

PERSONAL COMMUNITIES: THE WORLD ACCORDING TO ME¹
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Except for some saintly altruists, the world revolves around 'Me'. We keep a mental network map showing who are our friends and our enemies. Who are the people I will see today or contact by the internet or mobile phone? Who can I count on for different kinds of help? Which of my friends and relatives know each other, and which get along with each other?

So networks built around 'Me' – personal communities – have always been with us. But, nowadays, with Facebook and its ilk, people are becoming very aware that communities can consist of a person's network of relationships, wherever they are located.

In fact, there are three ways of looking at communities:

- a) Once upon a time, almost all people believed that communities were rooted in neighbourhoods: the traditional spatially-bounded areas in which, at least in principle, most people know each other and can walk or make a short drive to each others' homes.
- b) As communities of people with a shared interest, such as communities of people who do drifting races.
- c) The less-traditional way we discuss here: personal communities defined as those connected to the individuals at their centres. From this standpoint, friends, neighbours, kin, acquaintances, co-workers and fellow members of organizations are personal community members, and are often connected to each other.

There has been a shift in perception from spatially-defined communities to relationally-defined communities (Kayahara, 2006). These personal communities are social networks defined as an individual set of ties (see Figure 1). Such personal communities have become more palpably visible with the advent of the internet. Email lists of friends and social networking software, such as Facebook, MySpace and Hi5 organize people's social worlds in terms of lists of their friends and acquaintances. While some scholars continue to study community in terms of spatially-bounded units such as groups, neighbourhoods and villages, others focus on community as an interpenetrating combination of online and offline worlds managed by autonomous individuals at their respective centres (Boase and Wellman, 2006). Hence, the traditional representation of community as a distinct set of local ties is often usefully replaced by looking at personal communities characterized by a

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combination of local, regional and distant ties, no matter how far-flung (Wellman, 2002).

To be sure, such personal communities have always existed (e.g., Bender, 1978), but their form has changed drastically with time. In an earlier period, personal communities were mostly geographically bound, densely knit and broadly based ties organized around discrete social units such as bars and taverns, steel towns and neighbourhoods (Keller, 1968). Today, many personal communities are geographically dispersed, sparsely knit and specialized (Wellman, 1979). The growth of social affordances such as mobile phones and email has facilitated this transformation radically. Where landline phones link 'households-to-households', mobile phones and e-mail sustain communications directly between 'person-and-person', giving rise to a contemporary form of community we call 'networked individualism' (Wellman, 2001a, 2001b).

The most persistent concern about contemporary communities has been their alleged decline in the past hundred years. Different commentators have offered different causes for the decline, ranging from industrialization, capitalism, socialism, urbanization, bureaucratization, feminism and technological change (Wellman and Leighton, 1979). In the mid 1990s, the political scientist Robert Putnam (1995, 2000), argued that Americans were now 'bowling alone' and that civic activities such as voting, social club memberships and family dinners were declining. More recently, Miller McPherson, Lynn Smith-Lovin and Matthew Brashears (2006) repeated the caution, showing that the number of people with whom Americans discuss 'important matters' had decreased from 2.8 to 2.1 in the span of two decades from the mid-1980s to the mid-2000s. Putative technological explanations for the alleged decline of community have been proffered since automobiles took people away from face-to-face interactions on streets and streetcars. The culprit du jour is the internet, with some commentators fearing that excessive use of email, Facebook, et al. would lure people away from face-to-face contact and perhaps even ensnare some with online addictions (Benedict XVI, 2009; Sigman, 2009).

Yet, most studies show that personal communities continue to be a central part of people's lives. The data are consistent from Western Europe, Latin America, China, Japan, Iran, Canada or the United States (Fischer, 1982; Wellman, 1999; Boase, et al. 2006; Wellman, 2007). It seems that the losses in formal organizational involvement have been supplanted by more informal means of communicating and socializing, and large networks of specialized ties are flourishing. With social affordances such as the internet and email, distance poses less hindrance as communication comes to be increasingly defined by social accessibility rather than spatial accessibility (Hogan, 2008b; Mok, Wellman and Carrasco, 2009). While personal communities may have gone indoors, from cafés to living rooms and computer screens, this does not mean that community has disappeared. People continue to be social when they are indoors. They chat online with friends, keep up with them via their Facebook pages, tweet them (via Twitter) about where they are going, meet them offline to round out discussions, and then meet online again to talk about other things (Robinson, Kestnbaum, Neustadtl and Alvarez, 2002).

In this chapter, we describe the nature of personal communities: their characteristics and their consequences. We also discuss how to collect information about personal

communities. For reasons of space, we focus on personal communities in the developed world, but bring in some comparative information from elsewhere.

Communities as Personal Communities

Personal community research invokes a certain understanding of 'community'. Instead of regarding communities as bound up with organized institutions such as family, neighbourhood, work or voluntary organizations, personal community research treats communities as 'personal networks'. The personal network approach views networks from the standpoint of a focal individual (*ego*) actively managing his/her ties with *alters*. This contrasts with the 'whole network' approach that observes an entire set of ties, such as in a neighbourhood, workplace or organization.

One practical way to understand the personal network approach is to think about a person's friends on the Facebook social networking website. The holder of the account is *ego*. His/her personal network would include all fellow Facebook users personally linked to him/her as 'Friends' (Hogan, 2008a). These 'Friends' may be anyone ranging from an acquaintance barely met, a long lost friend who has recently contacted you, a neighbour next door, or a sibling living within the same house. Because personal networks on Facebook (or of professionally gregarious folks such as politicians or salespeople) can include thousands of weak ties, we follow Hogan's (2008a) distinction here, distinguishing between 'personal networks' and our subject, 'personal communities' - consisting of the ties that are meaningful to egos.

Facebook and similar software such as MySpace and Hi5 have privacy issues. Such is the world we live in that communities have become personal and private and yet, in some ways, significantly publicized with friends being announced, shared and recommended across networks. For example, it has become quite common among Facebook friends to peruse one another's personal networks during their free time. This is done by simply clicking on a particular network member's name, and pointing the cursor to that person's network. One hypothesis is that Facebook and MySpace help to facilitate transitive relations, that is, if *ego* knows Bob and Alice, then over time, Bob and Alice will likely get to know each other (Davis, 1970; Holland and Leinhardt, 1977).

So personal communities are personal but are also shared across networks. As this sharing is multiplied, different parts of the social structure overlap and intersect in *ego* as the focal point. Such intertwining possibly breaks down barriers between groups and unites individuals through the sharing of new information and friendship, creating opportunities for developing diverse personal communities - to have diverse friends is to have diverse experiences and all these experiences add to broad and culturally enriching life (Erickson, 2003).

The Community Question

The early nineteenth century was a time of tumultuous change in western societies. Towns and cottages had quickly evolved into industrial centres and were engaged in the mass production of goods and services. Over time, the production and consumer markets became increasingly specialized with workers filling unique occupational roles. Scholars and policymakers feared that interpersonal relations would atrophy as relationships specialized, neighbourhoods were flooded with strangers, and

people turned to governments and large organizations for support. Social scientists feared that this new role-based approach reduced the quality of interpersonal relations within society, leading to a loss of community in a 'lonely crowd' (Tönnies, 1887; Simmel, 1908, 1922; Wirth, 1938; Riesman, 1950; Nisbet, 1953; Wellman, 1979).

While compelling, these fears rarely were based on systematic evaluation of people's everyday lives. In the 1960s, several well-known studies challenged the 'community lost' idea by highlighting the persistence of tight-knit communities in urban street corners and villages. Documenting the lives of working-class Londoners (Young and Willmot, 1957), Italian-American 'urban villagers' (Gans, 1962), suburban white Americans (Gans, 1967), and African-American men on a Washington D.C. street corner (Liebow, 1967), these scholars showed that local communities were still prevalent in modern cities. Their detailed ethnographies portrayed neighbourhoods as rich sites of social contact filled with active kinship and friendship relations.

Although these ethnographies were successful in demonstrating the persistence of community, by adhering to a neighbourhood-based approach, they neglected other important bases of community such as workplaces, voluntary organizations and online worlds. Moreover, by treating communities as coterminous with spatially-defined neighbourhoods, they deflected attention away from the large number of friendship and kinship ties that were not local. With the development of concrete highways crisscrossing cities, the metropolis increasingly came to be a decentralized network of edge cities expanding beyond an inner core of office buildings and infrastructure (Craven and Wellman, 1973; Greer, 1962; Fishman, 1995). On a wider scale, globalized communication and extensive air-travel have now come to facilitate the growth of transnational networks and entrepreneurial activity across continents (Wong, 1997; Chen, 2006). Immigration need not imply the loss of ties with the home country but rather the expansion of personal communities to include both host and home country ties (Salaff, Fong and Wong, 1999).

The historical trajectory of community formation can be seen as a series of three ideal types, reflecting changes in technology and human mobility. The first type, 'little boxes', was especially prevalent before the advent of the telephone. It involved reaching others through traveling by foot (or horseback), trudging from door to door.

In the second type, 'glocalization', the telephone, car and plane liberated a portion of this constraint and allowed communications to take place between households (Wellman and Tindall, 1993). However, one characteristic of the telephone was that the person on the other side may not actually be the intended recipient but the family member who happened to be nearest the ringing phone. Thus, such interactions – whether mediated by phone, car or plane – were 'place-to-place', involving the entire household.

> Figure 1 about here: Three Forms of Networked Communities <

A third type has proliferated in the past decade. With the widespread use of the internet and mobile phones, people may be reached directly, creating a situation whereby 'networked individuals' communicate as individuals. Such 'person-to-person' interactions create a unique way of life. They privilege interpersonal interaction among individuals rather than interactions between households. It is common to see individuals conversing on their mobile phones while walking down

the street and sending emails through their phones while on the run – not isolated, but connected (see Wellman, Hogan, Berg, Boase, Carrasco, Côté, Kayahara, Kennedy and Tran, 2006). With person-to-person affordances, people remain reachable regardless of their physical location. As to whether such accessibility is a boon or bane remains an open question. While some scholars argue that person-to-person affordances create flexibility in social relations and work schedules, others have pointed to the social control that such affordances create by allowing people to be located and contacted at any time and almost any place. (Olson-Buchanan and Boswell, 2006). For example, software tools such as Google Latitudes can immediately inform egos about the location of others in their personal communities.

Personal Communities Online and Offline Communities

For a while, many viewed the internet as a realm separate from the concreteness of the physical world. For example, some pundits imagined the internet as a sacred forum of interaction that would make socio-economic status markers arcane and time constraints irrelevant while simultaneously bringing together diverse people with shared interests (Turkle, 2005; Rheingold, 2000; see the review in Wellman and Hogan, 2004).

Although we still deal with media queries about the supposedly isolating nature of the media (e.g., Anderssen, 2009), research has made it clear that the internet is in fact seamlessly integrated with personal communities and is rarely a separate second life in itself (Veenhof, Wellman, Quell and Hogan, 2008; Quan-Haase and Wellman, 2002). One over-time study shows that for Americans, the mean number of friends in weekly in-person contact has increased by 20 percent between 2002 and 2007: from 9.4 to 11.3 friends. Moreover, the increase in the number of friends is greater as the amount of internet activity increases. For example, heavy internet users had a 38 percent increase in the number of friends during this period (from 9.0 to 12.4) while non-users had a more modest 7 percent increase (from 9.5 to 10.2). Not only do internet users have more friends, but their increase in the number of friends is growing (Wang and Wellman, 2009).

The internet not only enables people to maintain and strengthen existing ties but it also aids in forging new ties. The time that people spend online is not reducing time spent in face-to-face contact but rather is redeploying time formerly spent in less social activities such as eating, television watching and sleeping (Boase, Horrigan, Wellman and Rainie, 2006; Rainie and Wellman, 2010). However, one large Canadian study did show heavy internet users spending somewhat less time seeing friends and family (Veenhof et al, 2008). Whether or not there is some time displacement from the internet, it is now apparent that the addition of internet and mobile phone communication to traditional face-to-face and phone contact means that there is more overall communication between friends and relatives now than before the coming of the internet. Interactions via information and communication technologies (ICTs) have become cheaper, quicker and much more efficient than visiting, telephoning to households, or writing letters the old fashioned pen-to-paper way (Quan-Haase and Wellman, 2002; Wang and Wellman, 2009; Boase et al., 2006; Baron, 2008; Stern, 2008; Collins and Wellman, 2009).

Despite increases in online and offline communications with the flourishing of the internet, analysts continue to fear that online communication will replace face-to-face

interaction among individuals, particularly among household members (McPherson et al., 2006; Putnam, 2000; Sigman, 2009). Yet, this fear is unfounded, as the isolation of heavy users from the rest of the household is a concern only for some computer users and disappears with experience (Kraut et al., 2002; Veenhof, Wellman, Quell and Hogan, 2008). Moreover, internet users usually report that the internet makes life easier, more social, makes learning easier, and facilitates the connection of members within a personal community (Wellman et al., 2006; Collins and Wellman, 2009; the many reports at www.pewinternet.org). Studies in both Canada and the United States show that the most popular things to do online are 'learning new things', followed closely by 'connecting with friends' and 'connecting with relatives' (Wellman and Hogan, et al., 2006; Jones and Fox, 2009). In fact, most relationships formed via face-to-face interactions during the day are continued and extended via ICTs such as emailing, texting, instant messaging, or calling via mobile phones. Therefore, ICTs add on to face-to-face contact, rather than replace it (Quan-Haase and Wellman, 2002; Wellman and Hogan, 2004; Wang and Wellman, 2009; Boase et al., 2006).

In addition to concerns over the isolation of individuals and the demise of community, the increasing use of the internet as a communication medium has made distance a less limiting constraint on communication. The social affordances associated with email include high velocity and zero additional costs above the monthly rate, the ability to contact many people at once (and for those contacted to respond to one or to many), the ability of communications to be stored and retrieved later, the lack of visual and audio barriers to making contact, and the ease of contacting, replying and forwarding (Wellman, 1999; Wellman, 2001a, 2001b). Such affordances make communication between people rather accessible regardless of the distance separating them (Gotham and Brumley, 2002). On average, email contact is insensitive to distance although other modes of communication are not. Face-to-face contact drops off after a 5 mile cut-off point, phone contact is most sensitive only within 100 miles, and email is largely insensitive to distance (Mok, Wellman and Carrasco, 2009).

The issue of how the internet affects communication at a distance is especially salient in the 21st century as many people consider themselves global citizens of multiple countries. Prior to the internet, migration over long distances meant a disruption to relationships in one's personal community because visits and continuous contact were expensive and cumbersome (Hiller and Franz, 2004). More recently, the notion of transnational community has replaced the old concept of migration as severing social ties (Castles and Davidson, 2000; Levitt, 2001; Chen and Wellman, 2009). Immigrants and rural people particularly value the internet's effortless long-distance connectivity (Stern, 2008; Stern and Messer, 2009; Collins and Wellman, 2009; Veenhof, et al., 2008).

One of the key factors supporting this transformation has been the revolution in internet communication. For example, the 2003 General Social Survey found that 56 percent of Canadians aged 25 to 54 who immigrated to Canada between 1990 and 2003 used the internet in the previous month to communicate with friends, as compared with only 48 percent of Canadian-born individuals (Veenhof, et al., 2008). It is now possible to return home to Trinidad (Miller and Slater, 2000), the Philippines (Ignacio, 2005) or anywhere else in the world, by virtual visits via webcam, email or to share electronic photographs through online networking sites

such as MySpace and Flickr. It is no longer necessary to rely solely on memories and letters to remain connected with friends and folk back home.

The result of the internet revolution – coupled with the proliferation of car, phone and plane contact – means that the physical boundaries of neighbourhoods, towns or cities no longer confine personal communities. Instead, they are based on ties of differing strength spanning city boundaries, country borders, seas and oceans. Personal community ties are maintained both online and offline, with relationships formed online spilling into the physical realm and ties in the physical realm continuing as online interactions (Wellman and Haythornwaite, 2002). To be sure, some ties start online and remain online, but they usually constitute just a small unrepresentative part of a person's personal community. American internet users have on average about four online-only friendship ties (Wang and Wellman, 2009). Critics of involvement with online ties often fail to contextualize the online relationship as a medium of communication, like the telephone, that largely fills the gaps between face-to-face interactions and helps to arrange future meetings (Wellman and Tindall, 1993).

Social networking sites such as Facebook and MySpace are now major sites of communication in North America. They have often superseded email and instant messaging as the main way for students and young adults to keep track and stay connected to their personal communities (Lenhart, Madden and Hitlin, 2005). In Canada, Facebook adoption within urban centres is especially high. Twenty-two percent of Toronto's population (aged 18+), 16 percent of Montreal's population, 32 percent of Vancouver's population and 54 percent of Halifax's population have a Facebook profile (Zinc Research and Dufferin Research, 2008). By contrast, in the United States, 80 percent of visits to all social networking sites are to MySpace (Zinc Research and Dufferin Research, 2008), while elsewhere in the world, Bebo, Hi5, Orkut, Cyworld and Friendster are also popular.

These networking sites do not suppress offline social contact, but are integrated with it as many relationships are migratory – moving from online only to offline and from offline to online. A 26 percent increase in the number of migratory friends reported by heavy internet users, from 2002 to 2007, is one indication of the seamless integration of social networking sites into our daily communication repertoire (Wang and Wellman, 2009).

Can these online-only ties be strong? One older study found that participants felt that their closest friends were members of their electronic group (Hiltz and Turoff, 1993) while more recent data indicates a 132 percent increase in the virtual friends of heavy internet users – from 3.2 in 2002 to 7.4 in 2007 (Wang and Wellman, 2009). In fact, the familiarity, closeness and strength of established online ties often acts to support individuals during major life transitions such as marriage, parenthood or moving (Kendall, 2002).

Collecting Personal Community Data

Collecting personal community data rest on tracing ego's relationships with alters, wherever they may be found. Issues of order and sequencing are critical. Methodologically, the interviewer starts by first asking people who they are related

to, treats that as community, and thereafter collects information about these ties (Wellman, 1979, 2001a, 2001b; Fischer, 1982; Hogan, Carrasco and Wellman, 2007).

The two most popular instruments for collecting personal community data are the name generator (Wellman, 1979; Fischer, 1982; Burt, 1984; Marsden, 1987) and the position generator (Lin and Dumin, 1986; Lin, Fu and Hsung, 2001; Lin and Erickson, 2008). While both of these methods aim at measuring social support and resources embedded within personal communities, there are important methodological and theoretical differences between them.

Name generators ask respondents to provide a list of contacts with whom they share one or more criterion relations, such as 'close with' or 'friendship'. There are two approaches, each differentially affecting the names of the alters elicited (Ferligoj and Hlebec, 1999; Straits, 2000). One approach asks respondents who are their 'best friends' (Laumann, 1973) or socially close 'intimates' (Wellman, 1979). The second approach asks respondents to name alters with whom they exchange specific resources, such as borrowing a large sum of money or getting advice on a work-related decision (Fischer, 1982). The latter approach yields a somewhat larger and more diversified set of names, although at risk of neglecting those who are socially close but do not provide the kinds of supportive resources that are being examined.

Both name generator approaches focus on the core regions of personal networks, although questions about finding a job usually locate a weaker but important set of ties (Granovetter, 1973, 1974, 1982, 1995). Overall, name generators tend to be biased towards eliciting alters who are closer to the respondents, who have known the respondents longer and who know more of the respondents' other alters (Marin, 2004).

Name generators are typically followed up with name interpreters designed to elicit information about each named contact and the nature of the ego-alter relationship (Marsden, 2005). Name interpreters may include items such as the personal characteristics of the named contact (his/her gender, age, education, socioeconomic background), and the attributes describing the tie, things such as the role-relation connecting ego and alter (whether parent, child, relative, coworker, friend or spouse etc), the frequency of contact, level of intimacy, longevity of the tie (Marsden and Campbell, 1984) and the origin of the tie (Fischer, 1982).

Although name generators gather detailed information about individuals in ego's network, this can be tedious. One innovation has been to use 'participant-aided sociograms' (Hogan, Carrasco and Wellman, 2007). With just paper, pencil and removable tags, this low-technology method requires respondents to place their contacts within a given set of concentric circles, each circle representing a different level of intimacy (Figure 2). While laptop computers were initially used, pretests showed that they made many respondents uncomfortable. Hence, the research team used paper and pencil. Respondents started by providing a list of names, each of which was written on removable Post-It notes. These tags were then placed within the concentric circles and adjusted iteratively as respondents added other names to the chart. Such an iterative approach induces respondents to think about their alters in relation to one another as well as to themselves. Given that people tend to classify alters according to groups (McCarty, 2002) it became relatively easy to collect all the relevant alter information once every name was set in place.

> Figure 2 about here: Concentric Zone Paper & Pencil Way of Collecting Personal Community Data <

By contrast to the name generator approach, the position generator approach asks respondents to report whether or not they have linkages to specific locations in the social structure (Lin and Erickson, 2008). Operationally, the position generator asks respondents if they know any alter who has a selected set of low to high-status occupations: 'lawyer', 'security guard', 'cashier', 'physician', 'secretary' etc. Cultural variations in occupations notwithstanding, position generators should be designed with several principles in mind: (a) choose occupations that suitably cover a range of low to high prestige occupations; (b) select those occupations that have fairly large populations so that respondents have a reasonable chance of knowing a person in that occupational category; (c) ensure that occupations have clear titles that all respondents will understand; (d) create a list that is fairly long since adding more occupations will hardly increase data collection time (Erickson, 2004b).

While name and position generators each provide a 'rich record of the social locations and hence resources in this part of a person's network' (Lin and Erickson, 2008: 12), there are important differences between them. Name generators tend to be more demanding because of the name interpreters that follow. In practice, people can usually give detailed reports only on a small number of connections, typically as few as three to five strong ties, and rarely more than a dozen or so (see Lin and Erickson, 2008: 12). By contrast, position generators are easier to administer and are better suited for measuring weak ties. Structurally, weak ties are more likely to bridge race, gender and class divides, and are channels through which individuals gain access to important resources (Granovetter, 1973; Lin and Dumin, 1986; Erickson, 2004a; Moren-Cross and Lin, 2008).

Other ways to collect personal community data include the more recent contact diary and resource generator approaches. One study using the contact diary approach asked respondents to keep records of every single interpersonal contact daily for three to four consecutive months (Fu, 2008). While a labour-intensive task, the information valuably captures a whole range of strong, medium and weak ties which may not appear in either a name generator or position generator. Relative to the name generator which tends to elicit strong ties and the position generator which tends to elicit weaker ties, the contact diary is a third way. It is particularly useful for measuring 'seasonal' contacts of weak to medium strength, such as a tax consultant or a summer vacation friend.

The resource generator is another effort to combine aspects of the position generator (its economy and extensive reach) and the name generator (its detailed resource information) (van der Gaag and Snijders, 2005). Operationally, a resource generator measures the extent to which an individual has access to specific resources such as whether he/she knows anyone who 'can repair a car' or 'play an instrument' or 'has knowledge of literature' etc (van der Gaag and Snijders, 2005). One advantage of the resource generator is that it is easier to administer than a name generator and more concrete and directly interpretable than a position generator. In general, resource generator measures are more likely to be related to expressive and personal skills-related types of social capital while position generator measures are most related to prestige- and education-related resources (van der Gaag, Snijders and Flap, 2008).

What Do Personal Communities Look Like?

Name generator studies began in earnest by the late 1960s. Within a decade, several personal community studies appeared, such as Edward Laumann's Detroit-area study (1973), Barry Wellman's first East York (Toronto) study (1979), and Claude Fischer's Detroit and northern California studies (Fischer et al. 1977, Fischer, 1982). These studies treated communities as personal communities and found them to comprise a variety of ties with friends, kin, neighbours and workmates.

Geographically dispersed – Contemporary communities are rarely found within neighbourhoods alone, but extend to include a significant number of network members living as far as an hour's drive or even a few continents away (Fischer, 1982; Salaff, Fong and Wong, 1999). Short distances remain advantageous because they facilitate face-to-face conversations and exchanges of goods and services. Where such contact is not readily available, there is always the internet. The Connected Lives study of personal communities in Toronto found that email contact is generally insensitive to distance, though it tends to increase for transoceanic relationships greater than 3,000 miles apart. The study also shows that email has only somewhat altered the way people maintain their relationships (Mok, Wellman and Carrasco, 2009). Transnational families see ICTs as improving the overall quantity and quality of contact – they encourage a wider range of kin to become involved in kin work typically performed by women and strengthen bonds between family members separated by distance (Wilding, 2006). Despite the ostensibly impersonal nature of email, people continue to integrate their email contact with face-to-face meetings and phone calls in everyday life. With such integration, personal communities are becoming more 'glocalized' – both extensively global and intensely local (Wellman, 2001a, 2001b; Hampton and Wellman, 2002, 2003; Wellman and Hogan, et al., 2006; Collins and Wellman, 2009).

Sparsely knit – Many personal communities are 'sparsely knit', meaning that most network members are not tightly linked to one another. A 1968 study in Toronto found that among socially close intimates, only one-third of all possible alter-to-alter links were present (Wellman, 1979; Wellman, Carrington and Hall, 1988). A 1979 re-study in the same area, found density to be even lower, at 0.13, although the study investigated a larger set of alters, including somewhat less socially close ties: the larger the network, the less likely that two alters would be connected (Wellman, 2001b).

Personal communities are often segregated, with distinct clusters of activity and interests. Kin may rarely know friends, and some friends may not know each other. At times, segregation allows egos to maintain clandestine associations with friends unbeknown to ego's inner circle (Hannerz, 1980). It is possible that social networking websites such as Facebook (which fosters mixing and sharing of friends across networks) will mitigate such segregation.

Specialized ties – Personal communities are usually specialized, with different community members supplying different kinds of social support (Wellman and Wortley, 1990). In these specialized relationships, the guiding principle is 'tit-for-tit' and not 'tit-for-tat': people tend to reciprocate with the same kind of help that an alter has given to them (Plickert, Côté and Wellman, 2007). In general, neighbours

are well-suited for handling unexpected emergencies because their proximity to ego enables them to react quickly with goods and services. Apart from that, neighbours are not usually good friends - their help typically arises out of convenience (Wellman and Wortley, 1990). Kinship is a bastion of emotional and long-term support: parents and adult children exchange financial aid, emotional aid, large services and small services involving things such as childcare and financial support (Wellman, 1990; Wellman and Wortley, 1990). Extended kin provide virtually no help. Spouses supply each other with many types of support (Wellman and Wellman, 1992). Friends are valued as confidants and social companions, especially among singles (de Vries, 1996). They are also valued for the non-redundant information they sometimes provide about job openings and housing vacancies (Granovetter, 1995; Ruan et al., 1997).

A few ties among many - While most Americans can name 200 to 300 alters in their personal networks (McCarty et al., 2001), personal community studies examine at most a small percentage of ties that are intimate and active. Depending on the actual study design, different name generator strategies elicit different kinds and numbers of names (Straits, 2000). For example, Fischer's (1982) North California study, which used a diverse set of ten name generators, elicited a mean of 12.8 names per person. A more recent study by Hogan, Carrasco and Wellman (2007) elicited six to sixty-six unique names. Yet, in neither case do the numbers approach the possibly thousand names that could comprise a network (Boissevain, 1974) or even the much smaller 150 ties that British anthropologist, Robin Dunbar (1996) posits as the maximum number of members that cohesive groups (such as subsistence villages, nomadic tribes, and military units) can successfully accommodate before disintegrating.

People like us - Personal relations are more homogeneous than chance would predict (Blau, 1977; Marsden, 1988). In everyday life, egos and alters are typically matched on attributes such as race, class and cultural interests (Lin and Dumin, 1986; Erickson, 1988; Marsden, 1988). There are two ideal-typical sources of observed homophily. On one hand, there is the role of choice. Interestingly, the root meaning of the word homophily is 'love for the same', implying the central role of personal preferences influencing friendship formation. Yet, the circumstances and situations in which individuals find themselves also influence homogeneous networks (Feld, 1981; McPherson and Smith-Lovin, 1987; Grossetti, 2005). Often, these social contexts are already pre-sorted according to some specific set of personal attributes. For example, institutions such as workplaces, schools, neighbourhoods and voluntary organizations tend to bring people of similar education, age, race and gender together, creating a relatively homogenous pool of 'eligibles' from which choice then exerts its secondary impact (Feld, 1981; McPherson and Smith-Lovin, 1987; Laumann et al., 1994). Depending on the context, some aspects of homophily may be more salient than others. At least in the United States, racial homophily is a robust phenomenon (Moren-Cross and Lin, 2008). Strong racial segregation in America is evidenced by studies showing the significant lack of intermarriage particularly between whites and blacks (Berry, 2006), the persistence of racially segregated networks in labour markets (Tilly, 1998), and the durability of racial clustering in school cafeterias and neighbourhoods (Clack, Dixon and Tredoux, 2005; Wilson, 1987; Massey and Denton, 1993).

Yet many ties cut across homogeneous groups, and such ties both help prevent homogeneous clusters from becoming insular and also integrate social systems by

providing links between groups (Ferrand, Mounier and Degenne, 1999; Granovetter, 1973; Laumann, 1973). Homophily on one dimension will not guarantee homophily on other dimensions.

The question then is why are some dimensions of homophily more important than others in influencing the formation and maintenance of ties – for instance, why are social relations, at least in North American society, more likely to unfold along class and ethnic rather than religious lines? One answer is that class and ethnic-homophilous networks often coincide with access to important resources. In everyday life, dominant ethnic group and class elites often make use of their in-group associations to hoard valuable resources for themselves at the expense of disadvantaged groups (Kadushin, 1995; Tilly, 1998). Meanwhile, lower-status groups (typically ethnic minorities) tend to rely on their important but less strategic networks to find jobs (Elliot, 1999), exchange small services (among themselves), and cope with unexpected life events (Espinoza, 1999).

Variation in network composition by individuals' social location – The composition of personal networks differs according to individuals' social location. On average, men and women have the same number of alters (Fischer and Oliker, 1983; Marsden, 1987), but differences exist in the composition and dynamics of these networks. American women tend to have more kin (Marsden, 1987; Moore, 1990), and they are also active networkers with their kin (Wellman, 1985; Moore, 1990). Even as dual-income households have become common, women still have more ties with neighbours and extended kin, relative to men who have more coworkers (Fischer, 1982; Moore, 1990). In France, while men confide in workmates about as much as they confide in kin, women are three times more likely to confide in kin than in workmates (Ferrand, Mounier and Degenne, 1999). Concerning gender, in Taiwan, women tend to have less access to influential contacts relative to men, because they are less likely to be in the workforce and more likely to be tied down with household obligations (Lin, Fu and Hsung, 2001).

Personal communities differ according to stages in the life course such age, marriage and parenthood. Marriage and early parenthood often entail high levels of commitment to kin, exerting strenuous demands on both time and energy for both spouses (de Vries, 1996). Whereas singles use weekends for socializing with friends, married couples use weekends and weekday evenings for childcare and visits to their parents and in-laws. Particularly for working mothers, there is hardly time after working hours to spend socializing with friends (Hochschild, 1997). When mothers are pressed for time, it is friendship that gives way and kinship that remains (Wellman, 1985).

Age is also an important predictor of network composition. Older people tend to have smaller networks because retirement removes an important sphere of non-kin contact in workplaces (Pickard, 1995), and their participation in voluntary organizations declines significantly (Mirowsky and Ross, 1999). Young single people tend to have larger and more diverse networks because they tend to gravitate towards cities (Fischer, 1982) and are more likely to have friend-centered networks (de Vries, 1996).

Personal communities also differ by egos' income, education and ethnicity. The wealthy and educated have more friends and acquaintances than the less well-off

(Fischer, 1982; Moore, 1990). People with higher education are more likely to know people from a greater diversity of occupations (Lin and Dumin, 1986) and to know high-status people (Ferrand, Mounier and Degenne, 1999). Ethnic minorities such as African-Americans and Hispanic-Americans tend to have less access to high-status contacts than whites (Lin, 2000; Erickson, 2004a; Moren-Cross and Lin, 2008). African-Americans' networks are highly focused on kin and neighbours (Martineau 1977; Lee, Campbell, and Miller, 1991). Consequently, their networks tend to be more dense and localized (Stack, 1974; Martineau, 1977; Green, Tigges and Browne, 1995).

Variation in networks by national context – Institutional contexts affect the manner in which individuals build their personal communities. Changes in these institutions are usually accompanied by changes in network composition. For example, as the Chinese economy began its shift from socialist to free-market, people became more likely to discuss important matters with friends rather than coworkers or kin. Within the space of just seven years, the percentage of friends within the observed Tianjin-based networks had increased from 5 percent in 1986 to 34 percent in 1993 – a 700 percent change (Ruan et al., 1997). In an increasingly capitalist economy, Chinese workers have gravitated towards friends and activating new forms of guanxi that can serve as better bridges to job opportunities (also see Wellman, Chen and Dong, 2002; Gold, Guthrie and Wank, 2002). At the same time, with state-driven work-assignment programs being gradually phased out, the role of coworkers has receded, with strong friendship ties becoming more important (Bian, 2002).

The former East Germany provides another case. Before the fall of the Berlin Wall, East German personal communities were characterized by distinct niche and provisioning components. Whereas the niche component was a set of densely knit ties that the East Germans used circumspectly while exchanging sensitive political views among close friends and relatives, the provisioning component was a set of sparsely knit ties that they used to garner instrumental resources such as job information and financial aid. This all changed after the fall of communism when the East Germans' personal communities were no longer linked to highly-controlled institutional conditions. As a result, differences between niche and weaker ties began to disappear (Völker and Flap, 2001).

Israeli networks are more densely knit than American networks, possibly because of Israel's more communitarian ethos (Fischer and Shavit, 1995). One downside with such a cultural explanation is that it obscures the important role of institutions influencing the composition of personal communities. We underscore that more work needs to be done to understand how institutions and culture interact to produce variations in network composition.

Friendship and Kinship in Personal Communities

The upsurge of education and physical mobility in contemporary times has not suppressed the importance of family in personal communities. Kinship continues to be important even among socially mobile people. In the United States, highly-educated individuals continue to consult immediate kin on important matters (McPherson, Smith-Lovin and Brashears, 2006). In Tehran, kin remains central among middle-class Iranians who share social and economic resources amid unstable state conditions (Bastani, 2007). In Toulouse, France, kin predominate in personal communities, especially among highly-educated individuals (Grossetti, 2007). Both

kinship and friendship remain important in German modern life, working interdependently with family to provide a range of social and emotional resources to egos (Hennig, 2007). One reason why kinship and friendship are so complementary is that they constitute somewhat distinct systems of activity characterized by relatively unique structural properties, exchange processes, and resources.

Differences in structure – In general, kinship networks tend to be densely knit clusters characterized by close bonds between network members, while friendship networks tend to be characterized by sparsely knit nodes creating ‘holes’ within broad network structures (Burt, 1992). Given that family and friends are important in everyday life, both aspects of network structure are typically found within many personal communities – they are characterized by a dense inner core comprising immediate kin and a separate middle and outer core comprising a range of close to superficial friendship relations (Wellman and Wortley, 1990; Bastani, 2007; Hennig, 2007; Grossetti, 2007; Hogan, 2008b).

Differences in exchange processes - Kinship and friendship tend to be marked by distinct exchange processes, due in part to the kinds of structural contexts in which they are embedded. Because between-kin relations are more likely to revolve around densely knit contexts, these ties are mostly governed by diffuse reciprocity norms whereby favours given to a beneficiary are not repaid directly by the beneficiary him/herself, but by other community members (Uehara, 1990). To be sure, such norms could well apply to a group of friends as well, but on average, kinship networks tend to be more densely knit (Wellman and Wortley, 1990; Bastani, 2007). As compared to kinship, friendship networks are generally more likely to be governed by direct reciprocity norms, whereby favours are usually repaid quickly and directly to the giver (Plickert, Côté, and Wellman, 2007).

Differences in resources – Friendship and kinship networks tend to be repositories of different kinds of resources (Wellman and Wortley, 1990). Kinship are typically cohesive networks, high on solidarity, trust and commitment, whereas friends and acquaintances are more likely to constitute loosely-coupled networks that provide channels to things such as job information and other novel opportunities (Granovetter, 1973). In many instances, friendship networks serve as bridges connecting individuals to different strata of society, thus facilitating social mobility (Lin and Dumin, 1986; Bian, 1997; Ferrand, Mounier and Degenne, 1999). That said, friendship is not purely instrumentalist, nor is kinship purely affective. In practice, the emotional versus instrumentalist distinction between friendship and kinship is more fluid. Often, friends make good social companions and providers of emotional support (Wellman and Wortley, 1990; Ferrand, Mounier and Degenne, 1999), while immediate kin can be important sources of instrumental support particularly in the areas of financial aid and knowledge acquisition (Coleman, 1988; Wellman and Wortley, 1990).

Consequences of Personal Communities

Personal community and social support - Personal communities are important to the routine operations of households, crucial to the management of crises, and sometimes instrumental in helping change situations. They provide havens: a sense of belonging and being helped. People count on family and close friends to provide routine emotional aid and small services that help cope with a variety of stresses and

strains. For example, when faced with a medical crisis, people typically consult close friends and family. These network members constitute a 'therapy managing group' (Pescosolido, 1992: 1124), and are important partners in the health management process (Pescosolido, 1992; Antonucci and Akiyama, 1995; Rainie and Wellman 2010).

Personal communities can also help to change situations. As conduits through which resources such as money, skills, information and services are exchanged, personal communities can often lead to enhanced life chances such as receiving advice on important matters (Fischer, 1982), having more diverse knowledge (Erickson, 1996) and getting a job (Granovetter, 1995). They are useful for negotiating barriers in everyday life such as formal bureaucratic structures. In pre-market China, close connections with influential friends and family were often invoked to expedite illegal job changes amid tight governmental control (Bian, 1997). In post-communist Hungary, taxi drivers in Budapest deployed networks to protest against raised gasoline prices. With the help of their radio networks, these taxi drivers were able to mount a unified revolt against the government, bringing the city to a halt until a compromise was reached (Sik and Wellman, 1999). During the authoritarian regime in Santiago, Chile, neighbours provided each another with food and childcare, as well as help in building homes and finding work (Espinoza, 1999).

Personal community and inequality - While personal communities are channels for the transmission of many benefits, they are also conduits for social control and the reproduction of inequalities. They can be mechanisms through which inequalities are transmitted in the labour market. With many employers preferring to use insider networks in addition to formal hiring methods, personal recommendations have become a popular form of hiring in both high-end and low-end jobs (Burt, 1997; Fernandez, Castilla and Moore, 2000; Erickson, 2001). From the employer's point of view, networks are perceived to lower screening costs and ensure good quality candidates (Fernandez, Castilla and Moore, 2000), but this practice can be disadvantageous to alternative candidates without equivalent connections.

In job searches, information holders with diverse networks (knows others from a wide range of occupations) and specialized networks (knows others within the same industry) are more likely to be aware of job openings, but they do not necessarily identify potential applicants nor share these job openings with job-seekers (Marin, 2008). Much depends on whether information holders are willing to share their information. Sometimes, they may be reluctant to share because they think that the job seekers are not reliable and will not be good candidates (Smith, 2005,

Homogeneous networks often reproduce inequalities in job searches. Consider gender homophily in organizations. Male managers are more likely to recommend members of their 'old-boy networks' into their ranks, preventing aspiring female candidates from attaining high positions even though they may be equally or more qualified (Reskin and McBrier, 2000). Here, an over-reliance on networks suppresses the impact of meritocratic hiring, preventing women from gaining access to managerial positions. Still, companies continue to actively use networks because job contacts are perceived to provide tacit information about candidates and their abilities (Fernandez, Castilla and Moore, 2000).

Another way through which job inequalities are reproduced is via class homogeneous networks (Lin and Dumin, 1986; Wright and Cho, 1992). Homogeneous class-stratified networks are especially disadvantageous for lower-status groups, who tend to have relatively little access to higher-status contacts (Ferrand, Mounier and Degenne, 1999; Lin, 2001). Given their relative lack of education, the job success of lower-status job-seekers is often closely bound up with their ability to reach up to more influential contacts. Yet, this rate of reaching up is often quite low (see Lin, 2000: 787). Similar disadvantages apply to lower-status ethnic groups. While lower-status ethnic groups tend to experience greater job success when they use contacts from high-status ethnic groups (Ooka and Wellman, 2006), the preponderance of ethnically homogeneous networks in labour markets and 'ethnic economies' suggests that ethnic minorities do face difficulties establishing ties with individuals from higher-status ethnic groups (Light and Gold, 2000).

Personal community and diverse functions – A personal community typically comprises a dual combination of network arrangements, differentiated roughly by an inner and outer core. The inner core tends to comprise ties with multiple role relations knotted together in densely knit clusters, while the outer core tends to comprise specialized ties in sparsely knit network structures (Wellman and Wortley, 1990; Hogan, 2008b). As modern societies have become differentiated, the functions of personal communities have likewise become specialized and diverse. It is not that personal communities have declined in contemporary times, they have complex structures and processes.

Reflecting modern trends in marketing and community, individuals now shop for support at specialized interpersonal boutiques rather than at general stores. Diverse ties fulfill diverse functions. Strong ties in the form of immediate kin are typically associated with long term care and small services. Friends, siblings and organizational members, especially those with strong ties, are likely to be social companions. Physically accessible relations are more likely to provide large and small services and women are more likely to provide emotional aid. As necessarily individual managers of their personal communities, people come to learn about what kinds of networks work for what kinds of purposes, and thereby invest in diverse combinations of relationships in accordance with their priorities and needs in life.

Conclusions

Personal communities are personal. And yet, they are also intensively social, spanning continents, social divisions, and other networks. In reality, personal communities are not like the thousands of isolated islands in the Indonesian archipelago. Rather, they overlap with other social networks to create a system of social interactions resembling a loosely coupled but unmistakably linked social whole (see Wellman, 1988). The birth and development of communication technologies such as the internet, email, mobile phones and smartphones are social affordances which now allow people to build communities in new and exciting ways. Because these technologies enable people to talk over large distances as well as keep short-distance ties, distance has become less of a barrier to the cultivation and maintenance of personal communities (Mok, Wellman and Carrasco, 2009).

With the explosive growth of technologies and social affordances such as the internet and the mobile phone, the contemporary world is undergoing a 'triple revolution': an internet revolution, a mobile revolution and a social network revolution (Rainie and Wellman, 2010). The internet revolution has opened up renewed ways of communicating and finding information. The power of knowledge is no longer the monopoly of professionals, since common folk can now engage the internet and compare research notes with their healthcare and financial experts. This internet revolution is bound up with the mobile revolution which allows individuals to communicate and gather information while on the move. With greater connectivity all around, people can engage their networks and access information regardless of their physical location. Home bases are still important as sources of ideas and inspiration, but the mobile revolution ensures that people never lose touch with either home-base or their other important social worlds.

These technological changes are in reciprocal acceleration with the social network revolution. While social networks have always been with us, the internet and mobile revolutions are both weakening group boundaries and expanding the reach, number and velocity of interpersonal ties. Modern individuals have become networked individualists managing their personal communities with the help of communication technologies as social affordances. Taken together, the personal community approach accurately reflects the habits of modern people who are profoundly and individually mobile and networked.

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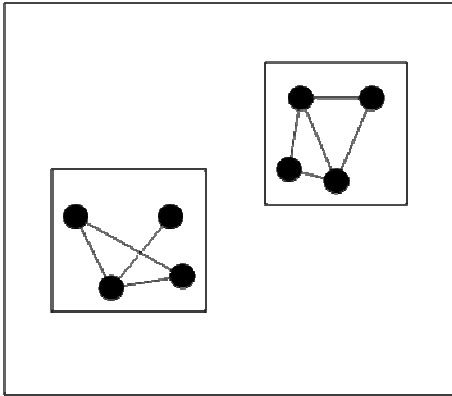
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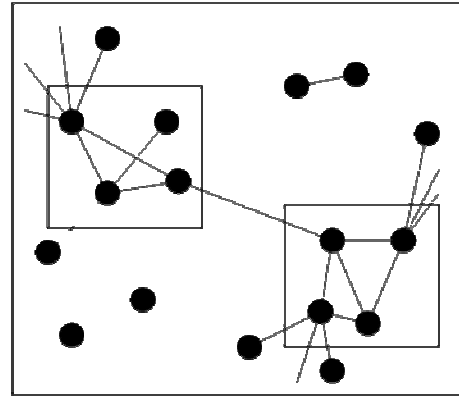
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Little Boxes



Glocalization



Networked Individualism

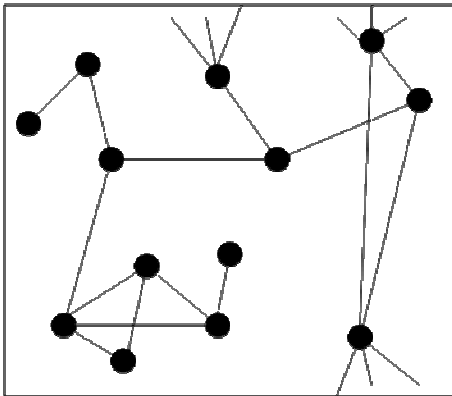


Figure 1: Three Forms of Networked Communities

Figure 2: Concentric Zone Paper & Pencil Way of Collecting Personal Community Data

