# **Chapter Three**

# **Understanding Community**

* 1. **Defining Community**

McQueqen, et el, (2001), based on an interview with 113 different individuals forwarded that community is as *a group of people with diverse characteristics who are linked by social ties, share common perspectives, and engage in joint action in geographical locations or settings*. Similarly Sarason (1974) defined community as “a readily available, mutually supportive network of relationships on which one could depend”. Sarason’s definition of ***community*** centers on sense of community and therefore he stated that “the absence of dilution of the psychological sense of community is the most destructive dynamics in the lives of people in community and society.

**3.2 Types of Communities**

* ***Geographical based community***: it is related to boundary and locality. Interpersonal ties of community members are based on geographic proximity. Residents of a locality more often share a strong sense of community; individuals often tend to identify themselves by their locality. Furthermore, community could be organized based on neighborhoods, small towns, and cities, and rural regions. Some community organizations and service giving institutions may established based on region/locality. In many nations, Political representation, public school districts, and other forms of social organization are demarcated by locality.
* ***Relational based community***: This type of community is built primarily on the basis of interpersonal relationships and a sense of community. For example, people could be bound by profession, attitude, opinion, spiritual ties, etc. Many relational based communities such as, religious congregations, sport leagues, students club, community business affairs, labor unions, political parties, etc. are bound by a common task or mission.

**3.2.1 Levels of Communities**

Communities exist at different ecological levels.

* Microsystems (e.g., classrooms, mutual help groups)
* Organizations (e.g., workplaces, religious congregations, civic groups)
* Localities (e.g., city blocks, neighborhoods, cities, towns, rural areas)
* Macro systems (e.g., the Filipino community, political parties, nations)

**3.2.2 Defining Elements of Community**

McQueen, et al.(2001) and McMillan &Chavis (1986) have identified the following elements in defining community.

1. **Locus:** a sense of place. Community as something that could be located and described, denoting a sense of place, locale, or boundaries.
2. **Sharing:** common interests and perspectives. Having the same value, emotion, vision, history, attitudes, time, activities, oppression, profession, etc.
3. **Joint action:** acting together. They pray, live, talk, and work together.
4. **Social ties:** Interpersonal relationships among members of the community.
5. **Diversity**: social complexity within communities (e.g., communities within communities, stratification, interwoven groups, hidden communities, or multiple levels of community).
* *Different levels of interaction* between people, from the intimate to the superficial.
* *Demographic and social diversity* in the form of race, ethnic origin, socioeconomic status, sexuality, drug use, profession.
* *The presence ofspecialized groups* that performed needed tasks, such as activists and service providers.
* *The presence of Overlapping and multiple communities*.
* The presence of groups that were disowned, stigmatized, stereotyped, or distrusted within communities.
1. **Membership**: sense of belongingness; investing part of oneself to become a member.
2. **Influence**: groups influencing members and vice versa.
* People who consider the needs, desires, and attitudes of others are more influential than people who dominate others.
* Influence is related to exerting control or power over members.
* Sharing power is an essential factor in creating satisfaction and ownership.
* Power can breed conformity among cohesive members.

**3.2.3 How and Why People Join Communities?**

Individuals belong to many communities. We form multiple identities as members of multiple communities, such as student, employee, family member, and neighbor. Our membership in communities’ changes constantly in response the relative importance of the communities to which we belong. The following are some of the ways and whys of people to join communities.

1. **Reinforcement**: people join communities in order to fulfill their need or to be rewarded. Community should be rewarding to its members.
	* ***Competence***: people need communities in order to enhance their competence and skills one way or another.
	* ***Emotional support***: spiritual bond, sharing emotion, needing others in our problem.
	* ***Security***: it could be provision of physical support, economic security, etc.
2. **Consensual Validation construct**: people inherently need others be validate their action, feeling, and attitudes.
3. **Contact hypothesis**: interaction with community members can increase the probability of membership.
4. **Closure to events**: we join others if something that we share with them is closer or not far in time, space, and ideology.
5. **Common symbol**: meaning known only to the members and not to nonmembers. For example, language, action, dressing code, etc.

**3.3 Sense of Community**

Sense of bonding among community members is important issues for community psychologists, which Sarason (1974) termed the **psychological sense of community**. He defined it as the perception of similarity to others, an acknowledged interdependence with others a willing to maintain this independence by giving to or doing for others what one expects from them, the feeling that one is part of a larger dependable and stable structure.

Similarly to Sarason, David McMillan & David Chavis (1986) defined sense of community as 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 need’s will be met through their commitment to be together.

However, more importantly, McMillan & Chavis (1986) stated that sense of community can also be reflected by sense of bondedness to the community.

**Social bonding** refers to the ability to identify neighbors, or community members and the degree of social interaction with other members in the community.

**Behavioral rootedness** is measures with years of community residency. Based on social bonding and years of residency, the authors came up with the following categories.

* **Young mobiles**: low bonded, low rooted citizens. These people are mobile citizens having low interaction with different community members (such as neighbors).
* **Young participants**: refers to high bonded but low rooted members. This refers to members who don’t live with together for long time in specific communities. However, their level of interaction is very high.
* **Isolates**: low bonded but high rooted members of community. These are people who live for long period of time in a community but don’t have interaction with the community members.
* **Established**: high bonded and highly established members of the society. Established people are those who live for long period of time in a specific community. Moreover, their level of participation is high.

**3.3.1 Elements of Sense of Community**

MacMillan and Chavis (1986) identified four elements of sense of community and they believe that these four elements must be present to define a sense of community. No one element is a root cause, all strengthen each other.

1. **Membership:** This is the sense among community members of personal investment in the community and of belonging to it. It has five attributes.
* **Boundaries** refers to the necessity of defining what includes members and excludes nonmembers. For a locality, this involves geographic boundaries; for a relational community, it may involve personal similarities or shared goals. Either geographical or relational, or both boundaries are necessary for the community to define itself.
* **Common symbols:** help define boundaries, identifying members or territory. For example, colors and symbols among youth gangs and sport teams, religious imagery, university decals on automobiles, national flags, slang expressions and jargons, national teams, etc. are symbols that shows the quality of sense of community.
* **Emotional safety**: clear boundaries between the two communities/countries reduce the occurrence of conflict and so that members on both side of the communities more likely to experience sense of safety from crime. This can mean secure relationships for sharing feelings and concerns. Emotional safety in that sense requires mutual process of self-disclosure and group acceptance.
* **Personal investment**: a member who feels safe is likely to make personal investment in the community. Investment indicates long-term commitment to a community, such as home ownership in a neighborhood, membership in a religious congregation, or devotion of time to a charity organization. It can also involve taking emotional risks for the group.
* **Belongingness and identification**: the individual who is safe and accepted by other community members defines personal identity partly in terms of membership in the community. Individuals may identify with being a resident of a neighborhood, adherent of a religion, member of a profession or trade, students with a university…
1. ***Influence***: refers both to the power that members exercise over the group and to the reciprocal power that group dynamics exert on members.
2. ***Integration and fulfillment of needs:*** Influence concerns vertical relations between individuals and the overall community; integration concerns horizontal relations among members. Integration has two aspects:

**Shared values:** are ideals that can be pursued through community involvement: e.g., worship in a religious community, improving educational quality may be the shared value of a parent-school group.

**Exchange of resources:** deals with satisfaction of needs among community members. Integration is similar to interdependence and cycling of resources. Individuals are participate in community in part because their needs is met there. Needs may be physical (e.g., for safety) or psychosocial (e.g., emotional support, socialization, exercising leadership).

1. **Shared Emotional Connection**: It involves a spiritual bond, not necessarily religious-transcendent, and not easily defined, yet recognizable to those who share it. Shared emotional connection is strengthened through important community experiences, such as celebrations, shared rituals, honoring members, and shared stories.

**3.3.2 The Importance of Community**

Individuals seem to benefit from strong communities. A positive sense of community has been shown to correlate with adolescent identity formation, individual well-being, mental health, recovery from substance abuse. Sense of community has also been linked with positive outcomes for communities, such as members believing that working with others to take community action can be effective and participation in neighborhood groups and religious institutions. Finally, some correlates of a positive sense of community have national implications, such as voter participation. These positive outcomes for communities and societies are often discussed in terms of a concept related to sense of community: social capital.

**3.3.3 Social Capital**

Social capital is defined as the specific processes among people and organizations, working collaboratively in an atmosphere of trust, that lead to accomplishing a goal of *mutual social benefit*.

Putman (1996) defined social capitals a feature of social life—networks, norms and trust—that enable participants to act together more effectively to pursue shared objectives. He emphasized face-to-face associations that strengthen relationships and communication about community life. This may be formal—through community organizations—or informal—through friendships, neighboring, and other social contacts. Both types of association increase social capital (Putnam, 2000).Pamela Paxton (1999) has attempted to operationalize this definition by suggesting that social capital is built through associations including:

**Objective component:** refers to objective associations (an observable network structure that links individuals.

**Positive subjective component:** emotional tie characterized by *reciprocity and trust*.

Similarly, with just very slight difference, Harpham *et al.* (2004), distinguished two varieties of social capital such as, ***Structural*** (e.g., networks, connectedness, associational life, and civic participation, and ***Cognitive*** (e.g. perceived support, trust, social cohesion, and perceived civic engagement).

Note that structural social capital includes both horizontal bonds that occur among family, friends and neighbors, and vertical bonds between groups with different levels of power and influence in society, leading to social inclusion.

According to Putnam (2000), a key distinction of social capital is:

**Bonding** refers to creating and maintaining strong social-emotional ties—usually in groups of similar persons that provide belongingness, emotional support, and mutual commitment. These internal ties underlie a sense of community and shared identity. Their limitations are often a lack of diversity of members or views and an exclusion of outsiders.

**Bridging** refers to creating and maintaining links between groups or communities. Bridging ties reach out to a broader set of persons than bonding and involve links among people whose life experiences may be very different. Furthermore, Szreter and Woolcock (2004) distinguished three forms of social capital.

* + 1. **Bonding social capital:** trusting and co-operative relations between members of a network who see themselves as being similar in terms of their shared social identity.
		2. ***Bridging social capital:*** relations of respect and mutuality between people who know they are not alike in some socio-demographic (or social identity) sense (differing by age, ethnic group, class, etc.)
		3. **Linking social capital:** norms and respect and networks of trusting relationships between people who are interacting across explicit, formal or institutionalized power or authority gradients in society.

Bridging ties are especially useful when diverse groups face a common challenge and need to work together. A community coalition to promote positive youth development may bridge by bringing together persons from diverse parts of the locality, such as schools, religious congregations, police, recreation groups, diverse racial or ethnic communities, and youth themselves. Bridging links can also help a group obtain access to key decision-makers in a locality in order to make their concerns heard (Bond & Keys, 1993; Hughey & Speer, 2002).

Social capital varies from communities to communities; some have a lot of social capital and some have very little. And when communities have a great deal of social capital, their members benefit (Putman, 2000). In fact, social capital has extremely important benefits at the level of societies and nations. Researchers, such as Putman, believe that social capital is fundamental to the maintenance of a democracy. Pamela Paxton (1999), has done research that supports this hypothesis. She analyzed two international data sets —one including 41 countries and one including 101 countries and concluded that there is a reciprocal relationship between social capital and democracy.

Countries with higher levels of democracy generated more associations and higher levels of generalized trust over time. The reciprocal relationship is demonstrated by the finding that high numbers of associations and levels of trust in a country supported the development of a democratic system of government (Paxton, 2002).Democratic governments tend to support the development and maintenance of voluntary organizations—in many cases, actually providing funding for those organizations. And democratic governments also tend to foster generalized trust among their citizens (Paxton, 2002).

**3.4 Conflict and Change within a Community**

Relationships between communities often complex and interacting simply because community members tend to participate in more than one community as a result have multiple identities. Communities are more likely full of diversity. Diversity can be a strength for a community but only if it is recognized and valued (Trickett, 1996).

An emphasis on the similarities without attending to the differences in a community is what Wiesenfeld (1996) termed the myth of “we” in a community.

Romanticizing sense of community, without recognizing diversity within a community, supports the myth of “we.” People possibly develop sense of “we” following to a common disaster or enemy.

Relationships among diverse communities can create conflict. But that is where constructive community change often begins. For example, the societal transformations of the civil rights movement and the women’s movement in the United States began with some communities, especially African Americans and women, attempting to change their local communities and the nation as a whole. Ignoring conflict, stifling dissent, or excluding specific groups eventually undermines a community, while constructive resolution of conflict can strengthen it. A community has changed, is changing, and will change again (sarason, 1974). Change is inevitable for communities. Sense of community is ultimately a process.

Strong sense of community may be a potential threat that increases conflict between communities, especially if they encourage prejudice or hostility toward others. Sense of community may be strong in privileged communities that deny problems of poverty and injustice.

Traditional concepts of community do not address issues of justice and equality. McMillan and Chavis (1986) suggested with a call for building “free, open, accepting” communities “based on faith, hope, and tolerance” and using sense of community “as a tool for fostering understanding and cooperation”. Community psychologists should seek to maintain peace by balancing values of community psychology, such as individual liberty and equality (social justice)—within the community and in relations with the wider world.

In addition, spiritual communities used to foster mutual influence and integration and fulfillment of needs thereby conflict will be reduced among the community. Shared spiritual practices influence individual decisions, in turn, many spiritual settings provide opportunities for members’ participation in leadership and decision making. Members of a spiritual community help meet each other’s interpersonal, economic, psychological, and spiritual needs. Finally, spiritual communities foster emotional and spiritual bonds based on a deeply shared sense of spiritual transcendence. Furthermore, spiritual communities provide important community services. Religious involvement among teens and adult used to protect against risky behavior and promote well-being.

Community building can’t be assured without incorporating the religious and spiritual domains of the larger community, prevention, empowerment-oriented, and other social action efforts stand little hope of mobilizing the resources, building the scale, and challenging mainstream culture in the ways necessary to make any truly substantive difference in our social problems.