**CULTURE AND VALUES**

## Sense of community ad defined by McMillan and Chavis

**What is ‘community’?**

**Two major uses for the term:**

* A geographical notion such as a neighbourhood or town (a local community)
* The quality of relationships within a group without a reference to location (a relational community)

Four criteria that has to be met for an individual to feel a sense of community:

1. **Membership**
2. **Influence**
3. **Integration and fulfilment needs**
4. **Shared emotional connection**

# MEMBER SHIPS

**Membership refers to the sense among community members of personal investment in the community and of belonging to it**

* Establishes boundaries that divide those who belong to the community from those who do not
* Right to belong
* Membership is comprised of five attributes:
  1. Boundaries
  2. A common symbol system
  3. Emotional safety
  4. A sense of belonging and identification
  5. Personal investment

**Boundaries**

* The necessity of defining what includes members and excludes non-members
* For locality community, this involves geographic boundaries (gates, ganga graffiti)
* Relational community may involve personal similarities or shared goals

**A common symbol system**

* Common symbols help to define boundaries by identifying members or territory
* E.g. use of Greek letters among American campus sororities

**Emotional safety**

* Is part of the broader notion of security
* It can mean a sense a safety from crime in a neighbourhood
* Can also mean secure relationships for sharing feelings and concerns
* Can be more then emotional can be physical

**A sense of belonging and identification**

* This involves the feeling, belief and expectation that one fits in the group and has a place there
* Feeling of acceptance by the group and a willingness to sacrifice for the group

**Personal investment**

* Important contributor to a person’s feelings of group membership to his or her sense of community
* Personal investment places a large role in developing an emotional connection
* Indicates long-term commitment to the community, such as the purchasing of a home in a neighbourhood

# INFLUENCE

* Bidirectional concept: individuals are attracted to become members of a community in which they fell they can have some influence over what the group does, community cohesiveness requires members to be prepared to conform
* Communities are more cohesive when leaders influence members and when members influence leaders concurrently – people acknowledge other opinions and needs are often more influential than those who try to dominate others and ignore their wishes
* Most influential members in the group 🡪 often those to whom needs, and values of others matter most
* The more cohesive the group, the greater is its pressure to conformity – rooted in the shared commitments of each individual to the group, not simply imposed on the individual
* The ones that actually influence are the ones that can be approached 🡪 the ones that people want to follow (think difference between Donald Trump and Obama)

# INTEGRATION AND THE FULFILMENT OF NEEDS

* **‘integration’** concern horizontal relations among members
* Has two aspects
  + **Shared values**: when people who share values come together, they find they have similar needs, priorities, and goals, thus fostering the belief that joining together they might be better able to satisfy the needs and obtain the reinforcement they seek
  + **Exchange of resources**: the satisfying of needs and exchanging of resources among community members
* It is reinforcement: a motivator of behaviour that links to the idea that for any group to maintain a positive sense of togetherness, the individual-group association must be rewarding for its members
* Individuals participate in communities in part because their individual needs are being met
* Needs may be physical (e.g. safety) or psychosocial (e.g. emotional support, social support or exercising leadership)

Summary of the role of the integration and fulfilment of needs in a sense of community:

* Reinforcement and need fulfilment is a primary function a strong community
* Some of the rewards that are effective reinforcers of communities are status of membership and success of the community
* Individual values are the source of the needs that communities fill – the extent to which individual values are shared among community members will determine the ability of a community to organise and prioritise its need-fulfilment activities
* **A strong community is able to fit people together so that people meet others’ needs while they meet their own**
* Community should be helping you fulfill your needs, and you help other community members with their needs

# SHARED EMOTIONAL CONNECTION

* “definitive element for true community”
* Involves ‘spiritual bond’ – not necessarily a religious bond but one that is recognisable by those who share it
* Is based, in part, on a shared history
* Members may not have participated in the history by must identify with it
* Interactions of members in shared events and specific attributes of the events may facilitate or inhibit the strength of the community
* Shared emotional connection is strengthened through important community experiences, such as celebrations, shared rituals, honouring members and shared stories
* Features important to a shared emotional connection:
  + Quality of interactions
  + Providing closure to events
  + Sharing of significant events
  + Investment by members in the community

## Impact of significant events on individuals and communities

* Significant events result in challenging life crises
* Events considered to be stressors – objects or events that result in stress
* **Stress: a state of psychological of physiological arousal that results from a individual’s interpretation of stressors**

Types of significant events:

* **Individual:** events at which the personal level (experienced by only a few people) which are distressing (cause negative stress), such as the death of a loved one or a persons house burning down
  + include events that are generally welcomed but may still be stressful e.,g. marriage or birth of a child
* **world-level:** large scale events that affect more then the individual, but are often sources of stress to the individual (e.g. natural disasters, terrorism, global financial crisis)

# EVENT CHARCTERISTICS CONTRIBUTING TO STRESS – PREDICTABILITY, CONTROLLABILITY, EXPERIENCE OF THREAT OR LOSS

* **Predictability of the event**
* **Controllability of the event**
* **Experience of threat or loss**

PREDICTABILITY OF THE EVENT

* Refers to how well the events occurrence (timing, intensity) can be predicted
* While events that can be predicted (such as floods) can still be stressful, it is generally the case that unpredictable events are more stressful and have a longer lasting impact than predicable events
* Supporting research: Katz and Wykes (1985):
  + Aim: to examine whether predictable aversive events (electric shocks) are more beneficial than unpredictable aversive events
  + Procedure: eighty 18-40-year-old female volunteers were subjected to six predictable and six unpredictable electric shocks
  + Findings:
    - Participants felt less stressed during the interval before the predictable electric shocks then the unpredictable shocks
    - They perceived the predictable shocks to be less aversive than the unpredictable shocks
    - Autonomic indexes of arousal (e.g. heart rate) were lower during the signal for the predictable shock than during the equivalent period for the unpredictable shock
    - 64% of participants preferred the predictable shocks

CONTROLLABILITY OF THE EVENT

* Refers to the level of control a person had over themselves and the unfolding event
* An event is generally experienced as more stressful by the person when they have no control, compared to when they do have control
* This has been reported by victims of terror attacks and long-term detainees in refugee camps
* Supporting research – Geer and Maisel (1972):
  + Aim: to examine whether perceived control or actual control can reduce stress reactions to aversive stimuli
  + Procedure
    - In a lab experiment participant were shown photographs of dead car-crash victims
    - Stress levels were measured by GSR and heart rate electrodes (a baseline measurement was taken for five minutes before)
  + Findings:
    - Participants showed less GSR reaction – indicating less stress – when they had control over the situation (being able to turn off the photograph)
    - It is likely that being able to terminate aversive stimuli reduces stressful impact

EXPERIENCE OF THREAT OR LOSS

* Refers to whether the person experiences threat or loss due to the event
* This can be either direct or indirect
* An event is generally experienced as more stressful by the person the more direct the experience of threat or loss is

For example, in relation to the 9/11 attack on Manhattan the following groups may experience different levels of stress:

1. People who were in Downtown Manhattan during the 9/11 attack and were caught up in the attack (such those workers evacuated from the Twin Towers), and those people who lost relatives and/or close friends in the attack
2. People who were in Manhattan/New York City and were eyewitnesses to the attack
3. People who did not directly experience the attacks but who call New York City home
4. People who are not New Yorkers and who viewed the attacks on television and who did not know anybody who was caught in the attack

# POSTIVE RESPONSES – RESILANCE AND POST TRAUMATIC GROWTH

**INDIVIDUAL RESILIENCE – HARDINESS AND RESILIENCE**

* Kobasa (1979) thought that personality differences could account for different responses to stress (causes by significant events)
  + Carried out a study with 800 executives and managers
  + Asked to complete two questionaries: one being a personality questionnaire and other measured stressful events and illnesses that respondents had experienced over the previous three years
  + Divided respondents into two groups: one that had scored above average for illnesses and other that scored below average
  + When she compared high stress/illness group with high stress/low illness group she found that the high stress/low illness group
* Kobasa used the high stress/low illness to theorise the three elements of the ‘hardy’ personality:
  + **Challenge:** these executives saw change as a change, and an opportunity to demonstrate mastery and achieve growth
  + **Control:** these executives felt more in control of their own lives even during stressful situations – they do not feel that they level of stress is controlled by external factors
  + **Commitment:** these executives had a sense of direction in both their work and personal lives. They put 100% into what they are doing and feel a strong sense of involvement with the world
* The qualities that Kobasa saw in her ‘hardy’ types are some of the characteristics that have in more recent years been identified with the concept of resilience
* In addition to Kobasa’s features of control, challenge and commitment, other qualities seen in a resilient person include:
  + The capacity for making the most of small windows of opportunity
  + Having a deep-rooted faith in a system of meaning
  + Having a healthy social support network
  + Having a wide comfort zone
* Research has shown that, while resilience is influenced by a person’s genetics, to some extent a person’s resilience can also be trained
* It is evident from studying the McMillan and Chavis model that a strong sense of community can also assist a person in having a positive response to a negative significant event
* **Resiliency is the personal attribute or ability to bounce back**

**COMMUNITY RESILIENCE – Community Competence**

* Pooley (2006) community competence: the ability of a community to identify needs and issues, and work together to carry out plans and achieve goals
* Able to adapt
* Community competence explains resilience in a community
* If people live in a competent community and have a sense of community the community is considered to be resilient

**The Hurricane Choir -** Example of community competence

In 2005 Hurricane Katrina. Disasters such as this can have a major negative impact on mental health of individuals and the community. The Hurricane Choir was made up of hurricane survivors. hypothesized that participation in the choir would assist hurricane survivors to feel increased social support, a greater sense of community cohesion and lead to improved perceptions of coping and optimistic thinking, as well as a reduction in mental health problems in choir members. When the project wound up the governor of Louisiana considered that it had been so successful in achieving its aims that he wrote to the Australian Prime Minister to thank him for the work of the Australians involved.

**POST TRAUMATIC GROWTH**

* Most distressing forms of stress are referred to as trauma
* Two people can have very different reactions to same stressful event, two categories of reactions
  + Post-traumatic growth
  + Post-traumatic stress disorder
* PTG positive change, as result of a struggle with reality (after experiencing a traumatic event)
* Five factors/main aspects of PTG
  + A greater appreciation of life and change in pervious priorities
  + Changed relationships (greater intimacy and warmth)
  + Increased personal strength
  + Awareness of new possibilities
  + Spiritual development
* Tedeschi and Calhoun (2004) PTG differs from related constructs of resilience, hardiness and optimism
* Diagram

  Description automatically generatedRefers to ‘a change in people that goes beyond an ability to resist and not be damaged by highly stressful circumstances; it involves a movement beyond pre-traumatic levels of adaptation’
* Factors whether a person experiences PTG or PTSD:
  + Coping styles involve religious beliefs or positive reappraisals of the situation
  + Religious beliefs were of greatest value to women and older people as they sought to make sense of the situation
  + Provision of social support or act of seeking support
  + Acceptance of the situation

# NEGATIVE RESPONSES – POST TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER

**POST TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER**

* **A serve and continuing reaction to the trauma of experiencing actual or perceived threats to life, violence or serious injury**
* Particular set of reactions
* Person experiences feelings of intense fear, hopelessness or horror

**Symptoms and diagnoses**

* Physical: disturbed sleep, nightmares, exhaustion, restlessness, headaches
* Cognitive: poor concentration, disturbances to attention and memory, flashbacks, intrusive thoughts
* Emotional: fear, avoidance of activities, anxiety, depression, guilt, withdrawal and fearfulness
* Other mental health issues that may be associated: depression, anxiety and alcohol and drug abuse
* Diagnosis requires
  + Past experience of actual or perceived threats to life, violence or serious injury
  + Presence of distressing symptoms (recurring dreams, memories or flashbacks)
  + Persistence avoidance
  + Negative changes in thought and mood
  + Changes in reactions and responses to stimuli associated with the event

**Treatment**

* Medication
* Cognitive behavioural therapy
  + Talk-therapy focus on relationship between thoughts, feelings and behaviours
  + Targets current symptoms and problems
  + Person will work to identify distortions or unhelpful thoughts and feelings related to to trauma
  + Help person return to a place of hope
  + Feel better sense of control
  + Help reduce escape or avoidance behaviours
* Virtual reality exposure
  + Working to become desensitized to impact of the experience
  + Offers technology for person to be gradually exposed to the traumatic situation
  + Manipulated by the clinician and talked through together, exposing the person to the traumatic event
  + Over time helping the vent have less and less emotional impact
  + One combat participant said “you go over the story over and over again