

Sense of Community and Dynamics of Inclusion-Exclusion by Receiving Communities

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Sense of community is a concept in community psychology that is usually associated with supportive environment and positive outcomes. However, the very nature of sense of community necessitates acts of social comparison to determine who can and cannot be accepted as members. This paper explores the dynamics of sense of community, drawing on theories of whiteness and moral exclusion to understand the ways in which – formally and informally – some immigrants and refugees are treated in Australia. There is clear evidence that the positive elements of sense of community can also be used in ways that work to exclude, stigmatise, as well as vilify the newcomers. This paper will draw upon the knowledgebase in areas of immigration, race, and oppression, together with the political stance inherent in the field to encourage community (and other) psychologists to actively enter into the public and private debates about the place of immigrants and refugees.

Sense of community is often proposed as a positive outcome, or a mediator, of beneficial social functioning. Seymour Sarason highlighted key elements of support and identity formation that would help provide society, as well as individual, prevention and mental health promotion ideals. Formalisation of the model by McMillan and Chavis (1986) brought together the ways in which membership of community could be celebrated and result in benefits to be shared. It is a model that has at its core the very positives of social life, support, and identity – things to which all can aspire.

However, McMillan and Chavis' (1986) conceptualisation was quickly criticised as it could be applied to what some have described as negative groups (Dunham, 1986). Dunham expressed concern that groups such as Hell's Angels and the Ku Klux Klan, groups that choose to separate from the mainstream, or choose to actively exclude others, can be interpreted as having positive psychological and social functioning, as indicated by their sense of community. While this may be a criticism of sense of community, it also illustrates that it does not always deal with the positive aspects of life, for example, insulating oneself and family from negative social surrounds (e.g., Brodsky, 1996). Indeed, sense of community can be used in negative ways – that is, the maximising of sense of community for one group can mean a

minimisation of it, or effective exclusion of others.

In this paper, we will explore the ways in which sense of community can potentially operate with negative impacts on immigrant and refugee groups. The promotion or manipulation of elements of sense of community provide opportunities for active devaluation and exclusion of newcomers in order to promote the standing, privilege and status of, or at least parts of, the receiving community. In exploring these issues, we will first examine briefly the sense of community elements, and then the underlying processes of realistic conflict theory, moral exclusion and whiteness that can inhibit belonging.

Sense of Community Model. The model of sense of community proposed by McMillan and Chavis (1986) has held considerable sway within community psychology. It provides an effective way of understanding community and the benefits that can be gained from membership, however, the influence element alludes to potential negative impacts on members – when the influence of the community degenerates into a level of conformity or coercion in order that members will fit in. That is, freedom of expression and self-identity must be suppressed to the benefit or the advancement of the community's identity and aims.

Other elements of the model are typically

seen as much more positive, or at least benign. The ideas of fulfilment of needs and shared emotional connection reflect positives for individual members and the community as a whole. Even membership provides a set of ideals and positive values that relate to identity, individual's contributions, and group maintenance. However, it is in this element that the potential for exclusion and negative psychological and socio-political efforts can arise.

One of the key aspects of the membership element is that of boundaries -- quite simply, this means who is and who is not a member of the community. For some communities, the boundaries are very permeable, with few criteria used to include or exclude people (e. g., residential communities initially reflect those who live in a given area). Others, however, have quite rigid boundaries -- either for the protection of the group, or for the protection of something of value to the individual members.

Within *membership* other aspects reinforce its value -- and can be used to determine who should or should not be included. A common symbols system can designate membership through aspects of physical appearance (e.g., clothing), language (including slang), architectural styles, or food. With boundaries, the common symbols interact to provide members with emotional safety and a sense of identity and belonging. From these develop the personal investment that members are willing to contribute to the maintenance and growth of their community. For some, this maintenance will be reflected in an active degree of exclusion of those seen as not worthy of belonging.

The functions of community membership and generation of sense of community extend beyond a simple feel good process. It is not static, nor necessarily an outcome. Bess, Fisher, Sonn, and Bishop (2002) illustrated that sense of community can be considered at multiple levels -- SOC as the group and Psychological Sense of Community (PSOC) as the individual level of analysis. They also indicated that at whichever level we conceptualise it, the nature of sense of community varies because it is context dependent. Sonn, Bishop and Drew (1999) argued that research into sense of community was problematic because, like many studies of

culture, research was often conducted within a positivistic framework which assumed that sense of community could be understood as singular and as an essence. The original McMillan and Chavis (1986) model was a neutral, almost static, description of some desired outcome. Bess et al. proposed that there are different ways in which the model is considered, but this is not necessarily explicated, in the research. It can be an outcome, a predictor, a mediator, or even a process.

In this paper, we consider SOC as a process, and the model allows us to explore the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion in the context of intergroup relations with immigrants and refugees. With the component of membership, we re-consider the role of boundaries in allowing newcomers to become members or to be excluded by the receiving community. We explore these processes at both the informal and formal, with the potential for strong political ideals and processes underpinning the ways in which these groups are socially construed. Importantly, at a formal political level, we must face the issues of how and why this is achieved.

Immigrants, Receiving Communities and SOC

For immigrants and refugees there are processes of settlement and acculturation (cultural adjustment and adaptation) to negotiate. If the receiving nation is receptive, these processes are often more easily achieved, with integration and bicultural outcomes seen as positives, both socially and psychologically for those settling in the new country (Berry, 1997). Achieving these outcomes requires an ongoing process from the existing members of the receiving community to foster and allow permeable boundaries and to make their own acculturation adjustments. That is, as Redfield, Linton, and Herskovits (1936) said so long ago, the acculturation process is bi-directional. Consequently, integration and bicultural outcomes will be reflected within the receiving community. This, however, has not been given as much attention in the research, and it requires a political will on the part of the relevant representative governments to put in place policies, strategies, and rhetoric which will serve to make these adjustments positive from all perspectives.

Should there be a lack of will to accept the newcomers, to allow them through the boundaries to membership of the national community, there are numerous potential psychological and social problems to be faced. Such a lack of will can be exhibited either in formal policy and practice, or in the actions of the citizenry. Sonn and Fisher (2005) listed a variety of government responses to immigrants in Australia over different time periods. These highlighted the assimilationist 'New Australian' policies of the 1950s-70s, in which crossing the boundaries was predicated on the abandonment of home identity and culture and taking on the culture and identity of the receiving community. Seemingly, the bi-directional nature of acculturation (Redfield et al., 1936) was not a sufficiently strong notion for the Australian government, or opposition, of those times.

"New Australian" policies were followed by a multicultural, integrationist approach that is now the official policy, and has received political and financial support in order for it to be effectively implemented (but which has been weakened by, at the most generous construal, benign neglect on the part of the federal government). As Philip Ruddock, then Minister for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs wrote:

Australia today is a culturally and linguistically diverse society and will remain so. Like our sophisticated migration program, our multicultural policy continues our tradition of successful nation building. It will help us to ensure that we meet the challenge of drawing the best from the many histories and cultures of the Australian people, *within a framework of a uniting set of Australian values* [emphasis added]. (Ruddock, 2003)

Recently, the rhetoric of the government has not matched the multiculturalism policies, with some groups of immigrants and refugees almost vilified (e.g., queue jumpers, children overboard, and some maladaptive groups). Some of the current political rhetoric in Australia, from the main political parties on both sides of politics, reflects rejection of

integration and multicultural approaches to immigration in favour of more assimilationist ideas. Talk of English language and citizenship tests has gained degrees of populist support – but has been taken to an extreme with ideas of having tourists sign declarations to abide by "Australian values" -- which are not defined. While this may be of supposed electoral advantage, the wisdom and real outcomes of the process are questioned. It leads to official statements of us and them; of declarations of what or who is or is not worthy.

In fact, this talk reflects the construction of boundaries, a worthy in-group. For the individuals and groups defined as other by official policy it evokes negative stereotypes and rejection. It has the potential of dividing the incoming communities into those who must internalise these characteristics and develop negative self-images, and even as Bourdieu et al. (1999) indicated, self-hate and in the internalisation of stigma inherent in the application of collective representations of non-dominant groups (Major & O'Brien, 2003). Further, it could lead to those stigmatised to react in even more negative ways and so isolate and refuse to engage with the broader dominant community. The official 'othering' and exclusion raises spectre of not of this place, and not welcomed.

Populist political approaches are then able to afford support to the informal levels of inclusion or exclusion. There are several ways in which this occurs and for a variety of reasons. A simple example of this was used by Fisher and Sonn (2002) in their study of sense of community and dealing with change in Australia. When asked "What does it mean to you to be an Australian?" participants were able to quickly identify images, myths and stories that provided the bases of 'Australian' identity – a collective representation of the stereotypes that are shared, often unconsciously, by members of a culture (Major & O'Brien, 2005). Eliasoph and Lichterman (2003) explored not just the representations, but how people actually used them in order to have an understanding of interactions in daily life. That is, the representations provide a framework and set of explanations for the meanings of social activities.

In their research, Fisher and Sonn (2002)

found that the simple use of slang and cultural references (exacerbated by speed of speech) could effectively exclude others – even those who shared the same basic language. This reflected not so much a negative exclusion, but a protection of a valued identity, particularly when travelling in other countries. In the same way that immigrants and refugees protect identities that are challenged because of dislocation and relocation. This can be through social clubs, use of home languages, and maintenance of diet and celebrations.

While exclusionary processes are in place, community members may not actually realise what they are doing or the impacts that it can have – either for those excluded or for the community itself. In examining the functioning of a parish community, Miers and Fisher (2002) found an odd contradiction between sense of community and the ongoing existence of the community. The members reported a high sense of community and strong interpersonal links within the group. Indeed, they were so happy with their community that they were unwelcoming of new members – who often left. While this maintained and protected the sense of community, it threatened the continuation of the community as a whole.

This exclusionary process does, however, give rise to the use of sense of community elements in ways that are not just protective, but potentially malicious. The common symbols and shared history that are a part of the building and maintenance of identity come into play as means of developing rigid and impermeable boundaries. Hence, immigrants can come, but they do not really belong and are not really welcomed. Even if they can pass the government's new language and citizenship tests, there are simple everyday ways of continuing to exclude them as not really belonging.

Acculturation and the Dynamics of Exclusion *Realistic conflict theory and moral exclusion*

Why this exclusion may occur can have many interpretations. One is that there is a real or perceived competition for scarce resources, such as jobs. Several researchers have applied and extended realistic conflict theory to receiving communities' hostile and potential racist and discriminatory responses to immigrants. Esses, Dovidio, Jackson, Armstrong, and Tamara (2001)

have showed that perceived competition for scarce resources is a key factor influencing attitudes toward multiculturalism, and those who believed that the world is hierarchically structured have negative attitudes towards immigration. Arguably, this can be a class-based phenomenon, with the less skilled lower class perceiving themselves as most vulnerable to the competition. Often, these are the people most responsive to the politicians' populist rhetoric, and receptive of the moral exclusion (Opatow, 1990) that underlies such calls.

Moral exclusion is defined in relation to the scope of justice and occurs when individuals of groups fall outside "the boundary in which moral values, rules, and considerations of fairness applies" (Opatow, 1990, p. 1). Moral exclusion occurs in a series of processes involving the perception of conflict or tension, the construction of groups as expendable or worthy, justification of those constructions, justification of processes for exclusion, and the implementation of harmful policies (Opatow, 1990; 2001). This can be a process underlying the granting or refusing membership to a community by excluding those deemed unworthy.

In a study of moral exclusion and racism in Western Australia, Papadopoulos (1997) showed how community members mobilised populist rhetoric to justify the exclusion of vulnerable others from the community. In the first stage of the study, the highly publicised maiden speech of Pauline Hanson in parliament was analysed using discourse analysis to understand the dynamics of moral exclusion. The politician constructed vulnerable groups (immigrants and Indigenous people) as ones who received 'handouts' and other benefits from the government, while the more deserving mainstream [white] Australians were being left out. Mainstream Australian was presented as the group that needed to be looked after and that is being overrun by [Asian] immigrants and Aboriginal people. These immigrants and Aboriginal people were said to be different, did not want to assimilate, and often misused resources provided to them. Political correctness was criticised and the policy and ideology of multiculturalism blamed for the problems faced by the nation. She constructed worthy and unworthy groups, playing to the fears and prejudices of many in the receiving

community.

The construction of worthy and unworthy groups is central to understanding the responses of receiving communities. This requires that we examine how power and privilege is expressed in the differential access that communities have to social, cultural, and symbolic resources. In this case, vulnerable communities are constructed as the sources of conflict threatening mainstream Australians.

Whiteness, Sense of Community and Exclusion

As an essential component of sense of community is social comparison, we can see processes of othering at the informal level: 'They are not like us, can't be like us, we won't let them be like us'. This assists in determining who is and is not a member of our community by defining the necessary characteristics of members. Social identity theory can be used to explore the nature of these in-group and out-group comparisons. At its simplest, social identity theory (Tajfel, 1981) will explain the preferences we have for those like us against those who are different. At a more complex level, it refers to the ways in which we make categories for ourselves and others, and through which the group to which we belong is shown to have its own distinct, positive elements. Using this, we develop a favouritism for those who are also members, and reduce access to those who are not.

Whiteness: The dynamics of othering, of processes of moral exclusion, have been explored in research in race relations, in particular the growing area of whiteness studies (for example, Green, 2004; Fine, Weis, Powell, & Mun Wong, 1997; Frankenberg, 1993, Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1998; Nakayama & Krizek, 1999; Twine & Warren, 2000). Whiteness studies concerns antiracism and how white people's identities and positions are shaped by racialised cultures. Frankenberg (1993) wrote that whiteness can be broadly defined as "...the production and reproduction of dominance rather than subordination, normativity rather than marginality, and privilege rather than disadvantage" (p. 236).

While whiteness has originated in the study of race relations, the title reflects the metaphor for dominant and non-dominant cultures. Clearly, this is a metaphor that is appropriate in the study of immigrants, refugees and receiving

communities as the power differentials can be immense. Coincidentally, many of the receiving communities are also controlled by populations with Anglo-European origins.

In Australia, whiteness has been argued as placing white people in dominant positions and granting white people many privileges. These are often not visible to white people – but are reflected in their collective representations (Major & O'Brien, 2003). However, the meaning of whiteness is also more complex than this and, although whiteness cannot be separated from hegemony, the relations of power within whiteness are not monolithic, complete, nor uniform (Frankenberg, 1997; Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1998). Whiteness is multifaceted, situationally specific, and reinscribed around the changing meanings of race in larger society.

Whiteness studies are particularly useful to understand the dynamics of exclusion because of the focus on examining how groups in positions of privilege, or relative privilege, engage in practices to retain that privilege. To this end, whiteness studies are concerned with understanding the social, cultural and symbolic resources and processes through which privilege is maintained and, therefore, provides a vehicle through which receiving community responses to newcomers can be explicated and the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion made visible. As such, whiteness studies can also be used to understand how dominant cultures maintain the key elements of their sense of community and, especially through the membership element, reinforce the boundaries against the metaphorical non-whites. Moral exclusion then raises this to a justifiable economic argument.

While examining the links between diversity, social relations and economic development in rural and remote communities, Bertone and Sonn (2005; Sonn & Bertone, 2006) revealed the complex workings of race as an ideology in community responses to immigrants. In one community, established immigrant groups from Christian, European backgrounds (Italians, Greeks) were well accepted, while later arrivals (Turks, Albanians, Punjabi, Indians, Iraqi and Afghan refugees) faced a range of subtle and less subtle barriers, such as social isolation, under-employment and unemployment.

A key point in the research (Bertone & Sonn,

2005; Sonn & Bertone, 2006) was that, although different groups of people were accepted in the community and people did not see race relations as an issue, the data suggested a hierarchy of acceptability -- with those closer to the unarticulated ideal more likely to be accepted. Refugees and immigrants were welcomed if they were perceived as prepared to work and make a contribution, but some were also resented because they were seen as welfare dependent and reluctant to integrate [assimilate] through participating in social and cultural settings. Central to the sense of community model are the notions of shared symbols and values. These values and symbols are rooted in a deeper culture and often expressed in the context of work and as a work ethic. Those who are similar are welcomed; those who are deemed other are excluded and often blamed for their own exclusion.

The power and privilege to determine belonging is a central dynamic of the othering processes that are observed in race relations. According to Hage (1998), to feel a greater sense of 'governmental belonging' is to feel more or less white – or Australian. Governmental belonging is how some people feel that their views and opinions about national issues are represented in the public arena. This gives white Australians the right to be concerned about issues such as immigration and multiculturalism. These concerns are typically about making decisions whether newcomers are desirable and if they will contribute to the nation. The others, the immigrants and refugees, are represented as objects to be managed. As with moral exclusion (Opatow, 1990, 2001), notions of human rights and the plight of these communities become displaced and the issue becomes one of conflict over resources.

Whiteness theory allows us to explore the dynamics of cultural racism, those symbolic and cultural resources and practices that may be everyday and often invisible to those close to the centre of power. However, they are very visible to those who are marginalised and impact in negative ways. Internationally, there are many communities facing the challenges of reverse immigration, where those from former colonies are immigrating to the countries of the former colonisers. These immigrants are often not

welcomed and different strategies are put in place to protect the power and privilege of the receiving communities (Bourdieu et al., 1999). These challenges play out in everyday settings and have implications for receiving communities. Some have responded to the negative constructions in the media and other forms of communication by withdrawing. Others find themselves locked up and constructed as illegal and as threats to national security.

Conclusion

Immigrants and refugees face significant disruptions to their lives and cultures, often losing contact with family and friends (Sonn & Fisher, 2005). Yet, the reasons most usually given for undertaking the process is to build a better life for themselves and their children in a new land – to be members of a community that does not limit the opportunities and resources required for living based on dimensions of race, culture, religion or gender. While this is the ideal, there are many barriers which impede that new life and acceptance.

The membership element of sense of community theory is based on ideas of social comparison, and is usually premised on the idea of a positive outcome for members and for the community itself. All community membership is a balance between the individual's needs and those of the collective. As shown by Miers and Fisher (2002), even at its most benign, promotion of sense of community of the individual members can have serious consequences for the community as a whole. Active engagement is required in order to not just maintain, but also to grow the community – reflecting the ongoing need to recruit new members, as well as understanding the social dynamics within which the community operates and functions.

As a national community, the growing of membership and maintenance takes on dimensions beyond the individual and into the political realm. The ways in which debates about immigration and refugees are framed, with assimilationist overtones, play into simplistic, populist notions of sense of community, while stigmatising and excluding those who do not hold the privileged position of being a member of the dominant group (Bourdieu et al., 1999; Hage, 1998; Majors & O'Brien, 2003).

The privilege of being in the dominant

group provides ready access to the collective representations (Eliasoph & Lichterman, 2003; Major & O'Brien, 2003) of the dominant community. How these are used will be reflected in the permeability or hardness of the boundaries of community membership. The informal, planned or otherwise, use of collective representations can serve to exclude others, whether for positive reasons to do with identity maintenance and social support (Fisher & Sonn, 2002), for reasons of social comparison and competition for scarce resources (Esses et al., 2001), or for malicious reasons of oppression of those who are not deemed worthy (Opatow, 1990, 2001).

In summary, we have sought to utilise sense of community, a key concept in community psychology, to explore the dynamics of intergroup relations from the vantage point of communities receiving immigrants. The model can provide a dynamic set of constructs and processes that allows us to explore how communities respond to perceived or real threats to taken-for-granted privileges and ways of being. We use the idea of moral exclusion to explore the social and psychological dynamics at the formal and informal levels to explicate processes of boundary creation that work to other and exclude those who are deemed unworthy of belonging to a moral community. Boundary creation is a key part of sense of community and often achieved through the retrieval, creation and mobilisation of symbolic resources which serve as markers of distinction. These markers of distinction are historically determined, like many collective representations, they are based in the history of a community and are used to include and exclude.

In the Australian case, some of the collective representations are tied to understandings of race that are rooted in the history of colonisation. A core part of these representations are tied to the notion of whiteness that has been central to the subjugation of Indigenous people and different waves of immigrants to Australia. It is through the lenses of whiteness and moral exclusion that we are able to examine the content and dynamics of the sense of community as it is mobilised by receiving communities.

We have proposed that sense of community is to be considered as a process, not as a simple

outcome. As such, we have the position to explore, understand, and expose the ways in which sense of community (or surrogate terms) is used to manifest racist and exclusionary practices. The knowledge that community psychology has developed in areas of immigration, race, and oppression, together with the political stance inherent in the field, provides and impetus for us to actively enter into the public and private debates about the place of immigrants and refugees. It is imperative that we use and publicly articulate this knowledge in order to counter the negative psychological and social impacts that political rhetoric and inaction has on the targeted groups.

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