The Relational Fabric of Community

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To my dear wife, Josie, for her constant support and encouragement
and
my late mother, Ida, for her immense respect for education

Foreword

The notion of community has been the subject of longstanding contestation and debate. It has commanded the attention of innumerable social theorists, philosophers, and development practitioners. The sheer volume of academic and practice-based work on community attests to its intrinsically complex, nuanced, and ubiquitous presence. The word "community" is widely used, but it is far from uniform in meaning. And, while there is little promise or necessity that the vagaries of the community concept will ever be reconciled, there is considerable value in exploring different interpretations of this fundamental aspect of human social existence. The overarching goal of this book is to explore the relational underpinnings of community theory. Few would disagree that social relations are foundational to emergent community life. The ensuing discussion of theoretical material constitutes a "dialogue of texts" on relationality and community. And, while such an undertaking could never hope to be exhaustive, it can identify key themes of discourse on the relational fabric of community. The core thesis is that community is inherently relational in its continuous emergence, dynamism, and transformation. The "being-with" of relational social life is the basis upon which all conceptions of community are built, and it is the epicenter around which the book revolves. Community is a direct reflection and outcome of the basic human inclination to enter into relation with one another. At one moment, community may seem quite ethereal or, perhaps even, absent, while at other times, it can be experienced as something undeniably solid, obdurate, and resistant to change. This is the enigma of community.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction: The Enigma of Community

Community is one of the most heavily contested concepts in the social sciences (Bessant, 2015). It has been the subject of relentless debate, in part, because it is entwined with multifold themes of discourse on individual freedom, human (self) development, associational life, and collective action. Community evokes an expansive range of meanings and affective responses, alternately embraced as something intrinsically good or even utopic and, at other times, challenged in light of its potentially totalizing character. Concerns continue to resurface over the prospective emphasis on commonality and unity at the expense of diversity and difference. Hiddleston (2005) points to the mistrust and subsequent deconstruction of community proffered by authors such as Jacques Derrida, Jean-Luc Nancy, and Maurice Blanchot. As Selznick (2002) remarks, the notion of community is "frustratingly vague, elusive, even dangerous" (p. 16).

Much has been written about the impact of wide-scale transformative processes (e.g., urbanization and industrialization) on the nature of social relations. Some time ago, Warren (1978) argued that escalating extra-community institutional linkages were contributing to reduced autonomy and cohesion, otherwise known as "*the great change*" (p. 53). Berger (1988) similarly suggests that modernism brought about a notable decline in close-knit community relations in favor of more diffuse or partial involvements in diverse collectivities. The traditional view of localized, self-contained communities has become increasingly outmoded in light of

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the growing interpenetration of all sectors of organized social life. However, the claimed disintegration or loss of community has not completely eradicated the search for some deeper sense of association, relationship, or belonging (see Bauman, 2001). The convergence of contemporary change dynamics, such as social acceleration, individualization, and hypermobility, calls for a more flexible understanding of community.

The study of community languished somewhat within mainstream sociology during the 1960s and 1970s, but it continues to attract considerable attention (Day & Murdoch, 1993). Day (1998) contends that the rise of communitarianism—during the 1990s—prompted a renewed interest in community. Also, the decoupling of community from place has energized new avenues of thought and inquiry. The expansive body of social science literature on community testifies to its ubiquitous and multifaceted presence throughout the world. Notwithstanding its many meanings, community remains an important signifier of collective social life (Clark, 1973; Liepins, 2000). One of the most compelling aspects of this work concerns the "beingness" of community, most notably its treatment as an emergent entity or a collectively felt sense of "We-ness" (see Buber, 1947/2002; Husserl, 1950/1999). The purpose of this chapter is threefold: (a) to outline some basic attributes and ambiguities associated with the community concept, (b) to contextualize the ongoing debate over the meaning of community within the broader discourse on its "loss" or "decline," and (c) to comment on the role that theory has played in nuancing the interpretation of community.

Conceptualizing Community

Academic discussions of community commonly draw upon a primordial image of intimate social relationships, as contrasted with a more dissociative, contemporary way of life. Tönnies' (1887/1957) quintessential view of *Gemeinschaft* is often cited when authors harken back to a primordial, socially embedded mode of existence that many deem to be fundamentally lost. Delanty (2003) indicates that, from ancient Greek times to the Enlightenment, the idea of community conveyed a "lifeworld" of direct social relationships, commonality, sociality, and belonging, as distinct from the rather stark and distant state. According to Tyler (2006), one of the earliest understandings of community was that of "an *organised body* of people," which shifted, in the Renaissance, to matters of relationship,

shared identity, and common good (pp. 21–22). He remarks that the notion of community did not signify the members of a particular locale until the modern era. And, so, some of the complexity of the community concept stems from the accumulation of its diverse uses, as well as ongoing efforts to reframe its meaning (Tyler, 2006).

Sociological definitions of community during the mid-twentieth century typically outlined very general characteristics or inventories of dimensional criteria. Parsons (1951) refers to community as a "collectivity" of territorially situated people and their daily activities (p. 91). He treats community as a localized context comprising actors who enter into relations with one another through social role complexes (e.g., familial or occupational). In somewhat more elaborate terms, Mercer (1956) offers a list of attributes deemed to be indicative of community: a geographical area, an agglomeration of people, a shared culture, a core set of social institutions, a structure or system, and a functionally interdependent round of existence (pp. 25–26). These and other representations of the time reflect the influence of structural-functionalist and social system-oriented thinking about community.

Hillery (1955) conducted one of the earliest meta-analytic studies aimed at assessing the level of consensus across varied (i.e., 94) definitions of community. He concludes that the most oft-mentioned aspects of community include territory or place, shared social ties, and localized interaction (Hillery, 1955, p. 118). Thus conceived, community constitutes a geospatial locale in which people meet their everyday needs, engage in sustained interaction, and act together in relation to common interests, concerns, or problems. These elements combine to form an archetypal and, for some, a largely antiquated understanding of community. Some thirty years later, Wilkinson (1986, 1991) specified similar criteria: locality, organized social life, and goal-directed collective action. He also acknowledged that contemporary change dynamics were perturbing the core elements of community in the direction of indeterminate geospatial boundaries, escalating extra-local social ties, and a reduced capacity to act together on generalized interests (Wilkinson, 1991, p. 5). Despite these observations, Wilkinson contends that people still live in shared spaces, experience larger society in and through localized social life and, periodically, engage in collective community action.

Contemporary theorists continue to revisit many of the same dimensions of community. Chaskin (2008), for instance, indicates that "local" community can be viewed as a unit of close association, belonging, and

identification; a functionally integrated system of exchange and production; a network or confluence of relations; and an entity capable of collective agency (p. 67). Flora and Flora (2008) likewise define community in terms of place, social organization (or system), and shared identity, with the added caveat that these elements are becoming increasingly disconnected (p. 13). And, so, after more than a century of academic attention, the notion of community remains entwined with, but not limited to, a core set of attributes, albeit not in an integrated fashion. It is important to note that these are but a few of the many conceptions of community that will be discussed in this and the forthcoming chapters.

The effects of shifting social conditions, along with competing and emerging analytical frameworks, have prompted continued discourse on the meaning of community. Ongoing debate has been amplified by the postmodern emphasis on themes of difference, otherness, and diversity. And, furthermore, this expansive body of work has not yielded a coherent set of ideas or explanations (Summers, Clark, & Seiler, 1970), nor has it been adequately cumulative (Bell & Newby, 1972; Day, 1998). Definitional vagaries stem, in part, from an interest in the study of community across a wide range of social, political, and academic circles, not to mention its appropriation for quite varied and sometimes conflicting purposes. The term community is still used to describe everything from relatively isolated rural villages to larger urban centers, as well as neighborhoods, economic associations, groups, networks, online or virtual meeting places, geographical regions, entire nations, and beyond. And, so, despite longstanding attention, consensus has proven largely intractable. Community lacks consistent meaning in everyday conversation, as well as within and across academic disciplines. In light of such variability, community is sometimes viewed simply as shared values, beliefs, or places (see Cohen, 2002).

Over time, theorists have offered increasingly multifold representations of community that extend far beyond the narrowly conceived notion of a spatially localized, integrated system or social unit. Bender (1978) states that community is best understood as “a network of social relations” held together by emotional bonds and feelings of mutuality (p. 7). He believes that community involves the human experience of close self–other relationships, and, so, it cannot be reduced to locality or place. Calhoun (1980) similarly suggests that community has too often been defined as an administratively bounded or geospatially focused population, whereas it is more aptly treated as a configuration of diverse social relations. Clearly, the meaning of community is highly contested; however, as Blumer (1969)

points out, academics who avoid vague or multifaceted concepts neglect to deal with critical aspects of their disciplines. It is important to consider varied perspectives on community in order to develop a more nuanced understanding of this highly complex social phenomenon, particularly with respect to its relational fabric and foundations.

Communities of Place, Interest, and Communion

The notion of community encapsulates interrelated and sometimes contradictory themes of discourse: historical and cultural factors, identity formation, place identification, self–other relations, feelings of mutuality, personal freedom and autonomy, self-expression, pluralism, collective responsibility, and integration, to name but a few (see Selznick, 1996). In general terms, community can be thought of as forming around or emerging out of the many facets of lived relation that ultimately shape its meaning and makeup. Community relations comprise multifold types and intensities of associational life. And, in the absence of definitional agreement, the community concept is applied to diverse modes of association and communal existence. Indeed, there are "weak" and "strong" uses of the term community, for example, loosely connected agglomerations of individuals, as compared to persons bound together by some sense of commonality and collective identification (see Tyler, 2006). The following discussion presents three oft-noted representations of community based on (a) shared space or *place*, (b) common *interests*, and (c) communal bonds or *communion*. Although these intersecting elements do not exhaust the many ways of characterizing community, they offer a basic framework with which to consider its inherent complexities.

Place, Locale, and Shared Space

There is an undeniable relational fabric woven into both place- and non-place-based communities. Early twentieth-century approaches to the study of community typically included some reference to place or local residence, in combination with social, cultural, or social–psychological elements. And, notwithstanding the deterritorialization of community, Christenson, Fendley, and Robinson (1989) contend that the most significant interactions occur within localized spaces. The place-based view of community offers an image of people living in close proximity and going about their daily affairs in ways that bring them into regular contact with one another. Propinquity provides opportunities for community members

to develop social networks through which they can access information, resources, and supports. Sustained interactions within a shared space can, in turn, influence identity formation such that residents come to think of themselves as members of a community (Miller, 1992). It is also possible to conceive of a community as a "functional region" that is socially constituted by local inhabitants' thoughts and actions (Morgan & Moss, 1965, p. 349).

Day and Murdoch (1993) indicate that the notion of "locality" was put forward as a potential surrogate for the somewhat more definitive concept of community. And, although locality was initially interpreted more so in spatial than social terms, it came to correspond more and more closely to earlier understandings of community (Day & Murdoch, 1993). Localities, much like communities, can be viewed as situated complexes of social experiences, meanings, and actions. This is reflected in Murdoch and Pratt's (1993) depiction of locality as a place that exhibits a distinct configuration of economic and cultural features. The spatial aspect of a locality (or community), along with its constituent networks and interactions, can facilitate psychosocial feelings of connectedness and collective identity (see Mattson, 1997). The shared geography of life and living can be a significant basis of commitment and identification. And, notwithstanding escalating patterns of technologically mediated social networks, a notable proportion of face-to-face and online communications are "local" in nature (Wellman, 2005). Communities and their members are embedded within highly complex arrangements of interrelated social relations that affect identities, solidarities, and agential capabilities.

The idea of place intersects with symbolic and interactional facets of community life. Residents can have personal and collective attachments to place stemming from a multitude of experiences associated with the community's built or natural environment and the people with whom they share their lives. Ethno-cultural and linguistic factors are among the many defining attributes of place-based communities, as well as particular features of the physical landscape, local resources, historical events, and other attributes. As Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, and Tipton (1985) point out, communities are constituted by and embedded in the past, and it is because of their history that they can be termed "communities of memory" (pp. 152–153). Through prolonged situated interaction, a community of place can become an important signifier of geopolitical, economic, symbolic, and historical distinctiveness. The sense of identification stemming from material, sociocultural, and relational aspects of community can contribute significantly to feelings of belonging (see May, 2011).

Furthermore, community can be defined in social–psychological and socio-spatial terms, as distinct from treating it narrowly as an areal or geographically bounded "container" of social life. Interaction is perhaps the most essential component of community, regardless of whether it takes the form of a territorially localized context of solidary social relationships or a spatially dispersed network of relations. The relational fabric of community can assume diverse modes or forms, including social interaction, social networks, social bonds, social ties, and intra- or inter-systemic linkages, among others. Interactional dynamics play an important role in the co-constitution of all dimensions of community life. The community concept is quite commonly linked to social interactions that can, over time, assume structural patterns. Indeed, "micro-to-macro" processes are intimately involved in the social construction of organized social life. Whatever else may be said about community, it is a direct expression of intersecting types and levels of social relation.

According to Wellman (2005), the "neighborhood-centered" understanding of community prevailed for a good portion of the twentieth century (p. 53). Place-based communities remain important geopolitical reference points for the sake of service provision, state funding mechanisms, and development initiatives. Localized communities have taken on increased political-economic relevance in light of neoliberal policies of deregulation, fiscal retrenchment, downloading, and reduced service provision (Kelly & Caputo, 2011). Also, people continue to develop place attachments despite new modes of electronic communication and mediated relations (Hoggett, 1997, p. 15). For these and many other reasons, geospatial representations of community life persist within contemporary discussions of theory and development practice (see Matarrita-Cascante & Brennan, 2012).

Common Interest(s)

The interest-based conception of community broadly refers to individuals coming together around a common concern or sentiment with which they identify personally and collectively. Interaction can assume different forms and intensities, ranging from highly durable, localized interpersonal relationships to sporadic, technologically mediated social ties. In some instances, there may be little if any direct contact. The term "community of interest" can be used to describe everything from a loosely connected collection of online "gamers" to a highly integrated, territorially

localized action group. Communities of practice constitute a variant form of interest community insofar as members are collectively involved in exchanging experiences, knowledge, and information about a particular issue. A community of interest can also exist in a legal sense, such as a class action lawsuit among individuals who share a claim typical of the "class" or "group." The members may never have any tangible connection with each other but, in the eyes of the law, they are unified in their joint action. The latter situation differs sharply from a context in which individuals engage in extensive interpersonal interaction and, thereby, experience significant affective relations stemming from a mutual concern. Therefore, the degree of integration or cohesiveness among members of an interest community can vary markedly based on the mode, frequency, and intensity of interaction; levels of personal commitment; and perceptions of relative closeness (i.e., physical or psychological).

With respect to spatially focused communities of interest, Keller (1992) discusses the mobilization of grassroots political action in response to environmental disaster. She introduces the idea of an emergent interest community among inhabitants living within an area of contamination. The newly defined socio-spatial boundaries of such a community can be tied to the interests or goals of those defining the situation. This illustrates the potential for a sense of collective identification to develop around both a common issue and a particular place or locale. A mutually held value can become a key binding factor that draws individuals together in thought and action. The relative degree of solidarity is often viewed as an indicator of "communityness," which suggests that the communalization of a shared interest can facilitate social relationships, cohesiveness, and agency. Messer, Shriver, and Adams (2015) concur that community identification can influence the way in which residents respond to environmental threats, including varied aspects of participation, mobilization, and agency (pp. 317–318).

Also of relevance here are "intentional communities," which Hoggett (1997) defines as a sense of commonality other than (though not necessarily exclusive of) place, for example, shared values, beliefs, and practices (p. 8). This points to the sociocultural and affective dimensions of the community rather than its geospatial facticity. The notion of an intentional community is commonly associated with a group of people who elect to live together in the pursuit of a shared goal, purpose, or preferred mode of collective life. Some examples include ecovillages, communes, cooperatives, and residential land trusts, to name only a few.

These and other communities of choice express varied themes: environmental sustainability, spirituality, economic cooperation, health, and personal development, among others. Brint (2001) notes that members of elective communities may well experience higher levels of support or mutual interest than is typical of communities defined solely on the basis of spatial proximity. However, both forms of community are subject to the related problems of conflict and inequality stemming from differential levels of engagement and commitment.

As an aside, Webber (1963) long ago observed that advances in information, communication, and transport technologies were facilitating sustained interaction patterns over greater distances. He explored the changing character of relations between people and place. Webber (1963) is perhaps best known for introducing the idea of "community without propinquity" into the larger discourse on macro-level social change dynamics (p. 23). To the extent that he focuses on connectivity more so than place, Webber draws attention to emergent communities of interest. Indeed, Silk (1999) suggests that insufficient emphasis has been placed on the ways in which advanced communication technologies have impacted the socio-spatiality or scale of relations, as for example "place-free 'stretched-out'" forms of community (pp. 8–9).

There is a growing body of literature that deals with advances in electronic or computer-mediated communication and the emergence of varied types of specialized network communities. This has prompted questions as to whether place-free, technologically mediated networks can meaningfully approach Tönnies' (1887/1957) sense of *Gemeinschaft*, the latter of which is indicative of people bound together in mutual concern, caring, and relation. Wellman (2001) addresses the issue of how "networked individualism" is influencing interpersonal interaction and, by implication, the nature of community (p. 238). He acknowledges some of the prospective deficiencies of online relations, while noting that they can complement and enhance other forms of social interaction (see Hampton & Wellman, 2003). The increasing incidence of mediated ties reflects the contemporary movement toward more personalized networks (Wellman, 2005).

Bradshaw (2008) coined the term "post-place community" to designate a spatially dispersed network of people who share a sense of solidarity and identity (p. 5). Instead of focusing on place or common residence, he emphasizes that the essential facet of community is the presence of social relations or bonds. Thus conceived, community can exist in the absence of place attachment, but not without some collective sense of

belonging. This idea is loosely related to Anderson's (1991) depiction of a nation as "an imagined political community," given that members maintain a symbolic sense of their interconnectedness in spite of having contact with a relatively small proportion of their fellow inhabitants (p. 6). In this respect, an imagined community comprises a set of individuals who share an "identity sign" (e.g., nationality) that is experienced intersubjectively as a social object (Gleicher, 2011, p. 390). There is a need for more research on the nature of social relations and collective identities that emerge within varied types of non-place-based communities, most notably, technologically mediated (e.g., online) cybercommunities.

Communion

In addition to spatial and interest-based dimensions, community is regularly defined in terms of emotion-laden bonds or communion. Although the concept of "communion" lacks definitive meaning, it is typically associated with affective attachments, common sentiments, or collective (symbolic) identifications. Taylor (2016), for instance, refers to communion as "relations of shared emotional bonding" (p. 55). The general notion of a "community of communion" can be traced to Tönnies' (1887/1957) typification of a primordial, all-encompassing way of life—a "unity of being" premised on *Gemeinschaft* of locality, mind, or kinship (p. 42). He makes a distinction between a community stemming from common "external" or *objective* characteristics (e.g., language or occupation), as compared to the relationship-affirming bonds of a more unifying "internal" or *subjective* nature (Tönnies, 1925/1971, pp. 67–68). And, while people may live in the same location, speak a common language, or pursue a mutual interest, a true sense of *Gemeinschaft* is reflected in the members' collective and conscious sense of belonging together as a group. Tönnies further indicates that the objective attributes of community can give rise to close-knit social relations. By virtue of living, interacting, and working together, individuals can conceivably develop communalized feelings of psychosocial and emotional connectedness.

In direct response to Tonnies' (1887/1957) work, Schmalenbach (1922/1961) addresses the conceptual confusion between "community" and "communion," the latter of which he suggests is intimately linked to emotional dynamics (p. 332). Although he acknowledges that communal bonds possess psychic properties (albeit largely unconscious), Schmalenbach contends that communities are not based on "feelings." He defines community as an association of people whose life experiences coalesce around

matters of kinship, culture, tradition, and place, among other factors, out of which heightened feelings of belonging may emerge. These conditions can engender within individual members the psychic—and perhaps unrecognized—bases of community. By comparison, the relations of communion are far more intense, unstable, and transitory than those of everyday community life. Wild (1981) likewise defines communion as an affectively intense mode of belonging. It is this intersection of affectivity and social relationships that accounts for some of the definitional ambiguity associated with both concepts.

Buber (1947/2002) tends to use the terms "community" and "communion" interchangeably with respect to a deep sense of intersubjective closeness and intimacy. He points to the communalized elaboration of mutual relations and existential openness to others. Communion involves being drawn together in collective responsibility, affinity, and relation. For Buber (1947/2002), genuine community or communion occurs when members turn "unreservedly" to one another in true dialogue (p. 4). This resonates with Stein's (1917/1970) characterization of empathy as "being-turned-toward" and acquiring an understanding of the other (p. 8). Buckley (1992) discusses a related idea with respect to Edmund Husserl's notion of "authentic community," which emerges when individuals are able to build meaningful social relationships and social bonds with one another (pp. 214, 220). In this sense, authentic community exists by virtue of members willing and acting together in the pursuit of a common good (see Bessant, 2011; Hart, 1992). It represents a "higher-order" communal life that is founded on and inseparable from its co-constituents.

Calhoun (1980) makes the point that, at its core, the study of community is concerned with social relationships, which can give rise to social–psychological aspects of integration, belonging, and attachment. Community is held together by intricate, multiplex relations that facilitate a shared sense of belonging and collective identification. Selznick (1992) similarly suggests that community stems from the basic human inclination toward "*interaction, commitment, and responsibility*" (p. 359). However, he cautions against equating community with communion insofar as he considers the latter a form of "psychic unity" (Selznick, 1996, p. 201). Selznick is adamant that community life cannot flourish in the face of communal fusion. For some, a deep sense of collective attachment, solidarity, and belonging (i.e., communion) represents the penultimate basis of community, while others view it as a foreboding condition of merged social life. It would seem that a distinction can be drawn between a "community" of interconnected social interactions and relationships and a "communion" of more emotionally charged sentiments or bonds.

In summary, the foregoing discussion presents three relatively identifiable but intersecting bases of community. The experience of community can emerge, change, and dissipate in conjunction with the vagaries of place, interest, and connectedness. In moving forward through the following chapters, it will become apparent that these and other bases of community are differentially embedded within varied analytical approaches. The proliferation of diverse conceptions of community reflects both changing "real-world" conditions and continued theoretical innovation. Recent literature on community is replete with references to fluidity, fragmentation, and difference. The relational contexts of contemporary society expose the self and the experience of community to shifting contexts of interpersonal and collective association, affiliation, attachment, and belonging. At different points in time, individuals can become sequentially or simultaneously involved in any number of "communities." It is for all of these reasons that theory must address the relational foundations out of which community emerges continuously.

The Search for Community: Decline, Loss, and Transformation

The "search" or "quest" for community in an ever-changing world has been a compelling but elusive pursuit (Kaufman, 1959; Nisbet, 1953/1967). Community researchers have long considered the effects of macro-level transformative processes on the social and interactional fabric of community. For some time now, theorists have elaborated a host of community change dynamics and their prospective impacts on how people relate to one another in everyday life. A key aspect of this work concerns the idea that primordial community relations have largely disappeared in the wake of modernity (Delanty, 2003). One of the most persistent themes of discourse on community is fragmented social relationships combined with a lost sense of belonging and intimacy. Bauman (2001) suggests that the growing disengagement and disintegration of communal bonds in contemporary society has prompted a renewed search for meaning, identity, and security. He makes the point that community is "*missing*" and much needed at a time when our continued survival depends on the ability to act together (Bauman, 2001, p. 149).

Some facets of the community decline or loss thesis are embedded in Tönnies' (1887/1957) well-known work, *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft*. He notes the gradual depletion of communal relationships alongside

escalating patterns of rational, calculative, instrumental action. Tocqueville (1840/1946) similarly comments on the erosion of public life as people increasingly view themselves as standing apart from one another, neither owing nor expecting anything of anyone. Furthermore, Simmel (1908/1971a) contends that increasing patterns of differentiation and individualization have tended to weaken more immediate social bonds and to replace them with spatially dispersed networks of relations. These observations foreshadowed subsequent concerns over the prospective deleterious effects of emerging societal change dynamics on community life. The perceived decline of traditional, place-based communities has prompted interest in the study of cybercommunities. Interestingly, Fernback (2007) suggests that the treatment of online relations as "diluted community" fails to appreciate how technologically mediated relationships can intersect in meaningful ways with other facets of social life (p. 49).

The "mass society" thesis of the mid-twentieth century centered on the advent of large-scale bureaucratic structures, along with a panacea of pervasive and constraining effects on local autonomy, community solidarity, and collective identity. In the aptly titled book, *Small Town in Mass Society*, Vidich and Bensman (1958) posited that increasing levels of external bureaucratic control and dependency were reshaping local functions. Stein (1960), in turn, envisioned growing interdependence and reduced autonomy, while Nisbet (1953/1967) spoke of declining personal relationships. For Nisbet and others of his time, community meant people working together to address common problems or interests. Community constituted an expression of "thick" social ties, as compared to the "thin" relations thought to predominate in modern society. Nisbet believed that community life was becoming disintegrated in response to increasing patterns of dislocation, individualization, and depersonalization. This work brought the macro-environment into the analysis of localized relationships (Young, 1996). Also, there were suggestions that the gradual weakening of intermediate structures (e.g., families, neighborhoods, and voluntary associations) was contributing to feelings of alienation, separation, powerlessness, and insecurity (see Thomson, 2005). And, although theorists have not always been of one voice on these matters, progressive individualism and atomization are central to much of the discourse surrounding the "Community Lost" argument (see Wellman, 1979, p. 1204).

Commentary on social transformation, extra-local linkages, and community decline continued into the late twentieth century (Bernard, 1973). Warren (1978) commented on the increasing incidence of vertical linkages

to macro-institutional systems, which he associated with reduced levels of community cohesion, control, and solidarity. The proliferation of external social networks, economic relations, "hypermobile capital" (Urry, 1985, p. 33), and institutional structures directly challenged the notion of relatively independent, autonomous communities. Cohen (1985) likewise observed that social change dynamics were threatening community boundaries and "social encapsulation" (p. 44). Furthermore, the territorial dimension of the community concept came under increasing scrutiny in light of what Massey (1994) termed the "speeding up, and spreading out" of the globalized world (p. 146). The early emphasis on place has since given way to varied conceptions of how community is experienced in everyday life.

A key aspect of the community disintegration thesis involves the claimed decline in meaningful, durable social relationships that foster a deeper sense of collective identity and agency (see Poplin, 1972). Taylor (1991) points to the weakening of social ties and the growing fragmentation or atomization of modern society. He comments on "the malaises of modernity," with particular reference to the manner in which individualism and instrumental rationality militate against conditions of solidarity and authenticity (Taylor, 1991, pp. 1–5). The essential idea is that individuals are becoming untethered or separated from a more consequential mode of association or community. This resonates with the ongoing debate over decreasing levels of social capital, civic involvement, and social trust (see Putnam, 2000). However, it is important to recognize that not all authors subscribe to the notion of community loss. Nancy (1991) claims that modern society did not emerge out of the destruction of a harmonious, intimate mode of *Gemeinschaft*-like relations. He believes that the penultimate community of communion, if it ever did exist, is an illusion fabricated in the shadows of a deeply dissociative society. And, so, that which never existed cannot be lost, nor can it be restored.

The Community Question

The impact of comprehensive change dynamics on the nature and organization of social ties is central to Wellman (1979) and his associates' discussion of the so-called "Community Question" (p. 1201). Rather than conceptualizing community as a discrete local solidarity, Wellman employs social network analysis to identify social relationships, linkages, and resource flows. He uses this approach to explore the presence of network-related neighborhoods or communities that need not be based on shared space or

sentiments. Wellman and Leighton (1979) contend that the transformation of community social relations has followed three trajectories in response to increasing patterns of urbanization, industrialization, and technological innovation: "*lost*," "*saved*," and "*liberated*" (pp. 367–368).

The community "lost" thesis is associated with Tönnies' (1887/1957) remarks about the diminishing presence of *Gemeinschaft*-like relationships and the accompanying proliferation of instrumental action tendencies. Proponents of this viewpoint contend that traditional, close-knit interactions and common sentiments have eroded in favor of less intense, weakly connected, and diffuse ties. The community "lost" perspective is premised on general patterns of social disorganization, disintegration, fragmentation, and decay. In contrast, the community "saved" argument emphasizes the persistence of communal ties, kinship associations, and neighborhood contacts in spite of the growing tendency toward bureaucratized social relations. It highlights localized networks of sociability and support that mediate between community members and large-scale social institutions. The "saved" approach is based on the idea of persistent structural facets of neighborhood relations, as opposed to presuming that urban dwellers are largely disconnected from one another. In other words, urbanites continue to develop network solidarities around family, work, and neighborhood. These interactional loci represent important contexts within which residents can express their shared interests and sentiments. Interestingly, Wellman (1996, 2005) suggests that a notable proportion of active ties within personal networks can form within "local" neighborhood geographies.

Quite unlike the community *lost* and *saved* positions, the *liberated* argument is detached from "spatial and normative bases" (Wellman & Leighton, 1982, p. 247). Primary social ties retain their importance, but they are typically of a more "sparsely knit, spatially dispersed" nature (Wellman, 1979, p. 1207). And, although this response to the "community question" does not preclude the possibility of solidary communities, it favors de-spatialized network relations. Individuals can establish any number of interpersonal connections in search of assistance, information, and other forms of support. Therefore, social relations are not understood narrowly in terms of a bounded locality insofar as analytical attention is broadened to include widespread, multifaceted social networks.

Wellman (1999) advocates against treating community as "a preeminently *social* phenomenon" or place and, instead, favors the notion of a *personalized* network community (p. xiv). This can be likened to an ecological community involving all of the interactions of a single (i.e., focal)

individual and, so, there can be as many communities as there are individual actors (see Parker, 2004). Wellman's (1996) "personal community" comprises a highly fluid set of diverse, means–ends oriented social ties through which one's particular needs or interests are addressed (p. 348). Clearly, social networks represent core facets of collective life; however, it is quite another matter to reduce the meaning of community to a "person-centered" assemblage of social ties. Such an approach lacks an appreciation for the collective sense of identity, interrelatedness, and agency that can cut across multiple "personal" communities. Brint (2001) notes that the contemporary focus on relatively more transitory interaction patterns and social networks tends to efface the continued presence of *Gemeinschaft*-like relationships.

Social researchers continue to explore aspects of the "community question." Hennig (2007), for example, analyzes family (neighborhood) embeddedness in several German cities. She, much like other researchers, reports evidence of all three of Wellman's (1979) conceptions of social relations (i.e., "lost," "found," and "liberated"). Rather than confining the analysis of network structures to Wellman's trifold typification, Hennig (2007) suggests that it is preferable to view communities as mixtures of densely and sparsely knit social relations. On a related theme, Xu and Chan (2011) investigate the effects of urbanization on neighborhood social networks in Shanghai, China. The authors find support for the "community lost" argument, as indicated by a general reduction in primary relations among rural residents (i.e., farmers) who have relocated to urban areas. They identify changing patterns of social relations such as declining friendship ties and increasing neighborhood contacts.

In summary, a considerable amount of academic work on community addresses the impact of change dynamics on social relations. Some authors claim that social relationships of a more intimate or all-embracing nature have fallen prey to wide-scale transformative processes, while others question whether any such form of communal existence ever did exist in the past. The core problematic that must be recognized is that community cannot be conceptualized easily because it is not a static phenomenon, neither can it be confined to a single understanding of lived (collective) relation. This is made abundantly clear by the many meanings that have accumulated over the years and by the ever-widening array of perspectives on community. In moving forward in this chapter, it is important to bear in mind that there is no intellectual imperative to advance a definition of community or to provide a definitive list of its core dimensions. However,

there is merit in examining how, in the midst of growing complexity, fluidity, diversity, and change, individuals continue to enter into relations and generate a sense of togetherness or connection with one another.

The Liberal–Communitarian Debate

Some mention of the liberal–communitarian debate is warranted given its relevance to the larger discourse on community (see Dixon, Dogan, & Sanderson, 2005; Walzer, 1990). These two contrasting traditions of thought express divergent conceptions of human nature, identity formation, and community. Liberalism has come to be associated with an atomized, self-determining view of separate individuals pursuing their own particular ends, whereas communitarianism portrays the self as a social product constituted within the context of shared meanings and substantive communal bonds (Sayers, 1999). Community, from a liberal standpoint, emerges and changes in conjunction with myriad individual choices, attachments, and identifications. In this sense, community constitutes a collection of self-interested actors joining forces in order to increase their chances of success (see Selznick, 2002). Macpherson (1962) traces the difficulties or excesses of liberal–democratic theory to its origins in seventeenth-century "possessive individualism" (p. 263). In essence, individuals relate to one another as the sole "proprietors" of their own capacities, while "owing nothing to society" (Macpherson, 1962, p. 3). Society and community are, thereby, reduced to exchange relations among a collection of free functioning individuals who act largely independently of others' wills.

Communitarianism emphasizes multi-stranded, face-to-face social relationships and authentic communal experiences within which members' lives are situated and acquire meaning (Silk, 1999). This viewpoint is reflected in Etzioni's (1996) definition of community as "a web of affect-laden relations" among those who share a common culture and respond to each other's needs, as contrasted with an aggregate of atomized (i.e., free) agents (p. 5). Selznick (2002) remarks that "new" communitarians consider traditional liberal theory overly individualistic insofar as it stresses rights over duties, underestimates the social bases of the self, and expresses a weak conception of the common good. This form of *hyper-individualism* has prompted some writers to advance a socially embedded and "irreducibly relational" view of self-governing actors (Christman, 2004, pp. 143–144).

As noted earlier, Selznick (1992) disclaims the idea of community as fused social life, preferring instead to stress the need for balance between

independence and interdependence. He makes mention of "a unity of unities" whereby the integrity of the foundational components, upon which the community depends (e.g., persons, groups, and institutions), is protected by virtue of a coherent "whole" (Selznick, 2002, p. 39). Thus conceived, community comprises both structural differentiation and collective consciousness or responsibility. Selznick (1996) indicates that, by treating community as a network of interrelated and yet distinct institutions, attention is directed away from an overly cohesive or unified understanding of communal life. In essence, both difference and diversity are elemental to community. This resonates with Feinberg's (1988) discussion of diverse groups held together by interlocking networks, bonds, and memberships (p. 106). He, like Selznick (1996), observes that intermediate associations are vital to community members' sense of belonging and attachment. This is consistent with Etzioni's (1996) suggestion that a "community of communities" rests in some fashion on multiple levels of interrelated "loyalties" (p. 10).

The liberal–communitarian debate stems in part from the inherent tension between autonomy and self-reliance, on the one hand, and community embeddedness and social integration, on the other. Brint (2001) argues that the liberal concern over limits to human freedom should be reinterpreted in light of contemporary change dynamics and varied types of community. He points out that intolerance, illiberalism, and authoritarianism are associated more so with communities characterized by stronger *in-group* versus *out-group* relations, high levels of internal solidarity, and coercive mechanisms of social control (i.e., conformity). According to Brint (2001), there are many forms of community in the modern world that are not prone to such tendencies, including dispersed interpersonal networks, loosely interconnected communities of place, and "nonideological" imagined or virtual communities (p. 19).

Contemporary Challenges to Community

The community concept has undergone a significant transformation over the years in response to its multifarious "real-world" manifestations and continued theorization. Varied representations of community are woven out of and around diverse modes of relational social life. In a Tönniesian (1887/1957) sense, a social world comprising individuals who act largely out of rational self-interest will yield a very different mode of associational life than one in which members share a sense of collective responsibility.

Consider the opposing views of absolute individualism and communal fusion, each of which is constitutive of qualitatively very distinct self–other relations. Delanty (2003) points out that the contemporary social self is constituted in relational contexts of "difference" rather than "coherence" or unity (p. 135). He suggests that the autonomy of the self is no longer constrained in ways that it once was by institutionalized structures.

The postmodern condition has problematized the meaning of community by opening up discourse on its multifold and sometimes conflicting interpretations. Lyotard (1984) defines postmodern as "incredulity toward metanarratives," which pertains to the tendency among modern sciences to engage in self-legitimizing "language games" (pp. xxiii–xxv). The resistance to grand narratives reflects a growing appreciation for indeterminacy, difference, otherness, and particularity in lived experience. Postmodern thinking raises questions concerning the legitimacy of generalized knowledge claims, which are also implicated in the theorization of community. In the midst of this debate, Churchill (1997) remarks that community is perhaps best understood as people co-existing and cooperating in an effort to identify common goals, as opposed to rigidly pursuing preordained aims. The postmodern community has a liminal and dynamic nature—attributes quite unlike those associated with essentialism and immanentism. Postmodernity is routinely associated with de-centered identities, singular beings, social dis-embeddedness, and the weakening of traditional, organic communal relations. However, these conditions open up opportunities for people to become involved in more fluid, elective communities that appeal to their personal interests and proclivities.

Contemporary community theory is entwined with the evolving discourse on multiplicity, flexibility, dynamism, and uncertainty. This is exemplified by the postmodern critique of any type of unitary or potentially totalizing community and the implied threats to individual autonomy, privacy, and identity (i.e., illiberalism). For some authors, the intrinsic danger of a "fused life" calls for the "deconstruction" or "interruption" of community, while others wonder how or whether community is possible among singularities (see Derrida, 1994/1997; Nancy, 1991). Still others search for community somewhere in between the extremes of an oppressive unity (or totality) and the complete absence of relation. This wide-ranging debate has prompted theorists to advance open-ended conceptions of community that incorporate varied elements of otherness, separateness, alterity, difference, and sovereignty.

The Deconstruction of Community: Singularity, Alterity, and Difference

Concern over essentialist notions of community has motivated a number of scholars to deconstruct or "put community under erasure" (Morin, 2006, p. 1). Authors such as Jacques Derrida, Jean-Luc Nancy, Maurice Blanchot, and George Bataille, among others, focus on matters of difference and disruption, as opposed to conformity and commonality. Derrida (1993/1995) expresses reticence to invoke or even write the word "community" because of its connotation of fusion and identification (p. 46). He addresses the problematic of *le-commun* or the *in-common* as it pertains to the fundamental irreducibility of singularity. In *Politics of Friendship*, Derrida (1994/1997) considers themes of community and friendship in relation to the work of Blanchot and Bataille. He describes a type of friendship (or community) that is "beyond being-common…beyond the social bond itself" (Derrida, 1994/1997, pp. 297–298). Derrida contraposes the notion of a community of "singularities" to a more conventional, unified view. This non-totalizing, "bondless" friendship expresses aspects of separation and difference that are also evident in Blanchot's (1983/1988) "unavowable community," Nancy's (1991) "inoperative community," and Bataille's "negative community" (as quoted in Blanchot, 1983/1988, p. 24). These ideas reflect an antipathy toward collectivist, organic, or immanent conceptions of community (i.e., anti-essentialism).

Caputo (1996) claims that Derrida's work was motivated by the perceived dangers associated with an "identitarian" community of fusion that walls itself off against the other (p. 35). This restrictive form of community underrepresents and suppresses ways of "being-together" that privilege difference over commonality. Caputo (1996) ponders the nature of a "community of singularities," which he imagines as being highly fluid, dynamic, and porous—perpetually in motion and, therefore, "unpredictable" (p. 26). Unlike communities based on closure or some form of penultimate bond, the "gathering-together of singularities" *without* unity or essence is deemed to be more accommodative of diversity and difference (Derrida, 1993/1995, p. 46). The latter mode of thinking calls for the interruption of what is conventionally understood as community—one that is constantly reworked in conjunction with alterity or otherness. It is in this vein that Burke (2001) proposes "the *interrogative community*," which rests on skepticism, conflict, tension, and perpetual contestation (p. 98). In this way, the "question of community" remains open as individuals

recognize and come to terms with competing perspectives, values, and ideas. The interrogative community is enriched by a fundamental openness to diversity (Burke, 2001).

Community is perhaps most commonly interpreted in terms of self–other relations. What remains at issue, however, is the lived experience of "being-with-one-another." In his book, *The Inoperative Community*, Nancy (1991) points to the inherent contradiction between a completely detached individual ("for-itself") and the fundamental sociality of being "*inclined*" toward others ("being-in-common") (pp. 3–4). Ironically, the very act of conceptualizing the self, other, or community fosters the impression of discrete, analytically decomposable entities. Nancy (1991) argues that the world is not (or cannot be) built out of atomized individuals, nor can a community exist in the complete absence of relation. And, although he acknowledges that community involves some form of bending toward the other, Nancy rejects any implication of immanent beings or transcendent social bonds. In an effort to reconcile the relative extremes of absolute separation (atomistic individuality) and communal fusion (totalizing collectivity), he emphasizes that both "being" and "community" are relational in nature and, perhaps more significantly, occur or co-emerge simultaneously. As Nancy points out (1996/2000), singular beings affirm their distinctiveness through their relations "with" and "among" others, and, as such, singularity and plurality are inseparable (p. 32). Thus, the nature of "being" or, more accurately, "social being" is intimately entwined with the question of community.

For Nancy (1991), community is "the sharing of singularities," as when singular beings communicate and, thereby, "compear" (pp. 27–28). It is only by virtue of "being-in-common," as distinct from communal fusion, that finite beings come into existence or *co*-originate. Nancy's ideas stand somewhat apart from radical singularity. Community, for Nancy (1996/2000), is linked to the *co*-existentiality of distinguishable singular beings who are constituted in and through "being-with-one-another" (pp. 3, 94). Heidegger (1953/2000) similarly observes that "Being means: to appear in emerging" while also recognizing that one's "presence" is made manifest against the other (pp. 121, 220). "Being" is revealed in the movement away from "concealment" and "seeming" (Heidegger, 1953/2000, p. 121). Nancy states that community is not produced; it is experienced when singularities share communication. And, so, "compearance" should not be misconstrued as a social bond, communion, or higher-order "We" that develops among already existing immanent

individualities; rather, it is what happens "between" co-emerging finite beings (Nancy, 1991, p. 29).

Nancy (1991) expresses the nascent character of community, the experience of which, if only briefly, brings one into existence in and through relations with other finite singularities (see also Blanchot, 1983/1988). This speaks to the possibility of a relational context of communicative sharing that should not be confused with a concrete entity, the latter of which is, for some, the undoing or absence of "community." Community does not weave or sublate finite beings into an overarching (supra-individual) subjectivity or immanent entity; it is the "compearance" of singularities in communicative sharing (Nancy, 1991). Polyphonic singular beings co-emerge within multifold relations that are continuously being formed and reformed, which Hiddleston (2005) refers to as the "coexistence of difference with relationality" (p. 75). There is a sense here of the ethereal, relational, and liminal quality of community—one that exposes its members to each other's particularity. And, yet, "something" can happen when otherwise singular beings become open to one another in moments of communicative sharing.

Levinas (1961/1979) points to the primacy of relations between the *I* and others, most notably with respect to discourse (or language), consciousness, and intersubjectivity. The essential relation between the *I* and the "personal" other is based on a relationship of "being for the other" (Levinas, 1995/1999, p. 105). By looking directly into the vulnerable "face" of the "absolutely other, the Other," the *I* is called to an open, non-indifferent sense of responsibility (Levinas, 1961/1979, p. 218). And, furthermore, neither of the participants in "face-to-face" relations can be absorbed or subsumed by the other. This expresses a decided resistance to the notion of synthesis or fusion in favor of separate beings coming into relation (see Olthuis, 2004). The face of the "infinite" other signifies a "living presence" that is in constant motion and, therefore, irreducible to a finite entity (Levinas, 1961/1979, pp. 49, 66). Finitude is indicative of a "being" or an "event" that is finished, complete, or knowable, as contrasted with the dynamism of "infinity" (Levinas, 1995/1999, pp. 57–58). In entering into relation, neither the *I* nor the other is pregiven, known, or adequately represented. The alterity of the "face" invites others into relation and, yet, defies containment or possession, which is central to Levinas' conception of (inter)subjectivity. Based on this approach, transcendence involves "traversing" the space or distance between the *I* and the other without forming an immanent totality (Levinas, 1961/1979, pp. 39–40).

The "face-to-face" is the penultimate human condition of multiplicity and intersubjective relation that can never be consolidated into some form of "higher-order" unity. Neither should such a relation be construed as a reciprocal pattern, given that the *I* is always-already moving toward or beyond the other. Levinas (1995/1999) challenges any thought of the *I* as a "part" of some solidary whole (i.e., organism) comprising integrated members. Having said this, he intimates that participative speech or conversation facilitates the relational making of a common, albeit non-static, world by means of the asymmetrical interposition of ideas. It is through language that interlocutors are revealed to one another, and it is by virtue of the ongoing discourse between infinite beings that something novel arises in their relationship. This evidences a subtle interactionist tone insofar as the *I* goes out toward or seeks itself in and through relations with the other. There is also a parallel here to Bakhtin's (1963/1984) contention that the meaning of the "word" emerges within dialogic relations between individual consciousnesses.

Plessner (1924/1999) very succinctly captures several of the most compelling and timely points of contention in the perennial debate over community. In his book, *The Limits of Community*, Plessner (1924/1999) remarks on the inherent danger of politicizing an idealized conception of community or *Volk*. He refers to a fundamental (ethical) distinction between "societal" and "communal" modes of lived experience (Plessner, 1924/1999, p. 71). His discussion centers on contrasting views of an essentially cold, mechanical, commercial, emotionally distant, and calculating mode of societal relations versus an unspoiled, authentic, unmediated, open, and intimate communal existence. Plessner refers to community as the *idol* of his time or age—a powerful counter-image to the artificiality of society. He suggests that those who seek the security and warmth of a trust-based community, regardless of whether it rests on kinship ties (love–affect) or common interests (reason–rationality), must be prepared to relinquish claim to their own (individual) selves or personalities. And, although Plessner (1924/1999) does not dispute the "right of a life-based community," he emphatically opposes "the radicalism of community" (p. 81). Hess (2007) contends that Plessner felt a sense of loss in the face of modernization but, rather than dreaming of a return to an earlier form of community life, he chose to move on.

The postmodern discourse on community draws attention to the relational character of "self-being" while simultaneously "being-with-others." Brogan (2002) refers to an existential "community of singularities" stand-

ing in relation to one another "in the whole of their being" (pp. 241–242). He comments on the potential for a unique mode of community that emphasizes plurality over sameness. In a similar vein, Secomb (2000) rejects conventional notions of commonality and unity in favor of a "fractured community" that embraces diversity, difference, and disagreement (pp. 136, 148). She envisages a community that fosters interrelatedness and sharing among singularities—one that is forever incomplete. These intersecting viewpoints reflect the fundamentally diverse, evolving, non-essentialist, and contested nature of (postmodern) community.

Atomization, Fragmentation, and the Continued Quest for Community

Academic efforts to characterize community as something lost, found, or perhaps even forgotten are embedded in a temporal framework of looking to the past in order to re-imagine the future. Notwithstanding persistent patterns of individualization, deterritorialization, plurality, and mediated social relations, community continues to resurface in varied forms, most notably with respect to matters of identity (see Yar, 2002). For some, the atomizing conditions of contemporary society have prompted the re-embedding of social relations in alternative forms of associational life (e.g., elective communities). This is reflected in Hetherington's (1994) discussion of Schmalenbach's (1922/1961) concept of *Bund*, with specific reference to the postmodern pursuit of new avenues or styles of community. Also, Delanty (2003) points to the emergence of "post-traditional" modes of community, such as more spontaneous or fluid forms of association, liminal spaces or moments, symbolically constituted relationships, and cybercommunities (p. 30). The notion of community persists as a way of signifying that which draws people together (e.g., sense of belonging or common identity), despite perpetual and sometimes tumultuous conditions of "fluid modernity" (Bauman, 2000, p. 6).

It is not uncommon for sociologists to remark that the authentic social relationships of quintessential community life have been lost. Implicit herein is the perspective that there can be no return to the past. Bauman (2001) contends that the decline of community is unrelenting and so, once begun, cannot be halted. Something of the same nature is reflected in Selznick's (2002) observation that community has deteriorated in light of escalating conditions of "limited" as compared to more "open-ended obligation" (pp. 24–25). In the wake of the perceived dissolution of and

nostalgia for an earlier way of life, all that remains, at least for Nisbet (1953/1967), is the timeless "quest for community" (p. 47). Lee and Newby (1983) suggest that this yearning for community reflects the desire for identity, security, and belonging. Interestingly, Bauman (2001) indicates that, if there is to be any hope for community in our contemporary, individualistic society, it will need to embrace mutual sharing, caring, and responsibility (pp. 149–150). Little (2002), too, speaks of communities based on values of "friendship, voluntarism and care" (p. 3). Perhaps, more importantly, the pursuit of "community" in contemporary society must come to grips with conditions of growing fluidity, uncertainty, and change (see Delanty, 2003). As is so often the case, the embattled notion of community is suspended precariously between the pursuit of personal freedom(s) and the search for some collective sense of belonging. Notwithstanding the growing complexity of social relations, economic processes, and global networks, community remains a fundamental aspect human life.

The Relational Fabric of Community Theory

Over the past half-century and more, there have been significant transformations in the way(s) that people meet, interact, exchange ideas, and enter in relation with one another. One key issue involves the despatialization of localized community life. It is not so much that place has become irrelevant to sociological study; rather, the analytical landscape of community theory has expanded into ever-widening areas of thought. Far from being "lost," community has been freed from a strict association with place. It is becoming more and more elastic in response to complexity, personal choice, multivoicedness, and the de-centering of identity (Smith, 1996). The relational contexts within which individuals develop self-conceptions, form relationships, and pursue their interests are increasingly diverse. Furthermore, the notion of community is interpreted in varied ways across academic disciplines, analytical frameworks, and research traditions. Theorists alternatively conceive of community as a spatial or ecological entity, a social system, a field of (inter)action, or a socio-symbolic construction, among other viewpoints. The following discussion briefly introduces some basic themes of discourse on community that are taken up in subsequent chapters.

One of the most traditional and longstanding ways of thinking about community is that of a place in which people carry out an organized round

of existence in the course of addressing their everyday needs. These ideas are central to the *social system* approach to community as an integrated arrangement of social units (e.g., institutions) performing locality-relevant functions (Warren, 1978). This perspective has been criticized for fostering a static view of community in the midst of escalating conditions of societal transformation, complexity, and fluidity (see Little, 1999). Early proponents of *human ecology* likewise considered socio-spatial facets of community life, with a special emphasis on relational mechanisms (e.g., cooperation and competition) operating between people and their local surroundings (Hawley, 1944). Community, in this sense, involves inhabitants' collective adjustments or responses to one another and the environment. And, although interest in human ecology *per se* has faded, there is important related research on social–ecological systems and community resilience.

Well over a half-century ago, Kaufman (1959) contributed to an analytical shift away from social system theory by focusing on interaction processes that give rise to collective community action. Wilkinson (1970, 1991) subsequently reformulated *social field theory* with an enhanced emphasis on the role that interaction plays in the social definition of place, the emergent organization of community life, and the generation of collective agency. In interactional terms, community action fields arise in and through the relational dynamics of people coming together around the pursuit of common goals. The interactional approach offers a unique synthesis of field-related thinking woven around foundational aspects of *Gemeinschaft* (Tönnies, 1887/1957), joint social action (Mead, 1934), and relational emergence. It has only been within the last decade or so that social field theory has gained wider recognition within the area of community development theory and research.

Social constructionism is concerned with how people actively define social reality through their everyday interactional dynamics and lived relations. Symbolic interaction is essential to processes of meaning making, "world-building" (Berger, 1967, p. 3) and, by implication, the social construction of community. From this perspective, community is viewed as an intersubjectively constituted social phenomenon that can take on external, obdurate properties. And, to the extent that community is a relational construction, it is continuously being reshaped through ongoing processes of social representation and (trans)formation. A similar idea is reflected in Hendley's (1996) discussion of community as a "shared interpretive context" that directly impacts how individuals look at the world

(pp. 211–212). He recognizes the contested nature of what is "shared," given the potential for varied understandings of any given situation. It is for this reason that community involves a "deferred" way of "being-together" that emerges out of the constant flow of "doing *and* undoing" (Hendley, 1996, pp. 216–217).

The theoretical shift from material (geospatial) to ideational (symbolic) conceptions of community is by no means recent. Quite some time ago, Hosteller (1964) and Cohen (1985) drew attention to the involvement of linguistic and cultural factors in shaping the symbolic meaning of community, as well as personal and communalized identities. These and other authors have illuminated the socio-cognitive processes through which people intersubjectively create and re-create the world around them. Community, in this sense, constitutes a *symbolic construction*—a product of interactional signification that acquires identifiable meaning. Similar processes of identity formation and collective identification are linked to the generation of "imagined communities" (Anderson, 1991, p. 13).

Recently, there is growing interest in applying dialogical theory to the interpretation of community relations and agential capacities. One of the core conceptual elements of this approach is Buber's (1965) notion of an ontologically real "sphere of the interhuman" or "between" that arises when individuals enter into authentic dialogical relations (pp. 74–75). Bessant (2014) contends that the "between" represents a pivotal relational context out of which community can emerge intersubjectively and develop into a more expansive complex of relations. Furthermore, the "relational turn" in sociology offers useful insights into the study of community. Notwithstanding the different streams of *relational sociology*, this work has refocused attention on the "primacy of relations." Social theorists and philosophers alike identify social relations as the foundational units of social life. Being is routinely referred to as "social being," and, more to the point, community can be viewed as a relational phenomenon insofar as it exists in and arises out of social relations (see Donati, 2011).

The following chapters offer a cross-section of community approaches, including earlier discussions of social system theory and human ecology. The presentation of this foundational material is complemented by more contemporary discourse on field-interactional processes, self–other dialogue, socio-symbolic construction, social representations theory, and relational sociology. The primary intention of the book is to explore the relational underpinnings of these relatively distinct perspectives on community. Each approach rests in some fashion on social relations as a basis

for understanding social processes, structures, or change dynamics. The main thesis throughout is that, regardless of intellectual vagaries, community involves people continuously entering into (and *co*-emerging within) relations, forming identities, building relationships, and giving rise to social phenomena through which they express their collective lives. As Simmel (1908/1971b) states, emergent interactions "are, themselves, society" (p. 27), a seminal idea that Donati (2011) and others continue to echo to this very day. All of social life *is* relation(s), and it is in and through relations that community emerges and changes in the ceaseless flow of lived experience (Bessant, 2015).

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CHAPTER 2

Entering into Relation: Being as *Social* Being

Well over a century ago, Tönnies (1887/1957) described sociology as the study of social relations, and, yet, Donati (2011) indicates that this foundational subject matter remains largely "unknown" (p. 4). Social relations are as ubiquitous as the air that humans breathe and just as critical to their existence, albeit in very different terms. Every aspect of social life is relational in some sense; indeed, it seems inconceivable that anyone could live completely separate from others. Devisch (2013) succinctly states that "being is always social being" (p. 84). And, to the extent that lived experience is inextricably relational, it is commonly argued that individuals (or selves) are social products (see Feinberg, 1988). This resonates with Dewey's (1958) observation that all "things" exist in constant interaction. The relational underpinnings of everyday life form the basis of built relationships and emergent social phenomena.

Social relations are inextricably bound up with the interplay between "self-being" and "being-with-others." This reflects the basic condition of living somewhat at a *distance* from, while also entering into *relation* with, others (Buber, 1965, p. 60). Fromm (1955) contends that human beings have a deep-seated need to establish social relations with one another and, in so doing, they develop a sense of self-awareness and identity. As Lyotard (1984) and many others have pointed out, the self is embedded in the fabric of social relations (p. 15). The self is intrinsically social, owing to its relational emergence within a community of others (Mead, 1934, p. 200).

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Community, too, is unequivocally founded in and born of social relations at multiple, interrelated levels of analysis: intra-subjective, inter-individual, and transpersonal (or structural). Not surprisingly, community theorists are heavily invested in the examination of relational dynamics, processes, and structures.

Academic work on social relations encompasses an expansive range of life events and social phenomena. One of the primary goals of this chapter is to explore varied understandings of the social relation(s) concept. There is a significant body of literature that deals with the many facets of lived relation, largely in the absence of substantive consensus. Definitional vagaries abound with respect to type (or form), intensity, duration, scope, and level of analysis, to name but a few dimensions. The chapter opens with an overview of some key points of interest in the work of Ferdinand Tönnies (1887/1957), Max Weber (1978), and Georg Simmel (1950). This is followed by a discussion of several more recent contributions to the study of social relations, including classification systems (typologies) and other related issues. One of the most provocative themes of discourse on social relationality involves the interconnectedness of micro- and macro-level processes and the prospective emergence of comprehensive social phenomena (e.g., organizations and communities). The final section examines the notion of emergence as a way of interpreting how social interactions and relations contribute to the elaboration of novel social entities, along with their distinctive properties. Some attention is also devoted to competing views about the ontological status, causal powers, and (ir)reducibility of collective phenomena.

Relational Foundations: Tönnies, Weber, and Simmel

The following material addresses selected aspects of the above-noted scholars' ideas concerning the conceptualization of social relations. This brief foray into classical sociological theory represents a general backdrop against which to consider contemporary authors' thoughts about social relations, particularly as applied to the study of community. Some core issues include the individualism–collectivism debate, micro–macro linkages, part–whole relations, emergentism, and the interplay between social ontology and methodological considerations.

Ferdinand Tönnies: Relational Will and Collective Entities

Gemeinschaft and *Gesellschaft*

Tönnies (1887/1957) contends that sociology is concerned with the motives and intentions that draw people into relation with one another, bind them together, and engender collective action (p. 237). The *Gemeinschaft–Gesellschaft* distinction, for which he is most well known, reflects contrasting volitional bases of association. These two modes of social relation(ship) are intertwined with particular types of human (social) will or tendencies to action: *Wesenwille* (natural or essential) versus *Kürwille* (rational or artificial), respectively. Social volition is intimately embedded in the nature of self-other relations and, ultimately, in the formation of multifold social phenomena ranging from the most basic dyad to more comprehensive corporate entities. Neither *Gemeinschaft* nor *Gesellschaft* should be construed as concrete social entities, but rather as "ideal type" ways of "being-with-one-another" that are present to some extent in all forms of associational life. Tönnies' core argument is that social relations have undergone significant transformation, over time, stemming from the proliferation of exchange dynamics and strategic individualism.

For Tönnies (1887/1957), *Gemeinschaft* involves an intimate, genuine, and authentic manner of living together that is based on relations of "mutual affirmation" (p. 37). *Gemeinschaft* is premised on emotions and sentiments, as contrasted with *Gesellschaft*, which rests on rationality, instrumentality, and calculative deliberation (Tönnies, 1925/1971a). *Wesenwille* denotes thoughts and feelings that are immanent in action, whereas *Kürwille* constitutes antecedent thoughts about "means–ends" relations. Actions stemming from the latter reflect rational calculations pertaining to the most efficient method of achieving a particular end. Hence, social relationships can be willed into existence either for their own sake (intrinsic) or for the express (extrinsic) purpose of realizing a desired objective. *Gemeinschaft* involves tightly woven bonds of intimacy, mutuality, and affirmation, whereas *Gesellschaft*-like relations prevail among strategic, reason-oriented individuals (i.e., organic versus contrived unity). And, while a relatively clear conceptual distinction can be drawn between these two polar types, they are best understood in relation to each other.

Schmalenbach (1922/1961) proposed an elaboration of Tönnies' (1887/1957) dichotomy of social relations through his discussion of *Bund*,

a proposed "third" mode of association that differs qualitatively from both *Gemeinschaft* (community) and *Gesellschaft* (society). Schmalenbach was concerned with Tönnies' conflation of natural (kinship, tradition, or locality) and affective bases of sociation within the concept of community. He addresses this issue by differentiating the *unconscious* psychic basis of community from the overtly *conscious* emotional nature of "communion." As defined by Schmalenbach, communion involves an elective mode of social relation among individuals who experience shared interests, beliefs, or sentiments that may lead to the development of community. And, although he views communion as an emotional phenomenon, Schmalenbach contends that it is neither explicitly irrational nor rational. He emphasizes that affective experiences are foundational to communion, whereas feelings are generated by community. Thus conceived, communion can be treated as intentional affective action, an idea that runs somewhat counter to the Weberian notion of "rational as conscious and the irrational as unconscious" (Hetherington, 1994, p. 9). Communion is best described as a collective form of enthusiasm that is constituted by consciously felt emotions held together by a sense of solidarity, connectedness, and belonging (Schmalenbach, 1922/1961, p. 332).

Social Relationships, Collectives, and Corporate Entities

Tönnies (1907/1971b) characterizes social relations as products of common volition. He indicates that "pure sociology" is principally concerned with theorizing social entities, of which the corporation is the penultimate form. Tönnies (1887/1957) outlines three separate (i.e., "ordered") types of relational configurations: *social relationships*, *collectives* or *collectivities*, and *organizations* (p. 250). Through the elaboration of these concepts, Tönnies proffers the idea that collective will draws individuals together in the formation of varied social phenomena. All such entities, including communities, exist by virtue of individuals' general tendencies to associate with one another vis-à-vis *Gemeinschaft* versus *Gesellschaft*. It is important to note that common volition can influence individual wills, albeit to varied degrees. In very basic terms, then, social relations are thought, experienced, and willed. Social entities are the products of thought and action and, as such, their reality is relationally grounded in the minds of their co-creators.

For Tönnies (1887/1957), the "social relationship" is the most essential or embryonic form of association insofar as participants' wills are reciprocally intertwined (p. 242). His discussion of social relationships is

framed in terms of differential aspects of interdependence, connection, affirmation, and attachment. This follows directly from Tönnies' explanation of common volition, which emerges when the will of each individual member is relationally oriented to that of (all) other inter-actors. As a function of being involved in a relationship or group, each participant's intentions and actions are influenced by others' wills and the larger entity. Tönnies argues that an emergent "higher-order" social will is created through the interconnectedness of individual wills, which he associates with the agential capacity of social organizations. It is through these processes that social relationships are affirmed and recognized as "real" and "existing." In very similar terms, a "social collective" is held together by common ways of feeling and thinking that give it the appearance of a definitive *unit* (Tönnies, 1887/1957, p. 250). Notwithstanding the possibility that members of a collective may experience a sense of mutual connection and affirmation, this social form lacks the capacity for joint agency.

Tönnies (1887/1957) attaches particular significance to the notion of a "corporate organization," in part, because it can be thought of as a "social person" (pp. 243, 246). He contends that, under certain circumstances, a social organization can develop into a collective actor imbued with "person-like" volition and agency. This so-called social or collective person embodies the organization's common will, as expressed through one or more of its representatives (e.g., a constituted assembly). He suggests that individuals consciously and collectively act together to create social entities that take on obdurate social reality. And, to the extent that this type of corporate entity exists within the consciousness of its members (and "outside" observers), it constitutes a social phenomenon that is volitionally distinct from a simple aggregate of individuals. Dewey (1958) similarly remarks that legal entities such as corporations can be considered objectively real even though their existence and properties are derivatives of human (social) interaction. These ideas draw attention to the relational genesis of multiple forms of social phenomena, most notably communal organizations and communities (see Bessant, 2016).

Max Weber: Subjective Meaning and Social Action

McKinney and Loomis (1957) point out that, for Weber, relations are derived from the evolving dynamics of "social action." One of Weber's (1978) most significant contributions to sociological theory involves his work on the subjective bases of human (social) action. He discusses the

manner in which individuals attach "subjective meaning" to their actions, as they interact with and reflect on others' behavior (Weber, 1978, p. 4). Action is deemed "social" when it is meaningful to the actor (e.g., interests and values), consciously directed at some purpose, and takes account of others within the interaction process. Weber (1978) further indicates that objects, activities, and processes are "devoid of meaning" if they are not relationally embedded in some mode of social action (p. 7). Social action is relational insofar as actors intentionally (i.e., self-consciously) and intersubjectively orient their behavior toward a particular interest, value, or some other intended purpose. On a related theme, Dewey (1958) describes communication as the cooperative (reflexive) act of entering into one another's behavior, whereby a social relationship or interactional dynamic generates shared meanings (p. 179). He emphasizes the relational bases of meaning in the context of both communion and community.

Weber (1978) elaborates the inherently relational nature of social actions that are meaningfully oriented to others' behavior. And, given that meaning involves attributions of subjective understanding, neither imitation nor purely reactive responses constitute instances of social action. Having said this, Weber acknowledges that the defining line between meaningful action and that which lacks subjective meaning is not clearly drawn. He goes on to proffer the following typology of social action:

1. *Zweckrational*—involves the rational achievement of desired ends by calculative selection among alternative means,
2. *Wertrational*—concerns the realization of a fundamental value or belief "for its own sake" and, to some extent, regardless of potential costs or chances of success,
3. *Affectual*—expresses specific emotional states and feelings where meaning is embedded in the act rather than some ulterior end, and
4. *Traditional*—pertains to "ingrained habituation," such as behavior that follows customary or longstanding lines of action (Weber, 1978, pp. 24–25).

These four "conceptually pure form[s]" of meaningful action are illustrative (i.e., "ideal") types, and, as such, Weber (1978) contends that everyday social actions are unlikely to express only one or another of these orientations (p. 26).

Zweckrational is comparable to Tönnies' (1887/1957) notion of rational, self-interested action, whereas *Wertrational* denotes a consciously held

and deeply binding value or belief that can exhibit instrumental attributes (e.g., planful action or deliberation). Weber (1978) characterizes the latter type of social action as "irrational" to the extent that actors do not necessarily consider the consequences of their actions (p. 26). However, he equivocates over the strictness with which "affectual" and "traditional" behavior can be viewed as subjectively or meaningfully constituted social action. Weber intimates that "real-life" expressions of these latter two types of social action can move in the direction of either rational or unconscious action. He suggests that, from a typological perspective, it is useful to analyze irrational behavior as a departure from more understandable rational action. Through his emphasis on the subjective bases of action, Weber draws attention to the varied ways in which meanings are embedded in social action. This pertains directly to how people enter into relation with one another and go on to develop short-term or more durable social relationships.

For Weber (1978), a "social relationship" involves a number of individuals whose actions are mutually oriented to—or take account of—one another, regardless of the nature of their interpersonal relations (e.g., cooperation, competition, or conflict) (p. 26). Indeed, participants need not attribute the same meaning to their relationship. There may be a lack of "reciprocity" or symmetry of perspective, which directly affects the nature or presence of a social relationship (Weber, 1978, pp. 27–28). Weber (1978) also differentiates between "communal" and "associative" relationships (p. 40). In broad terms, communal relationships can reflect affectual or traditional orientations, whereas associative relationships are commonly based on *Zweckrational* or *Wertrational*. Weber believes that these two modes of relation co-exist to varying degrees within lived social experience. And, although a parallel can be drawn between the communal–associative distinction and *Gemeinschaft*- versus *Gesellschaft*-like social relations, Weber maintains that Tönnies' types are more narrowly drawn than his own.

With respect to associative relationships, the constituent orientation to action is "rationally motivated" in terms of either (a) a preoccupation with self-interest, economic gain (markets), and expediency or (b) a sense of commitment, obligation, or adherence to an essential value (Weber, 1978, p. 41). Communal relationships, by comparison, rest on the social actors' subjective sense of belonging together. The latter comes into being when the participants mutually orient their behavior to one another based on a common feeling of togetherness. Weber clarifies the meaning

of these two contrasting modes of relation by drawing a distinction between individuals who intend to exploit a relationship for personal benefit versus members of a group or community who share a common interest. However, he goes on to say that the presence of common attributes, orientations, or behaviors does not necessarily indicate the existence of a communal relationship. Weber's observations on this matter are reminiscent of other authors' efforts to differentiate between a loosely related aggregate and a more interconnected community (see Buber, 1947/2002).

For Weber, the essential subject matter of sociology is social action which, from a relational perspective, directs attention to actors' subjective awareness or consciousness of others, including some understanding of how they affect one another's behavior. And, quite unlike Tönnies (1887/1957), Weber (1978) rejects the idea that social entities (e.g., states or corporations) possess a "collective personality which 'acts'" (p. 14). Although people may well think about or act toward corporations (or communities) as existent entities, he contends that such social phenomena lack the capacity for subjectively meaningful action (i.e., methodological or ontological individualism). Weber's work emphasizes the interpretive dynamics embedded in relational social life.

Georg Simmel: Content, Form, and Sociation

Simmel (1950) is one of the foremost classical contributors to relational sociological theory (see Donati, 2011). He asserts that society comes into existence when individuals enter into relation, and it is this "interaction of elements" that gives rise to varied modes of "sociation" (Simmel, 1908/1971b, pp. 23–24). And, to the extent that social experience involves different forms of sociation, individuals are mutually influenced by others in the context of ongoing lived relation. Simmel suggests that multifold micro-level interactions not only connect people to each other, they also prevent society from becoming overly fragmented. Society is wrought by the ceaseless emergence of social interactions and relationships. Even casual interpersonal contact is indicative of the potential for more substantive social formations to develop through patterned interaction. Everyday social interactions may seem relatively insignificant in and of themselves; however, when taken together, they have the potential to generate social manifestations—such as organizations, communities, or societies—that act back on their co-producers. Simmel (1950) refers to

matters of societal production such that emergent, irreducible relational phenomena arise in and through interaction processes (p. 13).

Simmel (1950) conceives of society as founded in interaction and, as such, the primary focus of his "pure sociology" involves the identification of multifold "societal forms" (e.g., exchange and conflict) (pp. 21–22). Society or, more accurately, sociation refers to the connections that develop among individuals as they interact with and influence one another. It is in this context that Simmel (1950) discusses contrasting interpretations of society as an "event" versus a concrete "substance" (pp. 10–11). He argues that interaction derives from diverse types of motives or psychic states (e.g., love and hunger), which he refers to as the "*content*" out of which "forms" of sociation arise (Simmel, 1950, p. 41). Content pertains to the drives, purposes, or inclinations that motivate individuals to enter into specific types of relations with one another. Simmel further notes that motivations are not intrinsically social; they are factors that bring individuals together in the pursuit of interests and, in so doing, generate different modes of social relation. In other words, the many forms of social life stem from the transformation of otherwise disconnected individuals into identifiable interactional units.

Simmel (1950) remarks on the constantly unfolding nature of lived relation which, for a time, can take on more stable ways of being-with-one-another (p. 385). He draws attention to the inherent fluidity of society stemming from the continuously evolving nature of social interaction. Society is realized in "real time" through individuals' ongoing interactions, connections, and mutual influences on one another. In the course of everyday life, people are drawn into relations that can both acquire a relatively durable structure and potentially influence or constrain future (inter)actions. Sociation, then, constitutes the multiple and varied ways that individuals come together in order to address their shared interests. Furthermore, social relations that develop or stabilize into "forms" can take on a life of their own (Simmel, 1950, p. 43). It is for this reason that crystallized modes of sociation can conceivably persist in the relative absence of their originating motive(s). Simmel's (1908/1971a) discussion of social relations solidifying into forms resonates with contemporary discourse on social emergence (see Donati, 2011). His early work on these issues represents an important aspect of the historical development of relational sociology.

Conceptualizing Social Relations

Tönnies, Weber, and Simmel offer notable insights into the nature of social relations. And, notwithstanding conceptual and ontological differences, their work reflects the central place of social relationality in sociological thought. This section highlights some of the analytical complexities of the social relation(s) concept. The following material is illustrative in nature; it serves as an introduction to the more detailed examinations of social relations presented in subsequent chapters. This discussion includes mention of general definitional considerations and the development of classificatory systems or typologies of social relations (e.g., Fiske, 1992; Parsons, 1951). Finally, the chapter explores some of the analytical intricacies of social and relational emergence, particularly as applied to the theorization of community. All of these issues are meaningfully embedded in the different approaches to community.

Social Status and Social Role

In advance of delving into varied conceptions of social relations, it is useful to first examine the *status–role* distinction. The manner in which authors define and explain social relations reflects, either directly or indirectly, the relative analytical emphasis placed on social status versus social role. These interrelated concepts are subject to variable interpretation, most notably with respect to structural properties and interactional dynamics. Among the many definitions of "role," two points are commonly mentioned: (a) expectations concerning the actions of those occupying a particular status (or position) and (b) enactments stemming from role performances. In contrast to normative or patterned expectations (*structure*), it is the individual's actual behavior, relative to the occupied position, that constitutes the unrehearsed, relational aspects of a social role (*process*). Individuals' role-related interpretations and actions introduce dynamism into "real-world" interaction processes. Interestingly, Masolo et al. (2004) combine rights, duties, expectations, and behaviors within the general notion of a social role, while Gleave, Welser, Lento, and Smith (2009) assume a structural approach to the generation of roles based on patterned commonalities of behavior.

The notion of "status" has been used to designate a collection of rights, responsibilities, and duties linked to a particular position within a social system, group, or some other structural arrangement. Parsons (1951)

observes that statuses or positions locate actors, relative to one another, in a system of interactive relationships. This idea is evident in Tilly's (2005) reference to inequality as relations among social positions that have, over time, sedimented into a hierarchical system of ordered strata. Roles, by comparison, reflect the processual nature of what actors actually "do" in the context of their relations with others. As Parsons (1951) points out, individual actors hold "object-significance" based on their status-positions, as contrasted with the active nature of role performances (p. 25). One holds a status and performs a role, which suggests that relations can be differentiated along parallel lines (albeit in general terms). Therefore, social actors can be thought of as standing in relation to each other with respect to their occupied status(es) and enacted role(s).

The conceptual distinction between status and role is reflected in social network researchers' efforts to map the ties connecting various positions (or nodes) within an activity field, without necessarily investigating the associated role-related behaviors. On a related point, Wilkinson (1970) indicates that inquiry into community action processes should take note of role dynamics, rather than focusing principally on structural networks among status-positions. The key point is that social roles are inherently emergent and relational in nature. This speaks to the dynamics of role reciprocity and complementarity as individuals fit their lines of action together *in situ*. Also, roles can conceivably provide patterns for future behavior. It is in this sense that roles can, over time, exhibit normative properties, even though they are subject to ongoing interpretation and revision.

Theorists and researchers continue to offer novel understandings of the role concept. Loebe (2005), for instance, proffers three different types of roles: *relational*, *processual*, and *social* (p. 95). In the first sense, roles can be viewed as interdependent "parts" of a relational unit or whole. In addition to being processes in their own right, roles are elements of ongoing relational dynamics. Social roles comprise admixtures of qualities, properties, and processes that can be framed in terms of temporal and contextual factors. Furthermore, Gleave et al. (2009) make reference to the emergence of "social role ecologies" within online communities, which derive from the interaction of roles within a defined social space (p. 8). The authors go as far as to say that roles not only organize social behavior, they endow local networks with structure. The status–role distinction is somewhat parallel to structural versus processual ways of thinking about lived social relation.

Definition and Typological Classification

The (Inter)action–Relation Dynamic

An abundance of terminology has accumulated under the general rubric of social relations, for example, social ties, transactions, and networks, among other concepts. Znaniecki (1965) defines a social relation as "a system of functionally interdependent social actions" generated and acted out by two (or more) individuals engaged in a sequence of interactions (p. 88). A social relation, then, is an outcome of people coming into contact with one another and interacting in a sustained manner based on shared concerns or mutually accepted norms of behavior. This is indicative of a conceptual difference between social relations and the interactional dynamics out of which they emerge. Based on this line of reasoning, social relations are elemental to the study of more comprehensive social phenomena.

More recently, Mucha (2006) has indicated that a social relation constitutes an interaction context that has become relatively stable, structured, and regularized (p. 137). Here again, social relations originate with but cannot be equated to interaction. A similar theme is evident in Strauss' (2008) discussion of less rigidly structured interactions among people who stand alongside others, as compared to the more formalized relations that occur within an integrated totality or whole. Donati (2011) quite clearly states that a social relation is an emergent outcome of mutual (inter)action; it is the irreducible "third element" that arises out of the conditioning effects of one actor on another (p. 124). Crossley (2011), too, discusses the idea that interaction generates social relations that can act back on individuals' actions. And, although he accepts the notion of emergent properties (e.g., language or relational structures), Crossley emphasizes that relationships are processually embedded in an historical trajectory of transactions. The main point is that interaction is foundational to the emergence of varied forms of relational phenomena (e.g., communities).

Typological Systems

Tönnies' (1887/1957) *Gemeinschaft–Gesellschaft* distinction and Weber's (1978) fourfold typology of social action represent two early contributions to the theorization of differential social relations. Simmel (1950), in turn, treats the study of "societal forms" as a central aspect of the "science of society" (p. 22). As noted, Tönnies (1887/1957) long ago distinguished between close, all-embracing social relationships (*Gemeinschaft*) and those of a more instrumental (i.e., rational), self-interested nature (*Gesellschaft*).

He indicates that the former are characterized by affect-laden, multi-stranded social relations, while the latter constitute less intense, single-stranded associations. Tönnies suggests that these two modes of relationship co-exist to varying degrees within collective social phenomena or entities (e.g., organizations or communities). Maciver (1970) similarly notes that society comprises individuals whose relations with one another can be "deep and vital," while others are more transient and superficial (p. 71).

Over the years, there has been sporadic interest in developing typologies of social relations. Parsons (1951) proffered a series of five role (action) orientations that individuals can assume when entering into relations with "partners" or "social objects" (p. 58). These so-called "pattern variables" specify alternative "value-orientations" related to the role structure of social systems, as noted below (Parsons, 1951, pp. 58–67). Of Parsons' five concept pairs, two constitute motivational dispositions. The "affectivity–neutrality" distinction is concerned with the pursuit of expressive interests, immediate versus deferred gratification, and emotional factors, while the "specificity–diffuseness" variable reflects the relative breadth or narrowness of obligations within interaction contexts. Parsons also identifies two sets of orientations pertaining to the social system. The "universalism–particularism" classification differentiates between actions based on generalized norms, as compared to more specific role relationships. A second cultural orientation deals with matters of "ascription" and "achievement," whereas the final integrative variable is concerned with "self-orientation" versus "collectivity-orientation." All five patterned alternatives are interrelated in complex ways with respect to the functional prerequisites of the social system, and, as such, they should not be understood simply as a list of discrete attributes.

Somewhat in the vein of Simmel's (1950) discussion of "forms," Fiske (1992) suggests that the intricacies of human interaction derive from varied aspects of *communal sharing*, *authority ranking*, *equality matching*, and *market pricing* (p. 689). Briefly stated, "communal sharing" refers to situations in which social relations are symmetrical or equivalent (e.g., kinship ties), whereas relationships based on "authority ranking" are asymmetrical, ordered, or hierarchical in nature. "Equity matching" denotes contexts in which participants focus on comparing, counting, and balancing elements of their relationships (e.g., reciprocity). Finally, "market pricing" is founded on rational, calculative mechanisms of cost–benefit analysis, efficiency, and utility. Fiske claims that these modes of social relation can explain much of the diversity of human (social) life, including but not limited to matters of affective response, identity formation, and

group dynamics. However, he acknowledges that more than one modality may come into play when analyzing social action, which points to the complexity of human behavior and the problem of specifying elemental modes of relation.

Of late, Donati (2011) has reviewed a number of classificatory approaches to the study of social relations. He identifies several paired relational concepts: static and dynamic, primary and secondary, direct (person-to-person) and mediated (Wellman, 2005), "weak" and "strong" (Granovetter, 1973, p. 1360), "thick" and "thin" (Putnam, 2000, p. 136), distant and close (Buber, 1965; Simmel, 1950), and, of course, many others. This work is indicative of efforts to identify or typify varied modes of social relations. Notwithstanding the relative merits and limitations of typological method, it reflects an intention to conceptualize the intrinsically relational fabric of social life.

Social Transactions and Joint Actions

Theoretical discourse on social relations continues to evolve along competing lines, most notably within the field of relational sociology or sociological relationalism. Tilly (2005) has argued that "interpersonal transactions" are foundational to social processes (pp. 6–7). He favors the study of relational dynamics and social mechanisms over individuals' dispositional tendencies or self-regulating social systems (i.e., the atomism–holism debate). Tilly (1995) proffers a relational interpretation of social processes (i.e., "relational realism") (p. 4). His use of the term "transaction" is fitting, given that he discusses the passage of resources, information, and energy between so-called social sites (e.g., persons, groups, or networks) (Tilly, 2005, p. 7). And, while transactions can be observed, Tilly notes that relations are matters of inference from a sequence of interactions.

According to Tilly (2005), a successive, accumulating pattern of interaction between social sites is indicative of an existing or prospective relation that may take the form of a more durable social connection. And, in line with Emirbayer's (1997) conception of relational sociology, Tilly (2005) claims that multifold and quite modest transactions can accumulate in ways that both generate and transform social life. He further argues that relational or transactional mechanisms provide a more substantive basis for the analysis of social systems. Tilly focuses attention on the changing nature of transactions, the characteristics of social sites (as outcomes of interaction), and subsequent relational mechanisms and dynamics. Based on this stance, he opposes the analysis of *sui generis* structures, at least

insofar as such an approach directs attention away from relational mechanisms—the essential fabric of social life. What is of particular interest here is Tilly's application of the transactions concept and his emphasis on relational dynamics.

It is also useful to take note of Blumer's (1969, 2004) elaboration of Mead's (1938) theory of the "social act." This work offers insight into the relational, interpretive, and emergent nature of joint action and group agency. Blumer (2004) emphasizes the relational dynamics in and through which social actions are formed *in situ* as participants fit their respective acts together. He contends that collective enterprises built up through relational processes of joint activity are irreducible to individual acts or their aggregation. This emergentist orientation stems in part from the understanding that social organization is embedded *in* human interaction and, therefore, it neither "precedes" nor "produces" the social act (Blumer, 2004, p. 98). Structure exists within the ongoing process of participants organizing their multiple lines of action into a combined performance. Blumer's remarks are indicative of interactional process dynamics and self-organizing structures. The emergent social act constitutes a transcendent, interconnected "whole" or "unity" that possesses its own distinct character and makeup (Blumer, 2004, pp. 96, 100). This suggests that all things social are relational insofar as nothing social can exist in the absence of human interaction. And, to the extent that social action is processual in nature, interaction does not occur "between" independent and separate acts; rather, all of the constituent elements are bound together in the ongoing dynamic of continuous adjustment (Blumer, 2004). These ideas express a unique intersection of process thinking and emergentism, which is very much in keeping with contemporary discourse on structure and process within relational sociology.

Emerging Theoretical Issues in the Study of Social Relations

Buber (1923/1958) once observed that "[a]ll real living is meeting" (p. 17). This simple but profound statement aptly expresses what many classical and contemporary social theorists have repeatedly asserted about the nature of lived experience. Dewey (1958) notes that human association is so commonplace as to be unremarkable—what is of greater significance is the emergent outcomes of multifold patterns of social relation (p. 175). It is not surprising that academics have focused considerable attention on the study of varied relational phenomena, such as social ties, networks,

relationships, and bonds. An abundance of terms has been proffered in an effort to specify different types or modes of social relation that, admittedly, cannot be neatly defined or classified. Community is rife with multifarious relational dynamics ranging from the most fleeting exchanges to more durable relationships and multi-layered systemic (e.g., institutional) linkages. Not only is community inherently relational, it is crosshatched with intersecting processes and mechanisms for which theorists are continuously devising new analytical language.

Based on a long history of theoretical and philosophical work, contemporary relational sociologists focus on the primacy of relations. The recent "relational turn" in the social sciences has prompted a resurgence of interest in process-based thinking. And, notwithstanding different streams of thought within relational sociology, it is generally agreed that events, actors, activities, and phenomena exist or arise within social relations. The intellectual foundations of sociological relationalism are often contrasted with essentialist or substantialist views concerning the relative fixity of pregiven actors and social entities (Tsekeris, 2010). Indeed, some relational sociologists emphasize the ongoing flow of interactional dynamics whereby both "inter-actors" and their "inter-relations" *co*-emerge. Crossley (2011) frames social relations in terms of a temporal process such that interactions are enacted within a series of events. He suggests that social relations have a life course which, for a time, brings inter-actors together in contexts of shared activity. And, once set in motion, these relational processes can evolve into action sequences that have the potential to shape future interactions. It is in this sense that patterned social relations or structures can be said to arise out of and influence subsequent interaction processes.

Nancy (1991) has offered a number of observations about emergent social relations and community. He rejects analytical representations of both absolutely independent, atomized individuals and immanent social bonds (i.e., communal fusion). Nancy, among others, opposes the notion of antecedent individuals and their aggregation into some form of communalized entity. In Nancy's view, relations are contiguous but lacking in the kind of continuity that can give rise to substantive structures. Being is essentially "social being" constituted through the endless process of coming into relation with others. On each occasion of communicative meeting, singular beings arise anew in the temporal flow of life events. For Nancy (1996/2000), community is reduced to finite beings "co-appearing" together while remaining spaced—a mêlée of separateness and entanglement lacking any communal bond (pp. 63, 65). His anti-essentialist view of community rests on the relational co-emergence of singular beings.

The renewed focus on relationality and processuality has been accompanied by theoretical discussions of emergence. A key aspect of social emergence hinges, in part, on a distinction that Donati (2011) makes between *interpersonal* and *social* relations. Interpersonal relations involve actors' mutual influences on one another, whereas social relations are both emergent and nonreducible. In other words, social relations possess unique properties and powers. Archer (1982) states that these emergent social properties are relational insofar as they are embedded in and arise out of interaction (p. 475). Donati (2011) makes a similar point with respect to his understanding of a social relation, which he views as a "reciprocal action" that grows out of mutual interaction but also "connects" or "binds" participants together structurally (p. 124). Reciprocal exchanges between co-actors (e.g., information or other capitals) are elemental to diverse types of social ties and networks. And, furthermore, mechanisms of exchange between individuals create connections through which "*something* passes [emphasis added]" (Donati, 2011, p. 73). In this sense, social relations possess distinct properties that are irreducible to their co-producers, most notably with respect to the emergence of macro-social phenomena.

Inquiry into the nature of social relations has generated an expansive and multifaceted body of work. In addition to exploring conceptual aspects of social relations, theorists continue to debate the issue of whether social phenomena exist "in their own right" apart from human actors. This bears directly on the ontological status that some theorists attribute to emergent social relations and structures (e.g., Archer, 2010; Donati, 2011). The foregoing discussion alludes to several key ontological and methodological bases for contending that social relations constitute the elemental focus of sociological consideration. Furthermore, the theoretical contention that interactional dynamics can give rise to novel *sui generis* relational phenomena, along with their unique properties and powers, is particularly relevant to the study of community processes, structures, and agency. The following section examines different representations of emergentism, with a view to the theorization of community.

Emergentism, Ontological Individualism, and Critical Realism

There is a growing body of sociological theory that interprets social relations as the essential units of analysis. Crossley (2011) suggests that the study of social relations offers an alternative to either treating social entities

as simple collections of purposive individual actors (*individualism*) or assuming a substantialist approach to society as a "solid object with fixed properties" (*holism*) (p. 13). Based on the former viewpoint, social relationships and collectivities are framed as "individuals-in-interaction"; in the latter sense, actors (and their roles) are likened to "parts" within a superordinate "social whole" (Strauss, 2008, p. 199). Methodological individualists focus on the determinative powers of human relational processes (Elder-Vass, 2012). Holists or methodological collectivists, in contrast, argue that social events and actions are outcomes of structural forces. Taken together, these two perspectives theorize human beings as continuously involved in multifold relations through which they generate and transform collective phenomena.

According to Emirbayer (1997), relational theorists reject the notion of individuals as independent, self-contained agents who can be analytically separated from the social contexts within which (inter)action is situated and takes shape. Furthermore, human behavior is not dictated by the internal laws or maintenance functions of a "higher-order" social entity (e.g., system). Quite apart from substantialist thinking, Emirbayer (1997) indicates that actors are embedded and emerge within the processual dynamics of "transactional contexts" (p. 287). This shifts emphasis to relations as the essential units of analysis, as opposed to pre-given actors or entities. Indeed, for some social theorists and philosophers, actors and their relations are inseparable insofar as they *co*-emerge within the perpetual unfolding of lived experience (see Nancy, 1991).

Individualist Versus Collectivist Emergence

Much of what follows centers on social emergence, relational ontology, and causal powers. In very basic terms, emergence refers to the appearance of something "new." Explanations of novel emergent phenomena typically involve some reference to "lower-level" elements that interact, combine, or become organized in a way that gives rise to a "higher-order" effect, event, or structure. A key point of contention in this area of study is whether emergent outcomes possess unique, irreducible properties or (causal) powers. Notwithstanding such issues, certain aspects of emergence can complement efforts to theorize how communities arise and change through the interplay of dynamic interaction processes and "structural patterning" (Archer, 1982, p. 456). Emergentism offers a valuable

approach to understanding the relational elaboration and transformation of varied social phenomena, including communities (see Sawyer, 2003).

The notion of emergence is implicated in relational interpretations of "micro-to-macro" connections. The longstanding debate over how micro-level processes develop into macro-social entities, properties, or effects has yielded diverse views about emergence. One need only read the preface to one of Durkheim's (1895/1938) foremost works, *The Rules of Sociological Method*, to find very explicit mention of social emergence. Dewey (1958), too, makes reference to the idea that, when human beings enter into association, novel emergent properties come to bear on individuals and their relations with one another (p. 175). The term emergence is regularly used to denote situations in which relations generate outcomes (e.g., social phenomena) that exhibit unique properties and powers. However, theorists offer varied interpretations of the ontological status, (ir)reducibility, and causal powers of emergent effects. Sawyer (2001) points out that, although "individualist" and "collectivist" emergentists agree that lower-level properties can interact in ways that lead to the formation of social entities, they differ with respect to matters of reducibility and reification (p. 552).

Individualist emergentists generally contend that higher-level phenomena are both supervenient on and reducible to lower-level components and their relationships (Sawyer, 2001). This is akin to explaining the behavior of social systems in terms of the organization of individual actions. Maciver's (1970) early work on community evidences a strong affinity with ontological or methodological individualism. In his book, *Community: A Sociological Study*, the first edition of which appeared in 1917, Maciver characterizes society (or community) as nothing more than human beings bound together through their relations and relationships. He contends that people build relationships and communities through "psychical relations, relations of minds" (Maciver, 1970, p. 98). Maciver rejects the "realist" view of a transcendent and ontologically substantial society. Indeed, he questions how it is possible to aggregate social beings (presumably the "parts") who are always-already embedded in relationships with one another. Maciver explicitly disagrees with those who make use of organic analogies to represent community as a *sui generis* entity that is somehow "greater than the sum of its parts" (p. 88). And, although he accepts that individuals' actions are influenced by their associations with one another, this should not be taken to mean that members of a community form a single unity or collective mind.

Collectivist or *realist* emergentists are principally nonreductionist in their thinking, with varied references to issues of nonadditivity, ontological autonomy, and downward causation. All of these facets are evident in Durkheim's (1895/1938) suggestion that "*social* facts" can be treated as "*things*" that are external to, coercive over, and irreducible to individuals (p. 14). He asserts that social phenomena arise from the synthetic combination of social relations among individuals, which is entwined with his *sui generis* conception of society. Durkheim emphasizes that the properties of these emergent phenomena cannot be ascertained from their constituent elements. This point is clearly evident in his contention that collective representations are fundamentally different from the substratum of plural consciousnesses from which they emerge. In addition to viewing social phenomena as supervenient on interacting individuals, Durkheim regards "social facts" as ontologically distinct, relatively autonomous, and endowed with their own causal powers (e.g., social constraint or obligation). In essence, an emergent collective entity can acquire an obdurate reality that is largely independent of its constituent members.

Archer (1995) theorizes that human activity and society (or community) are intimately interrelated. Human agency constitutes and continually transforms the social world. She argues against the simplistic idea that *micro*sociology is concerned with face-to-face social interaction, while *macro*sociology is relegated to large-scale social organizations and institutions. Archer advocates a "stratified" interpretation of social reality in which "macro" denotes social properties that emerge, over time, from interaction processes operating, relationally speaking, at the "micro" level. Put simply, there is a relational dynamic or interplay between (micro-level) social interaction and (macro-level) emergent systemic properties. What makes strata "*distinct*" and "*separable*" from each other are their "emergent properties and powers" (Archer, 1995, pp. 9, 14). Archer (1982) proposes a "morphogenetic approach" that is based on a temporal sequence beginning with (1) a pre-existing "*structure*" and its particular properties (t_1), (2) followed by "*action*" that is initiated within "a context not of its own making" (t_2–t_3) which, then, leads to (3) either structural reproduction or transformation (t_4) (pp. 468–471). The latter phase engenders structures that influence future interactions which, in essence, restart the "cycle."

Archer (1995) proffers a critical (or social) realist understanding of emergent properties stemming from the interactions of an antecedent time period (i.e., irreducibility). Hence, there is a temporal dimension

embedded in the ongoing processes of emergence whereby the structural patterns operating at a given point are not attributable to current interactions but, rather, to those of some distant past. And, furthermore, these stratified properties and powers constitute relatively autonomous and independent causal forces. This is consistent with a conception of emergence based on the "irreducible hierarchical organization" of events and processes, such that macro-social properties are not attributable to lower levels (Nagel, 1961, pp. 366–367). According to Archer (1995), social realists insist on "ontological emergence," as contrasted with "ontological individualism," the latter of which assumes that only individuals exist (p. 15).

Sawyer (2003), by comparison, advocates a "middle ground" orientation to emergence termed "nonreductive individualism," which is based on "a form of property dualism" that falls somewhere in between holism and individualism (p. 266). In basic terms, emergent collective phenomena derive from social mechanisms comprising human actors, but they are not necessarily reducible to individual properties. Sawyer (2001) supports this claim by theorizing that macro-level social properties may develop as a function of "*multiple*" or "*wildly disjunctive*" sets of supervenient (lower-level) properties (pp. 556–557). This is consistent with the idea that relatively stable social entities can arise or converge within the causal flux of highly complex, micro-level dynamics (Sawyer, 2002). However, Elder-Vass (2014) takes issue with Sawyer's reference to nonreductive individualism based on the argument that macro-social properties are "relationally emergent," not "wildly disjunctive" (p. 14). Relational emergence, as represented by Elder-Vass (2014), involves social properties that arise as a result of the specific relationships operating among component "parts"—meaning, it is the manner of their organization that constitutes the "whole" (p. 6). He also espouses a critical realist view of emergent causal powers that inhere within the properties of social entities.

Concluding Remarks

The forthcoming chapters explore varied perspectives on the lived experience of community: systemic, interactional, constructionist, and dialogical, among others. The relational bases of community are far more complex, overlain, and intricately interwoven than any single concept or theory is capable of explaining. The main thesis of the book is that social relations are foundational to the study of community. Based on Donati's (2011) and others' work, community, much like society, is a direct expression of social

relations insofar as it exists in a constant state of unfolding emergence and formative elaboration. And, so, it is important to consider how community comes into existence and changes continuously in and through ongoing social relations.

This chapter outlines several core aspects of relational thinking that should prove useful when examining various interpretations of community. It is appropriate to conclude this discussion by returning to the penultimate idea of "Being-with" (Heidegger, 1927/1962, p. 149), which many would agree is intrinsic to "social being" and, therefore, community. Authors who study community regularly comment on the interplay between everyday interactional dynamics and the emergence of patterned social relationships, bonds, phenomena, or structures. Even Nancy (1996/2000), who emphatically disclaims communal bonds and immanent communities, draws attention to the relationally "plural" nature of "being-with-one-another." He states that the "with" of "being-with" is foundational to "coessentiality" (Nancy, 1996/2000, p. 30). In a similar vein, Mead (1934) emphasizes the relational underpinnings of the emergent social self and the interactional contexts within which it develops and perpetually changes. All such ideas revolve around the processual and emergent nature of the self, other, relation, and community.

Nancy (1991) expresses a liminal view of community that emerges and re-emerges within the dynamics of *co*-being, *co*-action, or *co*-existence. His work conveys a unique understanding of singular beings reaching out toward each other. The notion of "betweenness," to which Nancy (1991) refers, involves finite beings "compearing" to one another *in situ* (p. 29). In keeping with his rejection of immanentism, Nancy (1996/2000) remarks that this "connection" is neither a "bridge," a shared place, nor an intersubjective milieu (p. 5). Buber (1965), in contrast, endows the "between" with ontological reality that transcends the existence of those who enter into mutual dialogic relation (p. 75). Here again, lived relation is of primary significance in the unceasing flow of human (social) life. Through his depiction of the "between," Buber (1965) proposes that greater attention be focused on the consideration of "interhuman" relations, as distinct from both individualism and collectivism. His work on this matter is consistent with relational emergence and relational ontology, both of which are pertinent to the study of community.

Academic discourse on the "micro–macro" linkage is embedded in the perennial debate over how or whether individual (inter)actions coalesce in ways that generate novel social phenomena, events, or entities. Archer (1982) calls for a more informed understanding of the interplay between

micro- and macro-level processes, most notably with respect to "the genesis of social structures" (p. 476). Perhaps what is most germane here is the notion of emergence, as applied to the study of lived relation, community, and agency. Emergence is implicated at multiple levels of analysis within the larger discourse on community. Such a claim takes on added significance when it is suggested that newly formed social properties or phenomena are irreducible to individual members. In this sense, explanations of so-called "higher-order" events or social structures cannot be predicated solely on "lower-level" components.

There are competing interpretations of emergence, particularly with respect to matters of ontology, reducibility, and causality. It is not uncommon for emergentist thinkers to argue that social phenomena involve properties and laws that are irreducible to those of the supervenient base. Feinberg (1988), for instance, takes issue with the idea that collective phenomena can be analytically decomposed into their constituent parts "without remainder" (p. 84). Indeed, some theorists go as far as to state that social phenomena or properties are ontologically independent of the co-producers over which they also exert causal powers. This harkens back to aspects of Durkheim's (1895/1938) "social factist" theory and Archer's (1995) reference to separable and irreducible strata that hold their own particular properties and powers (p. 14). Elder-Vass (2014), in turn, indicates that it is the specific manner in which components are interrelated or organized that accounts for the causal powers of social entities (i.e., relational emergence). Emergent phenomena, in this sense, stem from the particular nature of the relations that hold among constituent parts, elements, or individuals.

Community can be viewed as a dynamic complex of interconnected, iterative social relations. The relational fabric of community life is crosscut with diverse lines of association, replete with continuously emerging and transforming modes of social relation. Regardless of whether community is conceptualized as shared social space, common interests, or close-knit social ties, it constitutes an intricate confluence of multifold interactions and relations. This depiction rests on the core principle of "being-with"—the ubiquitous condition of relational *co*-existentiality out of which both human (social) selves and communities *co*-emerge. In attempting to devise a relational approach to community, the notion of "betweenness" warrants particular attention. It represents a highly valuable conceptual heuristic with which to interpret the emergence of everything from the most fleeting interpersonal connections to more comprehensive and enduring communal bonds. Relation is the origin,

the experience and, for some, the basic substance of community. And, as will become apparent in the forthcoming chapters, relational thinking is elemental to the theorization of community, regardless of one's preferred perspective.

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CHAPTER 3

Evolving Conceptions of Community

The word "community" quite commonly brings to mind varied ideas, such as common residence, shared understandings, collective feelings of belonging, or some combination thereof. Communities have long been conceived of as social-ecological systems—spatially focused interactions, institutions, and livelihoods (Pahl, 1970). However, the meaning of community is fraught with conceptual ambiguities concerning matters of spatiality (both physical and social), cohesiveness, collective identification, and a host of other issues. Warren (1978) suggests that, over time, the notion of community came to be understood as a social phenomenon that did not coincide with narrowly specified legal, political, or jurisdictional definitions. He refers to community as a complete round of existence comprising functionally relevant institutions, interpersonal networks, collective interests, and feelings of attachment. Of late, theoretical discourse has moved away from viewing communities as concrete entities or "containers" of social life. Neither communities nor localities should be treated as definitively bounded territories or places, but rather as constructed spaces of intersecting social interactions, processes, and "co-presence" (Massey, 1994, pp. 137–139).

Much like the social self, community is co-constituted within the ongoing flow of interactions and relationships. The study of social relations is widely reflected in classical sociology. Notably, Simmel (1908/1971) remarks that "sociation" is responsible for transforming otherwise atomized individuals into a "unity" of interacting elements (pp. 23–24). Academic discourse on community is rife with references to

K. C. Bessant, *The Relational Fabric of Community*,
https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-56042-1_3

person-to-person relations, social transactions, mediated interactions, and other modes of association. This wide-ranging body of work explores diverse structural, organizational, and relational aspects of community life. Interestingly, Dewey (1958) observes that, in light of constant change, structure must be understood as the "character of *events*" (p. 72). The chapter begins by reviewing early conceptions of community as a communal (social) group (Hiller, 1941), a social system of functionally differentiated components (Warren, 1978), and an adaptive human ecosystem (Hawley, 1944, 1950). This is followed by more recent interest in social–ecological resilience, social network analysis, and technologically mediated (e.g., online) communities. Prior emphasis on structural or systemic relations has left an indelible imprint on the interpretation of community. Regardless of whether community is framed in terms of social systems, social groups, or social networks, all such approaches share relational predilections.

Community (Social) Group

The understanding of community as "organized social life" has proven to be highly influential. Quite some time ago, Hiller (1941) explored the idea of treating community as a social group based on four basic criteria: agents, tests of membership, identifiable roles, and regulatory norms (p. 189). Thus conceived, both communities and social groups represent social systems comprising parallel sets of integrated and reciprocally interrelated components. Hiller (1941) suggests that the notion of community exhibits all four of these attributes and one other, "a habitat, locality or area" (p. 190). He contends that the territorial referent intersects with other facets of community through social mechanisms such as local codes of acceptance, rights, and responsibilities. Localized community systems constitute symbolically meaningful social spaces that shape social relations through normative regulation. To the extent that a locality involves the emergence of place-based social structures, relations, or associations, it is not simply a territorial agglomeration of people. And, in the absence of systemic integration, the various elements of a "locality group" cannot be considered a community social structure (Hiller, 1941, p. 199).

Hillery (1972) likewise makes reference to community as a human group, which he differentiates from shared sentiments. Somewhat earlier, he referred to community as a form of organization that is founded on symbolic interaction (Hillery, 1968). In contradistinction to those who

conceive of community as a real, "out there" entity, Hillery argues that it is little more than an analytical construct. He remarks that the meaning of community is so varied and sometimes contradictory as to be relatively ineffective for the purpose of describing a specific system. In response to the many uses of the community concept, Hillery (1968) proffers the notion of "communal organizations" (p. 152). The latter are somewhat loosely defined as systems of interrelated institutions formed by individuals who live together within a given space or territory. Communal organizations comprise collections of groups that exhibit some degree of collective organization. Hillery indicates that families can come together to generate neighborhoods, which agglomerate into more comprehensive social phenomena: villages, cities, regions, and nations. Therefore, communal organizations can exist at different levels of inclusiveness, and, as such, they can coalesce into what may be termed a "community of communities."

The treatment of community as a localized social group rests on the nature of interpersonal relations and social organization. Day and Murdoch (1993), for instance, observe that community is where people come into contact with one another in their everyday actions and practices. And, according to Selznick (1996), community can be viewed as a variable expression of "group experience" to the extent that it engages the whole person in a broad range of issues and activities (p. 195). Wellman (2001, 2005), in contrast, contends that community is found in social networks, *not* groups. His understanding of community reflects the idea that people are increasingly inclined to establish a series of spatially dispersed, weakly connected social ties with family, friends, co-workers, and acquaintances. Despite such observations, community theory and development practice continue to deal with locality-oriented conceptions of collective interests and actions.

Community sociologists have long been interested in the study of how social interaction becomes organized, regularized, or structured, over time, and subsequently influences future actions (Minar & Greer, 1969). For Sutton and Kolaja (1960), a community constitutes an organizational or structural unit that emerges when locality-relevant interactions become sufficiently patterned to generate an identifiably distinct entity. Summers, Clark, and Seiler (1970) similarly contend that community represents a unique form of social organization, which can be conceptualized on the basis of varied criteria, including the number of members, the extent of functional sub-units, and the level of "ecological dispersion" (pp. 219–220). This emphasis on structural aspects is reflected in the treatment of community

as a social system or a "system of systems" comprising differential units of social organization (Poplin, 1972, p. 152). Social system thinking held a prominent position within (community) sociology during the mid-twentieth century and, indeed, remnants of this approach are still evident today.

Social System Theory

In advance of discussing social and community system thinking, it is important to briefly mention "general system theory" or what is sometimes termed a "general theory of systems." Bertalanffy (1968) suggests that the expanding organizational and technological fabric of society has prompted the development of system-based models within the natural, biological, and social sciences. He notes that analytical challenges associated with "organized complexity," dynamic interdependencies, and differentiation have engendered a movement away from mechanistic approaches to isolated causal chains (Bertalanffy, 1968, p. 34). General system theory grew out of organismic biology and subsequently spread to the humanities and social sciences. Its development was buttressed by related ideas in areas such as information and communication theory, cybernetics, and network analysis (see Laszlo & Laszlo, 1997).

General system theory involves the search for parallel principles running through varied scientific fields. In contrast to more narrowly framed disciplinary specializations or modes of investigation, it attempts to offer an integrated understanding of complex organization (Laszlo, 1975, p. 10). Buckley (1967) argues that modern systems theory privileges the study of relations over entities, along with a particular emphasis on flexible structures, processes, and transitional dynamics. A key feature of this work concerns the manner in which elements are organized into systemic relationships. As compared to mechanical systems, organic and sociocultural systems exhibit greater organizational complexity by virtue of less stable structures (fluidity) and more dynamic interrelations among components (Buckley, 1967).

According to Rapoport (1968), a system comprises a set of entities whose relations can be specified and used to make deductions about future systemic behavior (p. 453). Buckley (1967) similarly describes a system as a more or less stable (causal) network of directly or indirectly related components. He points out that the nature of elements can range from relatively simple to highly complex, and interrelations can vary with respect to a host of factors such as directionality (e.g., mutual or unidirectional), (non)linearity,

and degree of flexibility. So, in very basic terms, a system constitutes a complex "whole" of interacting and interdependent components. Conceptual considerations include relationships among elements, part–whole relations, hierarchical ordering of subsystems, adaptive adjustment under conditions of perturbation, as well as environmental inputs, resources, and extra-systemic interactions.

Furthermore, Bertalanffy (1968) distinguishes between "summative" (*isolable*) and "constitutive" (*relational*) components (pp. 54–55). The latter are noteworthy insofar as their properties are dependent on specific interrelations within a complex that is deemed novel, emergent, and irreducible to its constituent elements. System-based models typically express a distinct preoccupation with "wholeness" while exploring the unifying principles (e.g., organization) that arise out of the interaction of parts and processes (Bertalanffy, 1968, pp. 34, 97). In structural terms, a system comprises multiple elements and sub-components, while forming a functionally integrated, "indivisible unity" that exhibits emergent properties (Laszlo & Laszlo, 1997, p. 9).

Talcott Parsons: The Social System

One of the most well-known proponents of the social system perspective is Parsons (1951, 1960, 1968). He describes a system as a complex of interdependent regularized relations (a) among constituent units and (b) between the totality and its environment. Parsons (1968) contends that social systems are inherently open by virtue of both intra-systemic (*internal*) linkages among functionally differentiated subsystems and input–output relations with the (*external*) environment. Although he acknowledges the importance of dynamic processes (e.g., unit interactions or environmental adjustments), Parsons pays particular attention to the structural components of a system. The operations of elemental parts, processes, and patterned relationships are framed within the context of a comprehensive system of interdependencies (the "whole"). A system comprises a network of interrelated and interdependent subsystems, each of which is a system in its own right (Parsons, 1961/2002). Parsons (1968) elaborates the notion of an organized system of action that includes four abstract subsystems: the *organism*, the *psychological* system (or personality), the *cultural* system, and the *social* system (p. 459). The social system is one of several components that together make up an integrated action system. For Parsons, functional imperatives form the critical linkage between structural and dynamic aspects of a system of action.

Poplin (1972) defines a social system as a relatively stable, organized set of social relationships involving two or more people or groups. On a related note, Parsons (1961/2002) suggests that a two-person interaction system exhibits many of the core structural elements of a social system. He refers to the latter as a plurality of actors whose interactions are oriented both to one another and to their shared situation. And, although Parsons (1951) identifies the *act* as the elemental unit of analysis, it is the organization of status–role bundles into patterned relationships that constitutes the social system. He refers to social systems as networks of interactive processes and relationships whose constituent statuses and roles are influenced by the relational bases of institutions. The structures and processes that comprise an action system are derivatives of contextually situated relations among its units. Put differently, the configuration of relations among individual actors engaged in interactive dynamics gives structure to a social system (Parsons, 1951).

Parsons (1968) conceives of society as a type of "self-sufficient" social system whose capacity to autonomously implement values and interests rests on internal resources, organizational dynamics, and critical inputs from the environment (p. 461). He emphasizes that a social system is a complex, organized configuration of human actions. This illustrates the inherently constitutive dynamic embedded in reciprocal (inter)actions and the essential place of social relations in Parsons' social system perspective (see Donati, 2011). Bertalanffy (1968) likewise points to interaction as a key facet of general system theory. He defines a system as an organized complex of interacting elements standing in relation to one another, where the interaction is considered *non*-trivial. Indeed, Bertalanffy warns against decomposing phenomena into independent elements and causal linkages at the expense of examining interrelations. This resonates with emergentist contentions that interactions among composite elements can give rise to (irreducible) relational outcomes, effects, or phenomena.

Society has often been described as a system of interrelationships or a complex network of interactions (Poplin, 1972, p. 153). However, the analytical involvement of interaction in system-based theory can be conceptualized at multiple levels: inter-personal, intra-systemic (among subsystem components), inter-systemic, and system-environment relations. Lee and Brosziewski (2009) observe that contemporary social system theory treats society as a self-organizing autopoietic system. The authors focus on the idea that society is produced through recursive connections among its elements stemming from the complexities of ongoing communicative

processes. Society involves "units of *communication*" that can form varied types of stable social systems: interactional, organizational, or societal, the latter of which comprise functionally differentiated parts (e.g., family, economy, or politics) (Lee & Brosziewski, 2009, pp. 3, 9).

On a related theme, Luhmann (1997/2013) discusses social system differentiation in relation to communicative "interaction systems" or co-presence (p. 133). He claims that even modest person-to-person interactions bring about society (see Simmel, 1908/1971). Luhmann theorizes that core societal systems and subsystems rest on perpetually emerging and dissipating interaction systems. These seemingly quite inconspicuous or inconsequential interaction processes are premised on autopoietic communication that is foundational to the realization of all forms of (sub) systems and society as a whole. The structure of society and community acquires a semblance of temporal stability set against the background of multifold, fluid interaction systems that "begin" and "end" within the continuity of lived relation. Notwithstanding different versions of social system theory, the foundational issue is the emergent nature of organized social life. The following section reviews the application of system-based thinking to the study of community.

Community as a Social System

Parsons' Conception of Community

Parsons (1951, 1968) makes mention of community in several different but interrelated senses. When speaking of society, he refers to the "societal community" in conjunction with economic, political, and cultural subsystems (Parsons, 1968, pp. 461–462). The societal community is associated with an integrative function, which is one of the four imperatives of an action system: "adaptation," "goal attainment," "integration," and "pattern maintenance" (Parsons & Smelser, 1956, pp. 18–19). Parsons (1968) refers to the societal community as a core structural component through which people associate with one another. Aspects of the societal community are articulated and interrelated with other subsystems in ways that facilitate alternative solidarities and integrative functions within the societal system. Furthermore, communal solidarity is reflected in common value orientations, mutual obligations, institutionalized norms, and integrated expectations.

In Parsons' (1951) book, *The Social System*, community is described as a territorially focused "collectivity" comprising individuals who share a mutual orientation to common values and solidary social relations (p. 91). He makes a distinction between a collectivity and an ecological system, the latter of which involves a plurality of actors who relate to one another as "objects" (Parsons, 1951, p. 93). Parsons pays particular attention to the integration of a collectivity, where members define their actions in relation to the overall interests and integrity of the system. In a subsequent publication, Parsons (1960) characterizes community as "an *analytical* category" more so than a concrete entity or unit (p. 250). And, yet, he refers to community as a collectivity of people and their activities relative to a shared locale. Parsons draws attention to the relationship between the community and its physical territory, as reflected in members' actions and interactions. He contends that the structural facets of community relations are shaped by the places in which people are located, carry out occupational roles, respond to normative obligations, and, most fundamentally, engage in person-to-person interactions (Parsons, 1960, pp. 252–275). In addition to performing local functions, the community is directly involved in binding together or integrating actors, actions, and processes on behalf of society-at-large.

Community System Theory

Theoretical emphasis on localized community structures and relations is clearly evident in social system thinking. Early rural sociologists often conceptualized community as a place-based set of associations, structures, and activities organized into a basic round of existence. The notion of "local society" connotes a relatively discrete, nucleated system of interconnected social institutions that addresses the needs of its members and safeguards the survival of the larger unit. Based on this analytical orientation, community constitutes a complex of interrelated elements performing locality-relevant functions. Nelson, Ramsey, and Verner (1960) describe community as a discrete structure of territorially focused social relations that can act as a single unit. Here, too, the community is viewed as a concrete entitative phenomenon—a spatially and functionally organized social system. Furthermore, Nelson et al. make a distinction between understanding community as an arena of intra-systemic interactions among composite elements (e.g., institutions) and treating it as a collective entity that acts through its sub-components.

Bates and Bacon (1972) suggest that communities, much like social groups and complex organizations, should be understood as social systems. However, they de-emphasize the territorial meaning of community in favor of a socio-spatial or socio-relational definition. Bates and Bacon's discussion of community as a system involves the identification of distinct structural attributes, for example, the nature of constituent (sub)units, internal operations, and cross-unit linkages. A community system comprises a set of specialized subsystems that are tied together by actors' interpersonal behavior. The authors also remark that community (social) systems include "interstitial groups" that manage potential conflict among elemental components through the formation of conjunctive relationships (Bates & Bacon, 1972, p. 376). And, to the extent that they take note of conflict and competition, their particular system-based perspective is not premised exclusively on mutual interests and cooperative behavior.

Sanders (1975) and Warren (1978) are two of the most recognizable community system thinkers of the twentieth century. Their work represents community as an identifiable social system composed of functionally differentiated parts that interact with, but remain distinguishable from, the surrounding environment (i.e., boundary maintenance). Sanders (1975) refers to community as a relatively enduring "territorially organized system" within which members share systematic communication networks, core services or facilities, and communalized attachments to place (p. 44). He defines community as a concrete collectivity (albeit open system) of interacting parts uniquely embedded in and influenced by different aspects of its "*setting*": ecological, demographic, cultural, and personality-related dimensions, as well as larger society (Sanders, 1975, pp. 43–48). Each of these factors affects the overall complex of social relations, relationships, and activities defining the community system. Sanders treats subsystems as core components of community analysis insofar as they include units of lesser size or scale (e.g., groups) and coalesce with other subsystems to form major systems (i.e., social institutions). This is consistent with Parsons' (1951) contention that a social system involves multiple, potentially overlapping collectivities of varying scales. Thus conceived, a community system comprises unit parts, such as statuses and roles, which combine to form groups and institutions that together give rise to "communal organization" (Poplin, 1972, p. 152).

For Warren (1978), a community is composed of units, subsystems, and activities organized around the performance of core "locality-relevant functions": the economy, socialization, social control, civic participation,

and mutual social support (p. 170). His work mirrors Parsons' (1951) conception of a social system and its intrinsic emphasis on the structural organization of social life. A community system constitutes a relatively enduring pattern of social interaction that exists in its own right as a concrete entity. It follows that a community (social) system persists to the extent that internal relationships among its constituent elements are distinguishable from unit relations with the external environment. This approach embodies the quintessential view of a localized collective entity that is systemically organized around the provision of core services (i.e., functional requisites). The territorial dimension expresses the notion of a relatively discrete system of interrelated social institutions that addresses the basic needs and interests of its local members. Mohan (1978) argues that the social system perspective facilitates a deeper grasp of the complex structures and processes operating at intra- and inter-systemic levels of analysis.

During the mid- to the late twentieth century, it was often claimed that community-level social relations were being profoundly reshaped by increasing patterns of differentiation, individualization, urbanization, bureaucratization, and extra-local relations. Warren (1978) commented on escalating ties with external organizations and institutions, along with the implied threat to community integration and cohesion. He broached this issue through the conceptualization of "horizontal" (*intra-systemic*) versus "vertical" (*extra-community*) linkages (Warren, 1978, p. 163). The former refer to social relations operating within and between "internal" system components, whereas the latter pertain to differentiated unit ties with "external" agencies. Warren points to the transformation of community life precipitated by the strengthening of vertical ties and the consequent weakening of horizontal connections (e.g., diminished solidarity).

Warren's (1978) reference to horizontal and vertical relations resonates with Kaufman's (1959) earlier remarks concerning the need to balance "localization" and "lateralization," that is, processes supporting the integrity or distinctiveness of the locality versus those extending residents' contacts with broader society, respectively (p. 17). This is somewhat akin to Poplin's (1972) discussion of interactions *within* subsystems and systemic linkages *between* community systems, and Tilly's (2004) more recent distinction between "within-boundary" versus "cross-boundary" relations or transactions (p. 213). Warren's (1978) work raised important questions about the capacity of communities to act purposively and collectively in order to resolve local problems and capture emerging opportunities. These

ideas have proven prophetic with respect to the effects of global forces on local institutions, livelihoods, and values. The issue of collective community action is as pertinent today as it was when Tilly (1973), among others, began to seriously consider the many factors impinging on local agential capacity.

Social system-based thinking about community tends to privilege structures, unit parts, and functional requisites over human agency. The community (social) system framework predominated in the 1960s and 1970s so much so that Wilkinson (1970) suggests that it largely overshadowed the development of the interactional approach. He observes that the overriding emphasis on social system thinking obscured efforts to explore the interactional dynamics of community agency. It is noteworthy that Warren (1978) expressed openness to the social field concept. He commented on the inherent value of understanding community as a field of interactions (albeit with systemic tendencies), as contrasted with a concrete entity, collectivity, or superordinate, inclusive "whole." Warren accepted the idea that clusters or fields of interaction can coalesce around common interests and facilitate joint agency. The field-interactional perspective shifts analytical attention away from narrowly defined systemic representations of community.

Human and Community Ecology

There are identifiable linkages between human ecology and social system thinking about community, most notably the analysis of systemic interdependencies (Murdock & Sutton, 1974). This section reviews early work on human ecology along with more recent developments in the area of complex systems and social–ecological resilience.

Human Ecology

In general terms, ecology investigates the manifest interrelations and interdependencies of organisms, as they adjust to each other and to the surrounding environment in the continued struggle for existence. Darwin (1861) states that organisms are intricately "bound together by a web of complex relations" (p. 71), a view shared by McKenzie (1936/1968) in his foundational discussion of human ecology. The human ecology perspective is essentially an application of general ecological principles to the study of human populations and communities (Hawley, 1944). Park (1936) is one of the primary originators of the classical school of human

ecology which, in its early stages, borrowed significantly from plant and animal ecologies (see Hawley, 1986). He made a key distinction between "biotic" and "cultural" bases of organization (Park, 1936, p. 13).

At the *biotic* or sub-social level, patterns of mutual interdependence and co-existence develop in response to competitive processes that accompany the aggregation of organisms within a circumscribed area. A biotic community constitutes a territorially organized population that is interrelated in a highly complex and interdependent manner due to conflicting and, yet, intersecting interests (i.e., competitive cooperation). However, Park (1936) recognized that the ecological analysis of human societies could not be limited to biotic processes, which led to his discussion of sociocultural factors. He contends that emergent communal structures (e.g., institutional networks) based on tradition and custom restrict competition in human society. The *cultural* facet of social organization or social order reflects consensus and communication. And, although Park (1936) posits a subtle interrelatedness between the "symbiotic substructure" and the "cultural superstructure," he theorizes that the latter rests, hierarchically speaking, on the former (pp. 12–13).

Hawley (1950) developed a version of human ecology that places less emphasis on the spatial analysis of relations and competition while recognizing the interconnectedness of "symbiotic" and "commensalistic" aspects of collective life (p. 209). For Hawley (1968), the former pertain to "complementary differences," such as the division of labor, whereas the latter derive from "supplementary similarities" or common issues (p. 331). He notes that these two types of interdependent relationships are present in all organized populations or communities: functionally differentiated relations (*symbiosis*), as compared to units of similar function acting together (*commensalism*). Each mode of relation acts in a somewhat distinct but integrative fashion while contributing to community cohesion (Hawley, 1950).

McIntosh (1963) indicates that ecology is properly defined as the study of a complex of populations which, when combined with related environmental dynamics, constitutes a functional ecosystem. (Human) ecologists are concerned with the way in which communities develop and change in response to myriad, diverse, and ever-changing relations involving individual organisms and the environment. Furthermore, ecological relations between members of the community, as well as between the larger ecosystem and the environment, can be differentiated in terms of multifold spatial, temporal,

and compositional dynamics (McIntosh, 1963). Indeed, Parker (2004) observes that the size and complexity of ecosystems differ depending on their scale and composite levels of analysis—the lower limit being the ecological "community" of a single individual.

Community Ecology

Community is a fundamental unit of ecological investigation; it constitutes an adaptive structure or mechanism by means of which a population adjusts to, makes use of, and sustains itself within a local habitat (Hawley, 1944, 1968). For Park (1936), the notion of community pertains to the interrelatedness of inhabitants, whether plants, animals, or humans, whereas Hawley (1944, 1968) refers to community as the general form of a population's adjustment to its environment. Communities comprise multifold, dynamic co-actions, the analysis of which can include cooperation, competition, and conflict, among other types of relations. Parker (2004) claims that the most basic defining feature of an ecological community is the interactions that give rise to some form of "organization" or "structure" (p. 28). This is consistent with a general view of community as structured interaction.

Hawley (1950) observes that his own work is only suggestive of the "tangled fabric of relations that is the community" (p. 209). Human ecology points to the complex interrelations within communities and the interactive dynamics that generate systemic reverberations. At issue here is the development of an adaptive organization that facilitates the continued survival of a given population (i.e., resilience). Relations within and between associational units, as well as with environmental elements, are dynamic and emergent in character. Organization, as used in this sense, refers to interdependencies or interrelations among composite individuals and groups performing unit functions. McKenzie (1936/1968) remarks that institutions are foundational to the very existence of community insofar as they constitute collective units involved in the performance of specialized functions. Furthermore, the processes of emergent organization contribute to a self-sustaining whole—a system of relationships that reflects differential, adaptive relations between unit functions and the environment (Hawley, 1968).

Hawley (1968) conceives of community as a discernible unit of organization arising out of the interaction of population- and environment-related dynamics, that is, "a territorially localized system of relationships

among functionally differentiated parts" (p. 329). This observation closely resembles Warren's (1978) conception of a community system. Hawley (1986) subsequently shifted analytical emphasis to the elemental parts of "human ecosystems" (or communities), for example, units, relations, and functions (pp. 10, 29). He discusses functional differentiation in terms of adaptations to the potentially constraining or supporting features of the environment (e.g., biophysical or sociocultural). And, although Hawley makes use of the "system" concept in analyzing ecological entities, he expresses unease with the functionalist notion of preordained system requisites. He argues that functions emerge out of the confluence of repetitive activities among units that become increasingly interrelated by virtue of reciprocating actions.

Murdock and Sutton (1974) note that an important aspect of ecological investigation deals with functional linkages and interdependencies among "systems of communities" (p. 324). Somewhat earlier, Morgan and Moss (1965) raised a parallel issue with respect to the highly multifaceted and dynamic nature of biogeocenosis among interrelated communities of plants, animals, and other species. The authors indicate that biological and sociological communities share key similarities insofar as they are both relatively complex, interconnected systems of organization. Communities of either type possess novel properties that emerge through processes of interaction and, as such, they cannot be reduced to or summed across constituent elements. Furthermore, human ecologists have contributed to the understanding of community as a complex web, network, or topology of interactions that exhibits diffuse boundaries (see Parker, 2004). Regardless of how central the notion of community may be to (human) ecologists, it is intrinsically problematic with respect to matters of boundary specification. Hawley (1986) discusses this issue in terms of a "systemness" gradient of diminishing complexity and interaction that radiates outward to the frayed edges of contact with other ecosystems (p. 27). It is for this reason that community is sometimes treated as a locus of interaction around which clear boundaries cannot be definitively drawn.

The community concept is central to human ecologists' efforts to theorize the manner in which organisms collectively establish a relatively balanced complex of relationships (Hawley, 1968). Stephan (1970) points out that varied representations of human ecology share an interest in the study of social organization, communal structures, and, more aptly, "the community" (p. 219). Work in the area of community (human) ecology continues to evolve. Young and Minai (2002), for instance, have advanced

a structural model of human ecology whereby communities act as "problem-solving organizations" that focus on ensuring members' general welfare in the face of relatively dynamic environmental conditions (p. 31). The authors identify two structurally distinct types of social organizations that mitigate threats to community health: local institutions and specialized agencies. The former offer a collection of differentiated and, yet, interrelated problem-solving structures that can be augmented by dedicated transaction organizations when dealing with adverse environmental impacts. Also, Leibold et al. (2004) analyze patterns of ecological interaction at three increasingly inclusive (i.e., nested) levels of analysis: the "*individual*," the "*local communit*[*y*]," and the "*metacommunity*" or region (p. 604). This work is indicative of new directions in community ecology, most notably resilience and system change dynamics.

Social–Ecological and Community Resilience

Aspects of ecological theory are highly pertinent to the analysis of community sustainability and resilience (e.g., Peterson, 2000). Abel and Stepp (2003) point out that there is a growing affinity with ecology across a range of social science specialities such as historical, political, and community ecologies. The authors make mention of a "new ecology" with respect to the shift away from equilibrium-based interpretations of the relationship between human agency and environmental transformation (see Scoones, 1999, p. 479). A substantial body of literature has accumulated on ecosystems and social–ecological systems, including an increased interest in non-linear interactions, non-equilibrium dynamics, variability, novelty, emergence, adaptive capacity, and resilience (see Wilkinson, 2011). Discussions of self-organizing ecosystems and complex adaptive systems offer alternative models of function, structure, and dynamics. All such ideas are entwined with relational processes; however, resilience holds particular importance for community development (Matarrita-Cascante, Trejos, Qin, Joo, & Debner, 2017). Earlier conceptions of ecological and social–ecological resilience have prompted related research on social and community resilience. Peterson, Allen, and Holling (1998) contend that it is important for humanity to understand resilience in order to better cope with significant environmental and global changes.

In very general terms, resilience theory is concerned with how systems adapt, cope, and change when confronted by disturbance or disruption. Park (1936) long ago posited that human ecology considers how *biotic*

and *social* order are maintained, including systemic transitions from one relatively stable state to another under conditions of perturbation (p. 15). His observations point to matters of stability, resistance, and resilience, the latter of which Holling (1973) defines as the measure of a system's ability to persist by absorbing changes in "state variables," driving factors, and control parameters (p. 17). Resistance, by comparison, focuses on minimal systemic deformation in response to disturbance (e.g., inertia) (see Walker, Holling, Carpenter, & Kinzig, 2004). Furthermore, Adger (2000) suggests that resilience pertains to how the system is functioning, whereas stability involves the capacity to maintain a steady state or return to equilibrium when perturbed. And, to the extent that systems cannot necessarily re-establish pre-disturbance states, it is important to think of newly adapted regimes in terms of reorganization, reorientation, or regeneration. The complexity of the resilience concept is reflected in its varied definitional attributes and diverse measures of system dynamics, as well as matters of self-organization, learning, and adaptation.

Peterson et al. (1998) define "ecological resilience" as the amount of disturbance required to perturb a system from one configuration of processes and structures (or steady state) to another (p. 10). This presumes that ecosystems can self-organize or exist in more than one stability domain (i.e., multiple attractors), as distinct from a single steady state (i.e., engineering resilience). Resilience, from a social–ecological perspective, is concerned with the interdependence of people-in-places (local communities) and nature (surrounding environments) (Folke et al., 2010). Walker et al. (2004) refer to "social–ecological resilience" as the ability of a system to absorb shocks, strains, or perturbations and reorganize while essentially maintaining "the same function, structure, identity, and feedbacks" (p. 1). The authors also note that systems comprise "nested dynamics" that operate at different organizational levels (e.g., subsystems). This raises the matter of cross-scale interactions and their impacts on system dynamics.

The terminological vagaries of resilience, adaptability, and transformability reflect the complexities of social–ecological systems (see Folke et al., 2010; Walker et al., 2004). Interest in resilience spans multiple disciplines, and it is gaining traction in an expanding range of analytical contexts involving complex adaptive systems. Given that social and ecological systems are interconnected (co-evolutionary), they cannot be properly or adequately studied in isolation from one another. Adger (2000) raises this issue in the context of "social resilience," which he defines as the ability of communities to cope with or absorb the impacts of social, economic, political, and environmental change (p. 350). He explores the interrelatedness

of social and ecological resilience within resource-dependent communities. The key issue concerns the relative capacity of community-level institutions to address prospective shocks and stresses stemming from close ties to the environment. The resilience concept is garnering increased attention within the field of community development, most notably with respect to adapting ecological principles, building general analytic models, as well as identifying indicators of health, vitality, and sustainability (see Zautra, Hall, & Murray, 2008).

Of late, there is an expanding interest in the concept of "community resilience" among academics, government agencies, and development organizations. Patel, Rogers, Amlôt, and Rubin (2017) conducted an extensive review of literature (80 papers) concerning the meaning of community resilience, as it relates to disasters. Not surprisingly, the authors report a general lack of consensus among the plethora of definitions. Patel et al. go on to identity three basic conceptual themes that focus on community resilience as (a) a process of adjustment to change, (b) a capacity to maintain a stable state of functioning, or (c) a set of positive attributes (e.g., local resources). These definitional elements reflect systemic responses to environmental change and community-level factors that facilitate resilience. In very basic terms, the notion of resilience pertains to the community's ability or capacity to resist, accommodate, recover from, or circumvent disturbance.

Chaskin (2008) examines core variables that intersect with community resilience, most notably structural factors, social capital, and collective action. He argues that communities differ in terms of an array of local attributes that either negatively or positively impact members' lives (e.g., housing). The former involve prospective threats to the community, whereas the latter include local social capital, problem-solving skills, and agential capabilities. Communities possess varied processes or mechanisms that can mitigate the negative effects of certain conditions on collective well-being. On a related theme, Brennan (2008) explores the relationship between community resilience and agency. He emphasizes the importance of localized interaction and communication channels that cut across diverse groups. These processes have the potential to engender mutual interests, build adaptive capacities, and galvanize local action, all of which are facets of community resilience. The literature on ecological processes, complex self-organizing systems, resilience, and other related areas offers valuable insight into community-level relational dynamics. This work is evolving the meaning of relationality as applied to the study of community life.

Social Networks, Cyberspace, and Community

Social Ties and Social Networks

Social network analysis spans multiple disciplines, including sociology, social psychology, political science, and communication, information, and computing sciences, to name the most obvious. Simply put, (social) networks constitute sets of interrelated nodes which, according to Castells (2000), act as "open structures" (p. 501). Those who study social networks generally focus on patterns of interpersonal relations, including aspects of content, direction, strength, density, and cohesion. This expansive body of work explores the nature of social ties, contacts, resource flows, and network structures, all of which fall within the purview of community sociology. As Marin and Wellman (2011) point out, social network analysis is premised on the idea that relations and their patterns are foundational to society and social life (p. 11).

Latour's (1996) discussion of *actor–network theory* (ANT) offers a useful point of entry into network-related thinking. He calls for the rebuilding of social theory around a network-based ontology. However, it is important to note that Latour makes an analytical distinction between ANT and more conventional examinations of the frequency, distribution, and proximity of social network relations. He contends that the "fibrous, thread-like" nature of society does not lend itself to analysis based on systems, hierarchies, or spheres (Latour, 1996, p. 370). Latour (1996) privileges connections and associations over "social" and "real" spatiality; indeed, he argues that there are only networks, with "nothing in between" (pp. 370–371). The actor, in ANT, is deemed highly fluid and inseparably entwined with the real-time formation of networks, which resembles some aspects of relational sociology (e.g., Crossley, 2011). Latour views a network as a phenomenon that is laid down by non-fixed, dynamic actors, where both actors and networks emerge and evolve together. He prioritizes the actual movement or trajectory of the "actor–network," which he distinguishes from what may be circulating within the network. Latour (1996) claims that, by focusing on networks, social theory can move away from spatial notions of *proximity* (near–far), *scale* (large–small), *hierarchy* (top–bottom), and *boundedness* (inside–outside) (pp. 371–372).

In somewhat more conventional terms, Haythornthwaite (1996) describes social network analysis as a set of techniques used to study the flow of different types of resources (e.g., goods, services, information, and money) between actors. She goes on to say that social network analysts

concentrate on identifying empirical social structures stemming from relationships and ties, after which they can be given labels such as group, clique, or community. By examining the content and patterns of relationships, it is possible to better understand the nature of resource flows. In this respect, social networks are regularized patterns of relationships or specialized types of interactions. Ties are built and strengthened through the accumulation of actors' varied relationships, while patterns among ties reveal or express social networks (Haythornthwaite, 1996, p. 328). More recently, Grossetti (2005) has suggested that network analysts treat interactions and relations as the key structural bases of sociological analysis. Therefore, the primary analytical emphasis is neither the nodes nor their attributes, but rather the web of relations within which they are embedded. From a network perspective, it is important to explore the interdependencies among units and the more expansive linkages that impact clusters or circles of actors. The latter point is particularly relevant to the study of groups, organizations, or communities insofar as individuals can have multiple, overlapping, cross-cutting, and diverse types (or intensities) of ties.

Giuffre (2013) indicates that network analysis focuses principally on structure, that is, regularized patterns of interactions among members of a system. A social network comprises a set of actors (nodes) and interrelations (ties, edges, or arcs), where the nodes can be defined as individuals, groups, organizations, institutions, or other types of interconnected units. In general terms, then, social network analysis concentrates on the properties of relational structures and the channels through which varied resources flow. The multifaceted nature of these linkages expresses the relational patterns that knit together otherwise disconnected or atomized individuals (Marin & Wellman, 2011). Furthermore, the complexity of such relations is reflected in the need to consider multiple levels of analysis: actor–actor, actor–community, and community–environment ties (Katz, Lazer, Arrow, & Contractor, 2004, p. 312).

Communities are rife with horizontal, vertical, and overlapping networks that are tied into diverse forms of capital, information, and skills (see Wellman & Wortley, 1990). The difficulties associated with specifying definitive boundaries around diffuse localities and diverse affiliations have led some authors to describe communities as social networks, as opposed to places. And, to the extent that networks can traverse multifold spaces, communities can be viewed as systems of relationships based on shared ideas, understandings, and actions (see Murdoch, 2000). According to Lee, Árnason, Nightingale, and Shucksmith (2005),

communities are not rigidly structured realities; rather, they reflect the ongoing articulation of social networks through which varied types of information and resources flow. Community networking is also concerned with how connections between members are developed and marshaled for particular purposes, which is closely related to matters of social capital and local capacity (see Gilchrist & Taylor, 1997).

Weak Versus Strong Ties

Social networks can differ with respect to a range of factors, including the medium of communication, content, proximity, and complexity. Granovetter's (1973) early work on the relative strength of social ties and between-group relations has proven influential in discussions of social cohesion and social capital. He makes a case for "the weak-tie argument," where weak interpersonal networks function as *bridges* that contribute to greater overall social cohesion between coherent clusters (Granovetter, 1973, p. 1368). A related aspect of this bridging function involves "boundary spanning" activities that facilitate more extensive sharing networks and increased community engagement in local issues (see Cunningham et al., 2016). Tie strength is linked to factors such as duration, intensity, and reciprocity.

Stronger connections are presumed to facilitate the formation of clusters, while bridging (i.e., weak) ties can act as linkages (e.g., resource channels) that would not otherwise exist between relatively disconnected or isolated social circles. Granovetter's (1973) comments regarding the relative strength of interpersonal ties intersect with the theorization of social capital (see Torche & Valenzuela, 2011), for example, Putnam's (2000) distinction between "*bonding* (or exclusive)" and "*bridging* (or inclusive)" relations (p. 22). The former type of social capital refers to densely knit, multifaceted ties that strengthen in-group solidarity, as compared to more outward looking, expansive networks. Putnam (2000) likewise contrasts "thick trust," which can emerge through stronger personal relations, with "thin trust" that extends beyond nested circles of close friends or associates (p. 136).

According to Coleman (1988), social capital resides *within* social relations, most notably "closed" social structures (p. s98). He argues that "the closure of social networks" facilitates social capital by strengthening obligations, normative sanctions, and trust (Coleman, 1988, p. s103). In the absence of bridging relations, however, closed networks can generate

what Burt (2004) refers to as "structural holes" between more densely connected groups (p. 349). Brokerage activities that cut across these so-called structural holes can conceivably generate social capital in the form of new ways of thinking and acting. Those who act as brokers or boundary spanners do so on the borders and in the "between" spaces. Such actions have the potential to build and strengthen comprehensive social relations and collective action. The implication is that communities would be reduced to little more than loosely connected agglomerations of relatively fragmented groups in the absence of "weak" interpersonal ties.

Granovetter's (1973, 1985) and others' ideas on this matter are particularly relevant to the interpretation of how or why some communities are able to more effectively mobilize collective action in the pursuit of mutual interests. Social capital, in the form of localized social relations and network structures, constitutes an important community development resource. Agnitsch, Flora, and Ryan (2006) explore the relative contributions of "bridging" versus "bonding" social capital to community action processes. The authors conclude that, although each of these two types of social ties is positively related to community agency, they operate more effectively in tandem. Also, the strength of one form of social relation can partially compensate for the other's weakness. The basic premise is that well-connected communities are better able to mobilize and activate varied resources. On a related theme, Paarlberg and Varda (2009) claim that community carrying capacity is linked to how effectively local network exchanges can facilitate engagement, collaboration, and agency. This raises the matter of how or whether communities are able to act through informal and formal relationships, most notably when collective action is motivated by shared concerns.

Personal Networked Communities

Social network analysis has introduced novel ways of thinking about the nature and meaning of community in contemporary society. Blakely (1989) states that network relations derive from intersecting interests and common concerns rather than shared geography (pp. 327, 332). The discussion of personal networks falls broadly within the purview of Wellman's (1979) "Community Liberated" concept (p. 1206) and Smith's (1996) reference to "Elastic Bunds" (p. 253). Wellman (2005) contends that, when communities grow in size to the point where members cannot main-

tain regular interactions with one another, "a network of networks" replaces group relations (p. 54). He suggests that this marks the historical shift from traditional village life to more urbanized and increasingly expansive, dispersed, and mediated forms of contact. Wellman (2001) describes the changing nature of community as a transition from neighborhood-related "door-to-door" interactions to "place-to-place" relations and, in more recent times, to personalized ties (p. 231). The latter form of networked "*personal community*" (Wellman, 1999, p. xv) is a reflection of greater fluidity of movement, blurred socio-local boundaries, and advances in technologically mediated connections, all of which facilitate multiple social circles.

Although early approaches to community often stressed the issue of locality-oriented interaction, Wellman (1979) pays particular attention to the structural formation of interpersonal networks. Quite early on, Wellman and Leighton (1979) indicated the need to examine the topology of social relations (e.g., linkages and flows), after which it is possible to ascertain the socio-spatial, affective, or other foundational elements of network communities (p. 367). Wellman (2005) makes use of social network analysis to study how people communicate or enter into relations with others, both online and offline, and thereby form communities. He refers to the contemporary trend toward "networks of interpersonal ties" through which individuals attend to a range of social, emotional, material, and informational issues (Wellman, 2001, p. 228). Quite unlike more holistic or system-based conceptions of community, each individual is placed at the epicenter surrounded by or linked into a conglomeration of personalized relations for the purposes of addressing varied interests or resource needs. According to Wellman, these person-centered networks offer opportunities for sociability, belonging, and identity formation. However, it is important to note that, with the exception of the central actor, the remaining members of these personalized communities are not associated in any comprehensive fashion with one another (Chua, Madej, & Wellman, 2011, p. 108).

The focus on personalized connections represents a marked departure from the more traditional understanding of community as localized social bonds and communalized interests. This perspective does not necessarily consider—in any significant fashion—relations among the *alters* with whom the "core" individual builds network ties. Such an approach reduces all forms of collective entities, including families, organizations, and communities, to agglomerations of social relations (Grossetti, 2005, p. 290).

Clearly, not all theorists would agree that community can be defined simply as a personalized network of exchange dynamics (Clark, 2007). This raises the issue of whether networked communities possess emergent properties, such as collective belonging or identification. Grossetti points out that it is largely through our life experiences within social circles of family members, friends, and coworkers that we are able to establish social relations. The personal network approach misses the essential idea of community as a shared sense of "We-ness" that develops when social relations cut across individualized networks or circles. And, although technological advances have greatly facilitated interpersonal communication, this should not be equated with increased levels of "communityness," unless the latter is narrowly framed in terms of the proliferation of personal ties.

Mediated Relations, Cyberspace, and Virtual Communities

Many factors are implicated in the changing spatiality of community, including advances in communication and transport technologies, time–space compression, and hypermobility. Communities can be interpreted as configurations of social relations that emerge perpetually and perhaps even transiently in geospatially localized "places" and socially defined "spaces." Liepins (2000) explores the inherent complexity of the community concept in light of conflicting aspects of unity, diversity, identity, and spatiality. The relationship between place and community is being altered continually, both *de*-spatialized and *re*-spatialized within the context of what Foucault (1986) refers to as "the epoch of simultaneity…of the dispersed" (p. 22). Digital technologies have steadily deterritorialized social communication and connectedness, while generating novel types of mediated community contexts such as social networking sites and location-based social networks. Notwithstanding such analytical vagaries, relationality is implicit in all forms of community.

Quite some time ago, McLuhan (1962) made reference to the "global village" and the accelerated pace of life in "the electric age of information movement" (pp. 31, 56). This resonates with Castells' (2000) "network society," and his suggestion that a globalized "space of flows" is being imposed on the more traditional notion of a localized "space of places" (pp. 458, 500). Flows constitute iterative sequences of interactions, exchanges, and transactions between spatially dispersed actors. Advanced information technologies facilitate the emergence of communication networks that define spatial flows among or across places. This new configuration

of network relations intersects with places while also re-defining the meaning of space. It is in this sense that the spatially localized or bounded conception of community has given way to more diverse interpretations stemming from ongoing technological innovations.

A multiplicity of aspatial relational groupings has emerged in response to the convergence of telematics and informatics. The resultant transformation of spatiality has reshaped the "landscape" of community theory. And, while the idea of community is no longer rigidly affixed to geography, territory, or place, this does not necessarily mean that it lacks a spatial dimension. Liu and Emirbayer (2016) contend that "new" ecological models have moved away from physical or concrete understandings of space in favor of "abstract, metaphorical" or social spatiality (p. 65). Hypermobility, computer-mediated interaction, and "*time–space distanciation*" have not yet obliterated the place-based notion of community; however, local boundaries are becoming increasingly fluid or porous (Giddens, 1990, p. 14). On a related theme, Walmsley (2000) has revisited Webber's (1963) discussion of "community without propinquity" (p. 23) in relation to the advent of telecommunications, virtual realities, and cybercommunities. Walmsley (2000) concludes that, while advances in information and communication technologies have significantly enhanced the prospects for mediated social interaction, localized communities remain essential to the functioning of society. He raises a number of cautionary remarks concerning the impact of cyberspace, including the potential for reduced human contact; increased involvements in more transitory, superficial, or indirect social relations; as well as weaker conceptions of community.

There is related work being carried out on the identification of community structures within computer-mediated social networks. Social media sites allow users to carry out multiple actions such as uploading pictures, posting documents, sharing links, commenting, bookmarking, and much more. A number of researchers have devised community detection algorithms in an effort to discover clusters of individuals who interact with one another in a relatively coherent manner. In general terms, network communities of this sort involve densely knit nodes that exhibit higher levels of internal versus external connectivity (see Nguyen, Dinh, Nguyen, & Thai, 2011). Lin et al. (2009) note the challenges associated with investigating the presence and evolution of consistent communities within highly dynamic multi-relational data. Additional analytical issues arise when attempting to identify structural topologies in rich social media networks, in part, due to individuals' involvements in multiple and potentially overlapping communication-based "communities."

Clearly, technological advances have facilitated the generation of personalized community networks in virtual space or "cyberplaces" (see Wellman, 2001, p. 228). However, some authors suggest that virtual meeting places are lacking in the levels of cohesiveness and collective sentiment generally associated with traditional, place-based communities. Calhoun (1998) contends that new communication technologies foster "categorical identities" as compared to "collective identities," the latter of which are more likely to develop among people engaging in dense, multiplex, and diverse social relationships (pp. 374–375). He emphasizes the essential linkage between community and social solidarity, as well as the importance of social ties that cut across differentiated lines of interest (see Clark, 1973). Driskell and Lyon (2002) similarly discuss the matter of whether virtual communities can offer *Gemeinschaft*-like (Tönnies, 1887/1957) interpersonal relations in the absence of place-based identification. Although cybercommunities can be issue-oriented, transient, and lacking in closeness, the authors claim that they have the potential to facilitate interpersonal interactions, social ties, and localized community participation.

Goodings, Locke, and Brown (2007) have contributed to the recent debate over the social–psychological nature and experience of mediated communities. They raise the issue of "virtual togetherness," which refers to the felt sense of belonging that individuals experience despite having little or no direct person-to-person contact with other members of a mediated or virtual community (Goodings et al., 2007, p. 463). The authors express a particular interest in subjective feelings of interconnectedness and place attachment. Furthermore, Wang, Tucker, and Haines (2013) raise the insightful idea that a weakened sense of security in modern society may be prompting a search for belonging and identity through involvements in virtual communities. Indeed, cybercommunities may well be offering individuals opportunities to become re-embedded with one another through their online relations, albeit in different ways and to varied degrees.

Concluding Remarks

Over the years, theorists have offered multifarious ways of thinking about community. This chapter draws together early discussions of community as a social group, a social system, and a human ecosystem, along with contemporary work on resilience dynamics, social network analysis, and technologically mediated communities. What is most noteworthy about this

diverse range of material is the emphasis placed on "organized social life." The notion of community as a localized group includes aspects of place, integration, and social structure, all of which are foundational to system-based thinking. Social system theorists typically represented community as a highly concretized and relatively autonomous, bounded entity. This focus on territorially organized communities performing locality-relevant functions guided much of the theoretical work and development practice of the mid- to late twentieth century. Human ecology also holds an important place in the intellectual history of community theory, as reflected in more recent work on complex (linked) ecosystems and resilience dynamics. Key relational facets of social system theory and human ecology are still evident today.

It is important to re-theorize community in light of the vagaries of constant change and everyday lived relation, on the one hand, and the emergence of form, pattern, and structure, on the other. Of late, there is considerable interest in viewing community as a web or network of relations. Social network analysis has been widely adapted to interpersonal ties, interorganizational relations, and other aspects of community life. It has contributed to alternative ways of conceptualizing social relations. Network-based research on cyberplaces, online communities, and other modes of mediated relations has opened up new areas of inquiry. The range of perspectives offered in this and subsequent chapters reflects a growing appreciation for the effects of social transformation on the lived experience of community. This expanding body of work illustrates the complexity of community and the evolving nature of its theoretical analysis. Notwithstanding differences of approach to the study of community, all are founded on social relationality. When taken together, these varied theories chart a trajectory of distinct but often intersecting and potentially complementary ideas concerning the relational fabric of community.

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CHAPTER 4

The Field-Interactional Approach to Community

Community is routinely defined in terms of commonalities of residence, culture, language, and interest but seldom, if ever, without some mention of interaction. Few would quibble with the contention that social interaction is foundational to community. Social relations are generally considered the primary constituents of community life. Indeed, when the notion of place is omitted, the meaning of community is typically represented in *psychosocial* terms (Mattson, 1997). The field-interactional perspective, which was proffered initially by Kaufman (1959) and Wilkinson (1970, 1991), deals expressly with the relational emergence of community and collective action. Of late, the interactional approach is being applied to an expanding range of issues: community leadership (Pigg, 1999), community organizing (Aigner, Raymond, & Smidt, 2002), community attachment (Theodori, 2004), sustainable community development (Bridger & Luloff, 2001), local entrepreneurship (Korsching & Allen, 2004), and interorganizational social fields (Bessant, 2014), among others. Community researchers continue to find novel ways of analyzing social phenomena based on field-related thinking.

In general terms, Wilkinson (1991) views the interactional community as a localized confluence of multifold social fields that can, under certain circumstances, coalesce into collective agency. Community action dynamics develop when individuals are drawn together on the basis of mutual concerns, common bonds, and shared experiences. Wilkinson (1970) contends that a "community field" emerges when diverse lines of action

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become coordinated around the pursuit of a generalized goal (p. 317). These collectivized (inter)action fields constitute fundamental social processes through which the community *acts*. This field-based representation of convergent interests and collective action is intrinsically relational with respect to its interactional bases and prospective outcomes. Wilkinson points to the substantive social bonds that are engendered within communities through symbolic interaction, joint meaning making, and collective identification.

The field-interactional perspective, also known as social field theory, is encountered principally within rural sociology and community development circles. Notwithstanding its namesake, Wilkinson's (1970, 1991) understanding of a "field" should not be confused with that of Bourdieu (1979/1984, 1985a, 1985b) or neo-institutional theorists (see Scott, 2014). The chapter opens with a brief introduction to the field-related ideas of Lewin (1951/1997) and Bourdieu (1985a, 1985b), followed by a discussion of how the field concept has been applied to the study of interorganizational relations. This leads into an examination of Wilkinson's (1991) interpretation of the "social field" and community action (p. 88). The chapter goes on to explore analytical linkages between social field theory and Mead's (1932, 1934, 1938) ideas concerning the social self, attitude (or role) taking, and joint social action (see also Bessant, 2012). Finally, some attention is devoted to a comparative discussion of social capital theory and Wilkinson's (1991) social field approach. The overall goal is to outline the relational foundations of his field-based view of community and collective agency.

The Field Concept

Field theory is perhaps best treated as "a family of approaches" that emerged in the physical sciences (e.g., classical electromagnetism), some aspects of which have been applied to social phenomena (Martin, 2003, p. 3). Lewin (1951/1997) and Bourdieu (1985a, 1985b) are two of the most recognizable, albeit earlier, proponents of field-theoretic tenets in the social and behavioral sciences. Their work offers insight into the relational underpinnings of (social) field theory and its prospective application to the study of community.

Kurt Lewin: Psychological Life Space

According to Lewin (1951/1997), general field theory explains human behavior in terms of the "totality" of interconnected forces acting on the

individual at a given point in time (pp. 187–188). Rather than focusing on isolated variables, he contends that individual and group life should be framed within a dynamic constellation of interdependent facts. A field is a continuously evolving context of interrelated and potentially conflicting forces that shape emergent actions within the individual's "life space" or "psychological space" (Lewin, 1951/1997, p. 188). Lewin (1951/1997) was interested in the idea of predicting individual behavior in specific situations based on the notion of a "*force field*" (p. 197). Thus conceived, a change of state or position within psychological space (e.g., learning) is coordinated to topological dimensions such as distance, direction, and path. Lewin turned to topology and geometry in an effort to develop a more formalized way of representing the forces, relations, and structures operating within psychological life space.

Lewin (1951/1997) advanced a series of field-related constructs, including "*position*," "*locomotion*," and "*force*," all of which have relational connotations (pp. 197–198). He commented on the value of depicting group dynamics through the analysis of structural relations, social forces, and goal-directed actions. And, although Lewin (1951/1997) was interested principally in psychological facts, he made reference to "social fields"—the combined life space of individuals or groups (p. 308). Social events are deemed to be dependent on the relative positions of coexisting entities (e.g., people or groups) and the multifold forces acting in the field. He further suggests that overlapping force fields can contribute to conditions of stability or conflict. Also, the properties of a dynamic whole are presumed to differ from those of its constituent components.

Pierre Bourdieu: Field, Capital, and Habitus

Bourdieu (1979/1984) proposes a relational understanding of social space and human agency that rests on the concepts "field," "capital," and "habitus" (p. 101). Individual (and collective) action or practice is treated as an outcome of complex interrelationships among:

1. the objective (institutionalized) "relations of force," logics, and interests that endow fields with their distinct properties,
2. the distribution of species capital (e.g., economic, social, cultural, and symbolic) among positions (or their occupants), and
3. the nature of agents' socially constituted (internalized) dispositions or habitus (e.g., perceptions, appreciations, and trajectories) (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, pp. 103–105).

Practice derives from the conjoint effects of differential access to valued resources (*capital*), socialized dispositions (*habitus*), and structural relations within a given situation (*field*). Individual actions are contextualized within (social) fields that are defined in terms of particular sets of objective relations and related dispositions toward shared goals (Martin, 2003).

Bourdieu (1985b) conceives of the social world as "multidimensional space" constituted by diverse arrangements of active properties or types of capital (p. 724). He argues that social space comprises a number of more or less autonomous, interrelated fields based on different types of capital, associated dispositions, and logics. The properties responsible for defining social space involve a particular arrangement of objective relations or *forces* acting on anyone who enters the field (Bourdieu, 1985b). Hence, agents' positions within a field are dictated by their comparative access to its essential properties (e.g., capital), among other factors. Bourdieu uses social topology to depict structural relations within a network of positions that are objectively configured on the basis of differential control over capital(s). Indeed, it is by virtue of the existence of the field that capital exerts power over the participants. A field acquires its objective quality as a function of structural relations (e.g., dependence or authority) among positions and their standings relative to competing assets. Based on this approach, it is possible to conceptualize actors' positions across the multifold fields that comprise social space.

Furthermore, each field is associated with a corresponding habitus that endows members with the knowledge, skills, and dispositions needed to be effective in that particular site of forces. The nature of the field influences human practice through the internalization of external determining factors. This system of cognitive, attitudinal, and motivational properties, which is presumed to influence individuals' actions, is derived from preceding environmental structures (Throop & Murphy, 2002). Habitus represents the embodiment of social conditions that take the form of proclivities to feel, think, and act in consort with the nature of the field. And, while *field forces* configure habitus, individuals co-constitute the field through processes of socio-cognitive construction (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). This speaks to the dynamic interconnectedness of field and habitus.

Bourdieu's (1979/1984) field theory is predominantly structural in nature. He asserts that social researchers should address the "structural and functional homologies" accounting for the practices that emanate, according to their own logic, from diverse fields (Bourdieu, 1985a, p. 18).

Bourdieu was critical of network analysts who focus narrowly on capital flows or linkages (e.g., information and resources) at the expense of exploring the structural relations among positions that make such transactions more or less probable (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). Bourdieu further suggests that intersubjective relations are the consequences, not the causes, of structures and, as such, the latter are the primary objects of study (see de Nooy, 2003). Although he cautions against an overly mechanistic understanding of human agency, Bourdieu stresses the importance of identifying the underlying objective relations of force that are irreducible to intentions, intersubjectivities, or interactions.

Different Interpretations of the "Field"

The inherent complexity of the field concept is reflected in its multiple meanings and applications across diverse disciplines of study. Martin (2003) discusses the "field" in three interrelated "senses": (a) a relational (topological) space in which one can *position* people, groups, or institutions, (b) a configuration of *forces*, and (c) a context of self-organized, *goal-oriented action* in the midst of contestation and conflict (pp. 28–30). First, a field can be treated as a socio-spatial arrangement of actors or positions within an analytic area of intersecting dimensions (i.e., a structure of relations). Bourdieu's (1985a) discussion of multidimensional social space is indicative of the varied ways in which individuals or institutions hold particular positions relative to their control over different forms of capital. He claims that relational space is as real as material space (Bourdieu, 1985b, p. 725). Of late, field-related ideas and social topology have been applied to the study of interorganizational behavior. A number of researchers have examined linkages between changing network topologies and evolving field structures among interacting organizations (e.g., White, Owen-Smith, Moody, & Powell, 2004). Medvetz (2008) also makes use of social topology in characterizing think tanks as hybridized "emergent field[s]" within a structure of interrelated institutions (p. 5).

Second, a field can be viewed as "an area of influence," an arena of continuous potential force (McMullin, 2002, p. 13), or a "spatial variation in force" (Jones, 1954, p. 117). Although this aspect of field-theoretic thinking is closely aligned with the physical sciences, it is pertinent to the study of power, status, and organizational behavior, among other issues. For Lewin (1951/1997), the field comprises a constellation of forces that can induce or constrain individual behavior, while Bourdieu (1985b)

draws attention to the power relations associated with different species of capital. On a related theme, Friedkin (2004) conceives of social cohesion as a "field of forces" (e.g., attitudes) influencing individuals to remain in the group (p. 421). The notion of a "field of forces" represents an innovative understanding of how interactional dynamics operate both within and across diverse groups. It offers a useful way of interpreting collective action processes within community contexts of conflicting and converging interests or power dynamics.

Third, a field can be defined as an "organization of goal-directed striving" that comprises elements of both contestation and alliance (Martin, 2003, p. 30). This raises the Bourdieuian conception of individual or collective actors competing over access to different types of resources distributed within particular fields of activity. A similar idea is evident in Owen-Smith and Powell's (2008) reference to interorganizational relations as "*fields of endeavor*" or "arenas of social action" (p. 601). Interestingly, Fligstein and McAdam (2011) propose a theory of meso-level "strategic action fields" (p. 2) that is based in part on Bourdieu's theory. The authors treat social life as a multifaceted web of action fields continuously vying for advantage over "who gets what." A field, in this sense, is a site of endogenous actions motivated by competing interests, which raises the issue of how diverse fields become organized around common goals (e.g., collective community agency).

Wilkinson's (1970, 1991) conception of a social field incorporates several of the above-noted attributes, most notably dynamic forces, organized striving, and purposive action. He defines a social field as an evolving interaction process through which individuals come together and frame their actions in terms of common interests. In such situations, actors are socio-symbolically oriented to each other, to their shared intentions and, to the field itself. This affirms the interconnectedness of interest and agency within the social field, from both an individual and an organizational perspective. The field concept offers a useful way of interpreting how diverse lines of (inter)action evolve into communalized processes of collective community action.

Interorganizational Relations, Networks, and Fields

Neo-institutional theorists, social network analysts, and community (development) researchers share an interest in the study of interorganizational relations.[1] A key point of intersection involves the application of "network"

and "field" concepts to the interpretation of interorganizational behavior. Much has been written about the nature of exchange mechanisms, resource flows, relational dynamics, and governance structures within and between diverse constellations of organizations. The notion of the field constitutes a valuable analytical tool with which to analyze varied aspects of interorganizational relations, interaction patterns, environmental contexts, and institutional arrangements (Bessant, 2014). Wooten and Hoffman (2008) state that the "*organizational field*" is a core idea within neo-institutional theory (p. 130). It represents a key theoretical linkage between organization- and community-related research (see DiMaggio, 1986).

In general terms, an interorganizational field is a relational system that connects organizations within or across different levels of analysis: local, community, regional, sectoral, societal, and global. Warren (1967) was one of the earliest researchers to propose the "field" as a means of interpreting interrelationships among community-level organizations. He views the community as a complex arena of competing and somewhat overlapping interactional (interest) fields. Warren (1967) contends that the behavior of organizations is influenced by the network patterns or environmental contexts (i.e., fields) within which they are situated (p. 399). Communities are crosscut with multifold interorganizational fields that directly impact social processes, structural relations, and change dynamics. Academic discourse surrounding the varied meanings and "real-world" instances of interorganizational fields has proliferated significantly since Warren's (1967) initial contribution.

DiMaggio and Powell (1983) proffered one of the most oft-cited conceptions of an "organizational field," which they define as a collection of interacting organizations that "constitute a recognized area of institutional life" (p. 148). Their approach emphasizes the interconnectedness of organizations involved in a common domain of activity, based on similar products and services, resources, or client groups, among other factors. DiMaggio and Powell suggest that organizational fields emerge and tend toward structural isomorphism as a function of increasing levels of interaction, differentiated relations of domination and coalition, mounting information flows, and a growing awareness of their involvement in a collective endeavor. Institutional structuration occurs in conjunction with relational patterns or properties that exist and change over time within the field. Therefore, organizations are embedded in particular contexts of environmental forces, constraints, or logics (see Scott, 2014).

Scott (1994) refers to fields as "communities of organizations" whose members participate in similar activities, interact on a more regular basis, and share a common system of meanings (p. 71). He discusses two core aspects of organizational fields: (a) "cognitive elements," including symbolic, constitutive, and representational meaning systems, and (b) "normative elements," pertaining to expected actions and regulatory mechanisms (Scott, 1994, pp. 64–66). Organizations are influenced by relational and institutional contexts, as well as the recursive interplay between field structures and their constituent organizations (see Owen-Smith & Powell, 2008). A socio-cognitive interpretation of organizational fields draws attention to the role that *micro*-level processes play in the generation of *macro*-level social phenomena. This points to the idea of "bottom-up," emergent institutional structures, as contrasted with earlier theoretical emphasis on "top-down" environmental impacts on organizational behavior (e.g., normative or coercive) (Scott, 1995, p. 140).

According to White et al. (2004), network relations are foundational to the emergence of both organizations and the fields within which they are embedded. The micro-level social actions of individuals and organizations are situated in macro-structural institutional fields of transactional relations (White et al., 2004, p. 96). From this perspective, organizations and fields are networks of interactions among nodes operating at multiple levels. This is consistent with suggestions that linkages among organizations are becoming increasingly organized within varied operational environments. Interacting constellations of potentially similar and dissimilar organizational actors can give rise to emergent structures that influence the composition, nature, and trajectory of the field (Powell, White, Koput, & Owen-Smith, 2005). Ultimately, it is interaction processes and social ties that define the nature of the field and, as Owen-Smith and Powell (2008) indicate, networks constitute their "skeletons" and "circulatory systems" (p. 596). Fields, in this sense, can be understood as emergent network topologies that give shape and direction to interorganizational relations. The latter issue pertains to the prospective structuration of an interorganizational field (i.e., institutionalization) based on shared and relatively stable understandings, meanings, and interaction patterns. Notwithstanding this interest in structural attributes, fields are intrinsically dynamic (White et al., 2004).

It is readily apparent that there are multiple ways of defining fields of interrelated organizations. In general terms, the notion of a field highlights the emergent, dynamic, and (trans)formative nature of relations that

draw organizations together within a "meso-level social order" (Fligstein & McAdam, 2011, p. 3). The organizational field is variously described as a network structure, a functional or institutional domain, a sector of activities, a socio-spatial arena of differential power and conflict, or a shared interest area (see Machado-da-Silva, Guarido Filho, & Rossini, 2006). One of the complexities associated with applying field-related concepts to the study of organizational behavior involves the relative attention placed on structural versus processual interpretations. Wooten and Hoffman (2008) contend that earlier representations of the organizational field were relatively static and homogeneous, whereas contemporary researchers focus greater attention on dynamism and agential change. The authors suggest that future research should examine how organizational fields are developed, maintained, transmitted (from actor to actor), and changed over time (Wooten & Hoffman, 2008, p. 138).

Finally, it is important to make an analytical distinction between a *collection* of like-situated or structurally embedded organizations (e.g., arena, domain, or sector) and a dynamic *field* of interorganizational interactions, goals, and processes. Wooten and Hoffman (2008) indicate that fields should not be understood as "containers" but, rather, as "interactive relational space[s]" (pp. 138, 142). Neither should fields be reduced to aggregated units insofar as they constitute social constructions imbued with symbolic meaning and collective identity. As noted earlier, Wilkinson (1970, 1991) views a community (social) field as an emergent process of interrelated actions that converges around a generalized interest or common will. This is akin to Fligstein's (2001) representation of fields as situationally defined contexts in which participants "frame their actions" in relation to one another (p. 108). Both he and Wilkinson (1991) subscribe to an interactionist interpretation of "fields of social action" or "social fields of action."

The Field-Interactional Approach to Community

Kaufman (1959) proposed the interactional approach in response to growing concerns over community decline and rapid change dynamics, which he attributed to wide-scale factors such as centralization, specialization, and impersonalization. However, it was Wilkinson (1970, 1972, 1991) who popularized social field theory and more fully elaborated its conceptual foundations, methodological considerations, and applications to community development. He demonstrated a keen awareness of the

challenges associated with studying community processes and structures at a time of increasing societal turbulence. His efforts to re-conceptualize the meaning of community in light of growing diversity, fluidity, and complexity are consistent with the recent "relational turn" in the social sciences. Indeed, Wilkinson (1991) claimed that too much attention had been focused on lamenting the loss of a primordial, ideal type form of community, whereas he placed greater emphasis on the study of dynamically interrelated *fields* and *forces* (p. 8).

Wilkinson (1986) proffered a trifecta of intersecting spatial, organizational, and agential dimensions of community:

1. a common territory in which people meet their everyday needs (*local ecology*),
2. an organized context of localized social life comprising relevant associations, institutions, and groups (*local society*), as well as
3. an emergent field of collective community action that expresses common interests and solidarity (*local agency*) (p. 3).

Wilkinson combines both traditional and emerging ways of defining community, without presuming that its elements constitute an integrated whole. The reference to local agency is particularly noteworthy. Wilkinson (1991) suggests that, in the midst of significant social transformation, communities can become fragmented and ill prepared to collectively address local problems. Notwithstanding such conditions, he argues that people continue to (a) live in, identify with, and develop attachments to places, (b) interact in and through localized organizations and groups, and (c) act together on behalf of the larger community. Wilkinson further remarks that generalized action fields can occur in the relative absence of a definitive local ecology or local society, which indicates his appreciation for the emergent nature of collective community agency.

Wilkinson (1991) contends that interactional dynamics merit greater attention in light of the diminishing significance of other aspects of community (e.g., clearly defined geospatial boundaries). He treats community as a natural outcome of members' ongoing interactions around their daily affairs. Wilkinson goes as far as to say that the territorial meaning of community is relationally constructed in and through interaction processes that both delineate and (re)produce its ecological and organizational dimensions. Individuals become engaged in the generation of communalized relations through everyday interactions and, on occasion, their collective

identities motivate joint social action (see Pavey, Muth, Ostermeier, & Davis, 2007). The community is deemed most visible or identifiable when members' actions are organized with respect to common interests. Mead (1934) points out that the self cannot develop apart from a community of others, but neither can the community emerge in the absence of people interacting with one another (p. 162). In relational terms, self and community co-emerge dynamically through the ongoing lived experience of "being" and "becoming" in the presence of others.

Social and Community Fields

Kaufman (1959, 1985) and Wilkinson (1970, 1991) advanced the field concept in an effort to interpret the relational underpinnings of community and collective agency. Wilkinson discusses several key dimensions of the field concept based on a review of its applications within varied disciplines (e.g., physics and psychology). He defines a *field* as an "emergent," "dynamic," "unbounded," and "holistic interaction nexus" (Wilkinson, 1970, pp. 313–314). Unlike Lewin's (1951/1997) discussion of psychological life space, Wilkinson (1970) believes that a field cannot be treated as a bounded entity. He proposes an intensity gradient that weakens as it radiates outward away from the core interactions defining the essential nature of the field. In general terms, then, a field is an emergent, nonreified social phenomenon that possesses properties unlike those of its constituent elements (i.e., irreducibility).

Wilkinson (1991) presents a dynamic view of community by addressing the underlying interactional bases of organized social relations and joint agency. He proposed the field-interactional approach as an alternative to system-based thinking about community as an organic entity. Social interactions represent the essence of community life—the foundational substance out of which elemental *Gemeinschaft*-like bonds arise (Tönnies, 1887/1957). Social field theory focuses on the emergent processes of collective action through which participants come together to purposefully address their collective needs and concerns. Social field theory focuses attention on the multiplicity of intersecting relational processes that operate within the interactional community. In essence, the field-interactional perspective is based principally on two core concepts: "social" and "community" fields (Wilkinson, 1991, p. 88).

A *social* field is a nexus of interactions that becomes organized around a common interest. More specifically, it is an emergent, evolving process

of interaction and structuration set against the backdrop of the broader community. Social fields evolve in consort with sustained interaction and identifiable direction toward a collectively defined goal. It is the manner in which actions converge that contributes directly to the development of varied types of social fields. Wilkinson (1991) believes that situated, goal-directed interaction can, over time, transform into a field of collective action. The social field is central to his understanding of the "community field structure" as a basis for purposive action (Wilkinson, 1972, p. 43). And, to the extent that social fields derive their existence from the actuality of social interaction, they exist in ceaseless flux. The intrinsic dynamism of interaction processes continuously re-constitutes the social relationships out of which structure emerges.

Wilkinson (1991) conceives of the community as a localized configuration of multifold and potentially overlapping social fields that express differentiated goals. His approach is best understood as "a theory of social fields" (Wilkinson, 1970, p. 314). The interactional perspective is based on the idea that collective action is motivated by interests, some of which are narrowly framed (e.g., educational, economic, or political), while others are of a more comprehensive nature. Put differently, certain aspects of the multifarious social fields that comprise the community can become coordinated on behalf of generalized concerns. Wilkinson (1991) refers to the latter process as a community field involving actors, activities, and associations that are drawn together around locality-relevant issues. The development of a community field is intimately intertwined with mutual interests and joint agency. In symbolic-interactionist terms, the participants enter into relations with one another in a manner that defines the welfare of the community as a common object of attention and concerted action (see Mead, 1932). It is the collective nature of actors' goal-directed behavior that gives shape and direction to the community field.

A *community* field reflects the convergence of diverse interests and activities within an identifiable goal-oriented social process (Wilkinson, 1970, 1991). It is a particular type of social field that self-organizes around a communalized pattern of integrated collective action. In such situations, individuals who may have little else in common act on behalf of their shared concern for the wider community. Members develop *Gemeinschaft*-like relationships that contribute to the emergence of cooperative activities. A community field facilitates the realization of mutual interests by identifying and reinforcing commonalities that draw together differentiated fields. In effect, community fields address specialized interests within the context of

a more comprehensively organized process. And, although generalized action fields can arise out of and coordinate narrowly drawn interests, they should not be equated with the "community" (see Theodori, Luloff, Brennan, & Bridger, 2016).

Wilkinson (1970) offers a dynamic view of how the convergence of interests can motivate localized interactions and generate collective community action. The community field comprises associational and participatory relationships that cut across, but do not subsume, specialized social (interest) fields. Differences do not completely dissipate in conjunction with the emergence of a community action field; rather, there is an increased emphasis on some aspect(s) of mutuality. Differentiated goals are very likely to persist, despite the emergence of a generalized action field. However, actors' particular intentions can become integrated on behalf of the broader community. The social bonds that develop among local actors and shape interaction processes derive from a shared interest in the community-at-large (Korsching & Allen, 2004). Therefore, the relative presence of community rests on diffuse, as contrasted to segmented, instrumental relations; the community is, as Bender (1978) points out, "an end in itself" (p. 8).

The volitional basis of the community action field bears some resemblance to Tönnies' (1887/1957) notion of social will. He refers to the formation of social relationships or bonds through which each person's will is influenced by that of other members. Tönnies (1887/1957) theorizes a "collective will" that both includes and conditions each participant's (individual) will (p. 243). Husserl's (*Husserliana*, XXVII, p. 22) portrayal of community as a "many-headed and yet connected subjectivity" is pertinent to the interpretation of generalized action fields (as quoted in Buckley, 1992, p. 214). This "higher-order" intersubjective community draws together individuals who experience a unique form of relatedness to one another (Husserl, 1950/1999). Community, thus conceived, is something "new" that arises out of the communalization of individual existences (Hart, 1992c). And, to the extent that this mode of community grows out of social relations, it is neither ontologically independent of nor prior to its co-producers. Herein lie the underlying themes of processuality and relational emergence.

Husserl (1950/1999) refers to the mutuality of human social existence that develops among ostensibly separate "monads." He discusses the presence of shared understandings and the interpenetration of wills through which members work together *for* and *as* a community (see Hart, 1992b,

p. 372). By virtue of being intentionally engaged in each other's lives, a form of "we-subjectivity" can emerge (Husserl, 1954/1970, pp. 108–109). The community is constituted in and through the performance of collective acts, out of which arises a common consciousness and a shared intention about what is to be accomplished (Bianchin, 2003). In parallel terms, a community action field is a dynamic (i.e., non-entitative) relational context that develops ("from below") through the reciprocal interaction of participants' thoughts, wills, and actions (Hart, 1992a, p. 95). It is in this respect that a community (social) field can be likened to Husserl's idea of an "authentic community" insofar as both phenomena grow out of the intersubjective relations of those who think, work, and act together (see Bessant, 2011; Buckley, 1996).

Wilkinson's (1991) community action field is held together by an encompassing communal will among members who consciously act in and through one another in the pursuit of a common interest. Levitt and Glick Schiller (2004) raise a related point with respect to "ways of being" versus "ways of belonging" within social fields or networks of relationships (p. 1010). This distinction draws attention to the social–psychological or affective facets of social field processes. The authors indicate that ways of being involve individuals carrying out activities and practices without necessarily identifying in any significant manner with the field in which they are more or less embedded. By comparison, ways of belonging constitute relations that enact a conscious identification with some aspect of the field. Sense of belonging is a seminal facet of Tönnies' (1887/1957) notion of *Gemeinschaft*; it is also elemental to Wilkinson's (1991) interpretation of collective community action.

The community field develops in conjunction with the convergence of specialized and common interests, that is, by abstracting the generalized (i.e., communalized) components of varied social fields. This comprehensive social field affirms a broader concern for the community across diverse interest fields. The community field both emerges out of and potentially influences differentiated action tendencies within the "local society." Wilkinson (1991) defines mutual interests primarily in terms of community-relevant issues, the basic premise being that a communal action context coordinates and strengthens relationships that traverse narrowly defined goals. And, although the interactional community can be understood in a territorial sense, "the place, per se, is not the community" (Theodori, 2008, p. 92). What is most relevant is the intention or choice to come together and purposively address issues confronting the community, regardless of its scale and how it is defined.

Wilkinson's (1991) application of the field concept directs attention to interaction processes when thinking about social organization and collective action. Social fields comprise relational dynamics and intersubjective processes that can give rise to emergent effects or outcomes (e.g., structure). They can develop under highly dynamic conditions and impel or induce goal-directed actions. A community (social) field that emerges in the midst of diverse interests and lines of action has the capability to initiate and coordinate purposive collective agency. This reflects the latent potential for community action to coalesce in highly diverse settings (Bridger & Alter, 2006). The field-interactional perspective shifts the focus away from functional or system-oriented views of community by highlighting issues of emergence, interactional dynamics, and evolving elements of structure.

The Social Self, Perspective Taking, and Emergent Community

Wilkinson (1991) makes specific reference to both Tönnies (1887/1957) and Mead (1934, 1938) in discussing the interactional or relational foundations of community. Tönnies' (1887/1957) notion of *Gemeinschaft* is indicative of deep-seated feelings of intimacy, connectedness, and belonging, all of which can contribute to the development of social relationships that foster collective community action. Wilkinson (1991) makes mention of *Gemeinschaft* with respect to the foundational social bonds that grow up among individuals who (inter)act together in relation to their shared concerns for the community (p. 14). *Gemeinschaft* is linked directly to the nature of individuals' interests and actions, most notably when the community is treated as the primary object of purposive collective agency (e.g., well-being). *Gemeinschaft*-like relationships constitute and shape personal identities in conjunction with the lived experience of community. Indeed, Wilkinson suggests that the geospatial, organizational, and agential aspects of community are embedded in relational dynamics. Given this mode of thinking, community cannot be viewed narrowly as a territorial entity insofar as its many meanings or attributes, including that of place, are socially constituted in and through ongoing interaction processes.

The theoretical relevance of Mead's (1934) work to the field-interactional perspective is perhaps best understood in terms of the emergent (social) self, attitude taking, and the "generalized other" (p. 154). First and foremost, the self and society (or community) co-exist in perpetual relation and mutual transformation. Mead (1934) believes that the

self emerges through everyday interactions with other members of the community. The individual develops a sense of self in relation to other selves. And, it is through perspective-taking behavior that the self becomes the "object" of its own attention while coming to know the other as "other." Self-consciousness is made possible by symbolically mediated processes of meaning- and sense-making that are played out continuously between the self and others. Therefore, language is elemental to the development of shared meanings and the human capacity to assume others' attitudes within contexts of joint social action (see Bessant, 2012).

Mead's (1934) conceptualization of attitude taking offers a meaningful way of thinking about community as a "social object" of conscious reflection and concerted action. He theorizes the self as emerging through role-taking processes associated with particular others and the larger group. This is closely aligned with Mead's (1934) discussion of the "inner conversation" (p. 141), by means of which actors engage in self-indications or "self-interaction" (see Blumer, 1969, p. 62). More to the point, Mead (1934) believes that the "organized other" reflects the presence or "voice" of the community (pp. 168, 265). And, so, the community is assimilated into human (social) consciousness through the process of assuming the perspective of the "generalized other" toward prospective actions. Mead (1934) states that communities comprise common ways of responding or acting, which he refers to as "institutions" (p. 261). In this sense, the community and its constituent repertoire of "common maxims" (Athens, 2005, p. 313) enter into individuals' thoughts, actions, and lived relations with one another.

One of the core aspects of the interactional approach involves the convergence of interests and actions within a community action process. According to Mead (1934), human beings possess the (varied) ability to assume the attitude(s) of other actors when they become involved in some form of cooperative undertaking. Such joint activities require that participants place themselves in each other's positions or roles and, thereby, "share their experience" (Mead, 1938, p. 137). The process of shifting orientations is deemed essential to the performance of intricately organized corporate activities. It is this capacity to take others' attitudes toward an intended action that allows actors to appreciate the interactional dynamics at play within a relational setting. Individual acts are formed *in situ* as individuals engage with each other in the course of constructing joint social actions (Blumer, 2004). The ongoing process

of coordinating different lines of action, interpreting situations, and taking account of others' responses contributes to the emergence and continuous transformation of organized actions (see Blumer, 1969). All of these processes are intrinsic to Wilkinson's (1991) theorization of community action fields.

Furthermore, Mead (1938) makes reference to a "community perspective," which is highly relevant to social field theory (p. 203). A community perspective defines a field of objects that is common to all of its members. In such situations, the responses of other actors are called out in each of the participants as they reflect on their own actions and the overall undertaking. It is important that all actors consider how their own and others' actions fit into the overall sequence of events that comprise the larger enterprise. Hence, a generalized attitude becomes embedded in each member's actions. And, by virtue of this common perspective, participants can assume a reflective orientation toward the organization of their interrelated acts. Blumer (2004) observes that, in the course of interacting, individuals take note of varied features of the situation, including others' expectations, dispositions, and actions. And, while a common perspective may well bring individuals together in the performance of a joint endeavor, it is the inherent dynamism of interaction processes that ultimately shapes collective action.

In summary, a community action field can be viewed as a dynamic, emergent social process of response interpretation and coordinated action that can, over time, assume structural properties. Attitude taking is particularly relevant to Wilkinson's (1991) theory of social fields insofar as members are able to act purposively on the basis of communalized interests, meanings, and understandings. Therefore, the development of a community field rests in some fashion on the constitution of an organized set of common dispositions among those involved in collective community action. And, so, the capacity of participants to assume the perspectives of other actors and the "generalized other" is implicated in the formation of a community field, most notably with respect to processes of interest convergence and organized action. In such situations, the members of a community action field may well forgo their narrowly defined interests, if only temporarily, in favor of what Mead (1934) terms a "larger self" (p. 388). Wilkinson's (1970, 1991) field-related thinking reinforces the relational foundations of community, as expressed by its members' capacity to act together on behalf of their collective well-being.

Social Field Theory: Some Interpretative Considerations

The foregoing sections focus primarily on situating Wilkinson's (1970, 1991) interactional approach within the larger discourse on field-theoretic concepts and research. It is noteworthy that social field theory is garnering increased attention in the community development literature. This expanding interest not only opens up novel applications of the field-interactional perspective, it also offers opportunities to reflect on emerging theoretical considerations. The following discussion examines two issues: (a) social field versus social capital theory and (b) structural versus processual facets of field-related thinking.

Social Field, Social Capital, Interest, and Agency

Quite unlike the *homo economicus* model of human action or rational choice, Wilkinson (1991) emphasizes communal bonds, collective identities, and communicative (inter)action (see also Miller, 1992). His understanding of collective action is not premised on strategically rational actors, transactional exchange, or norms of generalized reciprocity. However, there have been occasional efforts to draw linkages between the field-interactional approach and social or community capital (e.g., Allen, 2001). The social field and social capital theories address relational and intentional aspects of purposive action, albeit from distinct vantage points.

Coleman (1988) asserts that social capital exists *within* relational structures such as social norms, obligations, expectations, and trustworthiness. Lin (2001) similarly defines social capital as individual or collective assets embedded in social relations (p. 19). Social capital is a resource that is associated with various types of social connections, networks, and ties that can be accessed or mobilized in order to realize specific goals. It can be used to acquire, maintain, and combine other types of assets for the purpose of achieving desired ends. Exchanges can be understood as social relations that represent sources of social capital ("relational rationality") or as transactions through which economic capital is acquired ("transactional rationality") (Lin, 2001, pp. 149–150). Following Coleman (1988), social capital is implicit within the relation itself and, more specifically, in its potential to operate as a resource channel, connection, or network (e.g., information).

A key theoretical aspect of social capital theory concerns the intersection of individual and collective interest(s) in the course of making decisions about purposive action. While social capital can be understood as either a "private" or a "public" good, Coleman (1988) and Putnam (1993, 2000) concur that it most often takes the latter form. However, it is conceivable that some actors will be more inclined to invest in or build social capital when they are the unequivocal recipients of its benefits. A public good or collective resource is available to individuals other than, or in addition to, those responsible for its creation, which may influence rational actors to "underinvest" in such efforts (Coleman, 1988, p. s117). This may well be the case in situations where there are considerable "up-front" contributions and little, if any, assurance of short- or long-term direct benefits to active participants. Bridger and Luloff (2001), for instance, point out that, given assumptions of utility maximization and cost–benefit analysis, it is difficult to account for the convergence of self and collective intentions with respect to sustainable community development.

Some authors argue that social capital, of the collective resource variety, comes about indirectly as a by-product of other activities (see Putnam, 1993). Putnam (2000) discusses instances in which individual and collective facets of social capital operate simultaneously. This is reflected in the formation of social ties that not only contribute to norms of reciprocity and social trust but also facilitate cooperative action and mutual benefit. Community action, in this sense, is entwined with the extent to which collective social capital is embodied in norms, networks, and associations. Miller (1992) simply notes that generalized interest is in effect "self-interest" when the individual is embedded in and identifies with the larger group or community (p. 33). Quite literally, the public good is constituted within emergent communal bonds and individuals' collective intentions to act on behalf of the community. In order to resolve some of these issues, efforts have been made to reframe social capital in terms of three levels of analysis: (a) collective or public goods that benefit wider society (*macro*), (b) resources that are available to group members (*meso*), and (c) assets that individuals can mobilize for their own personal (*micro*) interests (see Stanzani, 2015, pp. 129–130).

If, as Lin (2001) indicates, collective interest only enters into individuals' calculations when there is some prospect for personal gain, then social capital theory differs notably from the field-interactional perspective.

Wilkinson (1991) acknowledges that the community is a turbulent arena of self-seeking fields where narrowly defined interests can act as barriers to the formation of community-oriented actions. Indeed, sector-specific fields organized around more specialized goals may not be oriented exclusively toward the welfare of the larger community. In spite of such circumstances, Wilkinson stresses the importance of purposive collective agency that arises out of latent social bonds and mutual interests, as distinct from relations of transactional rationality or generalized reciprocity (see Bridger & Alter, 2006). Clearly, community action fields are closely aligned with the public or common good, as expressed through the pursuit of generalized interests.

Wilkinson (1991) suggests that, when community agency is treated as an emergent process of dynamic interactions, "purpose" operates like a force that introduces a degree of order, unity, and direction into the field (p. 92). Therefore, social fields derive from actors' intentions to form and strengthen social relationships based on common sentiments and interests, which is closely related to Tönnies' (1887/1957) notion of *Gemeinschaft*. And, to the extent that social fields energize action processes on community-related issues, some authors may view them as expressions of social capital. This amounts to explaining the properties or outcomes of a community action field in terms of social capital theory. A similar problem arises when the terms social field and social network are used interchangeably, despite notable differences in their respective meanings, assumptions, and applications.

Finally, it is important to demarcate Bourdieu's (1985a) and Wilkinson's (1991) conceptions of the "social field." Each author proffers a distinct field-based interpretation of how interests are intertwined with human (or collective) agency. For Bourdieu, a field is a site of specific logics and properties, including common motivations or subjective dispositions about what is worth striving for (Martin, 2003, p. 37). Fields are distinguishable on the basis of elemental interests that are linked to agents' material and dispositional investments. Bourdieu further argues that interests do not originate in the dynamics of interaction but, rather, in the structural relations between field and habitus (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). He contends that habitus and interests are bound up with the sociocultural backdrop that shapes behavior—"a spontaneity without consciousness or will" (Bourdieu, 1980/1990, p. 56).

Wilkinson (1991) and Bourdieu (1985a) concur that fields are distinguishable on the basis of deeply ingrained interests. However, Wilkinson (1991) assumes an interactional focus on collective intentionality and

coordinated action, whereas Bourdieu (1985a, 1985b) links human action to objective field forces and dispositional influences (i.e., habitus). Bourdieu's conceptualization of interest is best understood in light of his opposition to treating human agency as a function of conscious intention or rational calculation (see Throop & Murphy, 2002). His preoccupation with the structural determinants of agency differs markedly from Wilkinson's (1991) contention that community (social) fields emerge dynamically in and through interaction processes.

Spatial, Structural, Interactional, and Transactional Relations

One of the most fundamental characteristics of the field concept is its relational nature (Owen-Smith & Powell, 2008). Field theory can be described as a "*relational* mode of thinking" (Bourdieu, 1985a, p. 16) that is variously expressed in spatial, structural, transactional, and interactional terms, among others. Lewin (1951/1997), for instance, made use of topological concepts to depict the dynamic forces and relations operating within psychological life spaces and social fields. For Bourdieu (1985a, 1985b), a field is a structured configuration of positions, forces, and logics. He proposed the idea of multidimensional social space to represent agents' positions within different types of fields. Wilkinson (1991), by comparison, stresses interaction and social relationships. His concern with process is linked directly to the interactional dynamics of emergent fields, along with their continuously changing elements of structure.

Wilkinson (1970) discusses how interaction processes shape or alter structure throughout the duration of a particular social field. His approach is consistent with Blumer's (1969) contention that society is constituted through the ongoing dynamics of social (inter)action, not some postulated set of structural relations. Wilkinson claims that community fields are expressions of organized social life and collective action. He conceives of structure in two senses: social relationships among actors and relations among positions. And, although both positions and roles can be viewed as relational aspects of social organization, it is the interaction of role performances that generates the social field. The novelty of an emergent field is directly attributable to the interplay of social roles stemming from actors' interpretations of their own and others' expected behavior. In this respect, the position–role distinction is somewhat analogous to the structure versus process dimensions of social fields.

On a related point, Wilkinson (1970) is careful to differentiate fields and networks. He associates networks more so with the structural features of society (e.g., positions and institutions), whereas fields bear a closer affinity with the dynamics of social interaction and collective action. Conceivably, networks exhibit dynamic qualities through the role performances of those occupying positions within a structure or system. This raises the methodological problem of inferring the emergence or presence of a social field based on identifiable network structures such as interlocking directorships (see Sharp, Flora, & Killacky, 2003). And, while network analysis offers a useful technique for mapping linkages among positions, groups, or institutions, it is the intrinsic emphasis on active role behavior that marks Wilkinson's (1991) conception of the social field.

Dépelteau (2015) recently observed that relational sociology focuses primarily on "fields of transaction (or social fields)" (p. 55). He conceives of social relations as transactions among interdependent actors. He further contends that the notion of transaction accommodates a wide range of interrelated actions. Dépelteau equates fields with the multifold social experiences and processes that bring people together in diverse relational contexts, including families, work spheres, nations and, by implication, communities. Social fields are created and transformed by members' transactional relations over time (i.e., historicity). And, to the extent that these fields are shaped in and through processes of construction, they are neither prior to nor separate from actors or their relations with one another (Dépelteau, 2015). This is somewhat akin to Wilkinson's (1970) remark that the field extends into its constituent members, as expressed through their role performances.

Much like Wilkinson's (1991) interpretation of "social fields," Dépelteau's (2015) "transactional fields" (p. 57) constitute emergent relational constructions. Also, both authors treat social fields as dynamic processes that are shaped by ongoing (trans)actions among interrelated individuals, albeit in their own distinct terms. The field concept draws attention to the processes through which actors come together in the context of multifarious life experiences and, thereby, define and shape the bases of their interdependent lives. By comparison to Wilkinson's (1991) field-based understanding of purposive community action, Dépelteau (2015) offers a more general representation of social fields. These two theoretical applications of the "social field" are well suited to the interpretation of community processes and action dynamics.

Concluding Remarks

One of the most compelling aspects of field theory is its relational underpinnings, regardless of whether it is framed in terms of objectively structured positions, interrelated forces, emergent dynamics, or interaction processes. This chapter provides an overview of Wilkinson's (1970, 1991) interactional perspective, as compared to other applications of field-related thinking such as Bourdieu's (1985a) multidimensional social space and Dépelteau's (2015) transactional fields. Wilkinson (1970) discusses the social field concept in a relatively unique fashion to characterize and differentiate varied contexts of collective community agency. Social fields are relational phenomena that have a life span, however brief, of evolving social processes and structures. Social relationality is implicit in Wilkinson's understanding of the social field, particularly when thinking about the generative and transformative nature of interactional dynamics.

Perhaps one of the most distinctive features of Wilkinson's (1991) work is its focus on purposive community action. The interactional approach is concerned with the processual interrelatedness of intentions, actions, and other factors that contribute to the emergence of community action fields. In the most fundamental sense, community fields grow out of the social actions and role performances of those who join together in the pursuit of generalized interests. Hence, emergence is a key feature of Wilkinson's social field theory, particularly as it relates to the development of novel events, activities, or phenomena. This is clearly evident in his observations concerning the irreducible nature of emergent field effects or outcomes, an idea shared by a number of relational sociologists (e.g., Donati, 2015). Interestingly, Mead (1934) observes that "the novel" happens continuously, whereas emergence constitutes "reorganization" (p. 198). The dynamic quality of interaction processes, when combined with emergence, augurs against a static view of social fields. Actors are constantly reacting and adjusting their responses in ways that transform "*institutionalized* social action" (Athens, 2005, p. 307). Through the analytical lens of the social field, Wilkinson (1970, 1991) applies notions of emergence, dynamism, and processuality to the study of community action.

Note

1. The terms "organizational field" and "interorganizational field" are often used interchangeably in the literature. The latter form is used preferentially in this chapter unless otherwise stipulated by a particular author.

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CHAPTER 5

Dialogical Conceptions of the Self and Community

The notion of community has prompted diverse themes of academic discourse, among which none is more fundamental than self–other relations. Dialogism is expressly concerned with the relational processes that underpin everyday lived experience. A core aspect of dialogical thinking involves the intersubjective meaning-making dynamics embedded within what is alternatively termed the "realm of the interhuman" (Buber, 1965, pp. 74–75) or the "inter-individual" (Bakhtin, 1963/1984, p. 88). Dialogic relations are implicit in the development of the self and the prospective emergence of a "*collective-we*" (Shotter, 1998, p. 193). More to the point, community can be viewed as arising out of dialogic relationships that draw people together in the continued (trans)formation of their collective lives (Westoby & Dowling, 2013). Dialogical theory offers important insights into the relational foundations of human existence, identity, community, and agency.

Academic interest in dialogism is perhaps best understood in contradistinction to the oft-mentioned drift toward atomism, instrumentality, and de-centeredness in contemporary society. Community sociologists have long been preoccupied with social fragmentation and weakening local agency (see Bauman, 2001; Warren, 1978). In light of such issues, dialogical thinking is making inroads into community development theory and practice (see Owen & Westoby, 2012). Greater analytical emphasis is now being placed on the ways in which people *talk*, *think*, and *act* together with respect to collectively defined goals (Kirk & Shutte, 2004, p. 240). The

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issue of how individual intentions, thoughts, and actions coalesce around shared concerns is a key theme in community development research.

This chapter explores the relational–dialogical fabric of lived experience principally through the work of Martin Buber (1947/2002, 1965) and Mikhail Bakhtin (1963/1984, 1986/1993, 1990). Both authors highlight the embeddedness of human existence in the ceaseless flow of self–other relations. They share the view that meaning arises in moments of meeting, communicating, and interacting. The multi-voiced self, intersubjective relations, and joint action emerge reflexively and responsively through dialogic interaction. From this perspective, community is a living event of "co-being" within which individuals co-constitute everything from the most basic linguistic meanings (i.e., words or symbols) to complex collective actions. In one sense, community *is* inherently relational while, in another, it can be said to *emerge* out of relations. In addition to a comparative examination of Buber's and Bakhtin's richly textured ideas about dialogic relations, the chapter considers the notion of "betweenness" and, in particular, its relevance to the study of community. This leads into a brief discussion of related work on situated (inter)action and dialogic community practice.

Dialogic Relations[1]: Martin Buber and Mikhail Bakhtin

There is expanding theoretical interest in dialogical interpretations of the lived experience of community and emergent agential processes (see Bessant, 2014). The representation of "being" as "co-being" owes much to the work of Buber (1923/1958, 1965) and Bakhtin (1986/1993), as well as a number of more recent authors. When Bakhtin makes the point that neither the self nor linguistic meaning can be achieved in isolation from others, he vouchsafes the essential role that dialogue plays in everyday social relations. His main contention is that novel understandings grow out of dialogic interaction. This strikes a familiar chord with Buber's (1965) depiction of the "interhuman" as a unique and ontologically real context of emergent relation. Dialogical facets of self–other interaction and meaning-making processes are directly implicated in the relational fabric of community life.

The fundamental point of departure for this chapter is the seemingly unremarkable event of individuals entering into relation with one another.

Dialogue involves being in relation, person-to-person, through which meaning arises and evolves continuously. And, to the extent that human existence is shared with others, so, too, is the self intrinsically relational (Clegg & Salgado, 2011; Holquist, 2002). The self emerges in and through dialogic relations with diverse members of a community of others (Mead, 1934, pp. 200–201). Durkheim (1895/1938) long ago purported, albeit in a different sense, that "the self is itself a society" (p. 111). On a related theme, Hermans (2002) suggests that the dialogical self constitutes a "society of mind" comprising a dynamic interplay of multifold "I-positions" (p. 147). He contends that individuals can imaginatively entertain an internal conversation among the multifarious voices instantiated within their minds. The dialogical self both emerges out of and reflects the polyphonic nature of community life. Furthermore, dialogue is irreducible to a simple sequence of exchanges or rejoinders insofar as the self is embedded in a "felt" association with others. It is in this sense that the self can be viewed as an expression of intersubjective relations and an embodiment of lived experience (Cresswell & Baerveldt, 2011; Hermans, 2001, 2002).

Emergence represents a core facet of the dialogical approach, which is indicative of the notion that all aspects of lived relation are essentially nascent—forever unfinished, fluid, and ever changing. Bohm (1996) associates dialogue with the process of creating something new in and through relations with others. One of the cornerstones of dialogical thinking is the emergence of meaning through the dynamics of self–other relations. In keeping with this idea, Shotter (1998) observes that our thoughts, feelings, and understandings are rooted in the perpetual flow of dialogic relations. Responsive communicative processes facilitate the coordination of complex actions and the accomplishment of tasks that could not otherwise be achieved alone (Shotter, 2008). The following sections outline and compare some of Buber's and Bakhtin's key thoughts on the relational underpinnings of lived experience and emergent meaning. This discussion forms the basis for exploring what is euphemistically termed the "between" or "betweenness" and its application to the interpretation of community.

Martin Buber: The Ontology of the "Interhuman"

Buber (1947/2002) considers dialogue an essential ingredient for the emergence of a sense of "We-ness," which can only be properly understood when read through his observations about relational life. He

presents a twofold conception of human existence that rests on a fundamental distinction between "*I–It*" and "*I–Thou*" (Buber, 1923/1958, p. 11). The former sphere refers to the world of *things*, whereas the latter involves mutual, all-encompassing relationships that directly engage and embrace the whole (other) person. In the realm of "*It*," the *I* constitutes a self-differentiated, separate person actively engaged in perceiving, experiencing, and making use of "objects" (Buber, 1923/1958, pp. 12–13). By comparison, the *I* of "*I–Thou*" enters into direct mutual relation and generates solidary connections with others. Buber (1965) further indicates that human life comprises two "movements": "setting at a distance" followed by "entering into relation" (p. 60). Nancy (1991, 1996/2000) similarly notes that "being-with-one-another" involves elements of both *distance* and *relation*.

Buber's (1965) twofold relational dynamic is premised on otherness. In conjunction with the first movement, "setting at a distance," other individuals, situations, and the world, more generally, acquire an independent existence opposite or over against one's own. Individuals develop a sense of their concrete "self-being" through this process (Buber, 1965, p. 71). It is by virtue of being set apart in this fashion that human beings are able to establish meaningful relations with one another (as "others"), albeit with differing degrees of mutuality. Buber (1965) remarks that the pinnacle of this two-pronged principle is realized when shared existence transforms into "mutual relation" (pp. 60, 71). Through this "interhuman" dynamic of making the other fully "present," co-participants in dialogue develop a sense of self through their shared relations (Buber, 1965, p. 70). His ideas support the notion that "being" is intimately entwined with "co-being" and "co-existing" in the presence of others (see also Nancy, 1996/2000).

Authentic dialogue, as per Buber (1923/1958), stands in sharp contrast to individuals expressing singular thoughts in a monologically focused exchange. He emphasizes that authentic dialogue occurs between "real" persons who are cognizant of their concrete ownness and the otherness of those who stand over against them (Buber, 1947/2002, p. 115). Prior to becoming engaged in the ongoing events of lived relation, then, each of us begins from somewhere, that is, from one's own "self-being." For Buber (1965), even the most fleeting exchange of glances between relative strangers is indicative of "turning" toward the other (p. 85). He suggests that, in contexts of "unreserved" relation or true presence, participants experience each other's unique particularity (Buber, 1947/2002, p. 42).

This is parallel to Bakhtin's (1986/1993) insistence that the *I* and all others exist in unique axiological positions.

One of Buber's (1965) pivotal concepts is the ontological sphere of "interhuman" mutuality. This mode of relation should not be misconstrued as a unity of perspective; rather, it involves engaging "open-hearted[ly]" with others in the fullness of the situation (Buber, 1947/2002, p. 9). The "interhuman" involves a mutual relation of "feeling felt" by the other. Also, the ongoing event of coming together in dialogic relation (re) shapes lived experiences and emergent actions. Buber (1965) makes the point that, within the "interhuman" realm, meaning does not rest with the participants *per se*, either individually or even collectively—it emerges out of the actuality of their ongoing dialogue. Bakhtin (1979/1986), too, mentions the act of turning toward or addressing the other directly in dialogic interaction (p. 99). Buber's (1965) interpretation of "the 'between'" (p. 75) stems from a deep dialogic and inclusive mode of "*I–Thou*" communion, which differs sharply from the more distant and instrumental nature of "*I–It*" relations. This distinction is vaguely reminiscent of Tönnies' (1887/1957) depictions of *Gemeinschaft*- and *Gesellschaft*-like relationships, respectively.

Buber (1923/1958) comments on the importance of intimacy and mutuality in the generation of "true" community. He conveys the idea that genuine self–other (existential) relations are foundational to community and, by implication, communal action. Of particular interest here is Buber's (1947/2002) discussion of "*I–Thou*" relations and, in a somewhat expanded but parallel sense, the "essential *We*" (p. 208). He suggests that a common life is built up through the meaningful dialogue of one person with another. A similar theme is evident in a distinction that Buber (1947/2002) draws between a mere "bundling together" or collection of people, as contrasted with a community of those who live "*with*" and "toward" one another (p. 37). He refers to the latter condition of communalized experiences and relations as an authentic sense of "We-ness" that cannot be reduced to a simple grouping or some such aggregate of individuals (Buber, 1965). Community emerges in and through multifold dialogic relations among those who live together with a shared sense of existence. The thoughts, feelings, and actions that are so often associated with community arise in (or out of) the "between spaces" generated by dialogic interaction.

The "interhuman" sphere, when understood in a somewhat larger sense, can be likened to an emergent community. Buber (1947/2002)

remarks that members of a community are bound to each other in unique selfhood or "concreteness" (p. 73). More to the point, they engage with other community members in ways that cannot be said of those who simply belong to the same group. In the absence of person-to-person relations, authentic community is not possible. Buber (1947/2002) points out that community arises or occurs, as does the "between," when individuals enter into direct existential relation—"being to being" (p. 199). However, the communion that emerges out of such relations does not constitute a form of fused life, nor does it involve the forfeiture of one's "self-being."

Buber (1965) explains that the "social" and the "interhuman" are separate dimensions of lived experience. He differentiates between a sense of association that exists within a social group and a truly mutual relation with others. Put differently, individuals can participate in varied modes of shared life, but partners in dialogue experience each other's particularity within the joint event of their "interhuman" relation. Buber notes that people can belong to a group without necessarily experiencing existential (personal) relations with each other. Indeed, there are many contexts in which individuals are detached in any meaningful sense from one another. This resonates with Heidegger's (1927/1962) discussion of *Dasein*'s dispersion into "average everydayness," which he refers to as an *inauthentic* way of "Being" that involves "*fleeing*," "falling," or becoming absorbed into "the 'they'" (pp. 69, 229). A social collective, as described by Buber (1947/2002), lacks the personal relations that he associates with more intimate communal existence. The implication is that a collectivity is relationally distinct from what may be termed a "true" community insofar as the latter reflects a more substantive bond, sense of "We-ness," or communion.

The notion of "betweenness" offers a novel way of interpreting the relational fabric and emergence of community within dialogic relations. And, much like the "between" (Buber, 1965), the relational ontology of community is irreducible to the experiences of its individual members. Community comes into existence by and through ongoing dialogic interaction. On a related point, Husserl (1954/1970) refers to an intersubjectively communalized sense of "We-ness" that develops as individuals work toward a common understanding or sense of the world (p. 109). He suggests that "authentic community" is founded on and embedded in the lives of those who participate in a communalized will and collectively pursue some form of "common good" (see Buckley, 1992, p. 220). Again, community

cannot be understood simply as a collection of individuals who happen to share similar thoughts, ideas, or interests; rather, it is premised on the mutual lived relations of its co-creators (Bessant, 2011).

Mikhail Bakhtin: The "Inter-individual" and Dialogic Interaction

The intersecting themes of dialogism and relationality are central to Bakhtin's extensive body of work (see Holquist, 2002). He left a legacy of innovative reflections on the intricacies of dialogic relations. Among the many concepts that Bakhtin (1963/1984) proffered, the "inter-individual" is particularly relevant to the study of community. This core idea is entwined with his assertion that lived experience is architectonically organized around two counterposed centers: "*I* and the *other*" (Bakhtin, 1986/1993, p. 74). To the extent that human existence is embedded in self–other relations, nothing in life can be achieved or understood in the starkness of unanswerable solitude. Dialogue is the gateway to meaning—always open and never isolated or one-sided (see Cissna & Anderson, 1998). All of life's moments are always-already in a state of continuous emergence and transformation by virtue of relational dynamics.

According to Bakhtin (1986/1993), people are actively engaged in the ongoing "event-ness" of lived experience, where "being" is bound up in the endless process of "becoming" (p. 1). "Being," much like meaning, is in constant motion, never finished, and perpetually played out in relational contexts of living consciousness. Every "answerable act" or deed is *unrepeatable* within the ongoing event of one's life (Bakhtin, 1986/1993, pp. 3, 28). Bakhtin contends that each individual's relation to any given event (or others) issues forth from a particular "place" in some architectonic whole, and, so, there are as many different viewpoints as there are actors. It follows that responsive acts must be interpreted from the perspective of those who, relationally speaking, are directly engaged in dialogic interaction. Answerable acts and responsive dialogue are embedded within relationships that are themselves shaped by the unique feelings, thoughts, and experiences of participative individuals (Hicks, 2000).

The unrepeatable nature of each individual's life brings with it the responsibility to act *non*-indifferently in relation to ongoing events, moments, and experiences. In Bakhtinian terms, all actions originate from a unique position "outside" that of others, and, yet, nothing happens in

complete isolation. Bakhtin (1990) considers the issue of what transpires when actors assume an axiological position other than their own while thinking about or interacting with someone else. He suggests that the special vantage point offered by this externality to another person's place in the world represents the potential to "see" or "know" something of which the other is unaware (Bakhtin, 1990, p. 23). And, although Bakhtin emphasizes that human beings experience others' lives from their own particular spatio-temporal positions, he holds open the possibility that they can shift, if only briefly, into someone else's lived experience.

From either a dialogical or a symbolic-interactionist perspective, isolation and closure are fundamentally antithetical to the relational (social) self. Dialogue constitutes the interplay of unique, diverse, even opposing voices engaged in the tensional search for meaning. Understandings are neither contained within the minds of interlocutors nor completely shared; they emerge in the dialogic interaction of individual consciousnesses. This is linked to Bakhtin's (1986/1993) relational principle that life is experienced as an intricate dynamic between what is "given" and what is "yet-to-be-achieved" (pp. 32–33). Meanings arise intersubjectively within the "inter-individual," whereby something new is created out of what is "given." Furthermore, human beings are always-already in communication with others, if only within their internal dialogue or "inner speech" (Vološinov, 1929/1973, p. 14). Dialogic–linguistic exchanges are never completely finished, which is in keeping with Bakhtin's (1986/1993) remarks concerning "being" as "becoming" and the perpetual flow of "life-as-event" (pp. 1, 10). The emergent nature of self–other dialogue ensures that speech communication is ever evolving and forever moving toward some unforeseen point. This is consistent with Buber's (1965) interpretation of how individuals enter into relation with one another in the conjoint act of unfolding dialogue.

Utterances are embedded in the participative, polyphonic context of situated dialogue. Diverse voices enter into relation while retaining the individuality or uniqueness that is so essential to dialogue and "responsive understanding" (Bakhtin, 1979/1986, p. 68). Here, again, otherness is essential to the "living" word insofar as interlocutors take into account each other's responses in dialogic interaction. To borrow from Mead (1934), the anticipation of others' behavior plays a significant role in the formation of gestures or utterances. Bakhtin (1963/1984) and Nancy (1991) also share the general notion that human beings are inclined toward one another. Both speaker and listener are actively disposed toward

each other's utterances within the context of speech communication. Participants' voices meet in dialogue, but they are never sublated or merged.

Active meaning is realized in the dialogic interaction of words or texts that are embedded in what Bakhtin (1979/1986) refers to as "*speech genres*" (p. 60). His depiction of intersecting ideas or words stands in sharp contrast to monoglossia, which would ultimately stifle the emergence of novel meanings within dialogic relationships. Bakhtin (1990) affirms the importance of diverse perspectives coming into contact and enriching the fabric of lived experience, thought, and action. Hermans (2001) contends that Bakhtin's reflections on multi-voicedness and multiperspectivity challenge a unified, stable conception of the self. However, polyphony does not preclude some shared sense of meaning from arising within a heteroglossic community, even if understood as perpetually in motion.

If interlocutors are to experience some measure of "*dialogic communion*," it is incumbent upon them to achieve some reasonable agreement about how their own symbol systems relate to those of others (Cooper, Chak, Cornish, & Gillespie, 2013, p. 77). In active meaning-making processes, both speaker and listener must break through the other's "alien conceptual horizon" and encounter new elements of discourse (Bakhtin, 1975/1981, p. 282). Understanding takes shape within a complex and potentially conflictual intersection of "alien" viewpoints, words, ideas, and modes of expression. This dialogic interplay of diverse voices contributes to a more richly textured context of answerable thought and action. Living dialogue involves a process of speaking, answering, and responding in ways that continuously reshape meanings. In essence, understanding is a dialogic achievement (Vološinov, 1929/1973).

Aspects of Bakhtin's (1986/1993, 1990) dialogism and, in particular, his use of architectonics are pertinent to the study of community. It is useful to consider his contention that participative deeds emanate forth from each individual's unique place. This should not be interpreted to mean that people act only out of self-interest, even though they stand at the "center" of their own concrete, architectonically structured worlds. And, notwithstanding Bakhtin's conception of human beings as architectonic centers of answerable action, nothing of lived experience transpires in complete isolation from others. Bakhtin's (1963/1984) analysis of Fyodor Dostoevsky's literary work offers insight into this matter (see Nollan, 2004). Bakhtin (1975/1981) refers to the polyphonic novel as a

form of "higher unity," that is, an organized collection of diverse and relatively autonomous voices (p. 262). In a somewhat parallel sense, community can be viewed as an architectonic whole involving a complex arrangement of multifold individual actors and actions—a fluid event of continuously changing interrelationships.

From a dialogical perspective, it can be argued that individuals act in relation to a felt sense of responsibility to both others and the community. This approach calls attention to the way in which multifold thoughts, voices, intentions, and actions can become drawn together around "community" as a common center. Here, again, diversity and polyphony take precedence over communal fusion or forfeiture of the self, which affirms the essential role that dialogue plays in the co-construction of intersubjective meaning. In somewhat parallel terms, Shotter (2008) discusses the notion of a "*polyphonic* form of organization" involving independent voices that meet without merging or forming an integrated unity (p. 516). Community can be likened to a multi-voiced, heteroglossic sociality or plurality of consciousnesses interacting with one another in a shared event space (Cresswell, 2011, p. 482). Put differently, community constitutes a trajectory of event moments that emerges out of the dialogic interaction of diverse affective, volitional, and agential tendencies.

The Notion of *Betweenness*

The concept of "betweenness" offers one of the most promising and enigmatic ways of interpreting emergent community life. Buber's (1965) notion of the "between" intersects with varied understandings of individual and collective existence. The essential point is that "something" of relational or ontological significance occurs when two or more persons engage in dialogic interaction. Perspectives, meanings, ideas, and actions emerge within the ongoing flow of relational dynamics. The following material explores the nature of "betweenness," along with related aspects of otherness, emergence, and relational ontology. Particular attention is focused on the work of Buber (1947/2002, 1965), Bakhtin (1963/1984, 1990), and Nancy (1991, 1996/2000).

Buber (1947/2002) observes that human existence cannot be understood adequately in terms of either individualism (separateness) or collectivism (embeddedness) and he, therefore, proposes a "third alternative" that arises out of lived relation (p. 240). According to Buber (1965), the process of entering into concrete existential relation with one another can

generate a "'between' which [we] live together" (p. 75). Language is one example of what arises in dialogic moments of "interhuman" relation. Furthermore, the "between" cannot be reduced to, divided among, or summed across individual experiences; it is the unexplained "remainder" that exists in excess of what can be apportioned to those involved (Buber, 1947/2002, p. 204). And, so, the "interhuman" does not reside with the dialogic partners themselves, not even the relation itself; rather, it is an ontologically "real" sphere that emerges therefrom.

The "between" to which Buber (1965) refers is co-constituted within ongoing dialogic relations. This irreducible dialogical context exists ontically as something that happens (existentially) between human beings who enter into relation. Buber emphasizes the existential significance of entering into relation with others "being-to-being." Moreover, the "between" possesses its own "being" that, ontologically speaking, "transcends" the personal existence of its co-participants (Buber, 1947/2002, p. 242). This uniquely emergent realm is accessible only to its co-creators. Shotter (1998) similarly refers to "a third being," possessed of its own distinct attributes, that arises between those who engage in shared contexts of situated dialogic activity (p. 193). His focus on the co-existentiality and co-constitution of the "between" offers a valuable way of interpreting the relational bases of negotiated meaning, joint action, and community life.

Buber (1947/2002) alludes to a kind of "in-the-moment" or *in situ* context of multi-voiced interaction whereby multiple viewpoints play off each other (see Stewart & Zediker, 2000). Face-to-face encounters bring people together in voice, gesture, and action, sometimes in harmony and at other times in cacophony, but always in relation. Buber (1965) conceives of dialogic relations as novel contexts of emergent meaning, as does Bakhtin (1963/1984). Both authors stress the importance of dialogic relationships as foundational elements of lived experience. Bakhtin (1990) explicitly states that human existence is situated between one's own unique "*I-for-myself*" and all those who are "*others-for-me*"; it is *from* this relational context that all life events and actions proceed (p. 129). Ideas, meanings, and actions emerge dynamically within intersubjective dialogic interaction.

Bakhtin (1979/1986) indicates that words or texts, in and of themselves, are "neutral" to the extent that they lack personal meaning or intonation. In contrast, "live" utterances are imbued with emotional or volitional tone (i.e., "authorship"). It is in this sense that individual selves

bring their unique voices together in communicative speech. Bakhtin (1979/1986) remarks that meanings emerge "*on the boundary*" or border between separate interlocutors who enter into dialogic relations with one another (p. 106). Dialogue brings individuals and their life experiences together such that, in the moment of their meeting, words are "half someone else's" (Bakhtin, 1975/1981, p. 293). Meanings emerge within the ongoing event of dialogic relation where the simultaneity of interaction gives rise to something that cannot be explained in terms of any single person alone (see Simmel, 1950).

In Bakhtinian terms, "betweenness" implies plural and distinct voices entering into dialogic relation without merging. A similar issue is reflected in his suggestion that the *I* and all others exist on different axiological planes of existence based on their unique places in the world (Bakhtin, 1990). If one hopes to appreciate another person's subjectivity, it becomes necessary to shift into the other's particular axiological position. Bakhtin describes this as a temporary projection into another's experience, followed by a return to one's own unique place. Likewise, the act of viewing oneself from someone else's perspective involves assuming an axiological position that is relationally "transgredient" to (i.e., outside) one's own (Bakhtin, 1990, p. 22). Even in instances of "sympathetic understanding," however, Bakhtin (1990) argues that the other's experience is actualized internally from the vantage point of "*I-for-myself*" (p. 102). He disclaims any notion of fusion or merged consciousnesses given that this would bring about the forfeiture of the self and, ultimately, the termination of true dialogic relations. And, yet, Bakhtin (1990) makes mention of instances in which individuals join in unison or "*rhythm*" with others and, as such, lack a definitive sense of their own participative self-activity (p. 117). This includes situations in which the *I* becomes passively submerged within a communalized mode of existence—living *in*, *for*, and *through* others.

Nancy (1991) makes an oblique reference to "betweenness" in his book, *The Inoperative Community*. He is adamant that no form of substantive social bond emerges when singular beings communicate with and, thereby, "compear" to one another (Nancy, 1991, p. 58). In contrast to Buber's (1965) treatment of the "between" as an ontologically real sphere, Nancy (1996/2000) states that "[t]here is no *mi-lieu* [between place]" or substantial linkage, which reflects his vigorous rejection of immanent community and communal bonds (p. 5). Co-existence involves both entanglement and separateness in the presence of plural others, and, so,

"being-with" is superimposed over a prior condition of "being-*without* the other [emphasis added]" (Critchley, 1999, p. 66). Both Bakhtin (1990) and Buber (1947/2002) share a similar understanding that, in entering into relation with others, participants do not forfeit their own unique consciousness or concreteness.

Nancy (1996/2000) contends that significations acquire meaning through the act of communicatively sharing with others (p. 2). His discussion of "betweenness" is associated with the relational "compearance" of those who try to make sense of one another (Nancy, 1991, p. 29). Human social existence is tantamount to "co-being" and "co-ontology" in the course of bending toward the other in lived relation (Nancy, 1996/2000, pp. 38, 42). Nancy stresses the intangible nature of communicative relations that lack any substantive consistency or stability. And, yet, out of these ethereal connections, meaning can arise. For Nancy (1991), "betweenness," and perhaps community, emerges within the relational event of singular beings "co-appearing" to one another (p. xl). The key issue here is not so much the absence of relation as it is Nancy's rejection of communal fusion and immanence (see Luszczynska, 2012).

According to Nancy (1991), singularities are constituted in and through relational sociality, with the added stipulation that these connections do not supersede "finitude compearing" (p. 29). "Being-in-common" involves sharing but not communal fusion; it is a mode of coming into relation in order to better know and understand the other. Nancy's (1996/2000) reference to "co-existence" expresses the fundamental notion that both the self and emergent meaning exist by virtue of the "with" of everyday sociation and, as such, neither precedes relation nor community (p. 13). This affirms the suggestion that one's "social being" is inextricably bound up with plurality, multiplicity, and co-existentiality (see Devisch, 2013). Although Nancy (1991) contends that communicative sharing between singular beings does not give rise to a form of immanent unity or bond, he does acknowledge that "*there is* indeed something" (p. 25). This *something* can be understood as "the ontology of event" (Domanov, 2006, p. 111) or perhaps some type of liminal community. Nancy's (1991) loosely framed community of singular beings differs quite significantly from an immanent supra-individual entity.

On a related theme, Heidegger (1927/1962) observes that "Dasein 'is' essentially for the sake of Others" by virtue of "Being-with" (p. 160). And, to the extent that *Dasein* exists always-already in relation with others,

authentic existence is experienced as a "'co-happening' with its community" (Guignon, 1984, p. 336). The *with* of "being-with-many" or "[*b*]*eing singular plural*" signifies "coessentiality," or, put differently, *withness* is at the center of one's "Being" (Nancy, 1996/2000, p. 30). The existential condition of "being-with" is foundational to "being-in-the-world" and the possibility of community. As noted, Nancy (1991) explores the relational underpinnings of "compearance." He also rejects both absolute individuality and communal fusion, preferring instead to stress the idea of finite (singular) beings entering into relation with one another. Lived experience involves communicative sharing other-to-other, and, as such, "*Being*" can be conceptualized "as relational,…and, if you will…*as community*" (Nancy, 1991, p. 6). In essence, then, "being-without-others" is tantamount to the absence of community.

In summary, Bakhtin, Buber, and Nancy offer interrelated understandings of what may be termed "betweenness." Nancy (1996/2000) rejects the prospect of immanent social bonds, but he admits that something transpires between singular beings—however fleeting, situated, and event-based it may be (p. 5). His work offers a somewhat weaker sense of relational emergence than is expressed in Buber's (1965, 1947/2002) sphere of the "interhuman." And, although it is unlikely that Buber would object to describing the "between" as a kind of "happening" or "event," he argues that it cannot be reduced to, understood, or explained solely in terms of participants' individual experiences. Buber (1947/2002) affirms the ontological significance of the "between" as existing somehow apart from each and all of those involved in its co-constitution. This view of emergence endows the "between" with its own reality—hence, the attribution of relational ontology. In contrast, those who espouse methodological and ontological individualism contend that social phenomena neither possess any unique quality of collective "being" nor exist apart from their members. Notwithstanding somewhat varied approaches to "betweenness," this concept offers theoretical insight into the relational emergence of community.

Situated Action and Dialogic Interaction

Some facets of dialogical theory intersect with the interpretation of situated action and agential capacity. Models of situated action emphasize the contingent and unfolding nature of human activity as it emerges dynamically out of the "particularities" of diverse interactional contexts

(Nardi, 1996, p. 36). Suchman (1987) contends that the organizational properties of situated action develop moment-by-moment in conjunction with actors' ongoing interactions with one another and the relational setting. This line of thinking represents a shift away from a "'container'-like" view of structured behavior in favor of a relationally emergent conception of human activity (Suchman, 1993, p. 74). In essence, structure does not precede behavior but rather arises *in situ*. Emphasis is placed on the inherent flexibility, fluidity, and dynamism of interaction processes that are influenced by complex conditioning factors or circumstances. However, this should not be taken to mean that situated action does not generate relational outcomes or effects. As Suchman points out, the stability of the social world rests on shared understandings that emerge out of interactional dynamics.

Academic work on the dialogic self and dialogic relations affords insight into how individuals come together in thought, meaning, and action. Dialogic interaction constitutes an essential process through which meaning and action are collectively generated. Gergen (2009a) makes the point that dialogue itself can be treated as "collaborative action" (p. 2). He remarks that meaning is achieved co-actively and reflexively within coordinated action, which directs attention to self–other relations (see Gergen, 2009b). Furthermore, Gergen, McNamee, and Barrett (2001) suggest that dialogue draws individuals and their actions together in ways that facilitate "relational responsibility" (p. 689). The continuous interplay of situated (inter)actions dictates that meaning is highly fluid and forever nascent (Gergen, 2009a). The essential point is that meaning is created and recreated through dialogue (Linell, 1990).

Shotter (2010) addresses dialogic aspects of situated action or what he refers to as "dialogically structured events" in which individuals coordinate or orchestrate diverse lines of action (p. 271). He argues that human conduct is produced by the interaction of past experiences and conditioning influences that come together within the relational context. Actions are generated in a unique and potentially spontaneous fashion through the interaction of embodied practices, prior experiences, and contextual factors. Also, individual actions acquire meaning as a function of being relationally embedded in some larger activity (Shotter, 2012). This work forms part of a larger discussion of how joint social action emerges dynamically within ongoing contexts of polyphonic interaction or "talk." According to Linell and Luckmann (1990), dialogue thrives on the tensions stemming from asymmetries or heteroglossic relations. The dynamics of situated dialogic interaction open up the prospects for new ways of

understanding and acting to emerge. Dialogue, in this sense, is a pathway to novel and unrehearsed ways of addressing problems and coordinating actions. As Isaacs (2001) points out, one of the most highly valued aspects of dialogue involves openness to "*the free flow of meaning*" (p. 711).

It is important to note that "real-world" (inter)actions can evolve dynamically without being directionless or chaotic. This is consistent with Shotter's (2010) observation that situated dialogic action constitutes a somewhat "orderly" and "disorderly" unfolding structure (p. 277). And, notwithstanding the presence of asymmetry or tension within dialogic interaction, its outcomes are jointly or collectively realized. Goodwin (2000) theorizes action as an "interactively organized process" involving the reflexive consideration of others' behavior *in situ* (p. 1492). The coordination of diverse lines of action in the performance of a collaborative enterprise implies that all those present have the capacity to interpret and potentially shape the trajectory of their joint activities (see Goodwin, 2000). This is reminiscent of Mead's (1938) contention that individuals who engage in cooperative endeavors share a "common perspective," which allows each participant to act in a particular and, yet, collective manner relative to the task at hand (p. 203).

Intersubjective self–other relations are elemental to the interpretation of human lived experience and agency. Berger and Luckmann (1966), for instance, note how actors gain a sense of others' subjective orientations and become co-participatively engaged in a common world. More recently, Sullivan and McCarthy (2004) suggest that inquiry into dialogic interaction requires some appreciation for "the felt agency of the other" (p. 307). Agency implies the felt presence of others and, so, actions are never performed in complete isolation from some sense of otherness. Dialogic relations bring actors' emotional and volitional tones into play with respect to the dynamics of self-awareness and situated action. This is what Bakhtin (1986/1993) refers to as the "givenness" and the "intonated" facets of acts performed in conjunction with ongoing events (pp. 11, 33). For both Bakhtin (1963/1984, 1990) and Mead (1934, 1938), self-consciousness is achieved through one's relations with others. This points to the reflexive process that is so foundational to the dialogic self, as well as the highly dynamic and polyphonic nature of lived experience. Emergent social action is entwined with dialogically situated interaction, intersubjectivity, and reflexivity. The following section briefly explores the application of dialogical theory to the study of purposive community action.

Dialogic Community Practice

Of late, there is a growing interest in theorizing the role of "community dialogue" in development processes and practices. Participation, inclusiveness, and engagement represent core facets of community development work. These basic themes resonate with a number of dialogical tenets, most notably Bakhtin's (1979/1986, 1986/1993) references to multivoicedness, dialogic understanding, and answerability, to name but a few. All such ideas are indicative of the many ways in which self–other relations are entwined with community dialogue. Meaningful dialogue is made possible through authentic "turning" toward others in the spirit of meaning making and active participation (Buber, 1947/2002, p. 26). It is important to consider dialogic practice as a method of engaging, empowering, and including diverse voices.

Quite early on, Wilkinson (1970, 1991) recognized the central role that relational processes play in the development of common interests and community action. He, much like Mead (1934), expresses the view that joint cooperative activities emerge when varied lines of action become organized or coordinated around a shared enterprise. Wilkinson (1991) theorizes that effective community development occurs when individuals become engaged in interaction processes that facilitate organized collective agency. Hence, interaction is foundational to the prospective emergence of community action. It can be argued that dialogic relations facilitate collective intentionality and joint agency through the convergence of diverse meanings, understandings, and ideas. In essence, community-oriented events, actions, and initiatives are relational coconstructions (Ahearn, 2001).

Purposive collective agency typically involves aspects of reflexive thinking, attitude taking, and communicative action. Community organizing, in particular, has the potential to draw individuals together in the pursuit of meaningful change (Aigner, Raymond, & Smidt, 2002). On a related theme, Westoby and Owen (2009) proffer a framework of dialogic community practice that nurtures intersubjective relations and agency. Within this mode of development practice, micro-level dialogue forms the initial phase of a comprehensive process intended to generate community transformation. Dialogic practice emphasizes the importance of communication in building relationships that facilitate community change. Dialogue is foundational to the development of mutual relations that form the basis of more expansive community-level connections and networks (see Owen

& Westoby, 2012). Dialogue is closely aligned with the goals of collective empowerment, community collaboration, and distributed leadership. All of these inherently relational processes are entwined with the emergence of shared responsibility and joint agency.

Dialogic experiences can arise spontaneously in diverse interactional contexts. Cissna and Anderson (1998) hold that dialogic mutuality happens in moments of heightened awareness of others. Such events involve an openness to and acceptance of others that can potentially lead to meaningful action. Black (2008) remarks that "dialogic moments" are relatively fleeting and unplanned instances in which individuals become open and present to one another in lived relation (p. 98). The implicit suggestion is that dialogue represents a valuable method of bringing people together despite conditions of inequality and difference. At the community level, dialogic practice can focus on engaging citizens of varied interests in processes of collective problem solving, creative thinking, and joint action. In essence, the prospects for community transformation are enriched by multifarious viewpoints.

It is important to note that multi-voicedness, multi-perspectivity, and participatory inclusiveness can contribute to conflicting viewpoints and emergent tensions (see Hanny & O'Connor, 2013). And, while dialogue need not necessarily lead to complete consensus nor resolve problems, it may move individuals' thinking away from overly simplistic, monological approaches to development. True dialogue allows participants to more fully experience each other's personal horizons, memories, values, and histories. Furthermore, events of this nature may foster "a collective form of intelligence" that incorporates diverse perspectives and exceeds narrowly framed expert claims (Linder, 2001, p. 671). Herein lies the theoretical and "real-world" linkage between dialogic practice and deliberate efforts to build a more inclusive community through comprehensive civic engagement.

In summary, the seemingly ethereal character of dialogue does not mean that it cannot significantly impact collective experiences, meanings, and identities. Helling and Thomas (2001) refer to the "new community dialog movement," which includes a range of information exchange mechanisms aimed at defining and addressing localized community interests (p. 750). This is a particularly significant issue given that collective agency can be hampered by a lack of cooperation. It is routinely argued that collaboration is one of the most effective ways of addressing "'wicked' problems" requiring the combined energies and resources of multiple

actors (Rittel & Webber, 1973, p. 155). Development work that engages diverse voices and viewpoints has the potential to generate novel ideas, solutions, and actions. Dialogic community practice is concerned with facilitating active participation, creative problem solving, and collective agency. It is for all of these reasons that dialogic theory is thought to offer insight into emergent community action.

Betweenness, Relational Emergence, and Community

Dialogical theory is woven around a number of core ideas that offer valuable insights into the interpretation of community. In concluding this chapter, it is useful to revisit the idea of "betweenness." Martin Buber, Mikhail Bakhtin, and Jean-Luc Nancy, among others, share the general view that something of existential import happens when individuals enter into relation with one another. The "between," along with the "interhuman" (Buber, 1965) and the "inter-individual" (Bakhtin, 1963/1984), expresses the dialogic foundations of lived relation. These interconnected concepts highlight the essential role that dialogic interaction plays in the emergence and continued transformation of the self, community, and agency.

"Betweenness" is theoretically entwined with otherness and intersubjective relations. Buber (1965) contends that the "between" not only arises in mutual relation but also possesses its own distinct and transcendent character. He unambiguously states that the "interhuman" sphere cannot be reduced to any one or some combination of its co-participants. Neither should the "between" be understood as a form of merged entity. In somewhat parallel terms, Bakhtin (1979/1986) contends that separate consciousnesses actively engage in the pursuit of meaning within "inter-individual" contexts of dialogic interaction. He emphasizes that understandings are never fully realized because they are perpetually in motion, and it is the intersection of actors' unique positions that propels and enriches lived experience. For Bakhtin, participative engagement with the other is essential to living speech and the creative emergence of meaning in and through dialogic relations. A similar approach is evident in Buber's (1965) depiction of dialogue as "turning" toward or making the other "present," which requires that inter-actors assume each other's unique perspectives (pp. 70–71). Both Bakhtin and Buber proffer the idea that dialogic partners intersubjectively experience the other's particularity, albeit to different degrees, without forfeiting their own unique concrete places in the

world. The analytical principle of "betweenness" raises the very interesting prospect that community can be interpreted as an emergent relational phenomenon.

The dialogical theorization of "betweenness" is directly linked to intersubjective relations, shared meanings, and joint actions. Bakhtin (1979/1986) believes that meaning arises within the dialogic interaction of separate consciousnesses—the "inter-individual." As already noted, he discusses the manner in which the *I* comes into close association with others through empathy and rhythm. Bakhtin (1963/1984) also remarks that the "boundaries of the individual will" are more likely to be exceeded in contexts of multi-voiced interaction (p. 21). This indicates that polyphonic dialogue has the potential to organize multiple voices into a comprehensive but unmerged relational experience. By drawing on Bakhtin's views, one arrives at an understanding of community that emerges in and through dialogic relations.

From a dialogical perspective, self–other relations are implicated in a far wider scope of issues than the development of the self or the co-constitution of meanings. Put simply, social relations are essential to emergent community. In the *Fifth Cartesian Meditation*, Husserl (1950/1999) makes the point that community comes into existence through one's lived experiences *of* and *with* others; it emerges "between me,…and the appresentatively experienced Other" (p. 120). He describes community, in one sense, as an intersubjectively common or objective world that is founded on the manifest "being" of the other, co-presence, and self–other relations. Intersubjective relations are intimately involved in the co-constitution of the self and emergent community. Furthermore, the mutual connectedness of "being-for-one-another" is foundational to *Gemeinschaft*-like conceptions of community life (Tönnies, 1887/1957).

The dialogical approach represents a useful way of thinking about community as a dynamic interplay of diverse ideas, interests, and lines of action. The focus on multiple, heteroglossic voices introduces important insight into the nature of community life (see Gillespie & Cornish, 2010). This harkens back to the perennial liberal–communitarian debate and the related issues of radical individualism and communal fusion. Each in his own way, Buber (1947/2002), Bakhtin (1979/1986), and Nancy (1991) discuss matters of independence, separateness, or singularity while attempting to come to terms with what happens when actors enter into communicative relation. Bakhtin (1963/1984, 1990) routinely refers to the unique axiological position from which each individual participates in

dialogic interaction. And, although he stresses polyphony, outsidedness, and otherness, this does not preclude the possibility that one can empathize with, "in-feel" into, or "co-experience" another person's lived experience(s) (Bakhtin, 1990, p. 61).

Buber addresses the nature of community in a far more direct and transparent fashion than Bakhtin. Indeed, Buber's (1947/2002) understanding of the "between" gives one pause to think about community as an emergent co-construction. He describes the "interhuman" or the "between" as an ontological real and irreducible realm. The act of entering into relation contributes to event properties that cannot be explained or understood by reference to co-participants' individual experiences. The "between" that people create together is more than a metaphor for coexistence; it is directly implicated in the emergence of a community of mutually interrelated, participative actors. Discourse on the "between" enriches the study of community through its emphasis on self–other dynamics and relational ontology. Dialogical interpretations of the "between" provide a basis for viewing community as a direct expression and outcome of lived mutual relation. "True" community involves the genuine relation of self-to-self or person-to-person.

Although Nancy (1991) is not a dialogical thinker *per se*, he discusses the communicative processes through which singular beings enter into relation with one another in everyday life. He articulates an analytical position that lies somewhere in between the extremes of atomistic self-being and immanent community. Nancy (1991) suggests that finite beings simultaneously *co-appear* to each other in the moment of their meeting, without generating any form of substantive overarching unity, union, or communal tie that binds them together. And, although Nancy acknowledges that something transpires between individuals who are inclined toward one another in communicative relation, he remains firmly opposed to the idea of emergent social bonds or fused life. His understanding of the enigmatic relationship between separateness and relatedness allows little potential for close social relationships to emerge. Perhaps, as Nancy (1996/2000) intimates, community is nothing more than a fleeting sense of mutual affinity or some other such transient, liminal condition of lived experience.

In rather general terms, it can be argued that community *is* relation and, in another sense, it *is born of* relation (see Donati, 2011). Bessant (2014) contends that "community is founded on dialogic interaction and intersubjective representation, thereby becoming the conscious object of

reflection and action" (p. 467). The tenets of dialogical theory reinforce the essential presence of relational dynamics in the genesis of community. "Betweenness" encompasses diverse events of emergent meaning and connectedness, without which there would be no possibility of sociality or community. The "between" intersects with multifold relational processes: *co*-existence, *co*-presence, *co*-happening, and, ultimately, the *co*-constitution of lived experience. These interrelated ideas offer valuable ways of discussing how it is that meanings, understandings, actions, and, by implication, communities emerge through self–other relations. The notion of "betweenness" has intellectual currency that cuts across diverse perspectives. It is not surprising that contemporary theorists should express interest in this and other dialogical concepts when interpreting the complexities of the self, community, and agency.

Note

1. Although the terms "dialogic" and "dialogical" are often used interchangeably in the literature, "dialogic" is used here and elsewhere in the book in order to emphasize the interactive dynamic or interchange *between* interlocutors.

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CHAPTER 6

The Socio-symbolic Construction and Social Representation of Community

The notion of community remains an important topic of academic and practical consideration, despite the protracted debate over its varied meanings and manifestations in contemporary society. Early emphasis on concrete social systems and community structures has given way to a wide range of analytical frameworks. The community concept has undergone significant elaboration through continued theoretical innovation, notably in the field of social psychology. There is greater interest, of late, in the interactional dynamics, intersubjective relations, and socio-symbolic processes that underpin emergent community. Field-interactional, dialogical, constructionist, and representational perspectives, in particular, draw attention to the relational foundations of community. These and other more recent insights have contributed new ways of thinking about community as a direct reflection and outcome of self–other relations.

This chapter deals with the socio-symbolic construction and social representation of community. These interrelated approaches offer a nuanced understanding of community as an emergent relational phenomenon that is intimately entwined with co-constitutive meaning-making processes. Theoretical focus is placed on how people interpret shared life experiences, discursively co-construct meanings, and collectively build narratives or representations that define community. This work departs markedly from the once dominant entitative, *container*-based view of community as a functionally integrated and relatively autonomous system. It reflects a growing appreciation for the fluid, plural, and emergent nature of community life.

K. C. Bessant, *The Relational Fabric of Community*,
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The Socio-relational Construction of Community and Spatiality

This section outlines some basic tenets of constructionist thinking and their relevance to the study of community. Much like field theory, constructionism constitutes a "'family' of perspectives" with highly varied intellectual roots (Pearce, 1992, p. 141). Academic discourse on the social construction of community includes a range of relational dynamics, such as symbolic communication, social definition, and collective representation. The following discussion offers an overview of social constructionism, relational constructionism, and the social production of spatiality.

Social Constructionism

Proponents of social constructionism generally posit that people actively define reality in the course of their everyday lived relations and interactions. Social constructionism, as expressed by Berger and Luckmann (1966), is concerned with the fundamental issue of how (inter)subjective meanings are transformed into so-called objective reality (p. 30). However, Pearce (1992) points out that variants of constructionism differ in terms of whether they emphasize the *products* (e.g., identities and communities) or the *processes* (relational dynamics) of (social) construction (p. 139). Generally speaking, social constructionists reject the contention that language simply mirrors external reality, preferring instead to discuss the communicative–interactional processes by means of which the world is co-produced (Pearce, 1992). Hence, linguistic signification is intimately embedded in the meaning-making activities that are so essential to social constructionist interpretations of both products and processes.

Before proceeding, it is important to briefly address the distinction between construct*ionism* and construct*ivism*. McNamee (2004b) contends that constructivism deals more so with the cognitive processes involved in actors' construal of the social world. According to Hosking (2005), constructivism is premised on the idea that people never know what really exists, and, as such, they make use of sense information in order to construct an understanding of the surrounding world (p. 614). Rather than focusing narrowly on individual construct systems, social constructionists consider socio-historical factors, relational contexts, and communicative–linguistic processes that give rise to meanings (McNamee, 2004b). Constructionism is concerned with symbolic communication,

interactional dynamics, and discursive practices. This points to the relational, meaning-making foundations of constructionism, some aspects of which are reflected in constructivist thinking.

In general terms, then, human beings are treated as active participants in the co-construction of a shared social world or "common ground." This idea is encapsulated in what is termed the *Thomas Theorem*: "If [individuals] define situations as real, they are real in their consequences" (Thomas & Thomas, 1928, p. 572). A definition of the situation is not a mere representation of some externally existent world; it actually constitutes reality. The social definitionist perspective addresses the interplay between human actors and the social world, which dictates that neither can exist completely independently of the other. For some, however, the "taken-for-granted" nature of social reality can acquire an objective and reified quality that supersedes human existence. Here, too, an analytical distinction can be drawn between the products and the processes of social construction. In parallel terms, theorists can differ sharply with respect to the analysis of community as a concretized entity (Warren, 1978), as contrasted with an evolving configuration of relations (see Bessant, 2014). The latter view resonates with Bakhtin's (1986/1993) notion of "being" as endless "becoming" (p. 1).

Berger's (1967) reference to three dialectical "moments" of societal production is particularly relevant to a constructionist interpretation of community: "externalization, objectivation, and internalization" (p. 4). Simply put, human beings engage in a perpetual process of pouring themselves out into the world, whereupon the meaning of social reality is negotiated, acquires a measure of consensus, and, thereby, takes on an "out there for everyone" nature that is continuously re-appropriated. Chia (1999) similarly describes organizational activities as both "world-making" and "reality-maintaining" in the midst of the incessant flux and flow of lived experience (pp. 224–225). These processes can, over time, imbue social reality with an obdurate, structural quality. Whatever is defined as "real" is a product of social construction, reproduction, and prospective transformation. Having said this, it is important to note that social constructionism incorporates a change dynamic that can operate through definitional processes, joint actions, and pervasive social movements.

Constructionist scholarship has diverse philosophical and cross-disciplinary roots. Gergen (1999) identifies several interrelated assumptions concerning the manner in which human beings come to understand the surrounding world. His rendering of social constructionism is heavily

infused with linguistic and dialogic relation. Gergen relegates the notion of an independent world to the background by reflecting on how people collectively develop common meanings and representations that, in essence, define reality. Multifarious descriptions or images of the social world are treated as variable construals of what can never be adequately captured. People are involved in the ongoing process of generating shared meanings through their relations with one another. And, so, what is deemed "real" or "true" about the world and one's own sense of self is a relational "product" that cannot be reduced to individualized cognitive processes. Everything is achieved in the totality of one's relations with others and the social environment. This is consistent with Mead's (1934) thoughts about the relational emergence of the self, symbolic gestures, and social objects. As Nancy (1996/2000) points out, meaning exists "for and through a self," but there can be no self in the absence of the "being-with" of co-existentiality (p. 94).

One of Gergen's (1999) most notable insights pertains to the involvement of common meanings in the co-ordination of joint actions and embodied practice. Symbolic language and social representations encapsulate understandings, images and, more importantly, reality frameworks that contribute to the continuity of a negotiated world. Gergen points to the active discursive processes through which people reframe, question, and reflectively critique dominant orientations. Language and dialogue play essential roles in both the social construction and transformation of intersubjective reality. This serves as a reminder that communicative dynamics and social relationships are fundamental aspects of what Berger (1967) refers to as "world-building" activities (p. 6). It is through the formation of symbolic representations that human beings create the social world (see Searle, 2010). Community, in like fashion, comes into existence, albeit in potentially varied ways, through socio-symbolic processes of co-construction. Indeed, Colombo and Senatore (2005) contend that community identity is discursively constructed in order to make sense of the world and to accomplish joint endeavors.

Hosking and Morley (2004) make reference to the constructive capabilities of the human mind, an idea that takes on added significance when considered in light of communicative (inter)action. From a discursive perspective, constructionism elaborates how people define or understand their social world(s) through language, conversation, and dialogue. This draws attention to the role that symbolic communication plays in collective processes of social construction, while acknowledging the potential

for multiple and competing interpretations across diverse groups. McNamee (2004a) emphasizes the involvement of "dialogic construction" in the collective capacity to coordinate multiple voices and to engage in joint actions (p. 406). Diverse viewpoints are treated as resources for identifying, defining, and resolving problems that affect all members of the community. She further remarks that interpersonal relations foster new ways of thinking and acting together on behalf of the community (see also Howarth, Cornish, & Gillespie, 2015). Therefore, social relationships are fundamental to the co-constitution of both community and joint agency.

The relational foundations of social constructionism offer insight into how individuals attribute particular meaning(s) to group memberships, social networks, or communal affiliations. According to Howarth (2001), the lived experience of community is mediated through the dynamic interplay of social representations that also influence the formation of collective identities. Insofar as community is treated as something co-created in the course of ongoing social production (i.e., both constituted and constituting), it cannot be conceived of as a pre-given, ontologically independent entity. Once constructed, however, community can take on an obdurate (external) quality that acts back on its co-producers and their actions. And, despite the potential for variant conceptions of reality, it is the ongoing process of intersubjectively interpreting and assigning meaning that ultimately generates some shared, albeit shifting, sense of community. Thus conceived, community grows out of a complex of self–other dynamics, most notably linguistic signification, shared meaning(s), and collective identification. It constitutes a socio-cognitive and interactional construct that emerges out of everyday processes of social definition and production. The social constructionist approach can be applied to the study of varied interpretations of community, including place-based "entities" and those of a more symbolic nature.

Relational Constructionism

Hosking (2011) and associates have proffered a variant form of social constructionism that focuses, among other things, on the ontology of linguistic relational dynamics (p. 47). The emergent construction of identities and "softer" self–other distinctions is central to this way of thinking (Hosking & Pluut, 2010, p. 67). The analytical emphasis on processes, within relational constructionism, shifts the discourse away from self-contained actors,

organizations, or communities. This stream of constructionism centers on the primacy of relations and co-constitutive processes, not independent actors and actions. Relational constructionism attempts to avoid an overly rigid, entitative conception of self–other relations and the related problem of how to represent the connection *between* "individual" actors or entities (Hosking & Bouwen, 2000, p. 130). Hosking (2011) proposes a relational understanding of multifold, "simultaneous" interactions (p. 53). Interactivity includes all modes of linguistic exchanges, voiced utterances, non-verbal gestures, and internal conversations that contribute to the processual (re)construction of reality (Hosking, 2006).

Hosking and Pluut's (2010) discussion of the relational nature of language calls attention to both the dynamic quality of interaction and the co-emergence of the self in lived experience. Gleicher (2011) similarly refers to the individual as a "social subject" shaped by constant self–other relations (p. 381). This manner of theorizing draws upon the dialogical perspective, which yields a much more nuanced, multifaceted, and socially constituted interpretation of the relational self. As Bakhtin (1986/1993) points out, the person exists and acts as a singular and unique *I*, counterposed to and yet standing in relation to all others and the world. And, so, consciousness of objects and others exists by virtue of one's involvement in everyday life. "To be" means to be in relation with others or, in Heideggerian (1927/1962) terms, "Being-with-one-another" (p. 158). Ongoing self–other relations are essential to the co-construction of shared understandings that give rise to an intersubjectively experienced sense of sociality or community.

The theoretical consideration of co-emergent processes, as contrasted with pre-given entities, mirrors an ontological distinction between *postmodern* versus *modern* styles of thinking. Chia (1995) indicates that modern thought emphasizes isolatable things, events, or experiences, such that human (inter)actions are treated as epiphenomena. The postmodern notion of reality privileges movement and flux over the products or effects of relational dynamics. In essence, local assemblages and configurations of relations give the appearance of stability and unity (Chia, 1995). By focusing on emergence and processual change as opposed to entities, relational constructionism articulates an "ontology of *becoming*" rather than an "ontology of *being*" (Chia, 1999, p. 215). This debate calls to mind Whitehead's (1929) "fallacy of misplaced concreteness," which deals with

the overgeneralization of abstract categories and the resultant neglect of "actual" experiences (p. 11).

Whitehead (1929) offers insight into the vagaries of being, becoming, process, and emergence. He refers to the "given" world as "the community of all actual entities," but goes on to suggest that "beings" form the basis out of which new creations emerge through ongoing constitutive processes (Whitehead, 1929, pp. 101–102). Therefore, the potential for "becoming" resides in all "being." Whitehead (1929) makes explicit reference to the emergent processes through which many "disjunctive" elements or entities come together in a novel "conjunctive" form of unity (pp. 31–32). Something of the same sort is evident in Bakhtin's (1986/1993) depiction of the dialogic tension between what is "given" and that which may be "achieved" in the perpetual flow of life events (pp. 32–33). These observations are particularly relevant to the interpretation of community as experientially founded in ongoing lived relation. Community, in this sense, can be viewed as a "shared 'relational-landscape'" that exists in a somewhat coherent, if precarious, "state" or condition (Shotter, 1998, p. 188).

McNamee (2004b) remarks that conversation is always-already relational, regardless of whether it is "actual, imagined, or virtual" (p. 44). Recent work on "relational realities" constitutes a meaningful basis for interpreting varied experiences of community life: territorial, mediated, imagined, intentional, symbolic, and others. The notion of "local, relational realities" holds particular significance in Hosking's (2011) constructionist thinking (p. 54). Local realities are associated with the ongoing interactions of community members who come together in the co-creation of varied relational configurations, situational definitions, and joint actions. This implies the potential for multiple, locally constructed modes of lived relation to emerge within larger community contexts. On a related theme, Harvey (2002) describes community as a localized "interactional nexus" in which social structures, institutions, and society, more generally, are constructed (p. 184). And, furthermore, Cronick (2002) argues that communities are the products of ongoing human activity and social construction. She states that collective phenomena begin as ideas which, by virtue of intersubjective relations, become reified within the human mind. The idea of relational realities offers a relatively flexible and useful way of thinking about collective definitions, identities, lifestyles, issues, problems, and agency.

Contemporary authors regularly claim that Tönnies' (1887/1957) conception of an overarching *Gemeinschaft*-like community is outmoded in light of increasing individualism, fragmentation, and multiple affiliations. Indeed, for some, the nostalgia surrounding a quintessential mode of solidary community is either misplaced or mistaken (see Nancy, 1991). Given the rapidly expanding potential for novel, emergent modes of association, there is a growing appreciation for the plurality of lived relation. This is reflected in the proliferation of concepts proffered to describe differential experiences of community, for example, "imagined communities" (Anderson, 1991, p. 13), intentional communities, "communities-in-the-mind" (Pahl, 2005, p. 637), symbolic communities (Cohen, 1985), or online communities. Even Wellman's (1999) so-called "personal communities" (p. xv) can be viewed as social constructions insofar as they are continuously created and transformed through relational dynamics. Somewhat the same can said of technologically mediated communities that have been co-constructed in virtual space or cyberplaces. All such communities are, to some extent, relational constructions that exhibit a measure of continuity and "objective facticity" (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p. 30).

The Social Construction of Spatiality

The changing interpretation of spatiality intersects in meaningful ways with the larger discourse on community. This section explores the socio-relational construction of spatiality and its relevance to the study of community. Jessop, Brenner, and Jones (2008) claim that social science research has been influenced by a succession of "spatial turns" concerning matters of "place," "territory," "network," and "scale" (p. 390). The authors contend that wide-scale societal transformations (e.g., global capitalism) have contributed to the polymorphic organization of multiple dimensions of interrelated and mutually constitutive socio-spatial relations (see also Dicken, Kelly, Olds, & Yeung, 2001). Escalating patterns of social and organizational complexity have precipitated greater interest in the many ways that social relations operate within and between varied orders of scale ranging from local to global spaces. A key issue here involves the understanding of place as a relatively fluid product of social construction, which constitutes a notable departure from the earlier emphasis on fixed geographies and territorial boundaries.

Foucault (1986) remarks that life is not experienced in a void, but rather in diverse relational configurations that demarcate multifold and irreducible life spaces. His work and that of Lefebvre (1974/1991), Soja (1980, 1996), and Massey (1994), among others, represents evolving conceptions of socio-spatial dynamics. Soja (1985) aptly states that spatiality is a "social product" and, furthermore, sociality is contextualized within spatiality (pp. 92, 94). Social spaces are relational constructions in the sense that they are socially produced, experienced, and transformed. Massey (1994), too, addresses the nuanced meanings of place and locality in the age of "time–space compression." She identifies several issues of particular relevance to the study of community, most notably the socially constructed nature of space and place. According to Massey (1994), social spaces can be understood as networks of social relations, either place-based or dispersed, that are constituted, "laid down," and transformed over time (p. 120). Place both constitutes and is constituted by a particular locus of interwoven social relations. Massey's (1994) work illuminates some of the challenges posed to place by dynamic geographies, deterritorialization, and globalization. Based on this approach, the socially produced spatiality of community involves relatively fluid and porous contexts of multifold interactions, differences, and representations (see also Day, 1998).

Soja (1996) builds on Lefebvre's (1974/1991) observations about the spatiality of human life or "lived space" (pp. 38–39). Soja (1996) proffers a threefold representation ("trialectics") of spatiality based on "*Firstspace*," "*Secondspace*," and "*Thirdspace*" epistemologies (pp. 74–82). He points out that spatiality can be interpreted from each or all three of these perspectives. Firstspace is concerned with the concrete or material (i.e., "mappable") nature of space, whereas Secondspace pertains to ideas, thoughts, and feelings about space. Thirdspace, according to Soja, is "space as fully lived" (see Borch, 2002, p. 114). He goes on to say that Thirdspace offers a way of moving beyond the overly restrictive binary of *objective* versus *subjective* space. In basic terms, Thirdspace is the lived experience of material Firstspace mediated through the representational lens of Secondspace. As Allen (1999) points out, spatiality is irreducible to its "real" (objective, material, concrete) or "imagined" forms (subjective, conceptual, representational), and, furthermore, a simple synthesis of the two discounts the postmodern view of "lived" social space (p. 258).

From a constructionist approach, various facets of society can be treated as social products, including spatiality and the organized fabric of community life. Hence, place-based communities can be understood as socially constructed spaces and loci of social interaction. Soja's (1985) contention that social relations are "space-forming and *space-contingent*" mirrors the constructionist notion that community constitutes and is constituted by interaction processes (p. 98). He suggests that aspects of *physical* and *cognitive* space are implicated in the social production of spatiality. A core feature of this work involves the dialectic that operates between sociality and spatiality. In essence, social life both produces and is produced by spatiality. "Social" (relational) space is intimately interconnected with "real" and "imagined" space (see Allen, 1999).

Arguably, then, the territorial dimension of community is just as much a product of interaction as it is a shared locale within which social life is situated. Interpersonal relations define or construct shared spaces and, so, places acquire meaning and significance through social interaction. Also, individuals can develop a deep sense of attachment to place through their lived experiences. Community represents a socio-spatial phenomenon that arises in and through intersecting social relations. It is a socially constructed place, space, or site that comes into being and changes in conjunction with ongoing interaction processes. Community, in this sense, refers to a particular locus of social relations or set of intersecting networks. This approach to community recognizes the dynamic quality of human (social) relations that converge in time and space (e.g., physical or virtual) but change constantly in response to myriad influences. People talk, think, and act the community into existence and, as such, it cannot be equated to a simple gathering or collectivity of individuals who happen to share similar interests or a common residence.

A socio-spatial perspective draws attention to the interrelatedness of actors and their environments. One of the most interesting theoretical aspects of socio-spatiality is its intersection with interactional, symbolic, and constructionist thinking. Foremost among these ideas is the interpretation of community as a socio-spatial construction that emerges and changes by virtue of ongoing interactional dynamics. Herein lies the notion that relational processes define and contextualize the meaning of community as a spatio-temporal, socially (re)produced, and collectively experienced way of life. A socio-spatial conception of community is embedded in contemporary discourse on the constructed nature of space or what Halfacree (1993) describes as "the non-tangible space of 'social representations'" (p. 23). Pratt (1996) similarly discusses the mutually

co-constitutive nature of social relations situated within a particular place and the social representations of that space.

Social actors develop place-based narratives that are often intertwined with personal and community identity (Alkon & Traugot, 2008, p. 99). Shared space or place can be viewed as a negotiated social construction stemming from the interplay of cultural, historical, and other contextual factors (Allen, 1999). And, to the extent that community is a social product, it re-emerges continuously in and through symbolically mediated interaction. This mode of theorizing is applicable to both territorial and spatially dispersed communities. In light of these issues, the discourse on community, which once focused largely on structurally localized relations, has expanded into new avenues of thought involving virtual places, imagined or symbolic associations, and socially produced spaces. And, so, the meaning of community is linked to the interrelatedness of *physical* (material), *cognitive* (representational), and *social* (relational) space.

Language, Symbols, and the Intersubjective Construction of Community

Symbolic constructionist views of community typically emphasize linguistic, ideational, and interactional aspects of social life, as distinct from strictly material or structural approaches. Symbolic construction is pertinent to the study of community in a number of ways. Community can be treated as a socio-cognitive representation or collective "object" of conscious reflection. Also, individuals who share a particular set of meanings, knowledge claims, or identity signs can be said to belong to a symbolic community. Both of these themes are evident in Husserl's work on "The Origin of Geometry," which was first published in 1939 (see Husserl, 1954/1970, pp. 353–378). He comments on the dynamic interplay between communicative relations and shared experiences of the surrounding world. By virtue of common language, individuals belong to a community of others (i.e., "cosubjects") within which they can reasonably expect to be understood (Husserl, 1954/1970, pp. 328, 358). Furthermore, shared linguistic expression permits the intersubjective transmission of ideas that generate "objects" of common consciousness, thought, and action (e.g., science, music, and art).

Gusfield (1975) contends that symbolic construction refers to the processes through which objects and persons are created and signified in

everyday talk. Therefore, objects are not simply given or self-evident; they are constructed in and through ongoing lived relations. Blumer (1969) suggests that objects possess no "fixed" meanings, nor reality for that matter, other than that conferred upon them by social definition and co-indication (p. 12). Intersubjective linguistic meanings facilitate the typification and objectification of everyday experiences (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Gusfield (1975) claims that actors perceive experiences through "typifying procedures" that generate and reproduce the "taken-for-granted" nature of social reality (p. 25). This is consistent with Schutz's (1971) contention that one's common-sense understandings of the world are based on "*a system of constructs of its typicality*" (p. 7). Shared meanings are treated as social phenomena that are constructed through socio-symbolic interactions, common indications, and intersubjective processes.

Socio-symbolic constructionism highlights the way(s) in which relational processes shape individuals' conceptions of "who" and "where they are" (see Alkon & Traugot, 2008). This approach theorizes the emergent presence of community as a meaningful object of attention, in both an individual and a collective sense. Mead (1912) draws attention to emergent meanings and the importation of social objects into human consciousness through social conduct and the lived experience of other selves. He argues that the "triadic relation" among ongoing gestures, responsive adjustments, and resultant outcomes gives rise to common meanings (Mead, 1934, p. 80). It is the attachment of meaning to symbols that generates consciousness. In this sense, language does more than simply represent objects; it is responsible for their creation. The world of objects would not exist but for the socio-communicative processes that translate them into matters of awareness and conscious attention (Mead, 1934). Blumer (1969) asserts much the same view of how social objects acquire meaning through interactional processes; he describes them quite succinctly as "anything that can be indicated or referred to" (p. 11). And, to the extent that the social meanings of objects derive from mutual indication, they are not fixed.

The notion that community "exists" as a mental image or cognitive construction is hardly novel. Maciver (1970) points out that community "is created by [the] activity of [people's] minds" as they routinely enter into relation with one another in everyday life (p. 98). He states that social relationships do not exist as external entities set apart from their constituent members, nor "*between* them," but rather "*within* them" (Maciver,

1970, p. 95). This highlights the subjective presence of community in human consciousness. And, while individuals may hold somewhat varied interpretations of community, it is not unusual for them to experience a shared sense of belonging or agency. Pahl (2005) raises a similar issue with respect to his discussion of "communities-in-the-mind," which are made manifest or "real" through the dynamics of social definition. The combined processes of symbolic interaction and social construction are theoretically associated with an emergent sense of community that is imbued with meaning, attachment, and signification. Symbolically constructed communities acquire ontological or agential significance, especially when members act together in relation to a common definition of the situation. Furthermore, individuals' symbolic representations can far outlive the material lifespan of place-based communities. Long after geospatial communities have disappeared, functionally or physically, they can persist in people's minds, memories, and sentiments.

The treatment of community as a mental, symbolic, or ideational construct is implicit in Anderson's (1991) reference to "imagined communities." His central premise is that modern-day national communities have little in common with primordial communities (see Bouchard, 2004). In essence, any community that is large enough to preclude significant or widespread face-to-face relations is, in some sense, *imagined*. Anderson (1991) argues that nations are held together by "a deep, horizontal comradeship," which at least partially accounts for generalized feelings of national loyalty despite limited interpersonal contact (p. 7). Symbolic processes of affiliation and identification, both personal and collective, can facilitate a broader sense of commonality. On a related theme, modern advances in technologically mediated communication and social media permit otherwise disconnected individuals to consider themselves members of an "imagined" symbolic community.

In general terms, Cohen (2002) indicates that community can be defined simply as something shared. He further suggests that it is the "something" that individuals have in common that can differentiate them, relationally speaking, from others (e.g., symbolic boundedness). Cohen (1985) refers to community as "a *relational* idea" that expresses aspects of boundedness, separation, opposition, or distinction (p. 12). He discusses community as a "mental construct" comprising a complex set of meanings and symbols that is embedded in interaction processes (Cohen, 1985, pp. 19, 108). Hosteller's (1964) early research on Amish communities explores similar ideas concerning the symbolic bases of community,

identity, and boundary. He presents a comprehensive analysis of how symbols serve multiple functions in guiding social reality, maintaining boundaries, and supporting common bonds or group unity. This work offers insight into the nature of community as a symbolic construct, representation, or object of reflection, as well as how such conceptions are formed, changed, and shaped in everyday lived experience.

Cohen's (1985) "boundary-expressing" interpretation of community provoked criticism on the grounds that it undervalues other bases of community (p. 15). He subsequently distanced himself somewhat from this view by emphasizing feelings of belonging or identification (Cohen, 2002). Among those who took issue with Cohen's (1985) work, Gray (2002) contends that "community-making" and "place-making" emanate from core constituting factors such as common interests, meanings, or activities (p. 41). Delanty (2003) similarly claims that communities are more closely linked to belonging than to symbolically constructed boundaries (p. 189). He indicates that newfound forms of belonging are likely to reflect identity projects rooted in religion, nationalism, and ethnicity more so than place, kinship, or family. All of these prospective bases of social relationship and community building constitute substantial sources of collective belonging, identification, and agency. Delanty (2003) further suggests that mounting feelings of insecurity have prompted the search for rootedness which, in recent times, has led to the proliferation of discursively constructed, imagined "communication communities" (p. 188).

One of the key theoretical points in the foregoing discussion involves the socio-symbolic construction of community as an "object" of consideration and prospective social action. In essence, community is signified and takes on identifiable meaning in and through the everyday processes of relational construction and representation. Community resides in the mind as a symbolic referent that can influence or shape social interaction. It exists within the subjective realm and as an intersubjective phenomenon of co-construction and purposive action. Discourse on the nature of symbolic community can be usefully applied to the analysis of places, identities, and agency (see Lamont & Molnár, 2002). The theorization of community as a symbolic construction is particularly relevant today, given the increased emphasis on plurality, diversity, and fluidity. The socio-symbolic approach to community construction is firmly based on aspects of interpretivism, interactionism, and socio-symbolic definition.

Social Representations Theory

The origin of the social representation concept is commonly traced to Durkheim's (1895/1938) understanding of the relationship between individual and collective consciousness. Farr (1998) believes that Durkheim's work on this topic formed the basis of Moscovici's (1963, 1988) more contemporary version of social representations. Durkheim's (1895/1938) observations about collective (social) representations are perhaps best understood in light of the distinction he draws between the sociology of (*objective*) "social facts" and the psychology of (*subjective*) mental activities or states (p. xliii). He held the view that social life is composed of collective representations that are fundamentally different in nature from the individual consciousnesses out of whose synthesis they emerge. In basic terms, Durkheim contends that novel social phenomena are generated by the combination of substrate elements and, more importantly, they exist in their own right, possess unique properties, and subscribe to laws that differ from those of their constituent components (i.e., emergentism).

For Durkheim (1895/1938), social facts (e.g., social institutions) are properly treated as "*things*" that are both external to individuals and have the capacity to influence them in varied ways (p. 14). These ideas are foundational to his claim that sociology should study ways of *thinking*, *feeling*, and *acting* that are common to most, if not all, members of a society. He clearly states that the collective aspects of individuals' "beliefs, tendencies, and practices" are the rightful subject matter of sociology (Durkheim, 1895/1938, p. 7). And, although he acknowledges that people are involved in the genesis of collective representations, the latter cannot be explained through psychological analysis. Individuals are essential to the emergence of a society that cannot be reduced to them. For Durkheim (1895/1938), social phenomena are existentially or factually distinct from the way they are represented "in the mind" (p. 28). In addition to stressing the separation between psychology and sociology, Durkheim contends that social phenomena are not merely epiphenomena (see Némedi, 1995).

According to Durkheim (1895/1938), neither collective phenomena nor society can be understood as the simple sum of individual consciousnesses or elements (i.e., irreducibility); rather, it is the manner of their interrelatedness that brings about a novel sort of "being" (p. 103). The unique intersection of human minds gives rise to newly formed, independent ("real") social phenomena. A similar theme is evident in Wundt's

(1912/1916) description of folk psychology (*Völkerpsychologie*), which he suggests involves "higher mental processes" that are constructed through reciprocal interaction and, therefore, inexplicable solely in terms of individual consciousnesses (p. 3). Wundt refers to these complex mental products (e.g., language and customs) as the collective creations of a social community. Much more recently, Searle (2010) has indicated that societal organizations and institutions derive from individual-level "mental phenomena" (p. 4).

Social Representations as Negotiated Meaning

Inquiry into social representations is an established field of study in social and cultural psychology. Prior to proceeding with more contemporary work on this topic, it is useful to briefly consider Husserl's (1954/1970) reflections on the communalization of experience, perception, and meaning. He speaks of the essential role that social relations play in the shared experience of the surrounding world. For Husserl, the core issue is not the actual nature of the world, but instead what people treat as valid—whether as individuals, groups, or communities. He repeatedly points to the emergence of multiple perceptions of objects within lived experience, while also raising the matter of intersubjective commonalities or meanings. Husserl's (1954/1970) remarks revolve around the idea that people make the world an intersubjective point of identification, verification, and reciprocal understanding in their everyday social interactions (p. 163). In so doing, he refers to the interrelatedness of individual and communal consciousness. What is of particular importance here is his discussion of simultaneous plural perceptions of the world. Through our collective experiences with others, a common world is built up that is always in motion. Husserl (1954/1970) asserts that the "things" to which people comport themselves can never be truly known, and, so, their particular perspectives offer "a mere 'representation of'" what is presumed to exist objectively (p. 164).

Moscovici (1963) defines a social representation as the elaboration of a "social object" that community members both devise and make use of in everyday processes of communicative (inter)action (p. 251). Social representations are sense-making tools that exist "at the interface" between individual consciousnesses and the larger sociocultural world (Moscovici, 1988, p. 220). Raudsepp (2005) points out that social representations are

not only situated *between* the individual and society, they also suffuse and influence both (p. 457). He argues against thinking about social representations as somehow separate from or external to human existence. Social representations are contextualized attributions of meaning that contribute to shared understandings and coordinated action. They can act as anticipatory devices that shape the interpretation of novel objects, while providing guidelines concerning how to interact within a particular community (Lahlou, 2015). Furthermore, the community itself can become a meaningful object of attention through processes of social representation.

Social representations are embedded in everyday processes of classifying and assimilating new information or, in more general terms, making "the unfamiliar, familiar" (Daanen, 2009, p. 377). They are communicatively constituted, experienced, and transformed through discursive thinking and debate. It is commonly noted that social representations are formed in socio-symbolic contexts and subsequently acquire a measure of intersubjective and temporal stability through ongoing interaction (Voelklein & Howarth, 2005). Tateo and Iannaccone (2012) refer to social representations as a "space" of negotiated meanings that operates intersubjectively and communicatively between the individual and society (p. 58). The authors indicate that social representations are bound up in a recursive constructive process of elaboration and transformation stemming from the tensional interplay of individual and collective consciousness. In essence, social representations both influence and constitute everyday social practices (Howarth, 2006).

Social Representations and the "Between"

Farr (1998) contends that Durkheim's (1895/1938) conception of collective representations is associated with the social solidarity and cohesion of an earlier time, as contrasted with the diversity and dynamism of contemporary society (see Höijor, 2011). Moscovici (1988) emphasizes the plurality and continuous emergence of social representations that operate as "world making" constructions (pp. 219, 231). Marková (2003) similarly refers to social representations as thoughts in motion. Changing world conditions tend to augur against overarching viewpoints, which has led some authors to think of social representations in a more limited sense. This is akin to suggesting that people can hold varied ideas, beliefs, or knowledge claims concerning a wide range of issues while asserting membership in a shared community of some sort. In a Husserlian sense, we

may well experience a "common world," but this does not mean that representations thereof are unified.

Theoretical discourse on social representations reveals important linkages to dialogism, particularly with respect to the contestation and negotiation of meanings. This is consistent with the argument that social representations arise in the process of communicative interaction. The intersection of multiple cognitions or consciousnesses offers the potential for the dialogical negotiation and construction of meaning (Marková, 2000). Howarth (2006) captures this point in her remarks about the dynamic emergence of social representations within the "in-between space" of dialogic self–other relations (p. 68). They are intersubjectively constituted in the relational sphere of the "between" (Buber, 1965, p. 75). And, to the extent that social representations are emergent phenomena, they are irreducible to individual consciousnesses or their simple aggregation.

Bakhtin (1963/1984, 1979/1986) contends that meanings, ideas, and representations develop within the dialogic interaction of multiple utterances and consciousnesses. Objects come into being or acquire meaning through social processes of construction, representation, and agency (Wagner, 1996). Jovchelovitch (2002) believes that representations are constructed and embedded within communication dynamics that link subjects to one another and to the surrounding world. In essence, they constitute mediating devices that reside within the relational "between." The communicative representation (and re-representation) of meanings is perhaps best interpreted in terms of a polyphonic background of diverse voices. Jovchelovitch (2002) discusses the co-existence of different types of knowledge deployed by a single person or collective. She attributes greater fluidity to social representations than is indicated by Durkheim (1895/1938). Hence, the notion of shared representations of knowledge, meanings, or understandings must be weighed against the hybridity and dynamism of lived experience.

Social Representations and the Construction of "Reality"

Since its inception, social representations theory has evidenced constructionist tenets (Wagner, 1996). This perspective-based theory is concerned with the socially constituted nature of reality and the (trans)formation of everyday knowledge (Flick, 1994). As Moscovici (1990) points out, social representations are not "mental creations," but rather "*social* creations"

that can take on an obdurate quality (p. 76). Social representations stem from everyday processes of symbolic interaction, while acting as socio-cognitive mechanisms of sense making and construction. They are continuously (re)produced in communicative dynamics and, as such, social representations should not be treated as mere reflections of existent reality.

"Anchoring" and "objectification" are two of the most fundamental processes through which social representations organize and structure common-sense knowledge (Marková, 2000, p. 447). Anchoring pertains to the cognitive processes involved in classifying and evaluating new phenomena based on pre-existing meanings or representations. Successful anchoring leads to the assimilation of what was initially "unfamiliar" into existing knowledge (Daanen, 2009). Through this process, abstract representations shift into the background as they are replaced by newly formed, objectified, and, perhaps, "taken-for-granted" meanings. According to Daanen (2009), anchoring and objectification constitute the "conscious" and "non-conscious" aspects of social representations theory (p. 377). They combine in the continued creation and transformation of social representations.

Moscovici associates social representations with the acquisition of common-sense knowledge (see Moscovici & Marková, 1998, p. 380). His thoughts on this matter are made transparent with respect to attitudes toward objects. Moscovici makes the point that, in order to express an attitude, the object in question must already be represented in the mind. Long ago, Mead (1910) remarked that it is only in social conduct that attitudes "become the object of attention and interest" (pp. 179–180). And, to the extent that representations can take on intersubjective reality and temporal stability, it follows that they are also capable of influencing knowledge claims and agency. Social representations theory can be used to explain how people are bound together, achieve a sense of collective belonging, and act purposively on behalf of their mutual interests (Moscovici, 2001).

Social representations can become routinized in a manner that both shapes everyday actions and evokes rule enforcement. However, too great an emphasis on the constraining, external, or coercive function of representations underplays the prospects for ongoing revision and transformation through communicative action. While it is commonly suggested that representations can be constitutive of reality, the ongoing processes of re-representation and re-interpretation bring with them the potential for

contestation and debate (Howarth, 2006). Lahlou (2015) observes that representations and objects co-evolve in conjunction with lived experience, while possessing a degree of autonomy and stability. What is of key importance here is how representations are formed, enter into human consciousness, influence prospective thoughts and actions, as well as change over time.

For some authors, social representations theory is overly cognitive in nature (see Daanen, 2009). Wagner (1996) contends that too much attention has been focused on the (trans)formation of representations rather than the creation "*of a social*[*ly*] *represented world*" (p. 95). He points to persistent ambiguities over the relationship or distinction between a representation and what it is presumed to represent (e.g., an object or person). If reality is socially elaborated or constructed, then objects cannot exist independently of social actors—"the representation *is* the object" to which it refers (Wagner, 1996, p. 108). Put differently, the object comes into existence through the process of representation. Wagner et al. (1999) contend that objects become "real" by virtue of the collective representations that community members co-construct through everyday talk and (inter) action. This shifts emphasis to the intersubjective emergence of social representations and the phenomena created by specific constructions of reality (see Jovchelovitch, 1995). And, so, social representations are involved in the construction, reproduction, and transformation of all facets of the social world, including communities.

Community and Social Representation(s)

Durkheim (1895/1938) long ago noted that society and, by implication, community is wholly composed of representations. He was referring to the many collective ways of thinking, feeling, and acting that constitute lived social experience. Indeed, community itself can be understood as a social object of meaning, attention, and purposive action. It is in this sense that Howarth (2001) considers how it is that communities are discursively constructed or, quite simply, talked into existence (p. 224). She contends that the social representations perspective is well suited to exploring varied aspects of community, including social knowledge, shared symbols, collective identities, as well as conditions of marginalization, exclusion, and empowerment. Stephens (2007) similarly argues that the meaning of community is socially constructed through everyday talk and action. She further explains that, depending on the context, members can represent

their communities in quite different ways through their "socially oriented" discursive practices (Stephens, 2007, p. 105). Both Howarth (2001) and Stephens (2007) point to the diverse meanings and functions that members associate with their communities, for example, support, belonging, service, identity, or need. Their work on social representations reflects an appreciation for the multifaceted, fluid, and contested nature of community.

Social representations inform practice and, as such, they are always-already embedded in lived relation. Unsurprisingly, dialogism is finding its way into theoretical discourse on social representations. As Howarth et al. (2015) point out, communities are not something given, they are multifold, polyphonic, and dynamic (p. 181). The presence of varied representations mirrors the multi-voiced nature of community life, which intersects with the Bakhtinian (1963/1984) notion that meaning arises in dialogic relations among diverse utterances, words, or consciousnesses. However, meanings are not confined to speech communication or dialogue; they are also expressed in the actions that individuals take on behalf of the community. And, while psychosocial sharedness is an oft-mentioned aspect of community, the interrelated actions of members engaged in a common project are equally important. The interconnectedness of social representations, meanings, and actions is particularly relevant to the study of community (Bessant, 2014).

Howarth et al. (2015) take up the matter of mutual interests in the context of how people of multifarious perspectives are able to come together in collective practice. This harkens back to Wilkinson's (1991) field-related interpretation of community action dynamics. Quite apart from rational actor theory, he claims that collective agency occurs when individuals' intentions and lines of action converge around the pursuit of common goals. Social field theory offers a process-based view of community as an emergent field of coordinated actions. Miller (1992) likewise points to the idea of non-strategic modes of interaction as a basis for developing common understandings, social bonds, and collective identity. Community action is indicative of shared or relatively compatible representations of what to do (common goals) and how to accomplish particular objectives (purposive action). So, the presence of varied perspectives either *within* or *of* community does not preclude the emergence of collective representations (or actions) that draw together diverse groups. Wilkinson (1991) notes that the meaning of community has been made problematic by "real-world" conditions such as blurring boundaries,

weakening local solidarity, and increasing societal turbulence. Notwithstanding these and other issues precipitated by change dynamics, he calls upon community researchers to re-theorize community in a way that recognizes its multifaceted, dynamic, and emergent nature.

Community: Construct, Symbol, and Representation

Under the pervasive influence of social system thinking, early academic work typically emphasized material or structural conceptions of community. Contemporary theorists express a much greater appreciation for the socially constituted nature of community life. A number of insights can be drawn from the intersecting interpretations of community as a social construction, symbol, or representation. One of the core aspects of this chapter concerns the relational processes by means of which community becomes an object of conscious attention and action, both individually and collectively. This raises the fundamental question of how social representations are co-constructed or co-constituted in the minds of community members. Jovchelovitch (1995) sheds light on this issue through her discussion of the "public sphere" as a social space of otherness, sociality, and intersubjectivity (pp. 82–83). The public realm brings individuals into contact with multiple perspectives, and it is through dialogic engagement with others that meanings are perpetually constructed and re-constructed. Much like the self, social representations emerge through ongoing symbolic interaction, dialogic processes, and intersubjective relations. People may well encounter what is socially represented as "given," but they also reshape and re-represent social reality through their ongoing relations with one another.

Jovchelovitch's (1995) work combines elements of dialogism and interactionism. Her reference to otherness and intersubjectivity is noteworthy in that it focuses attention on the critical role that symbolic or discursive activity plays in the co-construction of social representations. This point is made more significant when considered in light of the idea that symbols define meanings and objects (see Wagner, 1996). Therefore, once social representations are constituted in human consciousness, social objects and social reality achieve a measure of solidity, at least until they are recast in some new form. The treatment of community as a social object can be theorized in a similar fashion, irrespective of whether it is framed in terms of place, interest, identity, or action. Within any such community, there can and most likely will exist multiple and potentially

conflicting representations. This speaks to the plurality of representations and their variability across individuals and groups.

The contested nature of community draws attention to the varied ways in which social actors "define" and "deploy" its meaning in everyday life (Day, 2006, p. 154). It can be argued that community possesses no independent or external existence apart from the way it is intersubjectively constituted within and between human "inter-actors." This is parallel to suggesting that the communalized act of naming, classifying, or representing actually *creates* social objects, including community. People actively build multiple relationships of co-presence, mutual belonging, or collective attachment that lay the foundation for the emergence of community. Through such processes, community becomes the conscious object of thought, feeling, and action, while remaining forever nascent and unfinished. From a constructionist or representational perspective, community both emerges out of and (re)shapes social practices. Community is quite literally talked and acted into existence within the perpetual flow of everyday lived relation.

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CHAPTER 7

Relational Sociology and Emergent Community

Relational thinking cuts across diverse disciplines within the social sciences (Selg, 2016). Prandini (2015) notes that the "relational turn" within late twentieth-century social theory was catalyzed by the weakening of "individualistic–collectivistic ontologies" (p. 3). Of late, there has been a proliferation of work in the area of relational sociology. The intellectual roots of this perspective are routinely traced to theorists such as Karl Marx, Max Weber, Georg Simmel, and the more contemporary work of Pierre Bourdieu, Charles Tilly, Mustafa Emirbayer, Nick Crossley, and Pierpaolo Donati, among others. It is now quite commonly suggested that the "social" and the "real" are inherently relational, as is one's very "being." Kaipayil (2009) succinctly states that all things, objects, and events are embedded in relations. The expanding body of literature on relational sociology addresses a range of issues, including the structure–agency problem, transactional processes, and emergent phenomena. This growing emphasis on relational and processual thinking is highly relevant to the development of community theory.

Despite extensive discourse on the relational bases of the self, society, and agency, the conceptualization of social relation(s) remains quite varied. Those who share an interest in social relationality do not necessarily agree on its meaning or theorization. Inquiry into the nature of social relations is beset by interrelated epistemological, ontological, and methodological issues. And, to the extent that relational sociology is an evolving area of study, it is not surprising to encounter divergent viewpoints. This relatively new focus of social thought encompasses a number of

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competing strands or themes. Dépelteau (2013) observes that relational sociology "is not a consensual approach at the ontological level" (p. 164). Notwithstanding ongoing debate, relational sociology offers insight into the study of community, most notably with respect to process dynamics and emergent social phenomena. The following sections explore key points of discourse concerning relational sociology, with a particular emphasis on the work of Emirbayer (1997), Crossley (2011, 2015), and Donati (2011, 2015). Ultimately, what is at issue is the interpretation of community as a direct expression and emergent outcome of social relations.

Social Relations, Relata, and Emergence

Social relationality has figured prominently in the historical origins and continued advancement of sociological theory. A number of contemporary authors have proffered variant conceptions of relational social life, including "intra-actions" (Barad, 2007, p. 128), "trans-actions" (Dépelteau, 2008, p. 61), ties, and networks (Bourdieu, 1985a, 1985b). Powell and Dépelteau (2013) outline several notable ways in which social relations have been framed:

- transactions among interdependent actors,
- interactional trajectories or histories,
- patterned or habituated interactions,
- networks of ties among positions located in social space,
- irreducible emergent effects with distinct properties and powers, and
- generative aspects of elaborated social phenomena (pp. 3–4).

These are but a few of the many representations of social relations. The expanding scope of this work is indicative of a resurgent interest in theorizing the elemental nature of lived relation. Indeed, Gergen (2009) expresses openness to innovative ways of thinking about the meaning of *relations* and *relationships*. There is a parallel need to focus greater attention on the relational bases of community and agency.

Much has been said about individuals' relations with one another, social phenomena (e.g., organizations and institutions), and the social world, more generally. The basic condition of lived social experience is often characterized as "being-with-one-another," "being-together," or "being-in-relation." In very general terms, the act of entering into relation can include everything from a very brief conversation to a much more durable

or substantive relationship. Even relatively fleeting forms of interpersonal contact involve some form of reaching out toward the other (Nancy, 1991). Furthermore, the concept of social relation(s) can be understood in two interrelated senses: *process* and *outcome* (Donati, 2015). According to Bakhtin (1979/1986, 1990), individual consciousnesses are immersed in the continuous flow of life events and dialogic interactions that give rise to novel, irreducible meanings. Kaipayil (2009) similarly states that processism assumes an anti-substantialist view of "existents as occurrents and not continuants (things)" (pp. 9, 57). The emphasis on process dynamics has led some relational sociologists to conceptualize structures as patterned transactions or interactional trajectories (e.g., Crossley, 2011; Dépelteau, 2008).

One of the inherent problematics in the study of relations involves the conception of "relata"—those "units," "elements," or "entities" that are considered either antecedents or emergents of (social) relations. Some theorists view individuals as ontologically separate from or prior to social relations, while others take a non-essentialist interpretation of "interactors" emerging in and through interactional dynamics. This is akin to a distinction that Kaipayil (2009) makes between *relationalism* and *relationism*. In the former sense, a relation is understood as an "interaction of particulars," whereas the latter treats relata as intrinsic aspects of a relation (Kaipayil, 2009, p. 64). Based on a relationalistic conception of "being," Kaipayil contends that particulars (e.g., individuals) are inherently open to others. On a related theme, McNamee and Gergen (1999) contest the idea of independent autonomous agents on the grounds that the socially constituted self embodies aspects of other selves (p. 11). Interestingly, Donati and Archer (2015) indicate that social relations *both* connect and differentiate entities, between which there exists some element of "*distance*" (p. 18). All such remarks point to differences of perspective regarding substantialism, processism, and emergentism.

In *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, Barad (2007) discusses both relations and relata. She advances the notion that relata are not pre-existent determinate "things" that enter into relation; rather, they exist "within" phenomena (p. 140). In other words, relata (e.g., actors) are not existentially prior to relations, nor are relations secondary derivatives of relata. These so-called relata are bound together within the complex entanglements and "intra-actions" of ontologically primitive phenomena (Barad, 2007, p. 139). And, it is by virtue of *intra-activity*, as contrasted with the *interaction* of prior entities, that relata emerge in the ongoing (re)configuration of the

surrounding world. Barad (2007) further notes that phenomena or relations "are constitutive of reality" (Barad, 2007, pp. 136, 140). Quite unlike authors who interpret reality as comprising distinct objects with identifiable properties, Barad (2007) emphasizes the dynamic flow of agency that stabilizes and destabilizes "determinate causal structures" (p. 140). This understanding of relations and relata synthesizes elements of processism and emergentism, both of which are evident, albeit in different ways, in relational sociology.

Social emergence figures prominently in the work of some relational thinkers. It is useful to recall Buber's (1965) discussion of the "between" or the "interhuman" (p. 75). He refers to the event of something novel arising in and through dialogic relations. According to Buber (1947/2002), emergent relational phenomena cannot be explained simply in terms of participants' experiences insofar as what happens *between* them transcends or exceeds each and all. This ontologically real sphere of existence derives from the genuine act of engaging with the other in mutual dialogic relation. Buber draws attention to an intimate, all-embracing way of "being-with" or "being-toward-one-another." His depiction of mutuality is noteworthy given that it is used, in a very specific sense, to characterize relations that have the potential to generate a distinct mode of "interhuman" lived experience. It is in this respect that Buber (1947/2002) makes mention of an emergent "We-ness" that reflects a genuine sense of community or communion. Perhaps what is most interesting in these discussions is the suggestion that "something" novel transpires, happens, or emerges in consort with self–other relations. Dialogical theory supports a process-based view of community as a relatively fluid, emergent complex of lived relations.

In basic terms, emergence can be conceptualized as a continuously unfolding relational dynamic *and* as an irreducible outcome of reciprocal social (inter)actions. It is noteworthy that some authors endow relational effects with their own distinct properties, powers, and reality. This viewpoint is reflected in Archer's (2010b) critical realist theory of emergent outcomes (i.e., "structural elaboration") within the so-called *morphogenetic cycle* (p. 276). From this perspective, social relations can be conceived of as essential elements of emergent processes and as newly formed structures (Donati, 2015). Barad (2007) similarly remarks that matter is both "generative" and "generated" (p. 137). Agency is intimately entwined with the emergent properties and meanings bound up in the dynamism of endless becoming. Interestingly, Somers (1998) suggests

that causal mechanisms do not lie with agents themselves, but *within* agential processes. The agency–structure problem impinges on the historical development of community theory. While early theorists typically focused on functional requisites and community structures, more recent work emphasizes interactional dynamics, transformative processes, and collective action (see Bessant, 2014).

Relation*ist* Versus Relation*al* Perspectives

Contemporary discourse on social relations is an evolving theoretical and conceptual landscape. Tsekeris (2010) suggests that "sociological relationalism" typically treats social practices as perpetually reconstituted within the ongoing flow of reciprocal relations. Social relationality involves a ceaseless process or sequence of transactions that, taken together, account for both social order and social change. Quite unlike substantialism and essentialism, relationalism conceives of reality as a socially constructed, contingent effect of everyday lived experience and interaction (Tsekeris, 2010). It is important to reiterate that there are multiple modes of relational thinking. After reviewing four widely recognized proponents of relational sociology, Prandini (2015) concludes that their numerous differences preclude any possibility of a unified theory. And, much like Kaipayil (2009), Donati (2013a) draws a distinction between "relation*istic*" and "*relational*" perspectives (p. 85). Donati (2013a) contends that relationist thinking rests on a contingent, processual view of lived experience, as compared to a relational emphasis on ontologically unique "emergent effect[s]" (pp. 95–96).

Donati (2011) disagrees with the notion of social relations as "end[s] in themselves" insofar as it renders individuals and collective entities dispensable (p. 9). He makes mention of Emirbayer (1997), Dépelteau (2015), and Crossley (2011, 2015), all of whom, Donati (2011) claims, concentrate on transactional processes in a manner that deprives relations of any notable substance, stability, or continuity. He suggests that a narrow focus on everyday lived experience tends to minimize the role that human agency plays in the emergence and transformation of societal structures. According to Donati and Archer (2015), relational sociologists who emphasize dyadic relations, to the exclusion of emergent structures, endorse a "flat social ontology" (p. 7). Both authors stress the need to conceptualize social relations and their effects on different, albeit interrelated, planes of analysis.

There are key epistemological and ontological issues embedded in these different relational approaches. Donati (2013a) advocates critical or analytical realism and the theorization of social relations as emergent effects of reflexivity and mutuality. He notes that some proponents of relational sociology do not acknowledge the existence of emergent relational structures or their unique properties. In other words, they fail to distinguish between reciprocal actions and the *sui generis* phenomena (e.g., social forms or bonds) that emerge therefrom (see Archer & Donati, 2015). Interestingly, Dépelteau (2008) claims that all theories classified as "relationism," "relationalism," or "relational sociology" interpret social structures as the products of "trans-actions" among interdependent social actors (p. 59).

Another aspect of the debate over different versions of relational sociology involves the problem of how to understand the connection between structure and agency, without falling prey to conflationism or reductionism. One of the central facets of sociological theory concerns the relationship between the individual (or self) and society (e.g., Archer, 1995; May, 2011; Piiroinen, 2014). Archer (2000) argues that conflationists reject a stratified social ontology in which the "parts" (*structure*) and "people" (*agency*) possess their own distinct properties and powers (p. 5). *Upward* conflation is reflected in Weber's (1978) discussion of collective entities as the resultant (organized) effects of subjectively meaningful social actions (i.e., methodological individualism). By comparison, authors who think of human actions as epiphenomena of reified structures engage in *downward* conflation, as expressed by Durkheim's (1895/1938) "social facts" (p. 1). And, finally, *central* conflationism or "elisionism," as defined by Archer (2000), refers to instances in which structure and agency are considered mutually constitutive of one another, such as Giddens' (1984) structuration theory. A key issue here is the relative importance that authors attribute to "the mutual ontological dependency" of individual agents and collective structures (see Piiroinen, 2014, p. 80).

Field Theory: Objective *Structures* Versus Interactional *Processes*

This section explores a key distinction between *structural* and *interactional* conceptions of field-theoretic relations. Bourdieu (1985a, 1985b) is well known for his field-based representation of social space, which

differs in nature from Wilkinson's (1970, 1991) field-interactional approach. These two perspectives offer contrasting interpretations of the relationship between structural properties and human agency. Bourdieu (1985a) describes a field as a configuration of positions and forces defined on the basis of varied species of capital (e.g., economic, political, social, or cultural). Positions are located in social space and, as a result, their occupants (i.e., actors or agents) experience differential constraints or opportunities in relation to the distribution of capital(s) within diverse fields of activity. Bourdieu disclaims the relevance of studying either interactions or intersubjective relations in favor of investigating the irreducible structural properties of field forces (see Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992).

Bourdieu's (1985a, 1985b) structural orientation to field theory discounts the interactional aspects of network relations and participants' agential capacities. According to Bottero (2009), this perspective stresses objective relations among positions to the neglect of social relationships or interaction processes. Put simply, Bourdieu privileges "structure over interaction" (see Liu & Emirbayer, 2016, p. 62). By focusing on structure at the expense of interaction, he denies intersubjectivity a meaningful role in the interpretation of human social practice. Indeed, Bourdieu is critical of (symbolic) interactionists, whom he believes to be myopically unaware of objective structures that operate independently of human will. In direct response to Bourdieu's work on field relations, Bottero (2009) recommends that greater attention should be placed on intersubjective processes and their involvement in organized social practices (p. 413). Murphy (2011) likewise calls for an increased emphasis on intersubjective and affective dimensions of social life in light of Bourdieu's preoccupation with structural relations. It is important to consider the role of intersubjective relations in the emergence of collective actions, events, or phenomena.

In contrast to Bourdieu's (1985a) structural representation of the "field," Wilkinson (1970, 1991) emphasizes the role of (inter)action processes. His field-theoretic approach is little known outside of rural sociology, and it is sometimes misconstrued as a form of social network analysis. Wilkinson's notion of a social field is based on the convergence of diverse interests and activities within a goal-directed, collective action process. Community (social) fields emerge in and through interactional dynamics that become increasingly interrelated with respect to a common concern or issue. Wilkinson conceives of interaction fields as relational contexts that draw actors, actions, and associations together in the pursuit of mutual

interests, while giving rise to changing elements of structure. Dynamism is implicit in this decidedly processual interpretation of field-related collective action.

In addition to the central focus on interaction processes and dynamics, Wilkinson (1991) discusses the structural properties of community (social) fields. Elements of structure grow out of the coalescence of different lines of action and, as a result, they are continuously shaped and reshaped throughout the lifespan of the field. Wilkinson makes use of the field concept to express both the inherent vicissitudes of collective action and the relational emergence of social organization. His depiction of the interactional community as a complex network of differentiated and interrelated social fields is fundamentally relational in nature. Wilkinson theorizes the role that interaction plays in the evolving structural aspects of social fields, whereas Bourdieu considers interaction a reflection of objective field structures (see Bottero, 2009).

Wilkinson (1970, 1991) introduced the field-interactional perspective as an alternative to system-based interpretations of community structures, the latter of which he believed to be largely outmoded in light of the rapid onset of turbulence and change in the late twentieth century. He recognized the prospective impact of wide-scale social and technological transformations on the social fabric of communities. When the interactional perspective first emerged in the 1960s and 1970s, it represented a sharp departure from the then accepted view of community as a concretized system or functionally integrated unit. Wilkinson stresses the essentially relational foundations of emergent collective interests and community actions. His analytical emphasis on interaction processes and evolving elements of structure is consistent with Tsekeris' (2010) depiction of sociological relationalism. Wilkinson's (1991) conception of the social field encapsulates the dynamic nature of lived relations. It is founded on the idea that people actively construct and change their communities through purposive joint agency. His assertion that collective action grows out of goal-directed interaction constitutes an early form of emergentism within community sociology. Field-interactional tenets highlight the agential capacity of community members to build relationships that transform their collective lives.

Competing Interpretations of Relational Sociology

Emirbayer (1997), Crossley (2015), Dépelteau (2008), and Donati (2015) are among the most recognizable contemporary proponents of relational sociology. Notwithstanding differences of approach, these authors share a decided interest in social relationality. Their work and that of many others offers insight into the study of network configurations, transactions, social fields, and emergent processes, among other relational dynamics.

Emirbayer's Manifesto and Transactional Sociology

More than twenty years have elapsed since Emirbayer (1997) published his "Manifesto for a Relational Sociology." In this article, he makes a distinction between substantialist and relational perspectives, the former of which has, in past years, held a prominent position in community sociology. Substantialist conceptions of the social world and the associated concentration on static "things" or phenomena stand in sharp contrast to relational ways of interpreting the continuous flow of lived experience. Emirbayer embraces "the relation" as the primary unit of analysis while rejecting the notion of pre-given, fixed entities such as societies, structures, or actors. He remarks that individuals are not anterior to the relations within which they emerge together. For Emirbayer (1997), co-actors are indelibly linked to one another through their interactions, networks, or transactions. This is the essence of what is meant by "being" as "co-being" (see Nancy, 1991, 1996/2000). Unlike entitative thinking, the implicit suggestion is that "inter-actors" and their "inter-relations" unfold together and, through this process, there is the potential for novel events to emerge.

Somers (1998) contends that a "relational (realist) pragmatist ontology" rejects essentialism. She indicates that the primary focus is neither individual actors nor structural entities but, rather, "relational subjects" and "relational processes" (Somers, 1998, p. 767). Social beings are constituted in relationships and, as such, their identities can only be properly understood, relationally speaking, *in situ*. Knowledge, ideas, and meanings likewise emerge in relational contexts, which accounts for the relatively fluid and negotiated nature of social phenomena and social reality. This mirrors Emirbayer's (1997) contention that agency is situated within "transactional contexts," through which actors enter into relations with other persons, spaces, objects, and events (pp. 287, 294). He indicates that

this perspective brings with it a re-conceptualization of "the individual"—one that reflects a non-essentialist view of identities arising within relational dynamics. Nancy (1996/2000) offers a related interpretation of singular finite beings "*co-appearing*" to one another in communicative meeting (p. 59). By virtue of entering into relation, nascent consciousnesses come to exist in the presence of others and perhaps also give rise to newly emergent phenomena or realities (e.g., communities).

Dépelteau (2008) identifies several principles undergirding relational sociology, some of which are consistent with Emirbayer's (1997) earlier work. Dépelteau (2008) contrasts relationism and co-determinism, with specific reference to Archer's (1995, 2000) morphogenetic approach. He critiques the contention that social phenomena or the social world, more generally, can be explained by interactions between structures and agency, as distinct from "actor–actor" relations or "trans-actions." Dépelteau (2013) shifts attention away from the study of static, pre-existing things by stressing the fluid, processual, and dynamic nature of social reality (p. 181). Furthermore, he takes issue with the suggestion that actors interact with reified social structures which, in his view, is indicative of co-determinism.

According to Dépelteau (2008), social constructionism, as proffered by Berger and Luckmann (1966), falls within the co-deterministic tradition. He pays particular attention to their contention that the social (institutional) order is a direct result of human production. Berger and Luckmann (1966) assert that the experienced world takes on an external and objective quality that acts back on its co-creators. Social reality is formed through ongoing human activity but, nonetheless, possesses "coercive power" (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p. 78). Human beings are confronted by institutional structures, not entirely of their own making, that have become solidified and internalized in ways that can compel and constrain actions. It should be noted, however, that whatever powers or properties may accrue to emergent structures or phenomena are tied directly to relational dynamics. And, to the extent that social reality is entwined with human (social) agency, it is subject to prospective transformation.

Also of interest here is Dépelteau's (2008) discussion of "*self-action*," "*inter-action*," and "*trans-action*," the latter of which he considers the essential subject matter of relational sociology (pp. 60–61). He maintains that "self-action" invests actors and structures with their own intrinsic powers and properties that originate outside of or anterior to relations. Dépelteau goes on to suggest that "inter-action" implies a co-deterministic

relationship between agency and structure where action occurs among entities situated and constituted within relational fields. In contradistinction to both "self-action" and "inter-action," he claims that "trans-actions" are not premised on pre-given entities. Interdependent actors and their "trans-actions" emerge together, and, as such, individual properties are shaped by contextual factors. Agency, from a relational perspective, cannot be detached from situational dynamics (Emirbayer, 1997). Dépelteau (2013) makes mention of a "'deep' RS [relational sociology]" which, he remarks, is principally concerned with the social embeddedness of actors and their "trans-actions" (p. 178). He takes a non-essentialist approach to human (social) existence while interpreting social phenomena as the fluid relational outcomes of irreducible "trans-actions." Indeed, it is only by noticing certain similarities within the perpetual flow of lived experience that it is possible to typify relational patterns (Dépelteau, 2013).

Crossley—Interaction, Process, and Relation

Crossley (2011) rejects (ontological) individualism and holism in favor of an "agents-in-relation" view of social life (p. 2). This approach expresses a clear emphasis on the dynamism of social life, as defined by unfolding social relations. The foundation of everything that pertains to the social world and the social self exists within the perpetual flow of relations. For Crossley (2011), the basic units of analysis include the structure of interactions, emergent relations, and networks (p. 14). He, too, rejects a conception of individuals as self-contained, pre-given entities, preferring instead to focus on the embedded nature of the emergent self and human (social) activity. According to Crossley (2011), relational sociologists understand the social world as a complex network of varied types and scales of social ties among actors who are themselves products of these multifaceted interaction processes (p. 40). This idea is implicit in Elias' (1987/2001) observation that the individuals whom we encounter in everyday life and sometimes presume to be quite disconnected from one another are, in actuality, "tied by invisible chains to other people" (p. 14). Relational contexts constitute the fundamental social processes within which actors and social phenomena are formed and reformed. In other words, neither actors nor (inter)actions can be understood apart from their embeddedness in ongoing life events and relational processes.

Much of the above discussion is premised on "co-existence" or co-existentiality (Nancy, 1996/2000, pp. 42, 94) whereby human beings are immersed in social relations that continuously reshape the nature of the self and collective existence. Given that actors are viewed as perpetually "in-relation," there can be no possibility of society or community without relations (see Prandini, 2015). Relations arise in and through everyday lived experiences and, therefore, remain "always-already in the process of becoming what they are" (Fish, 2013, p. 39). Interactional dynamics not only account for the emergence of the social self, but a host of collective properties (e.g., language and culture). Emergent relational effects cannot be explained in terms of atomistic individuals. It is in this sense that neither social relations nor society, more generally, can be reduced to individual actors. And, although Crossley (2011) acknowledges that "the whole is greater than the sum of its parts," he rejects a reified interpretation of society and the notion of "mysterious societal forces" compelling actors to behave in a particular fashion (p. 4). He expresses concern over the representation of society as a "higher-order" entity because it shifts attention away from interactions, relations, and networks.

Even theorists who emphasize the processual nature of social life, on occasion, address the issue of (social) structure. Elias (1987/2001) observes that, in order to understand structure, one must begin by thinking about relations(hips) rather than isolated things, substances, or human beings. This is in keeping with Dépelteau's (2008) reference to structure as "chains of trans-action," interconnected actions, or webs of relations within the social world (p. 62). Structure constitutes a patterned sequence of transactions that is continuously produced and transformed through relational dynamics. Crossley (2011) privileges the study of social relations over pre-conceived entities, but he also discusses social institutions and structures. He defines structure as the properties that emerge from interactions among those who are mutually engaged in some shared interest. Crossley conceptualizes lived experience as an historical, ever-changing process, while claiming that relations are built up or constructed in ways that can lead to habituated interaction. More to the point, he refers to a social relation as a temporary or shifting "state of play" within a trajectory of interaction (Crossley, 2013, p. 124). Structure is visible in the ongoing pattern of relations that influences future interactions. This is similar in meaning to the idea of structure-in-the-process or "structure-as-empirical-regularity" (Elder-Vass, 2008, p. 288).

Donati—Critical Realist Relational Sociology and Social Morphogenesis

Much has been written about relational modes of thinking since the publication of Emirbayer's (1997) "manifesto." Despite differences of perspective, there is general agreement among relational sociologists that human beings are always-already in relation. Donati (2015) affirms the primacy of relations, with the stipulation that society should not be viewed as a "space" or an "arena" that somehow contains relations, nor should relations be treated as *things* (p. 87). The latter point reflects Donati's (2015) contention that social morphogenesis proffers a non-reified emergentist understanding of relational outcomes or effects (p. 90). He conceives of social relations as comprising both *subjective* and *objective* qualities. The subjective dimension of social relations involves varied aspects of attributed meaning, motivation, and intentionality (Donati, 2015). In essence, those who engage in reciprocal (inter)action respond to or take note of one another in the process of framing their behavior (see Mead, 1934; Weber, 1978). Social relations also have an objective side owing to their normative structure, which is reflected in the actuality of the social ties, connections, and bonds that exist between those involved. A social relation, along with its meaning, is the emergent outcome of repeated exchanges among co-actors. Therefore, it is the interweaving of subjective and objective dimensions that accounts for the generation of social phenomena (Donati, 2014).

According to Donati (2011), a social relation is a form of "*reciprocal action*" that emerges out of interaction processes; it is the result of the dynamic conditioning of *Ego* and *Alter* (p. 124). Put simply, social relations are the generative outcomes of mutual (inter)actions that are embedded in particular social contexts. It follows that a social relation possesses properties that are different in nature from those of the participants. Social relations constitute an order of reality that is ontologically distinct from that of the individuals whose ongoing interactions bring them into existence. Donati and Archer (2015) contend that social relations are inherently reflexive insofar as they act back on individuals in ways that influence future actions. Feedback mechanisms are directly involved in the reproduction and transformation of relational structures. This speaks to the complexity of relational contexts that give rise to novel organizational social forms.

Donati (2014, 2015) theorizes the relational foundations of social phenomena through the discussion of social morphogenesis. He takes a critical realist approach to the study of sociocultural structures and social change dynamics (see Archer, 1995, 2010a, 2010b). Archer (2010b) argues that structure and agency operate both *synchronically* and *diachronically* in accounting for the stability and transformation of social phenomena (see Porpora, 2013). She posits that structure is always anterior to human interactions that either reproduce (*morphostasis*) or change (*morphogenesis*) it over time. According to Archer (1982), the morphogenetic process begins with an established structure and its requisite conditioning effects (t_1), which influence (inter)actions (t_2–t_3) and, subsequently, generate novel emergent properties (t_4) (pp. 468–470). The final phase initiates a new morphogenetic cycle that restarts the process, along with its constituent influences on future interactions and structural transformation. The structuring and restructuring of the social order, across all levels, is linked to agential dynamics. And, while human agency reconfigures structural relations, it is reshaped by virtue of "*double morphogenesis*" (Archer, 2010b, p. 274). From this perspective, society changes through a sequence of morphogenetic cycles.

Donati (2011) claims that all *objects* of sociological study can be conceptualized in terms of social relations. Furthermore, relations represent a particular order or stratum of reality that is implicated in the emergence of macro-social phenomena—ontological emergentism (Donati, 2011, p. 12). For Donati (2013b), the relational dynamic that operates between two or more individuals can give rise to an emergent outcome. Thus, when someone enters into relation with others, a prospective entity can emerge that possesses irreducible, non-aggregative properties or powers. And, to the extent that institutions, organizations, communities, and other social phenomena can be conceived of as relational effects, they are subject to ongoing change. Emergent outcomes are an essential aspect of the overall process through which structures are continuously transformed. Indeed, social morphogenesis is theoretically invested in the notion of emergence as a generative mechanism.

In critical realist terms, relations constitute the reciprocal effects of interactions and, due to their emergent properties, the former are irreducible to the latter (Donati & Archer, 2015). Social relations reproduce and change structural properties that influence future interactions and prospective actions. More importantly, the act of entering into relation has

the potential to give rise to an emergent effect or outcome that acquires its own unique attributes. This new relational phenomenon, which Donati (2011) refers to as an unseen but ontologically real "third element," is brought into existence through a reflexive process of reciprocal actions (p. 124). In other words, emergent effects constitute a distinct order of reality. As noted, Donati (2015) disagrees with those who reduce social relations to transactions or interactions; he, instead, emphasizes the "peculiar effect of mutuality" (p. 87). The core assertion here is that a relation exists in its own right and, thereby, has its own "being." The idea of "thirdness" is indicative of an emergent relation that cannot be reduced either to actors' subjective experiences or to elemental interactions. Following this logic, community can be treated as a composite relational effect that emerges and re-emerges in and through (trans)formative actions.

One of the most distinctive features of critical realist relational sociology pertains to the theorized relationship between emergent structures and agential processes. Archer (2010a) suggests that critical realists are primarily concerned with the relational linkage between actors and relatively stable, "activity-dependent" structures (p. 201). However, morphogenetic social theory has met with some criticism regarding the implied reification of relational outcomes and, more specifically, their distinct properties, powers, and reality. King (1999) critiques Archer's work on the grounds that objective social structures are reifications of and reducible to human actions and interrelations. Therefore, the constraints that members of society experience are not a function of pre-existent hypostatized structures; rather, they stem from individuals' relationships with one another. In contrast to Archer's (1995) stratified social ontology, King (1999) argues that society must be understood in terms of social actors and their social relations.

On a related theme, Burkitt (2016) contextualizes purposive action within networks of relations among individuals who respond to, think about, and dialogue with one another, *not* some "higher-order" entity. He emphasizes the agential capacity of human beings to work together in the transformation of social reality. These views are more consistent with Emirbayer's (1997) manifesto than that of Donati (2015). Burkitt (2016) highlights the fluidity of relations among "interactants" who are embedded, along with their joint actions, in multifold events and social relations (pp. 322–323). A similar idea is evident in Barad's (2007) deliberate use of the term "*intra-action*," as distinct from "interaction," in order to avoid

the presumption of pre-existent independent entities (p. 139). She affirms the notion that human beings are always-already in relation, as reflected in the social constitution of the self and the perpetual transformation of the social world.

Notwithstanding continued debate, critical realist relational sociology offers a useful way of thinking about community processes, structures, and change dynamics. The assertion that social phenomena are generated and transformed through relational dynamics is particularly relevant to community theory. Recently, Donati (2015) has referred to social relations as "social molecules" that exist at varied levels of analysis and assume different composite forms (p. 100). Social relations are deemed primary in the sense that they are considered the essential building blocks or "molecules" out of which all other orders of social reality emerge. In the process of entering into relation, actors bring with them their own particular goals, intentions, meanings, and expectations, which combine in ways that produce outcomes with unique properties. And, furthermore, reciprocal relations can acquire a measure of stability that yields an emergent social form, sphere, or realm. Based on this line of thought, community represents a complex configuration of social relations or a "super-functional" social sphere (Donati, 2015, p. 91). Donati goes on to indicate that the members of a community confer meaning on their relations based on a sense of collective belonging ("We-ness"). Ostensibly, then, community is a *composite* "social molecule" that is continuously reconstituted by and through iterative social relations.

Social Relationality and Community

In the mid-twentieth century, community was typically conceptualized as a structurally integrated, concrete entity. This early concentration on spatially focused communities along with their functional properties and elements is, for some, as relevant today as it was when the social system perspective was at its zenith. The treatment of community as a quasi-bounded place in which people carry out their daily affairs remains an important feature of locality-oriented development theory and practice (see Matarrita-Cascante & Brennan, 2012). However, contemporary sociologists continue to explore new avenues of theoretical work, including the relational constitution of community in and through interactional, communicative, dialogical, and intersubjective processes. Greater attention

is now being placed on how people *think*, *talk*, and *act* community into existence in their everyday lives.

The expanding interest in social relationality has contributed to the theorization of community as an emergent relational phenomenon that exists in perpetual motion, change, and transformation. Community can be understood as a complex constellation of relations involving different types, scales, and degrees of interconnectedness. Much like Donati's (2011) depiction of society, community exists as "a relation of relations" (p. 17). The following material explores the notion of community in two interrelated senses: as a *process* and as an emergent *outcome* of lived social relations. This discussion explores the analytical distinction between interactional dynamics and their emergent relational effects, as applied to the conceptualization of community. Before proceeding, however, it is useful to briefly revisit the "primacy of relations."

Primacy of Relations

Relational sociology affirms the ontological and methodological primacy of relations, networks, and interactions (Crossley, 2015). This is clearly evident in Gergen's (2009) book, *Relational Being*, in which he states that nothing in this world exists apart from emergent relational processes. Aspers and Kohl (2013) contend that "socio-ontology" places self–other relations at the epicenter of the social order (p. 489). There can be no isolated individuals insofar as they are always-already enmeshed in lived relations with others. As opposed to treating individuals as static, independent, knowable entities, Hosking and Pluut (2010) grant ontological status to relational processes and relational constructions. And, in very similar terms, Powell (2013) proffers a "radically relational" approach, which considers "all social phenomena, including individuals themselves, as constituted through relations" (p. 187). He views relations as the elementary units of sociological analysis, and, as such, they are neither reducible to nor emergent from "something else" (Powell, 2013, p. 190). This focus on social relations is somewhat akin to situating subjectivity (or self-consciousness) and agency within intersubjective processes (see Coole, 2005). All such assertions indicate that life events, social phenomena, and social actors cannot be understood apart from the social relations within which they are embedded.

In contrast to essentialist conceptions of pre-existent actors, phenomena, or structures, relational thinking emphasizes intersubjectivity, emergent

meaning, and situated interaction (Erikson, 2013, p. 219). Dépelteau (2008) asserts that individual properties arise in and through "transactions." In essence, then, social relations are constitutive of individual actors or selves, as well as their agential capacities. This is consistent with Gergen's (2009) discussion of "relational being," as opposed to an artificially bounded notion of self and other (p. 5). He favors the idea of "*relational flow*" when describing lived experience (Gergen, 2009, pp. 46, 49). Gergen goes on to suggest that emotions, intentions, and identities do not emanate from within the person *per se*, but rather grow out of relations and their intrinsically generative dynamics. However, Crossley (2011) believes that social relations can, over time, become sedimented into substantive relationships. His remarks point to the prospective emergence of social forms or structures, whether understood as patterned transactions or as relational effects.

Community as Lived Relation

The general lack of agreement over the meaning of community speaks to its complexity, which calls for continued advancements in theory development. One of the primary goals of this book is to demonstrate that social relations are fundamental to the nature of community. Each of the perspectives presented in this and the foregoing chapters offers a particular set of ideas pertaining to the relational underpinnings of collective social life. In one sense or another, all of these approaches to community are premised on the lived experience of "entering-into-relation," "being-with-one-another," and "acting together." Non-essentialist orientations, in particular, firmly situate community within social interactions, ties, and relations, as distinct from the treatment of community as a concrete entity, structure, or system of functionally integrated units.

Relational processes are central to the production and transformation of all that is thought of as "social." Community, at its most elemental level, is experienced as lived relation with others. Social relations form the primary dynamic through which community is enacted or constituted. Ultimately, all members of a community are always-already in relation, and, as such, human agency emerges in the relatedness of social life (Burkitt, 2016). Process-based thinking represents community as a continuously unfolding collective event with its own particular historical trajectory. Communities, in this sense, are fluid manifestations of ongoing

social relations. This focus on process differs sharply from earlier understandings of community as a reified structural phenomenon.

If all "being" is "becoming" in the endless flow of life events (Bakhtin, 1986/1993), then the concepts "relational being" and "relational becoming" are well suited to the theorization of community. Fushe (2015) notes that social relations are intimately involved in meaning-making and situation-defining processes. Communicative interaction brings multiple voices together in ways that continually reshape personal and collective identities. Ideas, thoughts, actions, feelings, and actors themselves are embedded and also emerge in social relations. Furthermore, in the process of entering into dialogic relations, participants can give rise to novel aspects of community life. There is considerable analytical value associated with thinking about community as a complex configuration of interactions, transactions, exchanges, interdependencies, and ties. Such views express the processual nature of lived experience by concentrating on interrelatedness, emergence, and transformation (Tsekeris, 2010). This is evident in Emirbayer's (1997) observation that society is little more than "pluralities of associated individuals" (p. 288). For some theorists, however, such a stance does not adequately address the relational constitution of social structures. The latter issue has prompted Donati (2015) and others to propose a critical realist approach to the study of social phenomena that offers an alternative representation of the relationship between human agency and emergent structures.

Community as Relational Emergent

Some theorists argue that the outcomes or effects of social relations are irreducible to everyday lived experience, which raises the issue of emergentism (see Donati, 2015). One of the most general features of emergentist thinking involves the contention that "something" novel arises when actors or interlocutors enter into relation. And, furthermore, the events or phenomena that emerge "in between" participants are sometimes endowed with their own ontological reality (e.g., Buber, 1965). By way of clarification, Elder-Vass (2008) contends that the properties of "wholes" are deemed to be emergent when they cannot be explained by or reduced to their "parts." In relational terms, the unique powers or properties of the "whole" arise in conjunction with the organization or interaction of constituent elements. Crossley (2011) suggests that networks not only

manifest their own irreducible properties, but also give rise to "further emergent properties"—including the actors themselves (p. 4).

Emergence plays a significant role in critical realist relational sociology, most notably with respect to social morphogenesis (Archer, 1995, 2010a; Donati, 2015). Donati (2014) posits that reciprocal actions can precipitate emergent relational effects, which have the potential to either reproduce or change society. He draws attention to the involvement of human agency in the continued (trans)formation of societal and cultural structures. However, not all relational sociologists make explicit reference to emergent dynamics and effects, particularly when their work concentrates principally on processuality. And, so, while many theorists concur that social relations constitute the social fabric of society, there is considerable disagreement over whether relational phenomena possess irreducible, non-aggregative properties. It is this debate over emergent outcomes and elaborated structures that marks one of the key points of contention among relational sociologists.

The idea that novel emergent effects grow out of relational contexts of reciprocal (inter)action is highly relevant to the theorization of community (Archer, 2010b; Donati, 2015). There is a decided parallel between Buber's (1965) depiction of the "interhuman" or the "between" (pp. 74–75) and Donati's (2011) reference to the invisible "*tertium*" (p. 13). For both authors, this so-called *thirdness* possesses its own distinct reality. It is by virtue of "being-in-relation" that meanings and phenomena can be said to exist, in some sense, on a plane of reality different from that of the elements involved in their emergence. And, insofar as relational effects can be said to exhibit *sui generis* properties and powers, Donati (2015) argues that they "do not depend" entirely on human actors *per se* (p. 88). What is noteworthy about this mode of thinking is that it supports the treatment of community as an emergent relational phenomenon. Based on this perspective, communities of shared space or place, common interest(s), and mutual belonging (communion) alike can be thought of as emerging in and through social relations.

Concluding Remarks

There is no simple way in which to represent the multifarious relational facets of community life; however, Gergen's (2009) discussion of "confluence" offers a useful point of departure. He affirms the primacy of relations out of which all "things" emerge. Gergen's "relational being" and Mead's

(1934) social self are perpetually in motion within the flow of everyday lived experience. It is in and through relations that one becomes known to oneself and others. Dialogical, interactionist, and relational theorists typically discuss the co-emergent nature of interrelated social actors as opposed to self-acting, pre-given entities. Likewise, communities are founded in the relational dynamics of nascent, mutually constituting actors. All modes of association ranging from interpersonal interactions to the most highly structured relationships are indicative of social relationality. And, regardless of whether community is conceptualized as a place-based entity, an organized round of social life, or a sense of mutual belonging, it is a direct expression of social relations.

Although there is relatively uniform opposition to the notion of reified social entities among relational sociologists, this has not prevented some authors from embracing the principle of emergent relational effects. Those who reject emergentism tend to treat structures as patterned transactions, whereas critical realists emphasize the non-reductive properties of relational outcomes. Archer (2010a) and Donati (2015) argue that relational structures are produced, maintained, and transformed through relational dynamics. According to Archer (2010b), the relational effects that emerge within morphogenetic processes influence subsequent interactions which, in turn, have the potential to bring about structural change. This draws attention to the significant involvement of human agency in the (trans) formation of societal structures. Thus conceived, community involves "being-with-others" in varied ways, along with the realization that, through repeated relations, "inter-actors" emerge together and give rise to social phenomena.

In conclusion, the interrelated ideas of "betweenness" and relational emergence are particularly relevant to community sociology. From Buber's (1947/2002) perspective, the novel, emergent event of the "between" begins with, but cannot be reduced to, the simple act of "being-in-relation." Much the same view is implicit in his discussion of community as a sense of "We-ness" that grows out of the "ontic directness" experienced among its members (Buber, 1947/2002, p. 208). Perhaps what is most essential about the notion of "betweenness" is the critical role of intersubjectivity in the generation of emergent social phenomena. The basic processes of meaning making, symbolic communication, perspective taking, and joint social action are all indicative of intersubjectivity (Mead, 1934). The social bonds that people build and rebuild with one another are experienced *in relation*, as are the many local realities that make up the

complex social fabric of community. As Crossley (1996) points out, community is, in its most basic sense, "an irreducible structure of interactions" (p. 153). Community constitutes a complex constellation of differently configured networks of interrelated actors and actions. It is both a direct reflection and an emergent outcome of the fundamental inclination of human beings to engage with one another in ways that continuously create and transform their collective lives.

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CHAPTER 8

Intersubjectivity, Community, and Agency

Relational thinking is making inroads into the study of community, in particular, through the application of field-interactional, social representational, and dialogical perspectives (see Bessant, 2014). However, much more must be done in order to develop a distinctly relational approach to community. The foregoing chapters present a series of community theories while arguing that each is based in some sense on (social) relationality. The overall goal throughout has been to demonstrate the essential role of social relations in the conceptualization of community. A core facet of this undertaking involves the identification of analytical ideas, concepts, and tenets that support a relational interpretation of community and agency. This chapter draws together intersecting themes of discourse on intersubjective relations. Intersubjectivity is significantly involved in the social fabric of human lived experience and, as such, it is also implicated in the emergent nature of the self, community, and agency. As Husserl (1954/1970) points out, the *Ego* is constituted intersubjectively, as is a collective sense of "We-ness" (p. 172).

Intersubjectivity is routinely associated with the emergence of "between spaces" where thoughts, meanings, identities, and actions take shape. This understanding of intersubjective relations is reflected in Crossley's (1996) reference to the "interworld" (p. 153) and Taylor's (2016) discussion of the "interspace" of collective attention (p. 50). Intersubjectivity pertains to both personal and societal facets of human social existence. Indeed, Peperzak (2000) suggests that intersubjectivity mediates between individual

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and communal aspects of lived experience. Intersubjectivity is associated with a plethora of relational processes, such as self-consciousness, communicative interaction and, perhaps most significantly, the co-constitution of shared meanings and joint agency (see Grossen & Salazar Orvig, 2011). The chapter opens with a cross-section of theoretical and philosophical conceptions of intersubjectivity. This is followed by a discussion of the intersubjective foundations of collective intentionality and collective community action. The core thesis here is that emergent community and agency are always-already situated within intersubjective relations.

Intersubjective Relations

The nature of intersubjectivity is highly contested within phenomenology, cognitive psychology, and community psychology (see Gillespie & Cornish, 2010). It intersects significantly with the equally enigmatic notions of the self, relationality, and community. There is an abundance of work on intersubjectivity, much of which is based on relations between pre-given "things" or "entities." For many authors, intersubjectivity is framed in terms of relations among "singular beings" (Nancy, 1991, p. 58), "individual consciousness[es]" (Bakhtin, 1963/1984, p. 88), or "*pluralities of monads*" (Husserl, 1950/1999, p. 140), while others emphasize the "primacy of relations" among interdependent actors (e.g., Dépelteau, 2008). And, despite arguments to the effect that "inter-actors" *co*-emerge within social relations, the ethereal presence of individual consciousnesses, subjectivities, or singularities lingers. Marková (2003) points out that there are two distinct ontologies of intersubjectivity, alternatively framed in terms of "existentially separated" beings versus "irreducible dyad[s]" (p. 250). She concludes that a key aspect of intersubjectivity involves reducing the "distance" between *I* and others.

Duranti (2010) suggests that intersubjectivity forms the basis for theorizing how people "interpret, organize, and reproduce" their social lives (p. 2). Intersubjectivity is firmly embedded in constructionist, representational, dialogical, and interactionist approaches, among others, but its intellectual roots run deep within (continental) philosophy. And, furthermore, intersubjective relations are embedded in community life, regardless of whether it is defined as a geospatial unit, a socio-symbolic construction, a resource network, or a social field. This chapter addresses the problem of intersubjectivity as it pertains to the relational emergence and existence of community (see Grinnell, 1983). In advance of taking up these issues, it is

important to first consider some of the interpretive nuances of intersubjectivity. The following material briefly explores (a) the (inter)relational constitution of the social self, (b) the conceptual complexity of intersubjectivity, and (c) the notion of a continuum of differential modes of intersubjectivity.

The Intersubjective (Social) Self and Perspective Taking

Intersubjectivity is entwined with the relational foundations of the self, or, as Nancy (1996/2000) states, it is "the 'with' that constitutes Being" (p. 30). It is commonly observed that the social self, quite literally, cannot emerge in the absence of others. Sense of self is inextricably bound up with one's disposition toward others and the perceived attitude of others toward oneself. This speaks to the inherent sociality of all lived experiences and shared meanings, which is at the crux of dialogical thinking (see Clegg, 2011). However, reflections on the social elaboration of the self are not confined to dialogical thinkers (Bakhtin, 1963/1984; Gadamer, 1960/1989). Proponents of diverse perspectives discuss the emergence of the self in and through micro-level relational dynamics. Mead (1934) contends that the self arises and exists perpetually in relation and in motion. Bakhtin (1990) similarly states that the *I* cannot "find" itself in isolation, but only in, for, and through others (p. 33). Hence, self-consciousness is entwined with an intersubjective awareness of those with whom one enters into relations of co-existence and co-action.

Dialogical thinkers routinely point to the relational basis and nature of human (social) consciousness. Hermans (2002) claims that the many voices or "I-positions" within the dialogical self grow out of the diverse life experiences and events that contribute to its continued (trans)formation (p. 147). His work expresses the multi-voiced character of both the relational self and the internal dialogue (see Hicks, 2000). More importantly, the polyphonic character of the self is indicative of "*intersubjective interchange*" (Hermans, 2002, p. 148). Hermans (2001) also raises the notion of "collective voices," whereby social language influences individual voices (p. 262). And, in keeping with the inherent complexity of the self (the "other-in-me"), Grossen and Salazar Orvig (2011) suggest that Subject–Alter relations operate on "personal," "interpersonal," and "transpersonal" (i.e., institutional) levels (p. 497). The authors indicate that (transpersonal) social or community structures contribute to the development and stability of the self. Further to this point, Sedikides, Gaertner, and O'Mara

(2011) make mention of three intersecting dimensions of the self: *individual* attributes, *relational* bonds, and characteristics shared with a larger group or *collective* (p. 98).

The socio-cognitive process of shifting or transposing oneself into another's position is, for some, a seminal facet of intersubjectivity. Mead (1934) claims that attitude taking and reflexive thinking allow social actors to interpret others' gestures and to make adjustments within "real-time" interactional contexts. Individual selves indirectly experience their own actions (i.e., self-relation) through the processes of role taking and responding to others' behavior. According to Mead, the self develops in and through social (inter)actions that are performed in conjunction with the process of recursive perspective taking. It is as a result of these relational dynamics that the individual acquires a sense of self (as a social object) and, thereby, stands over against other selves. Mead explicitly states that individuals become self-consciousness in relation *to* others. In a similar vein, Buber (1965) believes that the realization of one's own "self-being," as distinct from that of others, occurs through the act of "setting at a distance" (pp. 60, 71). He contends that mutual relation is made possible by this process of "distancing" (i.e., otherness). Therefore, *separation* and *relation* are dynamically embedded in the lived experience of "being-with-others."

Furthermore, language plays a critical role in the genesis of the self and the process of internalization (see Glock, 1986). Vygotsky (1978) defines "internalization" as the transformation of an "*interpersonal*" activity into an "*intrapersonal*" process (p. 57). This idea is clearly evident in his theorization of "inner speech," which occurs when socialized communication is internalized (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 27). Mead (1934) similarly refers to thinking as "inner conversation" or, more accurately, as an internal "conversation of gestures" (p. 141). Internal conversation is significantly embedded in the rehearsal of prospective lines of social action and the interpretation of others' behavior. Mead (1934) indicates that the self is subdivided into many "different selves" based on our relationships with other members of the community (p. 142). Hence, the dynamics of inner dialogue are intersubjectively constituted through symbolically mediated interaction, attitude taking, and social action.

To *be* in the world is to *be in relation*, and it is by virtue of "being-with-others" that community is instantiated within the self as a conscious object of attention and action. According to Mead (1934), individuals assume the attitude of other co-actors when engaging in cooperative joint action.

And, in like fashion, the organized attitudes of the larger group or community enter into consciousness through the multifaceted process of assuming the perspective of "the generalized other" (Mead, 1934, p. 154). Interestingly, Taylor (1991) takes issue with Mead's (1934) contention that the self emerges principally through role taking and response adjustment. Taylor argues that the *I* acquires a coherent identity within everyday contexts of communication and conversation. Much like Bakhtin (1963/1984, 1990), he indicates that the self arises and acquires its own voice through participative dialogic interaction. It is important to consider the involvement of intersubjectivity in the relational emergence of the self, community, and agency.

Varied Conceptions of Intersubjectivity

Clearly, intersubjectivity is a highly complex and multifaceted idea. This is evident in the many ways that intersubjective processes have been conceptualized: sympathy, "empathic projection" (Stein, 1917/1970, p. 25), "consociates" (Schutz, 1970, p. 170), "co-experience" (Bakhtin, 1990, p. 61), or "co-being" (Nancy, 1996/2000, p. 38). Regardless of terminological and definitional vagaries, intersubjectivity is foundational to lived experience. Grinnell (1983) defines intersubjectivity as meaningful reciprocal interaction and, as such, it is often linked to the emergence of shared representations and meanings. Gallese (2003) similarly remarks that self–other relations are shaped within a shared intersubjective milieu or "manifold" that facilitates the mutual understanding of others' thoughts, feelings, and actions (p. 517). A key point here is the essential involvement of intersubjective experiences in the pursuit of common meanings and purposive actions. The following sections explore varied interpretations of intersubjective processes. This work offers competing views of what it means to be in relation with others.

Being with and Toward Others

The general notion of "being-with-one-another" is elemental to intersubjective sociality and lived relation. Heidegger (1927/1962) observes that "Being-with" is an existential condition of *Dasein*'s relationship to others in the world (pp. 149, 156). Even moments of aloneness do not abrogate the fundamental *withness* of *Dasein*'s "being." *Dasein* is always-already in a world of plural others, and "Being towards Others" constitutes an autonomous and non-reducible aspect of one's "being" (Heidegger,

1927/1962, p. 162). Having said this, *Dasein* can assume differential modes of comportment toward others ("solicitude"), ranging from aloofness, distance, disguise, and "closedness" to more authentic experiences of empathy, hermeneutic understanding, and "openness" (Heidegger, 1927/1962, pp. 161–162). This illustrates *Dasein*'s varied experiences of intersubjective proximity, or openness to others.

Heidegger (1927/1962) remarks that, for those who may be proximal but not necessarily open to others, a particular type of relationship is needed in order for them to "come closer." In light of this "unsociability" or indifference to others, he raises the notion of "empathy" (Heidegger, 1927/1962, pp. 158, 162). According to Heidegger (1927/1962), *Dasein* is "for the sake of Others" and, as such, has an understanding of and empathic feeling about others (pp. 160–161). More importantly, empathy does not constitute "Being-with" but, rather, is made possible by it. Also, Heidegger (1953/2000) makes a distinction between the "constant gathering" or "gatheredness" of what belongs together versus a mere "piling up" (pp. 136, 142). These interrelated concepts offer a useful way of thinking about the communalization of lived experiences, intersubjective relations, and collective actions, as distinct from a collection of relatively disconnected individuals lacking in any meaningful relationship with one another.

Husserl (1950/1999), too, has contributed to the philosophical discourse on intersubjectivity, most notably in the *Fifth Cartesian Meditation*. He discusses the matter of empathy in relation to the transcendental experience of another *Ego*. Husserl refers to the separation between one's concrete "being" and that of the other. And, to the extent that all experiences are peculiarly one's own, Husserl (1950/1999) states that others are accorded existence by virtue of "being constituted *in me* as others" (pp. 95, 128). The other is never truly known or encountered, but rather exists as an object of consciousness (Haworth, 2014). And, furthermore, it is through the harmonious synthesis of individual (i.e., monadic) intentions that an "*intersubjective* sphere" emerges (Husserl, 1950/1999, p. 107). This is the basis upon which a transcendentally intersubjective world is made accessible, "there-for-me" and everyone else (Husserl, 1950/1999, p. 59). The existence of both the other and the "objective" world is constituted within the psychic being of each individual. Likewise, a social community can become intentionally and intersubjectively communalized among a plurality of monads who share a sense of connectedness despite being separate psychophysical egos.

Emergent Meanings and Understandings

One of the most noteworthy aspects of intersubjectivity is its involvement in emergent meanings. This is an issue of considerable theoretical attention, particularly among symbolic-interactionist, constructionist, and dialogical thinkers. Bakhtin (1963/1984) broaches the notion of intersubjectivity with respect to separate consciousnesses meeting in "dialogic communion" (p. 88). He conceives of life as a perpetual flow of events through which individuals enter into relation with one another on multiple planes of experience. Bakhtin discusses the relational emergence of intersubjective meanings within the dialogic interaction of diverse voices. His representation of intersubjectivity, or perhaps more accurately "co-authorship," involves an endless process of coming together and reducing distance (see Marková, 2003, p. 256).

Bakhtin (1963/1984, 1990) offers an image of people who bring together their unique thoughts, meanings, and words within contexts of dialogic interaction. Meanings arise in consort with unfolding life events and dialogic relations. For both he and Buber (1965, 1947/2002), the dynamic of entering into relation holds the potential to generate novel, irreducible ideas and events. Intersubjectivity is realized co-relationally and, so, emergent meanings happen, arise, and exist in the "between," which Buber (1965) characterizes as an ontologically real sphere that does not belong to any one of the participants, nor to all (p. 75). He views the "between" as an existential (i.e., personal) relation that is distinct in nature from belonging to a social group. Consciousness and meaning are played out between those who engage in dialogic relationships. There is no implication of fused consciousnesses, only continuous moments of co-authored meanings that arise within self–other dialogue. Indeed, for Bakhtin (1986/1993), the presence of the other, who is situated in an axiological position *outside* that of the *I*, is essential to intersubjective processes of self-reflection and meaning making.

On a related theme, Gadamer (1960/1989) discusses intersubjectivity in terms of the prospective achievement of shared understandings through an awareness of the other's "horizon." Understanding is predicated on becoming familiar with another person's concrete position, perspective, or viewpoint. True dialogue is not concerned explicitly with someone else's subjectivity *per se*, but rather with the pursuit of common understandings. Gadamer expresses the familiar notion that, by placing oneself in others' positions or by locating their respective horizons, it is possible to build an awareness of their unique particularity or otherness. However,

the act of "transposing" oneself into another's situation does not necessarily garner genuine insight into or agreement over any particular issue (Gadamer, 1960/1989, p. 305). The latter requires a more substantive commitment to intersubjective hermeneutic dialogue. Meaning emerges in the process of opening up to someone else in dialogic relation and by moving beyond one's own and others' individualized positions.

Gadamer's (1960/1989) thoughts on dialogue intersect somewhat with Bakhtin's (1963/1984, 1990) contention that, by experiencing the uniqueness of the other, it is possible to expand one's own horizon. In the process of coming together in authentic communication, interlocutors can potentially build a sense of sharedness and generate novel communal relations. A similar view is implicit in the treatment of community as a "collective we" that emerges among individuals who enter into mutual lived relation and develop a common consciousness (see Taylor, 1991). This mode of intersubjective relation involves thinking or communing along with others while co-experiencing the same life event. Gadamer's (1960/1989) ideas form the basis of Smith's (1993) discussion of a "hermeneutical community" characterized by shared bonds, open dialogue, mutuality, and personal development (p. 388). Here, again, the meaning of community is bound up with the "*I*-to-*We*" aporia.

Language, Typification, and the Social World

Intersubjectivity figures prominently in the phenomenological interpretation of language, shared meanings, and social reality. Berger and Luckmann (1966) pay particular attention to linguistic communication in their book, *The Social Construction of Reality*. They contend, as does Schutz (1970), that reality is socially constituted and apprehended through language. Berger and Luckmann (1966) refer to language as an expansive "objective repository" of meanings and experiences that allows individuals to "typify" their lived experiences (p. 52). Herein lies the inimitable linkage between intersubjective meaning-making activities and the co-creation of a common world. Symbolically mediated communication is elemental to the linguistic objectification of reality, world-building activities, and collective agency. Berger and Luckmann (1966) argue that, through reciprocal relations, actors become involved in a process of negotiation that facilitates "intersubjective closeness" (pp. 45, 52). This has the conjoint effect of assisting individuals in acquiring a sense of self, developing a deeper sense of the other's subjective meaning, and acquiring an expanded orientation to the surrounding world.

According to Schutz (1970), intersubjectivity refers to what is *common*, particularly in a socio-cognitive sense. The world into which people are born is intersubjectively "common to all" and widely "taken-for-granted," in part due to pre-constituted systems of classification and orientation—what Schutz (1970) terms "typifications" (pp. 83, 163). And, while the social world is largely not of our making, it offers a shared environment within which we can enter into communicative relations with each other. Everyday experiences reinforce, to varying degrees, actors' impressions that they comprehend one another well enough to engage in meaningful interaction. Much like Buber (1965), Schutz speaks of instances in which *I* turns to the other in vivid presence, thereby giving rise to the sociality of mutual relation. These are the fundamental ingredients that allow members of a group or a community to experience each other's subjective meanings. The basic act of apprehending the other in lived relation is the beginning of a "Thou-orientation" which, when reciprocated, can give rise to a "pure We-relationship" (Schutz, 1970, pp. 184–186). In the course of encountering one another and taking part in each other's lives, there is the potential for hermeneutic understanding.

The notion of "We" expresses a mode of intersubjective relation that can transition from reciprocal awareness into a much more substantive social relationship. For Schutz (1970), a "common stream of consciousness" can develop through the coordination of individuals' distinct lived experiences (p. 188). The emergence of a "We-relationship" is facilitated by processes of symbolic communication and role taking in "face-to-face" relations with others. Furthermore, intersubjective relations cannot develop without shifting for a time into someone else's frame of reference. In becoming present to one another, co-participants can build meaningful relationships through which they become experientially involved in each other's lives. And, if individuals are reasonably able to interpret others' intentions and experiences, they can co-exist *within* one another's subjective meanings (Schutz, 1970, p. 187). Buber (1965) similarly states that, by making the other truly "present," dialogic partners can come to know or imagine what the other thinks, feels, and intends—so much so that they share a common life (p. 70).

Differential Levels or Degrees of Intersubjectivity

The nature of intersubjectivity continues to evoke significant contestation and debate (see Talamo & Pozzi, 2011). Duranti (2010) has endeavored to explicate a more comprehensive treatment of intersubjectivity than is commonly encountered in the social sciences. One of his claims is that intersubjectivity should not be limited to shared understanding, despite ubiquitous observations to this effect. Duranti makes a distinction between individuals coming to an agreement, as compared to gaining insight into each other's perspectives (see Gadamer, 1960/1989). He contends that there is no simultaneity of agreement in human association any more than intersubjectivity necessarily means sharing the same disposition toward something. Intersubjectivity involves acquiring an appreciation for one another's conceivably quite different positions. Duranti further purports that intersubjectivity informs an objectified sense of others and the surrounding world while leaving open the possibility that people will come to realize that their views may not be shared.

More recently, Benjamin (2015) has broached the subjectivity–intersubjectivity aporia through the discussion of relational ontology. He questions the presumption of antecedent singularities entering into relation. For Benjamin, the substantive basis of everyday life is plural and relational, whereas singularity is a derivative thereof. Put differently, plurality is the foundational condition of relational social existence that constitutes singularities. He emphasizes the inherently relational and irreducible nature of lived experience. This points to the continuous unfolding of relation(s) punctuated by moments of emergent singularity that are likewise refashioned unceasingly. Benjamin offers a reworked interpretation of singularity as an outcome of relational dynamics. His ideas concerning the primacy of relations are consistent with "being" as a perpetual process of "becoming" (see Bakhtin, 1986/1993; Gadamer, 1960/1989). And, in like terms, community can be treated as a complex fabric of ongoing relation within which singularities emerge and re-emerge in their interactions with one another.

Numerous concepts have been proffered in an effort to represent the diverse ways in which individuals understand or experience others' perspectives. In so doing, authors have identified differential modes of intersubjectivity (see Duranti, 2010). This is evident in the contrasting images of a "community of singular beings" (i.e., without essence) versus an immanent social bond or communal fusion (see Hiddleston, 2005). It is

conceivable that varied types or degrees of intersubjectivity can be framed in terms of a continuum ranging from relatively limited, absent, or "inauthentic" relations to more intimate involvements in others' lives (e.g., empathy). In reflecting on the principle of a conceptual continuum, it is useful to first consider Derrida's (1978) "community of the question" (p. 80). His and others' thoughts surrounding the deconstruction of community are directed at the "'common' [*commun*], the as-one [*commeun*]" of fused life (Derrida & Ferraris, 2001, p. 25). Nancy (1991), in turn, contends that "being" is always "co-being" whereby finite singularities "compear" to one another within relations of co-presence and shared communication (p. 39). He is particularly opposed to the notion of emergent bonds. Such remarks give one pause to wonder what kind of sociality might be found in "a community of the question" or whether the word "community" should even be used in this manner (Gaon, 2005).

Clearly, there are many instances in which individuals are only minimally engaged with others' thoughts or feelings, as compared to relationships of a more significant or substantive nature. A similar theme is reflected in Heidegger's (1953/2000) distinction between an "ungenuine" state of "seeming" and a more authentic condition of "*unconcealment*" or "appearing" to others (pp. 103, 107). Duranti (2010), too, makes mention of individuals who pass through the world in a *reflex-like* manner. The continuous flow of lived experience brings people into contact in a multiplicity of ways—sometimes only in passing and at other times in deeply felt mutuality. Notwithstanding minimal levels of self–other engagement, the simple act of engaging with others, even briefly, offers the potential for a shared sense of meaning to unfold (Buber, 1947/2002). This speaks to the variable nature or intensity of intersubjective relations.

Notwithstanding the Derridean notion of interrupted "We-ness," it is important to consider the nature of intersubjective relations that arise between those who become involved to a greater extent in others' lived experiences. Various authors have discussed the issue of how (or whether) it is possible for individuals to move beyond their own particular places or positions and acquire a deeper understanding of the other. Bakhtin (1990) refers to the act of "co-experiencing" someone else's life *from within* (pp. 61, 73). In the process of co-experiencing or empathizing *into* the other, however, the contemplator and the object of attention can co-exist completely (Bakhtin, 1990, p. 79). The act of empathizing in this fashion raises the prospect of merged horizons and the forfeiture of

one's distinct position outside that of the other. In Bakhtin's (1990) view, this type of fused relation nullifies the potential for a meaningful dialogic exchange of ideas, meanings, and understandings (i.e., polyphony and multi-perspectivity). He makes a further distinction between "empathizing" and "*sympathetic* co-experiencing" (Bakhtin, 1990, p. 81). In essence, sympathetic co-experience, unlike empathy, means apprehending the other transgrediently as another *I*.

Crossley (1996) addresses a related issue through the discussion of "egological" versus "radical" intersubjectivity (p. 23). With respect to the former, participants maintain a state of reflective self-awareness while projecting into others' lived experiences. Crossley (1996) describes this as an "analogical transfer" of one's own experiences and consciousness *onto* the other (p. 6). Radical intersubjectivity, by comparison, is based on Buber's (1923/1958) "*I–Thou*" relation of complete mutuality with the other (p. 11). Notably, Crossley (1996) describes radical intersubjectivity as "an irreducible interworld" of mutual understandings (p. 24). For Buber (1965), true dialogue transpires "between" fully present participants who together generate a novel, ontologically real sphere. Openness to others in the fashion of "*I–Thou*" relations gives rise to a nexus of interactions that binds individuals together. The conjoint act of coming together in dialogic relation approximates Buber's conception of (intersubjective) community (Friedman, 1999). In Buberian (1947/2002) terms, the development of a "true" community rests on members being mutually present to one another, albeit without merging.

The intersubjective act of projecting or transposing oneself into another's position has evoked varied intellectual and ethical considerations. For some, what is most at issue is the potential fusion of self and other or the prospective emergence of a totalizing form of community. This raises related questions about the sovereignty of the *I* when intersubjectivity approaches the point of merging with or displacing the other. Academic discourse on these matters offers differential interpretations of (a) individual subjectivity, (b) intersubjective access to others' innermost or ownmost experiences, and (c) community intersubjectivity or "We-ness" (see Cronick, 2002). As will become apparent in the following discussion, intersubjective relations are intimately involved in the theorization of collective intentionality and community agency.

Collective Community Action

There is an extensive body of work dealing with varied aspects of community agency, most notably collective intentionality, common interests, and coordinated action. In the latter portion of the twentieth century, a number of sociologists suggested that communities were experiencing reduced levels of cohesiveness and autonomy (see Davis, 1991; Warren, 1978). At around the same time, Tilly (1973) posed the rather compelling and provocative question: "Do communities act?" (p. 209). Since then, much has been written about the nature and emergence of community action processes. Proponents of the field-interactional approach typically link community agency to the convergence of diverse intentions and lines of action. However, the capacity to act together on behalf of the community is not explainable solely on the basis of common concerns or values; it also rests on shared understandings of events, issues, and prospective actions (Gauri, Woolcock, & Desai, 2013). Collective community agency involves an intersubjectively felt sense of others and the larger group. It is with this in mind that Peperzak (2000) considers the possibility that intersubjectivity facilitates the synthesis of individual and communal modes of togetherness (p. 55). The following sections address two interrelated issues: the relationship between individual and collective intentionality *and* the capacity of communities to act in a collectivized fashion.

Thinking, Willing, and Acting Together

Theoretical perspectives on community agency typically address the question of how diverse individual actions converge into some form of cooperative endeavor. In response to such issues, community is sometimes represented as a collective actor or *plural subject*, as contrasted with the treatment of joint agency as coordinated *individual* actions or intentions. Tönnies (1887/1957) long ago discussed the connection between a "higher-order" will and collective agency. A key element of his thinking about "social entities" involves common volition. He suggests that individual action tendencies can coalesce into an overarching social will. Tönnies (1887/1957) goes as far as to say that a corporate organization can be thought of as a "collective person" imbued with a "unified will" (pp. 243, 250). He views these social entities or phenomena as co-creations of human will, thought, and action.

Tönnies (1887/1957) comments on the dynamic interplay between individual and collective wills in the formation of social entities. In effect, social phenomena are intersubjectively thought of and willed into existence as social–psychological constructions. Tönnies (1887/1957) endows corporate entities with rational, volitional, and agential capacities (p. 250). Thus conceived, the actions taken by representative individuals or groups (e.g., councils) are direct expressions of common will. Tönnies treats corporate entities or (political) communities as socially constituted, existent collective social phenomena that possess "human-like" will and agency. Weber (1978), in contrast, espouses the position that only individuals are capable of subjectively meaningful (e.g., rational purposive) action. And, although people may well conceive of or act toward organizations as if they are "real" entities, he insists that "social action" is the sole province of human beings. The countervailing positions of methodological "holism" and "individualism" are represented in the contemporary literature on collective action.

Communicative Interaction, Shared Meanings, and Community

Miller (1992) contends that too great an emphasis has been placed on rational choice theory and strategic rationality within the study of collective action. He calls for a broader understanding of collective agency, including a wider recognition of the key role that communicative (inter) action plays in the emergence of shared interests, identities, and bonds. Miller (1992) distinguishes between two conceptions of community (agency), alternately grounded in communalized bonds or calculative self-interest. He pays particular attention to the former view of joint agency, which is closely aligned with both communitarian principles and Habermas' (1984) notion of "*lifeworld*" (p. 13). Clearly, cooperative action can be motivated by personal benefit. This is consistent with Tönnies' (1887/1957) suggestion that strategic intentions and instrumental actions constitute the predominant mode of relation within the world of *Gesellschaft*. If agency is understood narrowly in terms of utility maximization or transactional exchange, however, the meaning of community is reduced to instrumental relations among relatively atomized (singular) individuals.

Miller (1992), among others, points to the interplay between communicative action, common bonds, and collective community agency. And, to the extent that individual actors engage in the communalization of

shared meanings and experiences, they may come to see themselves as members of a community. This shifts attention away from explaining social phenomena narrowly in terms of the actions or properties of individuals. Connor (2011) similarly suggests that there is a need for alternative interpretations of intentionality when considering the dynamics of community-level transformative action. He, much like Miller (1992), recognizes that emergent interaction processes and social relationships can give rise to novel forms of community action. These remarks draw attention to the agential dynamics of collective willing, thinking, and acting.

The theorization of joint (social) action intersects with intersubjectivity, particularly within the area of dialogical theory. Shotter (1998) refers to the situational embeddedness of co-actors who respond to one another as they act "into" contexts of emergent meaning and understanding (p. 188). He emphasizes the sharedness of life events in which individuals do not act singularly *from within* but instead become engaged in the co-relational dynamics of collective agency. There is a distinctly interactionist tone in Shotter's conception of how individuals are drawn into ongoing processes of dialogue, interpretation, and responsiveness. Based on this line of thinking, community can be viewed as a fluid relational context of shared social experiences that may, over time, take on more lasting structural or patterned features.

Language represents an essential element of organized purposive action (Mead, 1934). As Ahearn (2001) points out, "[p]eople do things with words," including the meaningful creation of community (p. 110). Language and dialogue are implicit in the co-construction of meaning and social reality (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Dialogue can also facilitate change through its involvement in collective action processes. From a dialogical perspective, collective agency can grow out of relational contexts in which individuals' ideas, thoughts, and words come together and interact with one another. "Betweenness" is associated with the relational emergence and irreducibility of collective social phenomena and community action. In this sense, neither community nor agency can be understood simply in terms of the individual actions out of which they arise. Hence, the "between" (e.g., Buber, 1965; Shotter, 1998) offers a useful way of thinking about collective community agency.

According to Gergen (2009a), meaning is a "relational achievement," (p. 11); so, too, is collective action. Both he and Taylor (1991) share a preoccupation with the intersection of meaning-making processes and dialogic relations. Gergen's (2009a) dialogical approach focuses attention on

the embeddedness of meaning in social relationships. He shifts the discourse on intersubjectivity away from simple interchanges among independent actors by localizing emergent meanings within dialogic interaction itself. And, to the extent that dialogue can shape meanings, it is implicated in collective action. The relational dynamics of free-flowing dialogic processes have the potential to generate new insights that facilitate community agency (see Isaacs, 2001). This is consistent with Gergen, McNamee, and Barrett's (2001) reference to "transformative dialogue" which, they contend, can engender common understandings and coordinated actions (p. 682).

Community is woven seamlessly into the continuity of life events but, for some, it is an ontologically distinct complex of social relations that exists somehow apart from, but not independent of, individual thoughts and actions. Communities come into "being" through the thoughts and actions of individuals who are themselves held together in some fashion. Buber (1947/2002) describes community as a genuinely mutual way of "being-with-one-another," which can be likened to Edmund Husserl's notion of *Liebesgemeinschaft* or "community of love" (see Buckley, 1996, p. 116). Buckley (2000) indicates that the members of an "authentic community" possess an emergent "*collective insight*" into the nature of communalized activities and the way in which their actions fit together with those of others (p. 107). Given that this particular mode of community grows out of individuals' relations with one another, it cannot exist apart from its co-producers (see Bessant, 2011). A similar theme is evident in contemporary research on how diverse interests and lines of action converge around the pursuit of collective goals (e.g., Aigner, Raymond, & Smidt, 2002). In effect, the reciprocal processes of thinking, acting, and living together imbue the community with an irreducible quality.

Collective Intentions, Intentionality, and Agency

Philosophers and social theorists have proffered varied ideas about the nature of collective agency, most notably with respect to action tendencies. Analytical interpretations of joint agency quite commonly address the issue of individual versus collective intentionality (see Coleman, 1986; Zaibert, 2003). A further distinction should be made between the action of a collective (or community) and collective action (see Ware, 1988). Some authors argue that joint activity is built up out of interrelated individual acts, while others espouse a "first person plural perspective"

(Bardsley, 2007, p. 141). Searle (1990), for instance, distinguishes between behavior stemming from "I-intentions" and "we-intentions," the latter of which he refers to as "primitive phenomen[a]" (pp. 401, 406). He suggests that a key determining aspect of intentionality involves cognitive states. Although individual actions are integral elements of joint activity, Searle remarks that collective intentions are irreducible to singular intentions insofar as the former constitute a distinct mode of intending attitude. Even though participants may focus on performing discrete elements of a complex task, their actions are presumed to be motivated by a "we-intention." As Searle (1990) points out, the successful functioning of collective intentionality presumes some "sense of community" (p. 413). In actual practice, then, intentionality can be both *singular* and *plural*.

One of the key facets of the discourse on collective action involves how participants view their agential intentions in relation to a common goal or outcome. Kutz (2000) discusses the matter of "participatory intention" in terms of actors' thoughts about their own contributions to a collective endeavor (p. 3). In other words, individuals engage in joint actions through the performance of specific elements of a larger task. Bratman (2009) broaches a similar issue through the concept of "modest sociality" or limited forms of shared intentional action (p. 149). Joint agency, in this sense, is based on common intentions and actions that have been interpersonally structured, coordinated, and organized. Bratman (2009) observes that "*our* activity" is embedded in each actor's plan, which attests to the reductive nature of his approach (p. 155). This way of thinking about collective agency is akin to List and Pettit's (2011) discussion of "the distributed 'we,'" as distinct from a single group agent (p. 194).

Of the many ways in which collective action can be theorized, the "*plural subject*" is perhaps the most provocative (Gilbert, 2006, p. 12). The theorization of "We-ness" has met with criticism on the grounds that it implies the presence of a "unified" group of people who share a common way of thinking, feeling, and acting. Wiesenfeld (1996) equates the notion of "We" with an overly idealized and unnuanced understanding of community life—one that tends to minimize conflict, opposition, and difference. She contends that community is built up out of multifold relationships, networks, exchange mechanisms, and a host of other social–psychological factors. Wiesenfeld (1996) calls for an increased focus on diversity when thinking about community in order to better appreciate the multifold viewpoints and "*microbelongings*" that co-exist alongside shared interests, dispositions, and needs (p. 342). The inherent suggestion

is that a more comprehensive interpretation of collective community agency incorporates individuals' dispositions toward their respective actions, the joint enterprise, and the community-at-large.

The idea of "We-ness" raises the matter of "supra-individual" intentional action. On this point, Taylor (1991) makes a distinction between coordinated and dialogic action, the latter of which involves "common rhythming" and some form of integrated collective agent stemming from mutual understandings (p. 311). Rhythm among dialogic partners generates a shared space of meaning making and prospective action (see Gergen et al., 2001). A similar issue is implicit in Gilbert's (2006) discussion of the "joint commitment" to act together as a single entity (p. 9), which harkens back to Tönnies' (1887/1957) description of a "collective person." Gilbert (2006) draws attention to the binding together of several individual wills, which gives rise to a unifying intention and mutual obligation among all of the participants. Hence, the collective agent acts in and through all of the members such that they "intend *as a body*" (Gilbert, 2009, p. 167), which is clearly distinguishable from Bratman's (2009, 2014) "modest sociality."

Gilbert (2009) claims that, when "joint commitment" is in play, the participants' actions "*emulate*" as nearly as possible that of a single entity with a particular intention (p. 180). Put differently, a jointly committed and co-constructed action approximates the situation of a singular person intending to carry out the task at hand, where the action tendency of this "plural subject" is irreducible to singular intentions. Vandenberghe (2007) likewise makes mention of an "autophenomenological" process through which the members of a group (or community) are constituted into "a social supra-individual subjectivity" (p. 302). More recently, List and Pettit (2011) have referred to this particular form of group agency as a "corporate 'we,'" which can be viewed as "a single, unified center of attitude and action" (p. 194).

A key theoretical facet of *joint* and *group* agency involves the problem of explaining how (or whether) individuals' thoughts and intentions can move from the perspective of "I" (singular) to that of "We" (plural). This so-called "I-to-We Issue" requires an analytical shift from individual- to group-level agency, as implied in the oft-mentioned expression "acting together" (Pettit & Schweikard, 2006, p. 24). As already noted, some authors conceptualize collective action as involving a number of individuals who set out to enact a joint undertaking by performing their respective aspects of the larger task (see Bratman, 2007, 2014). Pettit and Schweikard

(2006) refer to such contexts as "severally intending," where each participant possesses an individual intentional state within the context of the common enterprise (p. 29). The authors conclude that joint action extends beyond situations where different individuals simply bring about a conjoint effect (e.g., coincidentally), but they do not accept that all such circumstances constitute the emergence of a plural ("We") subject. However, Pettit and Schweikard (2006) acknowledge the possibility that individual actors can, under certain conditions, generate novel collective agents that possess intentional dispositions differing from those of their individual participants (p. 33). Notwithstanding such observations, joint agency need not be interpreted as a fusion of minds, given that it can rest on a common definition of the prospective (collective) action.

Discussions of the "*plural subject*" (Gilbert, 2006, p. 12) or "collective subjectivities" (Vandenberghe, 2007, pp. 295–296) raise the problem of theorizing collective intentionality without resorting to some form of "group mind." Donati and Archer (2015) proffer the notion of the "Relational Subject," which is deemed central to individual and collective intentionality (p. 53). The authors contend that this concept can be applied to either *singular* or *collective* social subjects, both of which are "*relationally constituted*" (Donati & Archer, 2015, p. 58). The essential point is that actors are relational social beings (see also Gergen, 2009b). Simply put, social relations are directly implicated in the personal identities of all those who may be termed "relational subjects," as well as their individual and collective actions. Donati and Archer (2015) go further in suggesting that a collective relational subject (e.g., community) exists only to the extent that it takes on the character of a "We-relation," where all of the participants define it as real (p. 59). The "We" emerges out of interaction, but, more significantly, it is entwined with personal and collective identities, as well as joint social action.

In summary, the theorization of intersubjectivity and collective agency is particularly relevant to the study of community and development theory. Westoby and Owen (2009) address this matter through "the sociality of community practice," which forms the basis of their discussion of purposive social action (p. 59). The authors point to the importance of building interactional contexts that focus attention on the community through the deliberate use of language and action. Much like Wilkinson (1991), Westoby and Owen (2009) take note of intersubjective relations and interaction processes that contribute to meaningful community practice. Sociality facilitates agency through intersubjective processes, networking,

relationship building, and the structuring of community action. This approach is premised on dialogical "*I–Thou*" relations (Buber, 1923/1958) that engage community members in transformative action. Westoby and Owen (2009) contend that intersubjective thoughts and actions are fundamental to community. Furthermore, community praxis emerges through the negotiation of meanings that contribute to heightened conditions of mutual engagement and prospective collective action (Anyidoho, 2010).

Concluding Remarks

Theorists and philosophers alike have offered multifarious explanations of intersubjectivity and its involvement in the dynamics of relational social life. In particular, authors offer varied conceptions of inter-actor separation or closeness within intersubjective relations. Levinas (1979) remarks that, in "face-to-face" conversations, interlocutors remain "absolute" within the context of their relations with one another—alterity is neither absorbed nor internalized (p. 195). Nancy (1991), too, emphasizes the *unclosable* distance between singular finite beings, while Bakhtin (1990) and Gadamer (1960/1989) are careful to avoid any pretext of fusion among dialogic partners. Interestingly, Bakhtin (1990) makes mention of relational contexts in which separate consciousnesses come together in a social "*chorus*" or "rhythm" (p. 121), which blurs the boundaries of individual thought and agency. On the latter point, much has been written about communalized intentions and actions ("We-ness"), including Tönnies' (1887/1957) notion of a unified collective will and related work on the "plural subject" (see List & Pettit, 2011). This expansive body of work expresses diverse approaches to (inter)subjectivity, self–other relations, and collective action.

The foregoing material illustrates some of the many ways that intersubjectivity is implicated in the theorization of community and agency, including themes such as symbolic communication, shared perspectives, and collective intentionality. One of the most promising avenues of thought in this area revolves around the idea of "betweenness" and the contention that something novel is created in and through intersubjective relations. In light of postmodern deconstructionism, Nancy (1992) suggests that the "in" of the "in between" or "being-in-common" may well be all that remains with which to re-conceptualize the meaning of community (pp. 390, 393). And, on a related issue, Benjamin (2015) asks "[b]etween what

are there relations?" (p. 21). Both authors affirm the importance of reflecting on the nature of the sociality or relationality that exists within or arises out of this so-called *between*. And, although the idea of "betweenness" is commonly raised in conjunction with intersubjective relational dynamics, it is equally applicable to the study of community and collective agency.

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Afterword

Much has been written about the many facets of community and, undoubtedly, its meaning(s) will remain open to continued contestation and debate. The inherent complexity of the community concept is reflected in the multifarious theories that have accumulated over the years. And, although no single approach could ever hope to capture the highly nuanced nature of community, it is useful to explore analytical themes that underpin diverse perspectives. Of late, there is a growing appreciation for the relational bases of community and agency (Bessant, 2014). This book examines selected community approaches through the lens of social relationality and related aspects of processism, intersubjectivity, and emergentism. The core thesis throughout is that community both exists and arises within social relations—it constitutes a confluence of interrelated *processes* and emergent *effects*.

In basic terms, community can be viewed as a relational nexus of multiple, intersecting forms and intensities of associational life. As Calhoun (1998) points out, community is "a mode of relating, variable in extent" (p. 391). All of the theories considered in this book offer insight into the experience of community, however it may be construed—whether imagined, symbolized, dialogized, constructed, or represented. Each approach brings with it a particular understanding of community as a relational *process*, *event*, *structure*, *entity*, or *phenomenon*. Notwithstanding the expansive theoretical landscape informing the interpretation of community life, social relations constitute its most essential ingredients. Community

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emerges and perpetually regenerates itself anew within self–other relations. In concluding, it is important to briefly revisit the pivotal concepts of "being-with," "betweenness," and "emergence."

A key point of consideration when thinking about community is the fundamental lived experience of "being-with" or "*co*-being." Social theorists and philosophers have coined varied terms to express human (social) interrelatedness: *co*-existence, *co*-emergence, and *co*-presence. Nancy (1991) suggests that "finite beings" bend toward one another ("*clinamen*") in communicative relation, and, in the process, something novel can happen *between* them (p. 4). These everyday acts of co-existentiality express the essential human inclination to "enter into relation" and thereby come to know oneself and others. And, furthermore, it is conceivable that these elemental relations can develop into more comprehensive social phenomena—communities. The notions of "being-with" and "being-toward-others" (Heidegger, 1927/1962) form the basis for theorizing how interactional dynamics coalesce into a general sense of "We-ness" and collective community action.

If it can be said that all *is* relation, then nothing exists apart from relations. However, theorists differ widely with respect to their conceptions of social actors (or selves), relational processes, and social phenomena (or structures). There is persistent debate over whether human beings should be treated as separate *entities* or as co-emergent *inter-actors*. The former approach reflects a "subject–object" interpretation of relations, whereas the latter focuses on the ongoing flow of lived experience. In contrast to substantialism and entitative thinking, there is an expanding body of work that emphasizes a dynamic view of non-static "inter-actors" embedded in fluid social relations (e.g., Gergen, 2009; Shotter, 2008). Bakhtin (1986/1993) refers to the "ongoing event of Being" as endless "becoming" (pp. 1–2). Mead (1934) similarly contends that the social self is always-already immersed in relation(s), and, as such, it is forever in motion. In parallel terms, community can be treated as an evolving confluence of unfolding self–other relations.

The theorization of community as a complex of relations raises the idea of "betweenness." It is quite conceivable that both community *processes* and *structures* emerge out of the "interspace" of relational social life (Taylor, 2016, p. 50). The "between," as expressed by Buber (1965), refers to a penultimate mode of "interhuman" relation in which individuals turn to one another in authentic dialogue—a truly intersubjective sharing of thoughts and feelings (p. 75). There is an important analytical

theme embedded in Buber's discussion of dialogic interaction and the realm of the "between." He situates emergent community life within intersubjective relations, most notably when individuals engage with one another "person-to-person." This is reflected in Buber's (1965) distinction between a community of authentic mutual relations and a social group or collectivity.

"Betweenness" is implicit in dialogic relations, intersubjective meaning-making processes, constructionist interpretations of discursive practice, and socio-symbolic representations of shared existence. The main point here is that something unique has the potential to arise in and through the "between," or what some have termed a "third being" (Shotter, 1998, p. 193), "*tertium*," or "third element" (Donati, 2011, pp. 13, 124). Betweenness is elemental to the relational emergence of community, regardless of whether it is understood as a structural entity, a sense of belonging, or a communalized bond. Theoretical interest in the "between" brings social relations squarely into the discussion of community as an intersubjectively constituted and socio-cognitively represented phenomenon. Interpreted in this light, community is an "emergent [relational] effect" that arises out of multifold, reflexive self–other relations (Donati, 2013, pp. 95–96). "Betweenness" constitutes a critical theoretical connection between intersubjective relations and emergent community.

Early social system thinkers typically represented community as a relatively stable, bounded entity, while relegating social actors and their interactions largely to the background. By this way of thinking, community constitutes a system of functionally integrated institutions framed in terms of "part–part" and "part–whole" relations. Although this perspective has fallen out of favor over the years, there are still those who continue to think of community as a concrete albeit evolving structural "entity" of sorts. In contradistinction to the conception of community as a unit whole or system, analytical attention is shifting more so toward interactional dynamics and social emergence. There is a growing acceptance of the idea that community "exists" in a condition of constant "becoming" in and through communicative–dialogic interaction, socio-symbolic construction, and discursive representation.

Social constructionist, social representational, and dialogical perspectives, in particular, share an affinity with the notion of "between spaces" and community intersubjectivity. All of these perspectives draw attention to the essential role that social interaction and discursive practice play in shaping the lived experience of community (see Howarth, 2001).

To the extent that community emerges in and through symbolically mediated processes, it can be viewed as a social representation forged in association with others. In effect, socio-relational dynamics have the potential to generate "communities-in-the-mind" (Pahl, 2005, p. 637). And, as Wagner (1996) points out, a representation does not merely reflect reality, it *is* reality. Community is quite literally talked, negotiated, and acted into existence in everyday life. Here, too, communities are treated as co-constituted relational social phenomena. This work illuminates the intimate involvement of human social relations in the co-production of community.

The issue of whether relational processes can give rise to *sui generis* outcomes is particularly relevant to community theory. Social relations are, for some, the core elements out of which more complex modes of organized social life emerge. Hosking (2006) refers to the "self–other" formulation as an emergent, processual "relational unity," as contrasted with independent, pre-existing entities (p. 271). She further states that, in the midst of multifold, simultaneous interactions, there is the potential for "relational realities" to arise (Hosking, 2011, p. 54). Her depiction of relational constructionism is in keeping with Simmel's (1950) discussion of the relational nature of social life and the prospective emergence of social "forms" (pp. 21–22). Archer (2010a, 2010b) and Donati (2011, 2015) go somewhat further in stating that reflexive (inter)actions give rise to irreducible, relational effects. Their work emanates from a critical realist perspective that upholds the emergence of social phenomena and their unique properties and powers. This emphasis on the distinct ontological status of newly emergent structures differs markedly from the conceptualization of community as a network of social relations.

One of the primary objectives of this book has been to demonstrate the relational foundations of community and its theorization. A core facet of this undertaking involves elaborating relational ideas and tenets that have not typically been applied to the analysis of community, for example, the "between" (Buber, 1965, p. 75), "compearance" (Nancy, 1991, p. 29), "relational being" (Gergen, 2009, p. 5), "relational subject" (Donati & Archer, 2015, p. 53), and relational emergence, among others. Clearly, relational thinking is not confined to a single discipline, nor is it particular to any one approach to the study of community. Perhaps what is most needed at this time, in advancing a relational understanding of community, is a more definitive set of concepts or analytical heuristics. In moving forward, it is important to more deeply explore the relational fabric of community.

The notion of "betweenness" offers a relatively innovative, though hardly new, way of discussing how self–other relations can generate and transform community life. The *inter-human-individual-subjective* pertains not only to what happens *between* individuals or singular beings but also the prospective emergence of novel social phenomena (e.g., community). Crossley (1996) succinctly observes that community is "an interworld, an intersubjective space" of shared interests and mutual interactions (p. 153). Indeed, the "inter" can be viewed as an irreducible relational dynamic (see Gilbert-Walsh, 1999). Community is aptly characterized as an emergent relational phenomenon that is intimately entwined with intersubjective processes. When applied to the study of community, the "between" can be understood as a relational context of emergent meanings, ideas, and actions. It is in this sense that community reflects a *double* visage: (a) an intersubjectively constituted relational *process* that evolves continuously in and through everyday discursive practices and (b) an ontologically "real," emergent *phenomenon* that is endowed with its own unique properties and powers (see Donati, 2011). In essence, community is a direct expression and outcome of social relations.

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[1] Note: Page numbers followed by 'n' refer to notes.

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