynamic and responsive interventions in ways that are not available when one group is labeled as adaptive to school success and another group less is labeled adaptive because of their supposed traits.

**ENHANCEMENT #2: NOTICING THE DYNAMIC INTERPLAY BETWEEN SYSTEM AND COMMUNITY FORCES**

Ogbu’s stated opinion about community and system forces was consistent; he argued that both were important to understanding minority responses to schooling, but that community forces were systematically understudied. Thus, he devoted his time to understanding community forces. A problem that arose is that in his desire to bring attention to community forces, he went too far in that direction, overemphasizing them, overemphasizing their negative impacts, and undermining his contention that both sets of forces were important. In his many books, articles, and book chapters, Ogbu’s mentioning of community and system forces as equally important became a *pro forma* act. He typically mentioned them in one or two introductory sentences to articles that repeated his assessments about involuntary minorities’ roles in their own academic failure. This problem is one of emphasis and impression, but nonetheless it is important because Ogbu’s work increasingly has been used to bolster the culture-of-poverty arguments that he actually saw himself as arguing against (Hamann, 2004).

Another problem with Ogbu’s discussion of community and system forces reflects a need for deeper engagement with anthropological and sociological theory. In the case of any dichotomy, or any set of ideal types, it is important to remember that these are constructions. They help researchers think about problems, but must be used carefully, and with an understanding that categories and types are generally more fluid and unpredictable than the concepts actually allow. One understudied aspect of system and community forces is the extent to which they exist interdependently and constantly influence each other. In Ogbu’s (1978) work, the initial conception that a job ceiling, along with other forms of discrimination, led to certain responses by involuntary minorities is a case in which system forces facilitated a set of communal responses that became instituted strongly enough and shared widely enough to become community forces. But the impact of one set of forces upon another does not only occur during a formative period to produce an everlasting result. The system changes, and the community changes, and they continually
impact one another. An enhanced CEM would be much stronger with this recognition.

Especially in terms of accounting for and minimizing those community forces that Ogbu identified as undermining academic success, it is worth paying special attention to how individuals perceive specific system forces, and how the system incorporates and accounts for actions generated by community members. To an extent, Ogbu’s (2003) Shaker Heights work, *Black American Students in an Affluent Suburb* began to address this complex task. Even there, however, he underplayed or did not provide an analysis for data that seemed to shed light on how system forces impacted students’ responses to schooling, as well as how system forces impacted their academic achievement, placement, and outcomes. Examples occurred throughout the text, but are especially noticeable on pages 112, 117, and 237. In these places, Ogbu recorded comments by students, parents, and teachers that could have been used to shed light on system forces as involuntary minorities perceived them. Especially in those instances in which community members commented on system forces, Ogbu missed an opportunity to analyze how system forces interact with, inform, and are challenged by community forces.

In sum, while the point that community forces have not received enough attention is well taken, in any schooling situation, it remains important to maintain balance and perspective, to examine how both community forces and system forces impact students’ academic outcomes and also to look at the two as they interrelate, reinforce, or undermine one another. As a final repetition of this chapter’s mantra, greater focus on these areas will not compromise the basic tenets of the CEM, but enhance it by facilitating our understanding of the factors that influence minority responses to schooling, as well as how they operate.

**CONCLUSION**

In earlier work (Foster, 2004), I outlined Ogbu’s CEM so as to facilitate wider understanding and more nuanced use or criticism of his work. In the opening chapters of this volume, Ogbu likewise reiterated his key ideas, including additional consideration of the “acting White” hypothesis that he developed with Signithia Fordham. Between these works, the chapters in this volume, and additional works that did not find their way into this volume, we come away with a definitive sense of Ogbu’s ideas, and with important criticisms of his opus. We thus are well equipped to move forward. For my part, I have tried to use the concluding piece of this volume to frame and state my critique in such a way as to allow future researchers to utilize the CEM, refine it, build upon its strengths, and correct its shortcomings. I also have ventured into the delicate and seldom
written about politics of reception that often surround prolific scholars, and that certainly surrounded Ogbu’s work.

The criticisms here—especially those related to static notions of culture, poorly founded readings of cultural history, and underdeveloped notions of cultural process—are, in my view, the most essential to correct if we are to make the most use of the CEM in the future. Actively incorporating more sophisticated, processual considerations around culture will ultimately further, rather than destabilize or undermine, Ogbu’s important ideas about minority responses to schooling. Forthrightly laying out a body of theory, and then allowing for and engaging in its criticism—as has been accomplished in this volume—not only secures John Ogbu’s legacy, but also encourages a dynamic approach to ideas, where we see a seminal body of work not as the final answer to a question or set of questions, but rather as an important and lasting contribution to ongoing and vitally important discussions.

REFERENCES


Foster, K. (2003). The contours of community: The formation and maintenance


