The Problem Community in American Sociology and Public Health

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**Main Topics of Talk:**

- The Problem of Defining Community in American Sociology

- The Major Questions of Community in American Sociology: Overlaps with Contemporary Social Epidemiology

- The Problem of Community in the Social Epidemiology: Theoretical and Conceptual Questions
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Traditional Notions About Community: The Rigors of Nostalgia, Sociology 101 and the Sociology of Deviance

• Quality of Association: Gemeinschaft over Gesellschaft

• The Spatial Imperative

• The Fate of Community in Mass Society:
  – Community Lost
  – Community Saved
  – Community Liberated

• The Chicago School of Urban Sociology: Social Disorganization vs. “The Social Order of the Slum”
The Problem of Community in American Sociology and Public Health: Community in Macro Perspective

Carle Zimmerman’s (1938) Defining Characteristics of Community:

• Social Fact
• Specification
• Association
• Limited Area

Hillary’s (1955) 3 Areas of Definitional Consensus:

• Presence of Social Interactions
• Shared Ties Among Individuals
• Spatial Context

The Nature of Community in Mass Society:

• Community of Limited Liability (Janowitz, 1952; Greer 1962)
• Bifurcation of Community (Bender, 1978)
• Community without Propinquity (McMillan and Chavis, 1986)
• The “New” Decline of Community Arguments:
  – In Civic Engagement (Putnam, 1996)
  – Social Cohesion (Wilkinson, 1996)
The Problem Community in American Sociology and Public Health: Community in Local Area Perspective

The Chicago School of Urban Sociology: Social Disorganization vs. “The Social Order of the Slum”

• Classic Social Disorganization Theory and Extensions to Public Health

• Alternative Conceptions of Impoverished Urban Communities

• The New Language of Neighborhood Collective Efficacy
The Problem Community in American Sociology and Public Health: Major Questions About the Nature of Community

1. The distinguishing characteristics of specific definitions of community
2. The bases of communal experience and integration
3. The unique functions and tasks of community
4. The units of social structure within community and the relationships between structural units
5. The economic and social bases of community social structure
6. The relationships between community structural units and macrostructures external to the community
7. The relationship between individual experience and behavior and communal experience and behavior
8. The process of transformation from gemeinschaft to gesellschaft states of community
9. The resilience and adaptation of community in the face of macro structural change
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The Problem of Community in Social Epidemiology: Theoretical and Conceptual Questions:

• Aggregate individual effects vs. “community” as a social fact: when is the whole distinct from the sum of parts?

• More refined conceptualization and measurement of social capital and related aspects of community

• Investigating the range and effects of collective efficacy across different levels of economic segregation, racial/ethnic segregation, and health care resource deprivation

• Investigating health effects across theoretical rather than statistical boundaries of community