

Communication, Community, and Democracy : Toward a Theory of the Communicatively- Integrated Community*

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For democracy to work, community is necessary.

This argument is not obvious. If democracy simply consists in a sufficient number of individuals turning out to vote to generate legitimacy for governments, then the proposition doesn't necessarily hold. But historian Robert Wiebe (1995) argues that the essence of democracy, in America at least, is self-rule. I think this is true, but the definition of self-rule implicitly asks: what is the self that rules and how is it formed?

The democratic self is composed of two separate but related bodies. The first are publics of citizens. The second are the communities in which they live. The public concerns the problem of what sort of rule should we have as democratic citizens; the community what kind of

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selves are needed as the agents of democracy.

This essay is centrally concerned with the second half of the equation: how individuals and groups form democratic selves, or identities, and under what conditions of life. The answer is that they do so in communities, and, as I will argue, democratic groups are more likely to form in communities that are integrated through communication. But at least a few words about the publics of democracy are necessary before we begin this larger argument.

My arguments about community assume a strong version of democracy that is both deliberative and participatory, including the following normative and practical criteria. Citizens must have the opportunity to deliberate in public to discuss and formulate issues and problems that are important to them. These public deliberations at least should have the possibility of leading to the formation of public agendas. In other words, public talk is not simply talk among small groups. It is talk that, in principle, can be directed toward a broader public sphere. Public agendas should emerge from this public sphere, and they should be connected with the problems that citizens raise. And, citizens should have the opportunity of participating in, and formulating their solutions. Finally, these solutions should be publicized and monitored over time, so that citizens can see and decide for themselves whether and how proper solutions have been chosen and problems wholly or partly solved. If they haven't, then the cycle can begin again.¹⁾

This vision of strong democracy draws most directly from the pragmatic philosophy of John Dewey (1927) and the critical theory of Jrgen Habermas (1962/1989). However, the purpose of this essay is not

1) I'm not able to develop these arguments further here. See Dewey (1927) and Habermas (Habermas, 1962 (1989)) for classic statements of these problems. Barber (1984) links deliberative democracy to communications media, as does Abramson (1992; 1988). The best secondary accounts of these issues come from Bohman (1996; 1997). And Habermas (1996; 1998) himself has systematically resynthesized the problem of the public sphere and deliberative democracy in the light of his theory of communicative action.

to debate this vision. Rather it is to explore the second half of my central claim: that for this vision of democracy to be plausible, community is necessary.

Why community in general? Deliberative democracy inherently takes place between people (it is intersubjective). Further it is grounded in mutual discussion (or discursive). This mutual discussion could, in theory, be limited to individuals or small networks of individuals that do not form larger social groups. But discussion restricted to individuals or small groups does not reach the critical mass necessary for publics to form. And publics are necessary for democratic discussion to rise above the level of simple talk if problems are to be publicly formulated and resolved. Discussion among individuals is necessary, but not sufficient for the formation of a vital deliberative democracy.

The groups and networks that give rise to this kind of public talk do not form easily or at random. They emerge from communities. As I will argue, particular kinds of communities make this kind of intergroup and cross-network communication more likely and allow the results of discussion in smaller, more limited communication networks to flow to the center of public discussion, or the larger public sphere. That is to say, communities in which there are rich, cross-cutting networks of association and public discussion are more likely to formulate real problems, find solutions, apply and test those solutions, learn from them, and to correct them if they are flawed: in short, to rule themselves, or work democratically.

The task of this article is to frame a mid-range theory of the kinds of communities that work in this way, and to offer a sketch of what kind of empirical research program might allow us to discover the key comparative dimensions of such communities and the range of variation within those dimensions. I call communities that allow for the formation of robust democratic networks *communicatively-integrated*, so this is, in the first place a (beginning) theory of *communicative-integrated community*. I

further argue that the best approach for studying whether and how communities are communicatively-integrated is through their communication ecologies, defined initially, as the range of communication activities that link networks of individuals, groups, and institutions in a specific community domain.

To establish a larger framework for understanding communicative-integration, I draw from Jrgen Habermas's theory of communicative action, particularly his two-level construction of lifeworld and system (**Habermas 1981 (1987)**). This distinction will be taken up in detail below but here we can say that the lifeworld represents those social arenas in which culture, personality, and institutional legitimacy are formed through communicative action. It is both a world of lived experience, and the arena of social integration through which individuals, groups, and institutions are knit together. The system level, on the other hand, is composed of those arenas in which integration does not take place through communication, but rather through money and power, conventionally the economic and political systems.

A central thesis of this article is that all communities lie at the intersection, or in Habermas's term, at the seam of system and lifeworld (Habermas 1981 (1987)). Political and economic forces lying above the community level shape the basic opportunities for communities to achieve the fullest possible democratic and communicative-integration. Macroeconomic forces determining the location of businesses have profound consequences for local structures of employment, racial segregation, and housing, to name only a few. These same forces shape the local political structure. At the same time, local politics are determined by state and federal law, administrative regulation, and fiscal policy, as well as national party politics. In short, the overall democratic opportunities for any given community are circumscribed by its location in these larger political and economic systems.

At the same time, the structure of communication in any given

community, I argue, explains a great deal of the remaining variance in a community's capacity for democratic action. Communities have different capacities for responding to similar sets of system level constraints, and I argue that these can be explained through the degree of communicative integration. This, in turn, is a function of how robustly the lifeworld functions at the local level, and of the degree to which problems and issues generated from it can be thematized as larger public issues.

The structure of this article, then, is as follows. First, I discuss the concept of community that we start with, looking at its use in sociology and communication through the examination of three central subconcepts: integration, social networks, and solidarity.

Second, I introduce the theory of communicative action to propose some ways that we need to begin to rethink some of the foundations of communication theory. While this theoretical argument can only be suggested here, the central tenant is that communication is the central system of action that binds together many different types of social actors and groups. Further, this system of communicative action operates across the multiple levels of lifeworld and system. In a post-industrial society, communicative action becomes the central medium for the reproduction of lifeworld, the realm of social solidarity that we associate with earlier forms of community. But, at the same time, the economic and political systems come to depend on other forms of information and communication that both depend on the lifeworld and systematically disrupt it.

Third, I argue that community today is constituted by the integrating framework of communication. As the binding ties of traditional community have dissolved, new forms of communicative connection have developed to take their place. Further, the patterns of ties that these new forms of connection create are simultaneously networks of communication and social structure. It is no longer possible to separate social structure from communication (if it ever was). This moves networks of communication to the fore in a dual role. They bind and constitute fundamental social

groupings, including communities (traditionally understood through the concept of integration); and they also provide new, more flexible, and complex pathways of social change. In short, I begin with the discussion of the concept of the communicatively-integrated community linked to place, but which is appropriate to a post-industrial, information-driven society.

Fourth, I suggest that the larger analytic framework of the communicatively-integrated community can best be understood and empirically investigated as a communication ecology. I suggest the elements of that ecology, some possible interrelationships among them, and some future directions for investigating communication ecologies.

The Changing American Community

The classic understanding of community in American sociology was drawn from the ideal of the rural village with its traditional ties built from close-knit kin who lived nearby. This image, at least implicitly, also assumed religious, racial, and ethnic homogeneity. Despite the mass urbanization that began in the last quarter of the 19th century and accelerated through the building of the post-war suburbs, this rural ideal remained dominant from the Chicago School through at least the 1950s, even when it was mostly used as a point of contrast with a rapidly urbanizing present. Communities were places where most people knew each other (or could); where strong bonds of church, school, and voluntary association tied Americans together; and where most people were more alike than different.

That ideal has undergone a series of revisions in the past century. Chicago School sociologists from Park (1928) to Wirth understood that the city was not just a place of disintegration, but reintegration. The

Lynds (Lynd & Lynd, 1929) showed that Middletown was no isolated Midwestern idyll, but riven by forces of class, race, and mass culture. The small town in mass society (Vidich & Bensman, 1958/1968) incorporated the larger world into itself, even while the dominant paradigm of community was shifting from the small town to the suburb in post-war America (Gans, 1967). But these ideal images shared two things in common. They were all linked to an America tied together by an expanding, industrial capitalist society. And whether village, city, or suburb, each was defined by discrete (if shifting) boundaries.

As the century turns, scholars of community and communication face a new set of problems and prospects. The linked forces of post-industrialization and globalization, and the communication networks on which they depend, bring the concept of community itself into doubt. New urban theory and communication theory alike are converging on the idea that networks are the emergent form of social organization. In the words of Manuel Castells (1996), Networks constitute the new social morphology of our societies, and the diffusion of networking logic substantially modifies the operation and outcomes in processes of production, experience, power, and culture (p. 469). But this centrality of networks poses a difficult challenge to our traditional concept of community. If place is no longer defined by fixed boundaries, and identities become extended over networked time and space, then it is no longer clear what the concept of community means or how it functions in analysis. Is community simply a holdover category from our recent past, a placeholder for a set of social relations that we continue to wish for, but no longer exist? Or does it refer to a social structure that still persists, even in a networked, post-industrial society?²⁾

2) I have adopted the term post-industrial rather than post-modern, society, for two reasons. First, it is more specific, referring to a fundamental shift in the way that economic production is organized, and the effect of that organization on social relations. Second, it does not assume what is at question, i.e. whether blurring cultural boundaries and shifts in identity constitute a cultural stage beyond the modern era, or whether they represent a

The answers to these questions are not unambiguous. Each of the contributors to this special issue on Communication Technology and Community both assume that community persists and that various forms of communication, old and new, centrally define it. Shah, McLeod and Yoon (this issue) found that the strength and type of community ties vary significantly with different age cohorts of media users, with younger users of the Internet for informational purposes having both stronger participation and weaker community ties. Conversely, after constructing contextual indices for the communities of their respondents, they found that strength of ties of overall community context variables had a positive effect on trust and participation. This finding points in several directions. If younger information-seeking age cohorts using the Internet have weaker ties to community, it may point to a long-term weakening of the relationships of media use to place, and a weakening of local ties for both networks of support and participation. On the other hand, their exploratory findings that context matters continues to argue that place is significant for civic engagement.

Jung, Qiu, and Kim (this issue) address the larger social consequences of the diffusion of new communications technology and they also address the social context of its use. Like Shah and colleagues they criticize the use of simple time-based measures and argue that the nature and quality of connections are more important. Drawing from media system dependency and communication infrastructure theories, they argue that measures of use misdirect attention to the technology-individual level of analysis. Rather, they argue that measures of connectedness should replace use, and develop the Internet Connectedness Index for this purpose. Drawing from the Metamorphosis Project on emergent communications infrastructure in Los Angeles (discussed below) they focus on differences in Internet use among social groups, finding persistent inequalities in the quality of Internet connectivity for different groups.

cultural crisis that is implicit in modernity itself.

Mattei, Ball-Rokeach and Qiu (this issue), also drawing from the Metamorphosis Project, find inequalities of another sort. They study fear and discomfort in Los Angeles, finding that residents fear of certain areas is not associated with the actual likelihood of being victimized by a crime. Rather, the presence of non-White and non-Asian populations is the primary source of discomfort, which in turn is heightened by connection to both television and interpersonal communication networks. Contributing to our understanding of the negative side of imagined community, the research suggests a clear relation between the communication infrastructure and fear. Of particular interest is the finding that television augments fear but only in presence of interpersonal communication, suggesting that simple exposure to the television is insufficient to construct and shape behavior toward imagined others in an ethnically complex urban environment. For these images to shape behavior they must be elaborated through face-to-face conversation.

The research of Ball Rokeach and colleagues (Ball-Rokeach, Kim, & Matei, this issue) is most directly related to the question of how the concept and structure of community is being transformed in a post-industrial world. They construct a complex, multilevel model for analyzing the relationship between place and belonging. Linking the framework of the communication action context (drawn from Habermas's theory of communicative action) to the concept of storytelling neighborhood they develop a nascent communication infrastructure perspective. The communications infrastructure links at least three elements: the larger structural forces that shape the community ecology; the formal communications system; and the cultural and communicative elements that create a sense of identity, both with place and with others. The communication infrastructure is closest to the idea of communicatively-integrated community that I introduce here, and I will return to it below in the discussion of community communication ecology.

I argue that community does persist, but that both the concept and the

empirical realities it embraces have become significantly complicated and transformed. The forms of tightly bounded, well-integrated community that we associate with the rural village, the city neighborhood, and even the suburb, no longer correspond to a social structure characterized by more complex patterns of mobility and migration, the use of communications technologies to sustain certain ties (but not others) over time and space, and, more generally, voluntary patterns of association based on personal networks rather than ties of loyalty to social groups based on community and kin.

In short, community persists but under conditions that are radically different from those that existed as recently as 35 years ago. But the field of communication has only begun to rethink the fundamental conceptual assumptions of community on which much of our empirical research depends. We are lacking a conceptual framework for the study of community that can serve as a baseline for the future. To begin that process, we need to consider the community concept as we have received it.

The Concept of Community in Sociology

The concept of community in communication draws deeply from the sociological tradition. Although the community concept is rich, and its literature vast, the immediate concern is to focus on those issues that link sociological and communication issues. The three most important issues for this discussion are integration, why and how urban social structure and the groups within it cohere; social networks, the form of the interpersonal and group linkages; and solidarity, the normative resources that groups draw on for common life.

Integration

The starting point for the classical sociological discussion of

community remains Tnnies's distinction between *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*, which are generally translated as community and society, respectively (Tnnies, 1887/1963). In *Gemeinschaft*, people 'remain essentially united in spite of all separating factors, whereas in *Gesellschaft* they are essentially separated in spite of all uniting factors.' (Tnnies, pp.33, 64-65 cited in Bender, 1978, pp.17-18). The concepts were developed to explain the transition from predominantly rural societies integrated by traditional obligations to industrial cities which grew from the capitalist market economy.

The first serious attempt to link community structure and communication began with the Chicago School of sociology in the 1920s, which was influenced by the Pragmatist philosophical tradition, particularly the work of Dewey, Cooley, and Mead. Dewey placed the relation between communication and community at the center of his philosophy, holding that society was integrated by communication. In a series of studies, Robert Park and his colleagues applied this theory to the problems of integration in the urban environment of Chicago. Park was particularly concerned with disorder caused by immigration and the dislocation caused by industrial development. He developed a theory of urban ecology to explain the interaction of urban growth, structure, and social and cultural integration (Park, 1904/1972, 1925/1952,.) and extended this concern to the role of the newspaper and communication in urban integration (Park, 1923, 1929; 1938, 1940/1967).

Park's students later developed each of these strains separately. The *Gemeinschaft/Gesellschaft* dichotomy was restated by Louis Wirth (1938) in *Urbanism as a Way of Life*, in which, in essence, he argued that the face-to-face primary bonds of family, kinship, and neighborhood are displaced by the secondary relationships of competition and formal control. Although Wirth himself was optimistic that the media might actually serve *Gemeinschaft*-like functions, subsequent reception tended to reify the theory into a stronger, linear form. Later members of the school

linked communication with urban ecology (Hawley, 1986; Hawley & Wirth, 1974; Wirth, 1938, 1948) and the community press (Janowitz, 1952/1967, 1991). In the sixties and seventies, third generation Chicago students took up the problem of linking the urban social structure with the imagined community (Suttles, 1972).

Social networks

Beginning with anthropological investigations of rural migration patterns and urbanization in the 60s and leading on through major studies of social network and community in the 70s and 80s by Fischer (1975; 1982; Fischer et al., 1977) and Wellman (Wellman, 1979, 1982b, 1988), researchers demonstrated that the idea that community was lost, absorbed into modern, impersonal, urban social relationships was, at best, simplistic, and at worst, simply wrong. New forms of social networks recreated new kinds of ties that retained, reproduced, and reinvented some of the intimacy characteristic of traditional societies. In short, community was not lost, it was transformed, and from the 70s on, much of the debate has shifted to discuss the forms that community takes within modernity, not whether it persists.

However, the theories of personal community bear a hidden theoretical cost. Wellman and Fischer regain personal community at the expense of a larger concern with the traditional problem of solidarity. It is true that some essential needs for intimacy and social support can be sustained over time and space through networks of kin and friends, powerfully aided by communication technologies. But personal communities, however important for individuals, do not, per se, sustain the kinds of social relations necessary to support the common endeavors traditionally associated with community: the maintenance of public and civic life, strong forms of association, and the trust and reciprocity that make solidarity possible.³⁾

3) There is a methodological cost as well. While the concept of personal network is

Solidarity

Although the problem of solidarity is pushed back in theories of personal community, recent scholars of community have placed it at the center of concern. Robert Bellah, and his co-authors of *Habits of the Heart* (Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, & Tipton, 1996) argue that community is made particularly difficult in the United States. The root cause is the ideology of individualism, the first language in which Americans tend to think about their lives [which] values independence above all else (p. viii). They identify two forms of individualism, utilitarianism and expressive individualism, which take more extreme form in the United States. The core of utilitarianism is the belief that in a society in which everyone vigorously pursues his or her own interest, the social good will automatically emerge. Expressive individualism, in contrast, stresses the exploration of self-identity and the search for authenticity above all else. Bellah and colleagues argue that these two seemingly contradictory impulses—the first leading to the pursuit of self-interest, the second to hedonism and consumerism—are resolved in a society oriented toward consumption as the primary standard of the good.

Nonetheless, this individualism has been historically sustainable in the U.S. only because of broader moral understandings, rooted in community and voluntary association, or in Bellah's terms, commitment, community, and citizenship. In *Habits* these are gathered under the rubric of civic membership, understood as the intersection of personal identity with social identity. Civic membership is in crisis, reflected in temptations and

inherently social, concerning relations among individuals, it shifts concern to those attributes of individual intimacy and belonging that can be measured by aggregating individual network measures. The larger community networks in which individuals are embedded drop into the background, as independent variables, bundles of place characteristics. The larger form and purposes of community become hidden. This social psychological bias poses a particular problem for communication theories of community, which largely remain rooted in psychology.

pressures to disengage from the larger society by every significant social group (Bellah, et al., 1996, p. xi).

Robert Putnam (2000) makes a parallel argument rooted in recent history. Where Bellah sees a decline in civic identity, Putnam argues that there has been an overall depletion in stocks of social capital in the U.S., accelerating rapidly over the past several decades. Putnam argues that many measures of formal associational membership have declined, including a drop in the activist core of membership organizations of 45% from 1985 to 1994 alone, leading him to assert that nearly half of America's civic infrastructure was obliterated in barely a decade (p. 60). Other forms of associational ties, including family and informal neighborhood socializing, have also eroded, leading to a decline in generalized social trust.

There are significant countervailing arguments to Putnam's thesis. Verba, Schlozman, and Brady's (1995) study of civic voluntarism provides evidence that participation over the past several decades has modestly increased at the level of community and local problem-solving activities, running counter to the secular decline in voting turnout. The Pew Research Center for People and the Press (1997) in a large survey of civic involvement and trust in Philadelphia found a sharp contrast with Putnam's findings. And Sirianni and Friedland (2001) contend that whatever the quantitative evidence for decline, a civic renewal movement is growing from new forms of democratic social organization and innovation that have emerged since the 1960s. (For a more complete account of the social capital debates, see Shah, et al., in this issue).

Nonetheless, Putnam and Bellah agree that both civic identity and the social structures of solidarity necessary to support it have declined rapidly in the past thirty years. For Bellah the argument revolves around civic identity; for Putnam it is centered in the essentially structural notion of the decline of social capital. Wellman and Fischer, in different ways, also suggest a shift from traditional to personal forms of community. If

they are correct, then rediscovering the forms of community solidarity necessary to rebuild civic and public life is, indeed, a formidable task.

The Concept of Community in Mass Communication

Within the communication tradition, and his colleagues (McLeod, 1988; McLeod & Blumler, 1987; McLeod et al., 1995; McLeod, 1996a) have wed the broader Chicago concerns with integration and structure to empirical research on the community communication system, the relations among individuals, groups, and local media, and the formation of public opinion. More recently, McLeod and others (Friedland & McLeod, 1999) have developed a community integration framework that sees social networks as the structural linkages among individuals, groups, and the mass media. McLeod and colleagues (1996) have found that community integration is in fact multidimensional at the individual level in the dimensions of the strength of psychological attachment to the community; the presence of an interpersonal network connecting the person to others in the community; and the identification of the person with the larger community relative to three other sources of identity, neighborhood, local group or organization; and cosmopolis (beyond community focus).

Ball-Rokeach takes up the Chicago tradition in several dimensions. The Metamorphosis Project on the communication infrastructure of Los Angeles is perhaps the most ambitious whole-community communication study since the Chicago studies of the 20s and 30s. Drawing from media system dependency theory (Ball-Rokeach, 1985, 1998), Ball Rokeach and colleagues link the social-psychological production of meaning at the interpersonal level with the generation of meaning at micro-, meso-, and macro- levels through storytelling systems in the urban environment (Ball-Rokeach, et al., this issue). The storytelling system, in turn, is linked to the levels of belonging and identity that individuals and groups feel toward the urban environment. The over all goal is explore new

models for understanding the whole community communication system through the development of the concept of communication infrastructure, vast landscape of communication flows produced by people talking with one another, media producing stories, and local organizations bringing people together (Ball-Rokeach et al., 2000, p.1). In its emphasis on neighborhood ecology, the project pursues a structural vision of integration, while its concept of belonging also measures and integrates the social-psychological attachment of racially, ethnically, and nationally diverse individuals to both neighborhood and the larger metropolitan area.

Two major themes run through our discussion so far. First, our concepts of community received from sociology stress the ways that communities are integrated through structure, ecology, networks, civic solidarity, and symbolic communication. These varying forms of integration grew within the framework of the industrial city. Second, each form of integration is weakening (although to what degree is subject to debate) driven by the growth of the post-industrial economy, organized around the central concept of the network.

The network, however, is not a unitary concept. Networks operate at many levels. There are global networks of capital, finance, production, and transportation, and each type exists nationally and regionally as well (Castells, 1996; Erickson, 1998). There are national political networks of parties, and influence (Knoke, 1990b, 1998; Laumann & Knoke, 1987). At least three network levels can be identified in local communities: the macro-level networks of community power and influence (Galaskiewicz, 1979; Laumann & Pappi, 1976); meso-level networks of organizations and associations (Galaskiewicz, 1985, 1989; Laumann, Galaskiewicz, & Marsden, 1978); and micro-level interpersonal networks (Fischer, 1982; Wellman, Carrington, & Hall, 1988).

These multiplying networks are the central forms around which economic, political, and social life is being reorganized; yet they erode the structural and symbolic boundaries that make integration possible. It

is increasingly difficult to connect the traditional problems of community integration, communication, and solidarity to a network form that, by its nature, tends to overflow the boundaries that give these concepts meaning.

The theory of communicative action, with its two-level integration framework of system and lifeworld offers one of the most promising theoretical strategies for bridging this problem. By detouring to the higher level of abstraction required to see the outlines of communicative action, we lay the groundwork for returning to a concept of the communicatively-integrated community that is sufficiently rich to analyze the multiple networks that operate in community, distinguishing between those that operate above the level of community to set its system environment, those that form the seam, as Habermas has called it, between system and lifeworld, and those networks that form the structure of the lifeworld itself.

The Theory of Communicative Action

In the *Theory of Communicative Action, Volume 2* (Habermas, 1981/1987), hereafter cited as TCA 2) Habermas develops the fundamental distinction between the system and the lifeworld. The lifeworld is a multi-dimensional concept encompassing the structural components of cultural reproduction, social integration, and socialization. The system, in contrast, encompasses those aspects of society that are self-regulating, e.g. the economy and polity, which operate above the lifeworld horizon. The two are connected through a theory of integration through communication, that, in turn, offers a macro-theoretical framework for understanding the specific role of communicative action in linking the system and lifeworld (see Figure 1).

Lifeworld

The lifeworld is constituted by language and culture, and formed from

the culturally transmitted and linguistically organized stock of interpretive patterns (TCA 2, p. 124.). The lifeworld includes the deep symbolic background that makes shared meaning and interpretation possible, and is the foundation for all communication. This idea of lifeworld as background however, is only the starting point for the understanding of the ways that the lifeworld is structured by communicative action.

Figure 1. System and Lifeworld

Level	Subsystems	Form of Integration
Lifeworld	Culture Society Personality	Social Integration via communicative action
System	Economy Political System	System Integration via Delinguistified steering media

Communicative action draws upon culture, as the stock of knowledge from which participants in communication supply themselves with interpretations as they come to an understanding about something in the world (TCA 2 p 138). Communicative action serves social integration and the establishment of solidarity (TCA 2, p.137) by regulating memberships in social groups and securing solidarity. Finally, communicative action is the medium of socialization, the formation of personalities, the competences that make a subject capable of speaking and acting, that put him in a position to take part in processes of reaching understanding and thereby to assert his own identity (TCA 2, p.138).

Communicative action, then, is built from these three fundamental frameworks through which social life as a whole is reproduced and from which new knowledge, identities, and solidarities emerge. The cultural tradition links new meanings or contents with the background; groups are integrated and action coordinated in social space and historical time; and individual personality is formed out of these two frameworks through socialization.

Habermas takes pains to stress that communicative action is not only a process of reaching understanding: In coming to an understanding about something in the world, actors are at the same time taking part in interactions through which they develop, confirm, and renew their memberships in social groups and their own identities. Communicative actions are not only processes of interpretation in which cultural knowledge is 'tested against the world'; they are at the same time processes of social integration and socialization. (TCA 2 p. 139).

Because material production takes place through the purposive activity of economy and society, which itself is embedded in social organization, we can look at the problems that social actors confront from the dual perspectives of symbolic and material reproduction. Because these two are closely linked, to understand the embeddedness of social reproduction (including cultural tradition, social integration and solidarity, and identity) in material reproduction we have to shift our perspective to the level of system.

System

The system consists of those elements of modern societies in which apparently autonomous institutions and organizations become connected with each other via the delinguistified media of communication, of money and power, operating through the economic and political subsystems: Delinguistified media of communication such as money and power, connect up interactions in space and time into more and more complex networks that no one has to comprehend or be responsible for. (TCA2, p. 184).

The subsystems of economy and polity emerged from communicative action. We can think of the model of barter. Exchanges of goods were embedded in face-to-face meetings where the exchange value of commodities was directly negotiated by actors. Both the context of the interaction and the use value of the goods entered directly into exchange.

As exchange became increasingly detached from these contexts of interaction through trade and, eventually, capitalist production, it became detached from language, delinguistified, and turned into an autonomous signal system, the anonymous exchange of commodities via the price system. In short, information replaced communication, and the system became detached from the lifeworld.

The rationalization of politics proceeds differently. The system of administration can never be wholly detached from language: in the end, the system of rules, laws, commands etc. remains linked to understanding embedded in language. But bureaucratization takes on its own self-propelling, self-regulating rationality, purposive-rational action, which operates as an objective force over the heads of actors in the social world (Weber, 1978). As power becomes linked to this new form of administration, it too becomes systematically removed from the reach of communicating actors in the lifeworld.

Nonetheless, for Habermas, even if these subsystems of money and power are largely disconnected from the norms and values of the lifeworld, they still depend on it for their reproduction. Without the integration produced through the lifeworld via the medium of communicative action neither markets nor politics could legitimately function. As long as markets and politics are self-reproducing, that is to say as long as they are not in crisis, they can remain relatively detached. But as the systems of markets and politics are disturbed, they depend on the social integration through norms, values, and culture in the lifeworld as resources for legitimacy, new institutional learning, problem solving, and change.

Even while the economy and polity depend on these lifeworld resources, they simultaneously colonize and disorganize them through both intended and unintended consequences of the economic and political subsystems. Quite simply, markets systematically disrupt the lives of individuals, families, and communities, even while they remain the primary means through which social life is stabilized and reproduced.

The rationalized system of politics detaches political decisions from participatory democratic politics, grounded in the lifeworld arenas of civil society, community, and association, so that, while decisions can be made, they are decreasingly seen as legitimate. Finally, the cultural system and market-driven mass media pull social integration and reproduction (grounded in the primary communicative processes of socialization rooted in family and community) into the sphere of the economy. Core questions of which values are to be taught, how children are to be educated, how families are to be maintained, are shifted upward, away from community, family, and group and toward the sphere of market-driven, rationalized cultural production.

The Forms of Integration

The system/lifeworld analytic distinguishes between two types of societal integration that have potentially important consequences for the analysis of integration at the community level. Social integration operates through normative consensus grounded in communicative action and concerns the actions of actors in the lifeworld. System integration is carried out by non-normative steering of decisions by institutional sources of money and political power.

The two sources of integration are difficult to connect theoretically, being separated in contemporary society and based on differing sources of evidence, but for Habermas this is the fundamental problem of social theory: how to connect in a satisfactory way the two conceptual strategies indicated by 'system' and 'lifeworld' (TCA 2, p. 151). At a minimum, Habermas' formulation of integration tells us three things: that integration should be viewed as a dynamic process rather than a static condition; that different levels of analysis are required to understand integration, i.e., that the institutional system level and the social lifeworld of actors are conceptually distinct; and that separate methods of assessment are appropriate to each level.

I argue that the local community offers a privileged site for analyzing and investigating the interaction between the two basic types of system and social integration. Local communities are embedded in larger regional, national, and global economic systems, yet the structure of local elites is still visible. Political life can be analyzed at the neighborhood, district, or city-wide levels; the interactions between localities and states and regions are also recoverable; and still the effects of national system policies can be seen. Most importantly for our analysis, flows of information and communication that act as steering media can be seen interfering with the structures of communicative action that they disturb. In principle, at least, we can see the social integration of the local community as it is disturbed, disrupted, penetrated, and reorganized by system level forces. And we can see the opposite movement, as citizens engage in deliberation, collective problem solving, and other forms of communicative organization to restore social integration.

This dual movement—the disruption of the lifeworld by system forces and its reconstitution by communicative action in the lifeworld—points toward a solution to the problem of the blurring of the symbolic and structural boundaries characteristic of post-industrial societies linked together by networks. First, we can distinguish between networks embedded in communicative action and the lifeworld—the interpersonal, associational, and accessible political networks of local place—and those networks of the macro-level economic and political systems which function as steering channels for money and power. This allows a second shift of perspective. By acknowledging the system level of power as the macro-level **but bracketing it** for community level analysis, we can adjust our levels of analysis, shifting down, as it were, for local community. Without wishing away macro-level system effects, we can now see that the macro-level in community functions quite differently. The macro-level of community lies at the seam of system and lifeworld, but in a way that makes the seam visible. By understanding this seam as an interlocking

set of networks through which system and lifeworld meet, we also can begin to see how each affects the other. For purposes of investigation, we can, in effect, hold the macro-system level effects constant to investigate how they affect the entire communicative structure of local communities.

The Communicatively Integrated Community

To return to our central premise: community today persists. Americans of all types continue to live, work, and play in social structures that they themselves call community. But the boundaries of those communities have become increasingly blurred as the systems in which they are embedded have grown in complexity.

I have suggested that communication binds these multiple levels together, but that within each level, different forms of communicative integration are work. Within the local community, multiple lifeworlds shape the negotiation of very different sets of boundaries, out of which individuals and groups build their identities. Lifeworlds, in turn, are embedded in structural locations which are often coterminous with groups: neighborhoods, districts, whole cities.

But integration at the local level is not strictly speaking a system problem. As we have noted, when system effects reach downward into local communities, the seam between system of lifeworld becomes visible, and this level of the system becomes a structure that is capable of being thematized and acted upon. The workings of the local economy, real estate markets, schools, government and so on, are not delinguistified although they may in turn be embedded in larger systems that are farther removed from lifeworld discourse.

Figure 2 outlines the overall structure of communicative integrated community. The rows labels indicate the level of generality at which

Figure 2. Communicatively-Integrated Community Integration

Level	Location	Structure	Medium of Integration	Medium of Communication	Form of Symbolic Integration
System	Global National Regional	Urban ecology Political Economy Political Structure	Steering media of money and power	System wide elite media	System wide legitimacy
Macro	Metropolitan	Interorganizational elite networks	Power and money/ communicative action	Local media Specialized media Interpersonal networks	Legitimacy of local elites Metro-wide imagined community
Macro-meso	Metropolitan/ Community-wide	Elite-associational networks	Power and money/ communicative action	Local media Interpersonal networks	Metro-wide imagined community Normative obligations
Meso	Community-wide/ neighborhood	Associational networks	Power and money/ communicative action	Local media Community media Specialized media Community Networks	Sub-metro imagined community Normative obligations Storytelling Neighborhood
Meso-micro	Neighborhood	Associational-interpersonal Networks	Communicative action	Local media Community media Specialized media Community networks Interpersonal networks	Sub-metro imagined community Cognitive mapping Normative obligations Storytelling Neighborhood
Micro	Neighborhood/ Interpersonal	Interpersonal networks	Communicative action	Local media Community media Specialized media Community networks Interpersonal networks	Sub-metro imagined community Cognitive mapping Normative obligations Storytelling Neighborhood

integrative processes operate. Rows descend from system to lifeworld. The columns indicate the location, structural/network mode, integrative medium, medium of communication, and form of symbolic integration at each level.

To build one layered example: If citizens want to challenge failing schools in minority neighborhoods, they are free to do so (meso to micro levels) and more importantly, have the capacities to do so (communicative action, symbolic integration). While mass media attention may be limited or even non-existent, citizens have direct experience with schools to inform their formulation of problems (meso-micro level), a local school board to turn to (macro-meso level), negotiate with, and, if necessary, protest against or replace through elections. Local politics, in this sense, is close to the lifeworld capacities of citizens to frame problems and act on them.

If the same citizens want to then link school problems to patterns of racial segregation in housing markets they will have a harder time. Although still close to the lifeworld, real estate markets (like all markets) operate according to the delinguistified steering medium of money (system and macro levels). Segregation can be legitimated and obscured by reference to the natural workings of the market (e.g. there is no formal discrimination, anyone with the means to buy a home can do so, etc.). Although real estate markets *are* in fact often manipulated in the interests of racial segregation, it is more difficult to formulate this general claim, raise it publicly, and act on it as a public problem. Still, it is possible to imagine that with sufficient community organization, communicative coordination, and media support, such a claim could be made (using communicative action at meso-micro, meso, and macro-meso-level to challenge legitimacy, mobilize citizens and communications media, etc.).

Now consider the recent decision of the Boeing Corporation to leave Seattle. Although the company is deeply and complexly integrated in the local economy, history, and civic fabric, this was a system decision,

made from above, with little likelihood of reversal. It is certainly not anonymous. It was publicly communicated by Boeing's CEO and publicly debated in local and national media (macro and system levels). But this was communication about a decision made to move capital, within the extant rules and laws (system resource of legitimacy), and therefore was unlikely to be thematized as a public problem, much less reversed, except through an extraordinary, coordinated, action of citizens, consumers, and workers linked to the political system which did not take place. This despite its potentially disruptive effects on the entirety of local civic and economic life.

Each of the examples above is linked to a local community, to its complex of lifeworlds, and to one or several systems at work within it. Yet for each, the level of integration, closeness to the lifeworld, and the possible forms of communicative action shape the likelihood of coordinated action profoundly. The proposed framework of the communicatively-integrated community developed here is designed to allow us to make these types of distinctions among communicatively coordinated actions. The framework operates in three dimensions. First, it suggests what intra-lifeworld processes are necessary to form and recognize the boundaries of communities, and to make communication and coordination across them possible. Second, it allows us to locate local lifeworlds in relation to larger local structures and systems. Third, it links these multi-layered dimensions of communication to formal communications media operating in the local and supra-local environments.

Forming Community Boundaries

The boundaries of community are not fixed. They need to be negotiated in a variety of dimensions: the cognitive mapping of social and geographic space and the social framing of which groups lie inside and which outside those boundaries; the normative discourse of what our obligations are to others; and the cultural dimension of imagined

community, the story telling that frames identity-forming narratives at multiple levels of neighborhood, city, state, etc. Taken together, these are the elements of community-as-lifeworld. They form the cultural background of the daily effort to construct and reproduce a workable, navigable, community world.

Cognitive mapping

Actors in the lifeworld need to map multiple boundaries in the process of negotiating daily life in the lifeworld. Ball-Rokeach and colleagues (this issue) describe the cognitive mapping of community under the dual rubrics of communication action context and the multi-level storytelling system. The action context is conceived along the dimensions of openness and closedness, which indicate the willingness of people to engage in communication with others. The boundaries of a community (neighborhood in this case) are defined by shared conventions that map physical limits. The identified dimensions—physical, psychological, sociocultural, economic, and technological features—map a cognitive network that concretely shapes pathways of communicative interaction.⁴⁾

This cognitive mapping, however, can be and is used in multiple registers. Individuals draw on it both to construct the social-psychological sense of belonging and to contrast the boundaries of belonging with larger identities and groups. The use of the term community is so messy because these multiple registers are held in the background to be mobilized according to context. Individuals and groups locate themselves in any or all of the following dimensions (and others): local community (as both neighborhood and city), the metropolis, the national community,

4) Harrison White (1992) has proposed the concept of the category network (catnet) that connects stories and networks: Networks are phenomenological realities as well as measurement constructs. Stories describe the ties in networks (p.65). Although the idea cannot be developed here, the catnet as a method for linking stories and networks suggests a rich possibility for bringing together the storytelling dimension developed by Ball-Rokeach et al and the structural dimensions of community networks discussed below.

the community of like-others (ethnic, racial, sexual-preference), an occupationally or professionally bounded community (e.g. the medical community), a community of like-interests (the business or high-tech community), and increasingly the community of those who associate on the net for any one of the above reasons or others, (virtual communities). Indeed, when Americans invoke the term community they are likely to hold at least several of these registers in the background simultaneously.

The normative dimension

The normative dimension of community builds on this cognitive mapping of the boundaries of community, to ask who belongs within our community, who to other communities, and what set of mutual obligations of recognition, respect, trust, etc. regulate relations within and between communities. Much of the discussion of trust and social capital, for example, explicitly builds on this dimension, as does the debate over whether communities must share some common life in Robert MacIver's term (1928), and, if so, whether this claim of comprehensiveness is a central requirement for community. This normative (or moral-practical) dimension of community construction becomes further complicated in a complex, multicultural society like the United States where Americans are constantly traversing a series of geographic, social, and cultural boundaries, themselves built out of the multiple networks and roles discussed above.

Imagined community

The concept of imagined community describes both the modes and cultural resources through which individuals and groups form identities, and the way that these identities are realized in the lives of larger social collectives. For Benedict Anderson the nation is an imagined political community imagined because the members of even the smallest nation

will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion. Extending this to smaller communities, he claims all communities larger than primordial villages of face-to-face contact (and perhaps even these) are imagined. Communities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined (Anderson, 1991, p.6). As we have suggested, this image of communion is a complex construct, drawing from multiple cultural backgrounds, cognitive mappings, and narrative frameworks. Imagined community gives shape to group identities, and, by extension, the place of individuals within them. Identities are shaped from a shared sense of history and culture that binds communities together.

Community Structure and Social Integration

The cognitive, moral, and imagined aspects of community only cohere, however, within the set of social structures that bind the community domain. These structures are as complex as the multiple registers of the symbolic discussed above (race, ethnicity, residence, occupation, etc.), but they are also given in both geographic space and historical time. However, we can no longer naively invoke a given set of boundaries as a set of fixed limits on community space. Does Milwaukee evoke a city proper, a metro region, or a neighborhood, to name only several possibilities? The answer depends on the intersection of structural constraints and the imaginative construction of those boundaries discussed in the previous section.

Structure plays an ambiguous role in the model of communicatively integrated community. It has both objective dimensions (location in space, access to services and resources, etc.) and constructed ones. It is neither system nor lifeworld per se, but is poised at the intersection of the two. Conceptualizing this structural level poses unique problems. We need a method of linking multiple levels of structure that is flexible, and

that can still take the many locations of actors into account. Over the past thirty years the debate over the structure of social life, at least at the micro- and meso levels, has shifted to the ground of social network analysis. There are three central research projects that have guided this shift: the (separate) personal network studies of Fischer and Wellman; the community issue/elite studies of Laumann and his students; and a series of studies of community organizational ecology and voluntary associations.

Beginning with Wellman and Craven's Toronto studies in the early 70s, the city itself began to be reconceptualized as a network of networks (Craven & Wellman, 1973). In a series of studies, Wellman found that personal networks spanned a variety of relationships spread out over space and time (Wellman, 1979, 1982a, 1982b, 1988; Wellman et al., 1988). Typically, residents had local relations with neighbors, but these were not as important as ties to family and kin, which often were dispersed over wide areas as segments of family and friends became upwardly mobile and left the old neighborhood. These networks were metropolitan, national, and even global. The telephone and today the Internet provide a means of remaining in close communication with those who otherwise might have become more distant over time (Wellman & Gulia, 1999). Fischer's work of the 70s and 80s developed a parallel set of findings. As we have discussed, in his Northern California Community study, Fischer and colleagues argued that interpersonal networks form personal communities in which ties of intimacy to friends, neighbors and others take on voluntary and associative qualities. In this view, community is not lost, but redefined through more multiplex, networked, social relations (Fischer, 1972, 1975, 1982; Fischer et al., 1977).

At the same time that Wellman and Fischer were separately arguing for the persistence of personal community, a separate cluster of network-based community studies was, at least implicitly, arguing for the continuing relevance of geographically and politically bounded community networks. Laumann and Pappi (1976) were the first to systematically

apply these revised network principles to the study of community. In their analysis of a small German city of about 20,000, they employed a Parsonsian integration framework, first, to uncover the bases of social differentiation among population subgroups through an analysis of both community values and occupational structure. Second, they identified the networks of elite decision making, and connected elite networks to the population subgroups on which they depended for support. Galaskiewicz (1979) applied this framework to Towertown in the U.S., and found a shifting set of community networks that changed according to the medium of exchange that came into play in the conflicts over a given set of community issues studied, whether money, power, or values.

A third area of research on voluntary association membership and structure has shifted since the late 70s from one emphasizing the individual level correlates of organizational membership to one stressing contextual influence. Social networks effect the propensity of individuals to join associations and organizations and to maintain membership over time (Knoke, 1981, 1986, 1990a), as well as shape the resulting influence of associations. Organizational ecology (McPherson, 1983, 1990; McPherson, Popielarz, & Drobnic, 1992; McPherson & Ranger-Moore, 1991; McPherson & Rotolo, 1996) has found that the dynamics of individual membership are shaped by both the structure of competition among organizations in any bounded environment, and by the macro-dimensions of homogeneity and heterogeneity of populations. Blau has demonstrated the power of macro-level population structures to determine both the meso-level ecological structure, and micro-level associational behavior (Blau, 1977, 1994; Blau & Schwartz, 1984). Most recently Rotolo (2000) has attempted to bring these three levels together in a multi-level model that tests the effects of town-level heterogeneity on individual-level voluntary membership.

In sum, the study of community structure has become increasingly focused on interpersonal social networks, networks of community power

and structure, and organizational ecologies of association in the past thirty years. The new paradigm is both networked (grounded in relational rather than individual or aggregate data analysis) and contextual. Still, very little research has been conducted that systematically brings these three levels of personal community, macro-network structure, and meso-level associational structure together outside of the largely qualitative and holistic tradition of community studies.⁵⁾

The concept of communicatively integrated community allows us to reconstruct the multiple levels that we have just examined and to look forward to the model of community communication ecology. As we see in Figure 2, each level is linked closely to the ones above and below it; each constitutes a seam that is stitched together by its own set of network relations. Networks are the connective tissue of both structure and communication, but one level does not continuously blur into the other. Although this figure describes a complex set of community boundaries, tied together by networks, and although these boundaries are not fixed in any simple way by geography or arbitrarily drawn demographic, social, or cultural divisions, they describe a set of parameters that citizens and residents themselves use and would recognize. Whether through the process of deciding where to work, where to walk, or play; who to talk to about what sorts of problems; whether telling a civic story or storytelling neighborhood, residents negotiate these multiple-boundaries daily, in making multiple life decisions and reproducing imagined community. Certainly, they may not be able to articulate all of these levels in analysis (although I think researchers might be surprised at how many people do hold in everyday consciousness). But they form a background of a daily, civic, lifeworld nonetheless.

Before concluding, I introduce one final concept, the community communication ecology, as a framework for investigating and analyzing

5) Fischer (1992) remains a major exception in the area of historical sociology of technology and community change.

the multiple forms of communication at work in the communicatively integrated community.

Figure 3 Community Communication Ecology

Media Level	Location	Medium of Communication
System	Global National Regional	System wide media: National Networks National Newspapers Elite journals Global computer networks
Macro	Metropolitan	Metro-newspapers Metro-broadcast media Metro-Internet portals Metro-public media Cable systems Metro-alternative Media
Macro-meso	Metropolitan/ Community-wide	Zoned editions Cable Access Specialized community media (e.g. Ethnic radio) Civic Internet portals
Meso	Community-wide/ neighborhood	District newspapers Micro-radio Community Internet portals
Meso-micro	Neighborhood	Neighborhood newspapers Newsletters
Micro	Neighborhood/ Interpersonal	Newsletters Point-to-point communication (telephone and email) Interpersonal network discussion

The Community Communication Ecology

Taken together the lifeworld structures of cognitive, moral, and imagined identity and the network structures of local communitythe communicatively-integrated communitycan also be investigated as a

comprehensive community communication ecology. Friedland and McLeod (1999) have advanced one model for conducting integrated research on this unified community communication environment. This broad ecological perspective, finally, allows us to identify the elements of the community communication system proper. We have already distinguished between the formal media and media-related elements of that system and the structural characteristics of communities themselves. Now we can turn attention to modeling the interaction between these two broad sets of elements. The formal media elements of the community communication ecology can be further subdivided between those elements that are properly local and the larger media environment that shapes the flow of communication in any bounded community. The following discussion is outlined in Figure 3, which follows the same overall structure as Figure 2, further specifying media of communication. The list is not meant to be exhaustive, but to suggest a range of media.

Metropolitan commercial media consisting of newspaper, broadcast television and radio, and Internet portals do the most to shape the overall understanding of imagined community, including the imagined connections between and among levels where citizens lack direct experience. The range of variation among metro-level media differs considerably. Some newspapers, particularly those that have engaged in serious, extended, civic and public journalism experiments have managed to deepen their connection with citizens at the macro-meso level and below. Others operate primarily to establish a metro-wide market for advertisers.

However all metro-level media institutions are embedded in larger media environments that shape and frequently even dictate content. We only sketch a few of these relationships, most of which are well known. Local television stations primarily rebroadcast network content and local news increasingly repackages syndicated features with a local angle; local newspapers draw heavily from national syndicates for much of their non-local content; local radio stations, with the exception of some talk

and news programs, rebroadcast national news, talk, and music that is produced and determined elsewhere. Cable systems offer bundles of programs and services determined elsewhere, with the partial and minor exception of access. And even the locally produced content of news, talk, and the little music or culture that makes it onto the public stage, is shaped by nationally originated formats that frame their production. So a major proportion of the locally-experienced media environment is not local at all. With the spread of the Internet, these boundaries between the local and the national become even more blurred.

This boundary then, between local media and the larger media environment, is at best fuzzy. It is relatively simple to assert that the larger environment dominates the local, and indeed, judging by much of the substance and form of media content, this is true. Still, much gets done in the breach to shape the local imagined community, including the public imagination, which sets many of the parameters of community democratic participation.

For example, Kaniss's study of the role of media in the construction of local identity in the modern American city argues that the metropolitan news media have had to produce local identity as much as they produce news and entertainment (Kaniss, 1991, p. 4). She claims that local media are driven to focus on issues with the symbolic capital necessary to unite a fragmented metropolitan audience that comprises the extremely different urban environments of city and suburb. The common life, in this sense, has to be symbolically produced by the local news, and this imagined common life is functional, she argues, to both the news media and local elites. The media need an image of the larger metropolis, a Milwaukee, or Los Angeles to give shape to their product and sell it to widely scattered viewers (and advertisers) drawn from the entire patchwork of the metropolitan area. Elites need such an image to mobilize the symbolic capital necessary for large-scale development projects necessary for growth and profit (see also Molotch (1976; 2000)

for a stronger and more nuanced version of this argument). Kaniss and Molotch would argue that an imagined community does exist, but is constructed artificially to meet the functional needs of commercial media and local elites. Further, this artificial construct is needed in order to imagine a common life.

There is substantial truth to this argument. As common ties weaken in the structure of local life, the task of creating an image of that life tends to shift upward, to those institutions capable of manufacturing territorial identities, in this case the metropolis and its media. However, we need to avoid concluding too quickly that this *manufactured* community is the whole, or even dominant force shaping the local imagined environment. The question hinges precisely on whether common life is also constructed below this overarching level of meaning, and, if so, the patterns of that life itself and the forms and means by which it becomes woven into larger patterns of the civic imagination.

The research of Ball-Rokeach and colleagues on the imagined production of neighborhood (storytelling neighborhood) offers a powerful counterpoint to the concept that imagined community is primarily produced from above. They have begun to show in detail how the forms of media in Figure Three at the macro-meso level and below have been used by citizen/residents to storytell neighborhood in a variety of ways across multiple boundaries and cross-cutting networks. This suggests that research on the community communication ecology should focus on this particular question: where the metro-level and meso-level imagined community meet, how do they interact? Does, for example, the image of danger broadcast nightly on local television news counteract the willingness of citizens to travel or work in other areas? What are the asymmetries between the uses of imagined community by different ethnic and racial groups in different neighborhoods (for example, poor minorities may imagine certain neighborhoods to be bad, crime-ridden, and so on, but may be forced by necessity to venture into them anyway

for work or services; how does experience counter media image?). There are a multitude of similar questions that comparative research on community communication ecologies might begin to address.

Conclusion: Communication and Civic Life

The evidence for the effects of changing community structure on civic life that we have reviewed so far is contradictory. Although older forms of intimacy have been replaced by new, networked forms of personal community, the normative force of the idea of community has deep, historical roots and appears in a continual tension with individualism. Americans appear to continue to sustain a substantial amount of community-based, voluntary activity, although whether this is in decline is a subject of debate (Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995). New forms of civic activity are emerging, although their shape remains unclear.

The communications ecology itself is a major force in the shaping of these local outcomes and their definition, and appears equally complex. At the national and global level, the economic concentration of communication is accelerating, paralleling the emergence and exponential growth of the Internet. Local media systems are embedded in this national and international environment, yet, as we have seen, they maintain substantial autonomy. The shaping of the local imagined community emerges from a complex of forces: the national media images that circulate and saturate the local and regional media environment; but also the work of constructing the symbolic metropolitan area performed by major local media; the subcultural media of radio, the Internet, the ethnic press; the impersonal influence that locally constructed imagined community exercises on the public and civic imagination (Mutz, 1998); and, not least, the social networks of communities themselves, the complex

web of influentials and their networks (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955; Weimann, 1994). Each contributes to a sense of place, synthesized from both synthetic symbolic constructions and lived experience, and this sense of place is necessary for democratic action.

Certainly, this proposition is disputable. Some would argue that the growth of the Internet provides multiple opportunities for both local and extra-local engagement in civic and public life: the very act of gathering information, chatting about political subjects, signing online petitions, sending email, and so on. And this is, indisputably one form of political communication. But in an incisive criticism of the idea that online communities might substitute for communities of place, William Galston (1999) cautions that they fail to meet some of essential criteria for common life. At best, they are aggregates of individuals who share interests. They are communities of exit, because it is easiest for those who are dissatisfied, or simply bored, to leave rather than exercise their voice for change (Hirschman, 1970). Further, they fail to foster the mutual obligation and reciprocity that, we have seen, is necessary for building social capital.

We are left with our beginning question: how is public action in local environments possible? We know that it is possible to exercise control of the social, political, and economic environments from above at the level of system. It remains to be seen whether democratic control can be developed from below, at the level of community, where system and lifeworld meet. If it can, then the local communications ecology will play a central role in reconstructing the democratic discussion, the public sphere, necessary for framing citizen action. In their study, *Civic Innovation in America*, Sirianni and Friedland (2001) have found substantial evidence that place-based activity provides the strongest support for democratic action in the areas of the environment, community development, health, and journalism. The public journalism movement's successes point directly to the role that local media can play in

constructing local networks of deliberation and action (Friedland, 2001; Rosen, 1999). And nascent movements across the country for local information commons that can combine the strength of the Internet with demonstrate that place, the environment of action, not technology, is the critical element in civic and democratic participation (Friedland & Boyte, 2000).

In the end, however, these remain speculative propositions. Evaluating them depends, on the one hand, the development of local, regional, and national experiments in civic communication and democracy touched on above. On the other, scholars of communication and community will have to advance our knowledge in at least two areas.

Some of the major elements of a mid-range theory of the communicatively integrated community have been articulated in this article, but much work is yet to be done. On the one hand, a more careful working out of the implications of the theory of communicative action for a mid-range analytic theory is required. On the other the elements of such an analytic program need to be more carefully articulated and connected so that we can see not only the pieces, but a fuller range of hypothesized interconnections that can yield new research.

Further, we need to begin to develop a common discussion among those conducting community-level communication research, to develop a comparative framework of analysis. The work of the Metamorphosis Project in Los Angeles, whole community communication research being conducted in St. Paul by Friedland, Shah, and McLeod, and other community level communication research begs for a common framework across which variables can be specified and their relations investigated, not only in a local cross-sectional mode, but in a comparative and longitudinal framework. One important, if nascent, example can be found in Robert Putnam's Social Capital Community Benchmark Survey (www.cfsv.org). By comparing data on eleven variables, including trust, associational life, civic engagement, and politics, in forty communities, he

offers a beginning framework for comparative research and evaluation on social capital development in the U.S. As communication scholars, we need to develop a parallel framework, asking what contribution communication variables can make to this debate, seriously join our internal debate concerning a common framework, and then explore new forms of collaborative research that can make certain that communication, the most critical variable in community integration, remains central to the unfolding debate on democracy and civic life.

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