

**Community Formation: Divergent Environments**

C&E SOC. 140: Introduction to Community & Environmental Sociology

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A natural formation within a group of people is established by a particular social system or by a specified space. If a group of people cohabits or comingles then a community is established. Said community is formed in various ways depending on the physical and metaphysical environment of its members. A community should serve its members by sharing responsibility. Within each unique structure comprised of a group of people, is a sense of shared values; though, communities progressively evolve in their viewpoints, this fluctuates a community's practice(s) both internally and externally.

“Institutional practices concerning families and communities, as well as elite and everyday knowledge about family and community, form building blocks of social inequalities of class, gender, ethnicity, race, age, sexuality, and religion.” (Hill Collins, 2010, pp. 9).

Within a community is the sometimes-literal ‘gate,’ abstractly seen as a ‘community control,’ which takes on varying forms and degrees depending on a community's formation. In a gated community there is a distinction between ‘elite knowledge,’ insights controlled by privileged members, and ‘everyday knowledge,’ information easily obtained by community members regardless of an individual's authority. The type of community formed is contingent on access to information, entrance barriers and other community controls.

“I know that I am here today...because somebody, at some point, decided that loving their community and their country meant doing something to change it,” (Obama, 2009).

Before Barack Obama became the 44<sup>th</sup> President of the United States, he successfully pitched to Americans this idea of community via service. Here, the common identity for the group of people is plainly being American, which Obama mechanized in a grassroots style campaign. He placed value in serving one's country, thereby forming a community that is both bounded by place and affinity. Obama's 2008 win, helps prove that individuals who are made to feel part of a group, do mobilize as a community within the broader environment (Hill Collins, 2010, pp. 18-20).

“[S]ociologists also use the word community to describe a shared sense of identity held by a group of people who may or may not share the same geographic space” (Flora, C. B., Flora, J. L., & Fey, S., 2008, pp. 14).

Contemporary sociologist “consider both communities of place and communities of interest” to distinguish between location and affinity formations (Flora, C. B., Flora, J. L., & Fey, S., 2008, pp. 14). This agrees with a late 19<sup>th</sup> Century text by German economist, philosopher, and sociologist, Ferdinand Tönnies translated from *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschafts* as *Community and Civil Society*. Among many points, Tönnies argues that Community [Gemeinschaft], is the ‘old,’ ‘organic,’ foundation of the ‘new,’ ‘mechanical,’ society [Gesellschafts] (Tönnies, 2001, pp. 19).

“Community by *blood*, indicating primal unity of existence, develops more specifically into community of *place*, which is expressed first of all as living in close proximity to one another,” (Tönnies, 2001, pp. 27)

Tönnies describes community in three parts progressively evolving from one to the next. He describes blood, as familial structure, physical place, as location, lastly, spirit, as affinity as a

group of people with shared values or beliefs. Community and society are linked together by their authority structures, 'dependent on circumstance,' according to Tönnies (Tönnies, 2001, pp. 77). Said differently, the way in which a social group maintains its literal and metaphysical environment, shapes the formation of community itself.

**References**

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