Sense of Community: A Definition and Theory

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For several years many of us at Peabody College have participated in the evolution of a theory of community, the first conceptualization of which was presented in a working paper (McMillan, 1976) of the Center for Community Studies. To support the proposed definition, McMillan focused on the literature on group cohesiveness, and we build here on that original definition. This article attempts to describe the dynamics of the sense-of-community force—to identify the various elements in the force and to describe the process by which these elements work together to produce the experience of sense of community.

Review of Related Research

Doolittle and MacDonald (1978) developed the 40-item Sense of Community Scale (SCS) to probe communicative behaviors and attitudes at the community or neighborhood level of social organization. The basis of the SCS was what had been called the "critical dimension of community structure" (Tropman, 1969, p. 215), and it was to be used to differentiate low, medium, and high SCS neighborhoods on its five factors: informal interaction (with neighbors), safety (having a good place to live), pro-urbanism (privacy, anonymity), neighboring preferences (preference for frequent neighbor interaction), and localism (opinions and a desire to participate in neighborhood affairs). The results of Doolittle and MacDonald's study led to three generalizations. First, there is an inverse relationship between pro-urbanism and preference for neighboring. Second, there is a direct relationship between safety and preference for neighboring. Finally, pro-urbanism decreases as perception of safety increases.

Glynn's (1981) measure of the psychological sense of community is based on the work of Hillery (1955), augmented by responses to a questionnaire distributed to randomly selected members of the Division of Community Psychology of the American Psychological Association. Glynn administered his measure to members of three communities and hypothesized that residents of Kfar Blum, and Israeli kibbutz, would demonstrate a greater sense of community than residents of two Maryland communities. He identified 202 behaviors or subconcepts related to sense of community, from which 120 items were developed, representing real and ideal characteristics. As predicted, higher real levels of sense of community were found in the kibbutz than in the two American towns. However, no differences were found among the three on the ideal scale. Multiple regression analysis showed that 18 selected demographic items could predict adequately the real scale score ($R^2 = .613$, $p < .001$) but not the ideal score ($R^2 = .272$). The strongest predictors of actual sense of community were (a) expected length of community residency, (b) satisfaction with the community, and (c) the number of neighbors one could identify by first name. Glynn also found a positive relationship between sense of community and the ability to function competently in the community.

Riger and Lavrakas (1981) studied sense of community as reflected in neighborhood attachment and found two empirically distinct but correlated factors they called social bonding and behavioral rootedness. The social bonding factor contained items concerning the ability to identify neighbors, feeling part of the neighborhood, and number of neighborhood children known to the respondent. Behavioral rootedness refers to years of community residency, whether one's home is owned or rented, and expected length of residency. Using these factors, the authors identified four "meaningful and distinct groups of citizens": young mobiles (low bonded, low rooted), young participants (high bonded, low rooted), isolates (low bonded, high rooted), and established participants (high bonded, high rooted). In this study, age played a major role in determining attachment.

Examining the relationship between community involvement and level of residents' fear of crime, Riger, LeBailly, and Gordon (1981) identified four types of community involvement: feelings of bondedness, extent of residential roots, use of local facilities, and degree of social interaction with neighbors. They found that the first two types of bondedness were related significantly and inversely to residents' fear of crime, while the last two, reflecting behavior rather than feelings, were not related significantly to fear of crime. A plausible explanation for the differential relationships is that variables within a domain (e.g., feelings of bondedness and other feelings) are more likely to be strongly correlated than are variables measured across domains (e.g., feelings and behaviors) (Campbell & Fiske, 1959). Despite the weakness of the study as suggested by such an explanation, we believe that the findings of Riger et al. attest to the force of sense of community in the lives of neighborhood residents.

Ahlbrant and Cunningham (1979) viewed sense of community as an integral contributor to one's commitment to a neighborhood and satisfaction with it. They found that those who were most committed and satisfied saw their neighborhood as a small community within the city, were more loyal to the neighborhood than to the rest of the city, and thought of their neighborhood as offering particular activities for its residents — the characteristics representing the authors' conceptualization of sense of community. Also considered to be a contributor to commitment to neighborhood and satisfaction with it was social fabric, a term they used to capture the "strengths of interpersonal relationships" as measured through different types of neighbor interactions.

Bachrach and Zautra (1985) studied the coping responses to a proposed hazardous waste facility in a rural community. They found that a stronger sense of community led to problem-focused coping behaviors — behaviors that attempt directly to alter or counter the threat — and had no bearing on whether emotion-focused coping strategies — efforts to adjust emotionally to the threat — were applied. A path analytic model showed that problem-focused coping contributed strongly to the level of one's community involvement (e.g., reading reports, attending meetings, signing petitions), and the authors concluded that stronger sense of community may lead to a "greater sense of purpose and perceived control" in dealing with an external threat. In a similar study, Chavis (1983) identified the process of empowerment, which occurs through the development of community. Others have reported consistent findings; Florin and Wandersman (1984) and Wandersman and Giamartino (1980) found high self-reported levels of sense of community to distinguish those who participated in block associations from those who did not.

Bachrach and Zautra (1985) reported that they used a "brief, but face valid" sense of community scale on the basis of questions developed by Kasarda and Janowitz (1974) and Rhoads (1982). Their measure included seven items: feeling at home in the community, satisfaction with the community, agreement with the values and beliefs of the community, feeling of belonging in the community, interest in what goes on in the community, feeling an important part of the community, and attachment to the community. The scale was found to be internally consistent (alpha = .76).

The studies reviewed here contributed to our initial understanding of sense of community and emphasize the importance of this concept for research, intervention, and policy. Most important is the recurring emphasis on neighboring, length of residency, planned or anticipated length of residency, home ownership, and satisfaction with the community. Glynn's (1981) work is particularly important in its recognition of the discrepancies between real and ideal levels of sense of community and in demonstrating the relationship between sense of community and an individual's ability to function competently within it. The study by Riger and Lavrakas (1981) is especially significant for its conceptualization of the emotional aspect of the experience.

These were the initial studies in the area of sense of community; however, they cannot be expected to contribute an elaborated theoretical understanding of what sense of community is and how it works, and there are some important limitations to which we hope to respond. All of these studies, for example, lack a coherently articulated conceptual perspective focused on sense of community, and none of the measures used in the studies were developed directly from a definition of sense of community. Five of the studies used factor analytic techniques to create, post hoc, their domains and/or subdomains without theoretical or prior empirical justification, a practice about which Gorsuch (1974) and Nunnally (1978) suggest caution. The sixth (Bachrach & Zautra, 1985) defined its domain on the basis of face validity.

In addition, all authors assumed that each element in their measures of sense of community contributed equally to an individual's experience, although the value-laden nature of the phenomenon (as expressed by Sarason, 1974) would lead one to believe that some feelings, experiences, and needs would be more important than others. It is also notable that the studies reviewed did not investigate what was common among their participants regarding their sense of community. Rather, the studies focused on proving the validity of their measures through differentiation of communities or individuals.

Primarily, these studies revealed that the experience of sense of community does exist and that it does operate as a force in human life. What is needed now is a full description of the nature of sense of community as a whole. We begin that process of development with a definition and theory.

A Definition and Theory of Sense of Community

Gusfield (1975) distinguished between two major uses of the term community. The first is the territorial and geographical notion of community — neighborhood, town, city. The second is "relational," concerned with "quality of character of human relationship, without reference to location" (p. xvi). Gusfield noted that the two usages are not mutually exclusive, although, as Durheim (1964) observed, modern society develops community around interests and skills more than around locality. The ideas presented in this article will apply equally to territorial communities (neighborhoods) and to relational communities (professional, spiritual, etc.).

We propose four criteria for a definition and theory of sense of community. First, the definition needs to be explicit and clear; second, it should be concrete, its parts identifiable; third, it needs to represent the warmth and intimacy implicit in the term; and, finally, it needs to provide a dynamic description of the development and maintenance of the experience. We will attempt to meet these standards.

Our proposed definition has four elements. The first element is *membership*. Membership is the feeling of belonging or of sharing a sense of personal relatedness. The second element is *influence,* a sense of mattering, of making a difference to a group and of the group mattering to its members. The third element is reinforcement: *integration and fulfillment of needs.* This is the feeling that members' needs will be met by the resources received through their membership in the group. The last element is *shared emotional connection,* the commitment and belief that members have shared and will share history, common places, time together, and similar experiences. This is the feeling one sees in farmers' faces as they talk about their home place, their land, and their families; it is the sense of family that Jews feel when they read *The Source* by James Michener (1965). In a sentence, the definition we propose is as follows: Sense of community is a feeling that members have of belonging, a feeling that members matter to one another and to the group, and a shared faith that members' needs will be met through their commitment to be together (McMillan, 1976).

Membership

Membership is a feeling that one has invested part of oneself to become a member and therefore has a right to belong (Aronson & Mills, 1959; Buss & Portnoy, 1967). It is a feeling of belonging, of being a part (Backman & Secord, 1959). Membership has *boundaries*; this means that there are people who belong and people who do not. The boundaries provide members with the emotional safety necessary for needs and feelings to be exposed and for intimacy to develop (Bean, 1971; Ehrlich & Graeven, 1971; Wood, 1971).

The most troublesome feature of this part of the definition is boundaries. In *Wayward Puritans,* Kai Erikson (1966) demonstrated that groups use deviants to establish boundaries. He recounted the banishment of Anne Hutchinson as a heretic in 1637, the persecution of the Quakers from 1656 to 1665, and the witch trials of Salem in 1692. For each of these incidents, Erikson showed how the sense of order and authority was deteriorating and how there was a need for an issue around which the Puritans could unite. The community in each case needed a deviant to denounce and punish as a whole.

Social psychology research has demonstrated that people have boundaries protecting their personal space. Groups often use language, dress, and ritual to create boundaries. People need these barriers to protect against threat (Park, 1924; Perucci, 1963). While much sympathetic interest in and research on the deviant have been generated, group members' legitimate needs for boundaries to protect their intimate social connections have often been overlooked.

We would like to note two additional points concerning boundaries. First, the harm which comes from the pain of rejection and isolation created by boundaries will continue until we clarify the positive benefiits that boundaries provide to communities. Second, while it is clear that groups use deviants as scapegoats in order to create solid boundaries, little is said about the persons who volunteer for the role of deviant by breaking a rule or speaking out against the group consensus in order to obtain attention (Mead,

1918). We think that deviants often use groups, just as the groups use them in the creation of group boundaries.

The role of boundaries is particularly relevant to a neighborhood community. The earliest research on community in American sociology focused on the boundaries established by neighborhood residents (e.g., Park & Burgess, 1921). Park and the Chicago School's ecological model explains the mechanisms of classes and ethnic groups as they work out spatial relations among themselves (Bernard, 1973): boundaries define who is in and who is out. However, the boundaries can be so subtle as to be recognizable only by the residents themselves (e.g., gang graffitti on walls marking ethnic neighborhoods) (Berger & Neuhaus, 1977; Bernard, 1973). Berger and Neuhaus (1977) see them as creations of social distance — sources of protection against threat — that are necessary when people are interpersonally vulnerable. Such barriers separate "us" from "them" and allay anxiety by delimiting who can be trusted.

Emotional safety may be considered as part of the broader notion of *security*. Boundaries established by membership criteria provide the structure and security that protect group intimacy. Such security may be more than emotional; gangs, for example, provide physical security and collectives enhance economic security (Doolittle & MacDonald, 1978; Riger, LeBailly, & Gordon, 1981).

The *sense of belonging and identification* involves the feeling, belief, and expectation that one fits in the group and has a place there, a feeling of acceptance by the group, and a willingness to sacrifice for the group. The role of identification must be emphasized here. It may be represented in the reciprocal statements "It is my group" and "I am part of the group."

Personal investment is an important contributor to a person's feeling of group membership and to his or her sense of community. McMillan (1976) contended (a) that working for membership will provide a feeling that one has earned a place in the group and (b) that, as a consequence of this personal investment, membership will be more meaningful and valuable. This notion of personal investment is paralleled by the work of cognitive dissonance theorists (Aronson & Mills, 1959; Festinger, 1953). For example, the hazing ritual of college fraternities strengthens group cohesiveness (Peterson & Martens, 1972). Personal investment places a large role in developing an emotional connection (such as in home ownership) and will be considered again.

A *common symbol system* serves several important functions in creating and maintaining sense of community, one of which is to maintain group boundaries. Nisbet and Perrin (1977) stated, "First and foremost of the social bond is the symbolic nature of all true behavior or interaction" (p. 39). White (1949) defined a symbol as "a thing the value or meaning of which is bestowed upon it by those who use it" (p. 22). Understanding common symbols systems is prerequisite to understanding community. "The symbol is to the social world what the cell is to the biotic world and the atom to the physical world. . . . The symbol is the beginning of the social world as we know it" (Nisbet & Perrin, 1977, p. 47).

Warner and Associates (1949), in their classic study of "Jonesville," a midwestern community, recognized the strong integrative function of collective representation such as myths, symbols, rituals, rites, ceremonies, and holidays. They found that in order to obtain smooth functioning and integration in the social life of a modern community, especially when there is heterogeneity, a community must provide a common symbol system. Groups use these social conventions (e.g., rites of passage, language, dress) as

boundaries intentionally to create social distance between members and nonmembers (McMillan, 1976). Bernard (1973) mentioned that black leaders used symbols to unify the black community and defy the white population (e.g., Black Power, clenched fist), and Park (1924) offered a rationale for this strategy. Symbols for a neighborhood may reside in its name, a landmark, a logo, or in architectural style. On the national level, holidays, the flag, and the language play an integrative role, and, on a broader scale, basic archetypes unite humankind (Jung, 1912).

To summarize, membership has five attributes: boundaries, emotional safety, a sense of belonging and identification, personal investment, and a common symbol system. These attributes work together and contribute to a sense of who is part of the community and who is not.

Influence

Influence is a bidirectional concept. In one direction, there is the notion that for a member to be attracted to a group, he or she must have some influence over what the group does (Peterson & Martens, 1972; Solomon, 1960; Zander & Cohen, 1955). On the other hand, cohesiveness is contingent on a group's ability to influence its members (Kelley & Volkart, 1952; Kelley & Woodruff, 1956). This poses two questions: Can these apparently contradictory forces work simultaneously? Is it a bad thing for a group to exert influence on its members to attain conformity?

Several studies suggest that the forces can indeed work simultaneously (Grossack, 1954; Taguiri & Kogan, 1960; Thrasher, 1954). People who acknowledge that others' needs, values, and opinions matter to them are often the most influential group members, while those who always push to influence, try to dominate others, and ignore the wishes and opinions of others are often the least powerful members.

The second question has received more attention than the first (see Lott & Lott, 1965), and the major finding has been a positive relationship between group cohesiveness and pressure to conform. Festinger, Schachter, and Back (1950) and Kelley and Woodruff (1956) considered these correlational findings to be a demonstration of the negative effects of group cohesiveness (i.e., loss of freedom and individuality).

There is a set of studies on consensual validation that provides some balance to the contentions about group cohesiveness and conformity. The consensual validation construct assumes that people possess an inherent need to know that the things they see, feel, and understand are experienced in the same way by others, and the studies have shown that people will perform a variety of psychological gymnastics to obtain feedback and reassurance that they are not crazy—that what they see is real and that it is seen in the same way by others (Backman & Secord, 1959; Byrne & Wond, 1962). Implicit in conformity research has been an assumption that group pressure on the individual to validate the group's world view is the primary force behind conformity (Cartwright & Zander, 1960; Heider, 1958; Newcomb, 1961; Thibaut & Kelley, 1959). However, consensual validation research demonstrates that the force toward uniformity is transactional—that it comes from the person as well as from the group. Thus, uniform and conforming behavior indicates that a group is operating to consensually validate its members as well as to create group norms.

Conformity is not necessarily synonymous with loss of personal choice. A. Hunter and Riger (this issue) caution that many people do try to escape the conformity of the close community in order to express their individual freedom. This emphasizes the need

to develop communities that can appreciate individual differences. The group member believes that either directly or indirectly he or she can exert some control over the community. Long (1958) saw that through the leadership role, people can feel that they have influence even when their influence may be only indirect. According to Long, the people in a community sense "a need for a leadership with the status, capacity, and the role to attend to the general problems of the territory and give substance to a public philosophy" (p. 225).

The role of power and influence within a community has been at the head of one of the classic paradigms in sociology (Bernard, 1973). Nisbet (1953) organized *The Quest for Community* around the ways that power and influence have determined the formation and functions of community. Bernard (1973) believed that as influence is drawn away from a locality, the integration and cohesion of the community are threatened. Voluntary associations act as intermediates (or mediating structures) between the individual and the state (Berger & Neuhaus, 1977) by increasing influence and fostering a sense of efficacy. Through collective action, they cause the environment to be more responsive to the needs of the individual and the small collectivity. Participation in voluntary associations or in government programs yields a sharing of power that leads to greater "ownership" of the community by the participants, greater satisfaction, and greater cohesion (Dahl, 1961; F. Hunter, 1953; Wandersman, 1981). The concepts of power, influence, and participation as they relate to a sense of community can be seen in the growing neighborhood movement, the strength of labor unions, various social movements (Killian, 1964), and the Japanese perspective on management (Pascale & Athos, 1981).

In summary, the following propositions concerning influence can be drawn from the group cohesiveness research:

1.   Members are more attracted to a community in which they feel that they are influential.

2.   There is a significant positive relationship between cohesiveness and a community's influence on its members to conform. Thus, both conformity and community influence on members indicate the strength of the bond.

3.   The pressure for conformity and uniformity comes from the needs of the individual and the community for consensual validation. Thus, conformity serves as a force for closeness as well as an indicator of cohesiveness.

4.   Influence of a member on the community and influence of the community on a member operate concurrently, and one might expect to see the force of both operating simultaneously in a tightly knit community.

Integration and Fulfillment of Needs

The third component of our definition of sense of community is integration and fulfillment of needs, which, translated into more ordinary terms, is reinforcement. Reinforcement as a motivator of behavior is a cornerstone in behavioral research, and it is obvious that for any group to maintain a positive sense of togetherness, the individual–group association must be rewarding for its members. Given the complexity of individuals and groups, however, it has been impossible to determine all of the reinforcements that bind people together into a close community, although several reinforcers have been identified. One is the *status* of being a member (Kelley, 1951; Zander & Cohen, 1955). Berkowitz (1956), Peterson and Martens (1972), and Sacks (1952) have

shown that group success brings group members closer together. The literature on interpersonal attraction suggests that *competence* is another reinforcer (Hester, Roback, Weitz, Anchor, & McKee, 1976; Zander & Havelin, 1960). People are attracted to others whose skills or competence can benefit them in some way. People seem to gravitate toward people and groups that offer the most rewards. Rappaport (1977) calls this person–environment fit.

The main point is that people do what serves their needs. But this leaves questions unanswered: How do people prioritize their needs, especially after meeting the basic survival needs? What creates a need beyond that of basic survival? Reinforcement as an organizing principle seems blind and directionless unless it is complemented by other concepts.

One such directing concept is *shared values*. Our culture and our families teach each of us a set of personal values, which indicate our emotional and intellectual needs and the order in which we attend to them. When people who share values come together, they find that they have similar needs, priorities, and goals, thus fostering the belief that in joining together they might be better able to satisfy these needs and obtain the reinforcement they seek. Shared values, then, provide the integrative force for cohesive communities (Cohen, 1976; Doolittle & MacDonald, 1978). Groups with a sense of community work to find a way to fit people together so that people meet the needs of others while meeting their own needs. (cf. Riley, 1970; Zander, Natsoulas, & Thomas, 1960).

The following summarizes the role of integration and fulfillment of needs in a sense of community:

1. Reinforcement and need fulfillment is a primary function of a strong community.

2. Some of the rewards that are effective reinforcers of communities are status of membership, success of the community, and competence or capabilities of other members.

3. There are many other undocumented needs that communities fill, but individual values are the source of these needs. The extent to which individual values are shared among community members will determine the ability of a community to organize and prioritize its need-fulfillment activities.

4. A strong community is able to fit people together so that people meet others' needs while they meet their own.

Shared Emotional Connection

A shared emotional connection is based, in part, on a shared history. It is not necessary that group members have participated in the history in order to share it, but they must identify with it. The interactions of members in shared events and the specific attributes of the events may facilitate or inhibit the strength of the community.

The following features are important to the principle of shared emotional connection:

1. *Contact hypothesis:* The more people interact, the more likely they are to become close (Allan & Allan, 1971; Festinger, 1950; Sherif, White, & Harvey, 1955; Wilson & Miller, 1961).

2. *Quality of interaction:* The more positive the experience and the relationships, the greater the bond. Success facilitates cohesion (Cook, 1970).

3. *Closure to events:* If the interaction is ambiguous and the community's tasks are left unresolved, group cohesiveness will be inhibited (Hamblin, 1958; Mann & Mann, 1959).

4. *Shared valent event hypothesis:* The more important the shared event is to those involved, the greater the community bond. For example, there appears to be a tremendous bonding among people who experience a crisis together (Myers, 1962; Wilson & Miller, 1961; Wright, 1943).

5. *Investment:* This feature contributes more than just boundary maintenance and cognitive dissonance. Investment determines the importance to the member of the community's history and current status. For example, homeowners who have invested money and time in their part of a neighborhood are more likely to feel the impact of the life events of that community. Similarly, persons who donate more time and energy to an association will be more emotionally involved. Intimacy is another form of investment. The amount of interpersonal emotional risk one takes with the other members and the extent to which one opens oneself to emotional pain from the community life will affect one's general sense of community (Aronson & Mills, 1959; Peterson & Martens, 1972).

6. *Effect of honor and humiliation on community members:* Reward or humiliation in the presence of community has a significant impact on attractiveness (or adverseness) of the community to the person (Festinger, 1953; James & Lott, 1964).

7. *Spiritual bond:* This is present to some degree in all communities. Often the spiritual connection of the community experience is the primary purpose of religious and quasi-religious communities and cults. It is very difficult to describe this important element. Bernard (1973) calls this factor "community of spirit," likening it to the nineteenth-century concept of *volkgeist* (folk spirit). The concept of soul as it relates to blacks and its role in the formation of a national black community is an excellent example of the role of a spiritual bond.

> They [blacks] had a spiritual bond that they understood and that white people could not. Soul was an indefinable, desirable something; black people had it but white people could hardly aspire to it. It was the animating spirit behind their music, their dance, and their styles. It even expressed itself in their taste in food, their language, and their speech. Not even all black people shared it. Those who rejected their blackness did not. (Bernard, 1973, p. 130)

This element of shared emotional connection can be traced through Tönnies' (1957) use of the term *gemeinschaft:* a social unity based on locale. According to Konig (1968), gemeinschaft's root, *gemeinde* (local community), had a long-time original application as "the totality of those who own something in common" (p. 15). Cohen (1976) found this in the related concept of the *Bund.* Neither gemeinschaft nor Bund nor shared emotional connection as presented here includes the requirement of a small-scale local community. Kasarda and Janowitz (1974) demonstrated that "increased population size and density do not significantly weaken local community sentiments" (p. 338), which further aids us in understanding communities that are not bounded by location.
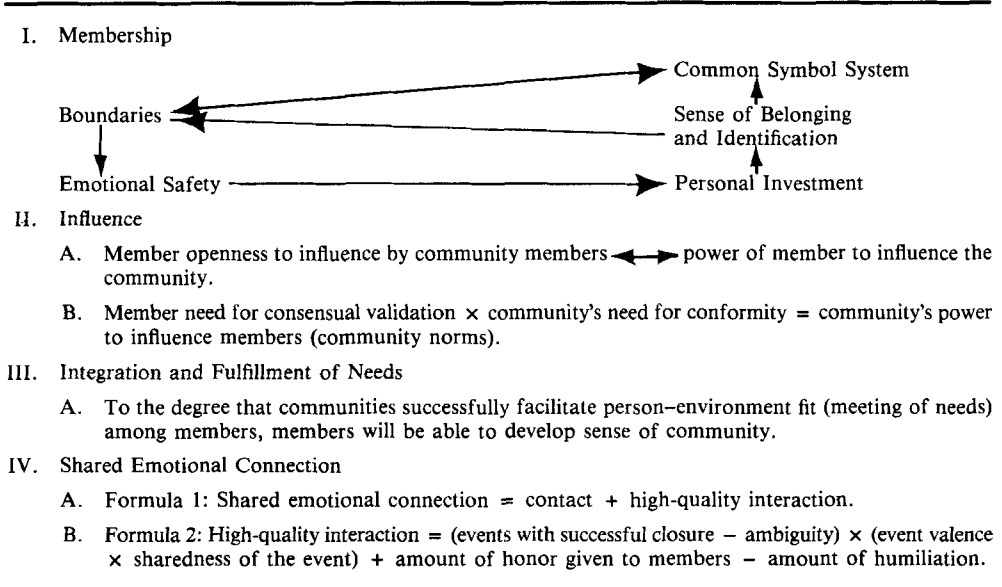
Future research should focus on the causal factor leading to shared emotional connection, since it seems to be the definitive element for true community. In summary, strong communities are those that offer members positive ways to interact, important events to share and ways to resolve them positively, opportunities to honor members, opportunities to invest in the community, and opportunities to experience a spiritual bond among members.

Dynamics Within the Elements

Now that we have defined the elements of sense of community, we will consider how the subelements work together to create each element and how all work dynamically together to create and maintain sense of community. (See Table 1.)

Five attributes of *membership* seem to fit together in a circular, self-reinforcing way, with all conditions having both causes and effects. Boundaries provide the protection for intimacy. The emotional safety that is a consequence of secure boundaries allows people to feel that there is a place for them in the community and that they belong. A sense of belonging and identification facilitates the development of a common symbol system, which defines the community's boundaries. We believe too that feelings of belonging and emotional safety lead to self-investment in the community, which has the consequence of giving a member the sense of having earned his or her membership.

Table 1
Elements of Sense of Community and Their Hypothesized Relationships

I. Membership

    Boundaries ⟷ Common Symbol System

    Boundaries ⟶ Sense of Belonging and Identification

    Emotional Safety ⟶ Personal Investment

II. Influence

    A. Member openness to influence by community members ⟷ power of member to influence the community.

    B. Member need for consensual validation × community's need for conformity = community's power to influence members (community norms).

III. Integration and Fulfillment of Needs

    A. To the degree that communities successfully facilitate person–environment fit (meeting of needs) among members, members will be able to develop sense of community.

IV. Shared Emotional Connection

    A. Formula 1: Shared emotional connection = contact + high-quality interaction.

    B. Formula 2: High-quality interaction = (events with successful closure − ambiguity) × (event valence × sharedness of the event) + amount of honor given to members − amount of humiliation.

Within the context of *influence,* community influence on the member allows him or her to have more influence in the community. When one resists the community's influence or tries to dominate the community, one is less influential. People are more likely to choose a leader who listens and is influenceable rather than one whose mind is made up and will never change. So, allowing others to have power over oneself can eventually lead to having influence with them. The last two attributes of influence, conformity (community norms) and consensual validation, are less clear to us. We believe that if people choose freely whether to conform, their need for consensual validation will strengthen community norms. The more a community provides opportunities for validation of its members, the stronger community norms become.

The transactional dynamics of *integration and fulfillment of needs* are clearer. Communities organize around needs, and people associate with communities in which their

needs can be met; people can solve their problems and meet their needs if they have alternatives and resources. Reinforcement at the community level allows people to be together so that everyone's needs are met. People enjoy helping others just as they enjoy being helped, and the most successful communities include associations that are mutually rewarding for everyone.

Shared emotional connection can be represented symbolically in two heuristic formulas. Formula 1 specifies the elements of shared emotional connection. Formula 2 deals with the content of high-quality interaction. (See Table 1.)

Dynamics Among the Elements

It is difficult to describe the interworkings of the four elements of sense of community in the abstract. Therefore, the following examples are offered as illustrations.

The university. Someone puts an announcement on the dormitory bulletin board about the formation of an intramural dormitory basketball team. People attend the organizational meeting as strangers out of their individual needs (integration and fulfillment of needs). The team is bound by place of residence (membership boundaries are set) and spends time together in practice (the contact hypothesis). They play a game and win (successful shared valent event). While playing, members exert energy on behalf of the team (personal investment in the group). As the team continues to win, team members become recognized and congratulated (gaining honor and status for being members). Someone suggests that they all buy matching shirts and shoes (common symbols) and they do so (influence).

Thus, the elements of sense of community operated in a linear fashion. Individuals sought to meet their needs by integrating them with the needs of others. Membership boundaries were set and practice sessions for members only were scheduled. This allowed for shared time and space, which in turn provided shared valent events. Winning facilitated reinforcement for being a member, which engendered influence and conformity.

The neighborhood. Consider a community organizer, whose prime task is the creation of sense of community. First, he talks to people in an area to find out their problems and concerns, that is, what would reinforce them and motivate them to work together (integration and fulfillment of needs). When a common concern emerges (i.e., something they all seem to need, such as a safe neighborhood), the organizer begins to conceive of ways in which the residents can work together to meet their need. Many of the residents have been victims of muggings, robberies, and assaults. Those who have not been victimized are ruled by their fear of becoming a victim. Fear of further victimization is a shared valent event. The community organizer calls a meeting of concerned neighbors with an announcement that explains whom the meeting is for. This sets the boundaries for belonging. At the meeting, the organizer introduces neighbors to one another and tells them about their common concerns. Members elect officers, set up bylaws, and begin to plan and implement programs (influence and salient event). They talk and plan for getting to know one another, and watching out for one another's safety emerges as a common theme. Other meetings are planned around buffet suppers at members' homes (another valent event). People arrange travel to and from these meetings in groups for safety. Neighbors begin calling the police when they see strangers in the area, and intruders breaking into homes are caught (influence). The success continues with neighbors feeling a greater sense of community.

In this idealized story, one can see how the elements of sense of community were used by the community organizer. He studied needs and thought about their possible integration. He called a meeting of residents, thus creating a potential for membership, and there asked members to discuss the shared valent event of victimization and fear. This led to the formulation of a structured plan and a successful outcome. Members began to accept others' needs as influencers of their behavior, leading to conformity (going out together in groups). The neighborhood's sense of community served as a catalyst for participation in local action (cf. Bachrach & Zautra, 1985; Chavis, 1983).

The youth gang. The youth gang is a community generally considered to be composed of alienated individuals. Its formation and maintenance are based on its members' shared experience of estrangement from traditional social systems and on the security (emotional and physical) that membership provides (Cloward & Ohlin, 1960). Gangs develop both territorial and symbolic boundaries. Gang colors (dress and symbols) and initiation rites serve as the bases for the integration and bonding of members and as important mechanisms for differentiating gang members from others. The gang exerts tremendous pressure on members to conform, and the gang's status and victories enhance the bonding even moreso. The rules to which members conform are based largely on the shared values and needs met by the gang. Along the same lines as college fraternities, youth gangs give members influence over the environment not available to them as individuals (Cloward & Ohlin, 1960).

The kibbutz. Before World War II, idealistic Zionists began immigrating to Palestine to establish a new state based on humanistic and religious values. After the formation of the state of Israel, the kibbutzim became primary holders of the new state's values and cultural norms. The following analysis of the kibbutz movement is based on Cohen's (1976) work.

The people who formed the original kibbutzim were Jews who expressed a hunger for a rebirth of a Jewish community that was not a minority in a dominant culture, but would be the dominant culture. They hoped to experience Jewish fellowship in a way that integrated the best aspects of the Western European ghetto without the oppression. Many had been displaced from their homes in Europe and were in search of a new home. They gathered, then, in hopes of integrating their needs and out of a shared emotional connection. Boundaries of membership were defined by being Jewish and by sharing the vision and symbols of these Jewish pioneers. Kibbutz members made great personal sacrifices in order to reach Israel and to establish a new viable community on a hostile part of the earth. Their sacrifices were a part of their investment in their new world, and while they made their own sacrifices, they watched their fellow members take great personal risks also. Such a willingness to risk for the community gave members a sense of security that they were among people who cared and whom they could trust. This shared caring engendered a sense of belonging that in turn supported strong boundaries and a willingness for personal investment. These dynamics are all part of the principle of membership.

The pioneering spirit, to create a culture that was not capitalistic and individualistic but based instead on caring and a willingness to share their vision and ideals, kept the communities cohesive and intact for some years. Their resources came in part from the government of Israel, which needed citizens of the new state to inhabit unproductive lands and make them productive. The kibbutz movement was proud that the government used it as one of the chief socializers of the new nation and as an example to the

nation and the world that a state in which human caring is as important as power and economic success could exist. The esteem or pride that came about was a source for change in the values of kibbutzim. Dependent on the outside world for economic support and esteem, the kibbutzim were vulnerable to outside demands for change. The needs of the kibbutz communities thus merged with those of the larger community (integration and fulfillment of needs), and the attributes that were appreciated and valued by the government and the greater culture began to filter into the kibbutzim. Simultaneously, as they received attention from the outside world, their inner strength grew.

Once the state of Israel became well established economically, militarily, and politically, it was not as dependent on kibbutzim for socializing immigrants and no longer wanted to support the communities with tax dollars. Consequently, kibbutzim began to feel pressure for economic self-sufficiency. Because of this pressure, many kibbutzim failed and were disbanded or resettled. Others specialized and modernized their means of production. A management structure developed, and power was no longer shared equally. As influence was directed more to the Israeli state, many kibbutzim lost their autonomy. Those that maintained or reinstilled it remained strong.

The formation of classes or subgroups within the kibbutzim came about with the introduction of new members, who were less experienced in all aspects of the community's life. Housing and resources were often allocated on the basis of seniority of membership. This resulted in a status differential between the new and the old. Seniority came to symbolize commitment and stability, creating a shared emotional connection (Glynn, 1981; Riger & Lavrakas, 1981).

The life stages of the members also changed the value orientation of the kibbutz movement. Members were initially antifamily, but as children were born, members began to identify themselves as family units oriented toward the nurturance of new life. The education of members into specialists, who were part of a profession and whose professional problems and challenges were understood only by other professionals who were likely not to be members of the commune, also weakened members' orientation toward the kibbutz as the primary reference group. These developments highlight the changes in cohesiveness that must occur when values are no longer closely shared or with differentiation.

With these changes came economic success and abundance; having more than the community needed for subsistence became a serious problem. How were resources to be allocated fairly? Who got to take trips and who got to continue their education? Did the community want to support members to meet individual interests and needs that were irrelevant or unbeneficial to the community, even if it had the resources to do so? A group's success in negotiating this problem of integration of resources and needs reflected the success of the community itself. Members needed to feel that they had power in such decisions, yet the community needed to know that members would place the community's needs high on their list of priorities. Abundance, however, meant that the community was basically secure and that members were more concerned with pursuing their individual needs and interests.

Because of the kibbutzim's organizational success and internal and external changes, cohesive bonds loosened. Day-to-day conduct of affairs became separated from the founding values, and these values were weakened. Life on the kibbutz lost its sacred quality. Social ties rather than idealistic allegiance became the chief integrating force, and subgroups formed.

Given all of these problems one wonders how the kibbutzim have survived and prospered for so long as active and thriving communities. One answer is that members have a shared emotional connection. They have lived and worked together; they have fought their country's enemies and the hostile climate together; and they have resolved these threats (shared valent events) with positive outcomes. This is reminiscent of the song in *Fiddler on the Roof* that asks how the Jews have managed to balance on the roof when the world is so hostile. The answer is a loud, deep affirmation, "Tradition." The kibbutzim, even in their short history, have built a tradition. Each has a story of how it was settled and how its life changed and grew as the community struggled successfully to survive. Members are proud of what they have accomplished together. Their shared story is the basis of their spiritual bond.

The kibbutz provides a good example of the dynamics inherent in the life cycle of a sense of community. Sense of community is not a static feeling. It is affected by time through changing values and external forces such as commerce, the media, transportation, specialization of professions, economics, and employment factors. This example of the kibbutz demonstrates the number of communities that one can belong to, each meeting different needs (e.g., family, kibbutz, nation, profession, religion). Sometimes these communities are compatible and sometimes their requirements are in conflict. Individual values and needs determine one's top allegiance in such cases. The layering of communities is very much part of modern life (Fischer, 1982), in which multiple affiliations are based both on territoriality and tradition (neighborhood, city, state, nation) and on what Durkheim (1964) called "organic solidarity" (interests, professions, religion, etc.).

A fuller understanding of the variety of communities in our society is essential. The definition and theory of sense of community presented in this article apply equally, we believe, to all types of communities because of their common core, although our four elements will be of varying importance depending on the particular community and its membership. These elements, then, can provide a framework for comparing and contrasting various communities.

Conclusion

The theoretical framework presented here has the potential for a broad range of applications. Dokecki (1983; also Hobbs et al., 1984) has proposed that we should intentionally model public policy around the values of human development and community. He suggested that emerging policies be evaluated against a series of questions that highlight the implications for human development, the family, and the cohesion of a community. Our definition of sense of community influenced the development of Dokecki's criteria. A clear and empirically validated understanding of sense of community can provide the foundation for lawmakers and planners to develop programs that meet their stated goals by strengthening and preserving community. Glenwick and Jason (1980) have shown that there are many contingencies in a system and that the community psychologist can play a role in identifying and designing mechanisms that reinforce behaviors leading to the development of a sense of community.

For example, consider that most governnmental assistance programs require individual application. What if it were required that residents apply as a group to receive certain benefiits? This would necessitate that specific group activites take place and that a certain percentage of an area's residents participate in the decision to apply (though all might not want the assistance themselves). A sense of community could develop,

especially if appropriate technical assistance were provided to assist in organizing. A situation is thus established whereby members' needs are met by being part of the group. Facilitation of the other elements in our definition will further strengthen the formation of a sense of community.

Our understanding of sense of community has implications also for community treatment programs for the retarded and mentally ill. Where "community" means more than residency outside of an institution, strategies can be introduced to allow the therapeutic benefits of community to be developed within group homes and to provide for better integration with communities surrounding such facilities.

Newman (1981) stated that an understanding of how communities are formed will enable us to design housing that will be better maintained and will provide for better use of surrounding areas (streets and parks) and safety from criminal activity. Along similar lines, Ahlbrandt and Cunningham (1979) have shown that people make the greatest investments in home improvements in neighborhoods where there is a strong social fabric.

Yankelovich (1981) reported that, in 1973, "roughly one-third of Americans felt an intense need to compensate for the impersonal and threatening aspects of modern life by seeking mutual identification with others," on the basis of a sense of belonging together. "By the beginning of the 1980s, the number of Americans deeply involved in the search for community had increased from 32% to 47%" (p. 85).

It is clear that sense of community is a powerful force in our culture now. This force does not operate just for good, however. In the South, the Klu Klux Klan is gaining in membership and power. Urban vigilante forces are forming to attack and intimidate people in the name of community. Neighborhoods advertised as exclusive communities are fencing themselves in to keep out people who do not belong and to separate themselves from poverty and problems of social justice. As the force of sense of community drives people closer together, it also seems to be polarizing and separating subgroups of people. The potential for great social conflict is increasing — a side of community that must be understood as well. A critical examination of community is essential.

It is our wish that this article will intensify the search for ways to strengthen the social fabric with the development of sense of community. Somehow we must find a way to build communities that are based on faith, hope, and tolerance, rather than on fear, hatred, and rigidity. We must learn to use sense of community as a tool for fostering understanding and cooperation. We hope that research on this topic will provide a base on which we can facilitate free, open, and accepting communities. We present the concept of community here not as a panacea, rather, as one of the means to bring about the kind of world about which we and others have dreamed.

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