Creating Social Glue in the Community: A Psychologist's View*

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Introduction

I have chosen to begin with a story that symbolizes the essence of what this paper is about. Many years ago I was consulting with the faculty of a three-year nursing school associated with a nonprofit general hospital in a mid-sized community. After a series of group discussions aimed at creating a safe space for examination of heart-felt issues, the group of a dozen or so faculty nurses were venting their concerns about how badly nurses in charge of hospital wards treated young student nurses assigned to them for practicum training. Complaint piled on complaint as the group warmed up to the theme. Suddenly a senior faculty member, a specialist in operating room procedures, for no apparent reason burst into loud, unrestrained laughter. The discussion ground to a halt until finally the laughter ceased and the faculty member was able to speak. It turned out that she divided the year between the nursing school and serving as head nurse for the hospital's surgical service. Six months of the year she was a nursing school faculty member; six months of the year she was a member of the hospital's nursing staff.

"Here I was," she explained, "Complaining with the rest of you about how the nursing students are mistreated by the nursing staff of the hospital. Then it hit me that only a month or so ago I was sitting in the cafeteria with other nursing staff colleagues, complaining about how the nursing school faculty didn't understand the pressures on us, how they didn't prepare the students to meet the practical every-day demands of dealing with patients in the hospital, and who did they think they were anyway, looking down at us from their lofty positions as nursing faculty members."

She was the same person. And she was in the same profession. Yet a shift in role (from faculty member to charge nurse,) in position (from one institution to another,) and in colleagueship (from those who shared her commitment to teaching students to those who shared her commitment to patient care) had created a 180 degree shift in where she stood in the pattern of mutual recrimination. Moreover that shift, which had occurred at six-month intervals for at least three years, had been until that very moment outside of her awareness.

The Prevalence of We-They Projections

That incident, taken together with other experiences in my work as a community psychologist, reminded me that, to an extent unrealized by most people, we create our own reality.. That is, we are selective in what we take in through our senses, we organize what we take in according to subjective categories of meaning that we have developed over the years, and we interpret our perceptions in terms of our beliefs, values, and moral standards.

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The incident also alerted me to the importance of role and position as determinants of behavior, in many situations having far more influence on how people deal with community situations than intra-psychic personality factors. Finally, it underscored another important fact about the human condition: namely, that, far more than most of us realize, we live in a "we-they" projective world that is largely of our own creation.. That is, we are prone to project onto others unacknowledged and unacceptable aspects of ourselves, which Carl Jung referred to as our Shadow (Jung, 1979) and structuralist psychologist George Kelly (1955) conceptualized as the "Not Me."

It is probably more accurate to say that we *co-create* our own reality. That is, although we behave according to our own individual interpretations of our experiences, those interpretations are, for the most part, shared with others and shaped by the culture and the identity groups that are important to us. When it comes to the many projections that affect community life it is far more useful to think in terms of collective identities rather than personal selves; that is, in terms of "us" and "not us" rather than "me" and "not me." In the dynamics of community life, those unacceptable, dis-valued, and malevolent qualities that are being projected onto others are not so much personal as they are collective in nature.

Sometimes recognition of the fact that we are living in a we-they projective world becomes inescapable, as it did for the nurse whose projections flip-flopped from hospital operating room to nursing school classroom. When that happens it is possible to have a good laugh about the ludicrous situations that we create for ourselves, take responsibility for our projections, and abandon the blame game.

Indeed, we would be assured of having sufficient social glue in our communities if only it were possible for all of us to take back our invidious projections of "not me" and "not us." By abandoning the world of projective psychology in which most of us live our lives we would find new and delightful vistas of appreciative knowing that until now most of us realize only in moments of grace that we allow ourselves only under certain special circumstances. (Klein, in press)

The problem is, of course, that when we are most passionate about social injustices and the malevolence of others, we are far from being amused. Quite the contrary! We are convinced of our rightness; and we are certain that those who disagree with us are, at best, misguided, or, at worst, malevolent and even sub-human. We feel and are righteously disconnected from such people. Apart from the oppositional nature of our relationship with them, there is little fellow feeling and little social glue that connects us as members of the same community. Although we are, in fact, living in a world that I would characterize as being governed by a "psychology of projection," we experience ourselves as responding to a realistic world of recognizable facts, essential values, and inescapable logic.

Harry Stack Sullivan, well-known, for his interpersonal orientation in psychiatry, pointed out that human relationships were grounded in what he called "consensual reality." (Sullivan, 1968) He meant that our ways of framing shared situations resembled each another enough so that we could count on one another to behave in predictable ways. In other words, under ordinary circumstances, our projective interpretations were "normal" in the sense that they were close enough to others' interpretations of events so that we could be understood and accepted

by them.

Sullivan understood that we were prone to over-emphasize differences between ourselves and others and to judge those who were different from us as deficient in some way. As his residents began to work with psychotic patients, he Sullivan is said to have cautioned them against being too caught up in their patients' differences from normal. With respect to those patients, he is quoted as saying, "Remember, we are all more human than otherwise."

Like those neophyte therapists, we all tend to ascribe deficiencies in character, motivation, and morality to those whom we perceive as different from us. This pervasive"We-They Dynamic" affects virtually all our relationships, especially those involving differences in social status, roles, and positions. For example, consider the teacher-student relationship.. When teachers get together to talk about students and students get together to talk about teachers, they often dwell on invidious differences between them. That is, "they" are perceived as difficult, deficient, or even dangerous. The two groups rarely acknowledge their common humanity. Even teachers, who have themselves been students, hardly ever see their commonality with their students. Thus, even something as socially useful as the interdependent relationship between teachers and students often becomes dysfunctional because both groups, enmeshed in a mutually projective, we-they disconnect, lose sight of their common humanity. If this is so in such a comparatively benign relationship, consider what happens in community situations when mutually projective disconnects involve differences in power, authority, control, or relationships experienced by one or both parties as unfair, oppressive, and humiliating.

The Paradox of Today's Communities

Unfortunately, today's complex urban centers, which must cope with diversity, high population turnover, and rapid socioeconomic and technologic change, provide dysfunctional, dangerous, and often deadly breeding grounds of disconnection between individuals and groups. The paradox of the contemporary community is that, on the one hand, it continues to be essential to our survival and well-being, while on the other hand, it provides a setting where projective, dysfunctional relationships and disconnections between groups abound.(See Figure 1).

Figure 1: The Paradox of Today's Complex Communities

Essential to:		Yet Prone to:	
★	Safety	-	Violence
★	Solving Problems through the Life Cycle	-	Dysfunctional Caretaking Relationships
★	Significance	-	Humiliation
★	Celebration	-	Mutual Recrimination

During the late 70s I was so concerned about the extent to which alienation and divisiveness permeated community life that I organized a graduate seminar in Community

Psychology around the theme of "Community Paranoia." My thesis was that communities were a rich breeding ground for the projective tendency that we human beings bring to all our relationships. The graduate students, however, were not impressed. They were idealists who came to the study of community psychology because they wanted to learn how to contribute to creating well-functioning communities. They were not unprepared to accept the inevitability of community paranoia. By now, thirty years later, I am inclined to agree.

This paradoxical state of affairs can be usefully examined in terms of what I think of as the four fundamental "meta-functions" of the geographic Community.

Safety

On the one hand, human beings come together in geographic communities to increase their chances of surviving environmental, economic, and social threats to their survival. Affording safety and security is very possibly the single most important meta-function that led to the creation of human communities in the first place. On the other hand, oppressed and disadvantaged groups in many of today's communities find themselves at greater risk of injury and death than others in those communities due to disease, environmental hazards, and physical violence.

Solving Problems

On the one hand, human beings come together in geographic communities in order to exchange goods and services and thereby increase their access to resources that will increase their quality of life. Affording the goods and services needed by individuals and families throughout the life cycle is a vital meta-function that required the invention of the human Community in the first place. On the other hand, as noted social critics have suggested, those who provide services on a professional basis, more often than they realize, act in such a way as to diminish the capacities for self-management of those who are the recipients of their efforts. Among those critics are Ivan Ilich, who champions, the de-professionalization of such major service functions as education and health care, and McKnight, who advocates programs of Community self-reliance in place of highly professionalized Community development efforts.

Significance

On the one hand, human beings come together in geographic communities in order to achieve significance and stature in life beyond their personal identities. Affording opportunities for significance in the eyes of fellow citizens is, in my view, an important meta-function that is often ignored by Community planners, government officials, and citizen groups. On the other hand, certain groups end up, to use Saul Alinsky's phrase, as meaningless social dust in the eyes of others and sometimes, even more tragically, in their own eyes. A classic well-documented example of what I mean is Elliott Liebow's poignant study of African American men who spent their days hanging out on Talley's Corner.

Celebration

On the one hand, human beings come together in geographic communities in order to celebrate life, engage in sports and games, carry out religious, historic, and other rituals that give larger meaning to their lives. Affording opportunities for celebration is a Community meta-function that brings

people together in ways that add excitement, fellow feeling, and uplifting sentiment to what otherwise might be dull, hum-drum lives. On the other hand, the Community also provides the setting for exclusionary marches, demonstrations, and other rituals that maintain inter-group barriers, add to divisiveness, and increase the mutually projective disconnections between alienated factions.

The Need for Integrative Connections

Uppermost on my mind today is the challenge of finding ways to reduce the prevalence and severity of mutually projective disconnects between Community groups. Put more positively, I am committed to identifying promising ways of creating fundamental linkages and integrative connections between groups who otherwise would remain indifferent to, ignorant about, or alienated from one another. Such integrative efforts will, I believe, develop the amount of "social glue" that must be in place before we can create the social capitol needed for effective problem-solving and community building.

I use the term "social glue" as a metaphor for the presence within a locality of a mutual bond of recognition, connectedness, feeling of responsibility for, and concern for others because they occupy the same territorial Community. This definition of social glue does not necessarily include trust, liking, or mutual respect. Those may come later once the feeling of connection and the sense of being in the same boat has been established. Social glue can and does exist between individuals and groups who are at odds with or even dislike one another. A sufficient amount of social glue maintains the bedrock of community even in the face of mistrust, differences, disagreements, and even bitterly contested conflicts. With enough effort and ingenuity it is possible to use that bedrock of connection to create the trust, fellow-feeling, and willingness to work collaboratively on issues of common concern that have been labeled social capital. Integrative infrastructures that foster social glue are, therefore, essential to any well-functioning Community.

Observations from a Scouting Expedition

Recently I have been engaged in an effort to (1) identify major cleavages or social fault lines in communities that engender disconnections based on mutual projections between groups; (2) to identify ways to create integrative connections across those fault lines. This paper presents what my reconnaissance has discovered. In what follows I present a quick inventory of what I believe to be major community fault lines. (While doing so, I invite you to think about other fault lines that I have overlooked.) I then survey promising approaches that have been used to create connections across fault lines, (once again inviting you to suggest approaches that I have overlooked.) Finally, I briefly describe several programs in the United States that, in my view, are devoted, in whole or part, to creating social glue in the community.

Community Fault Lines

In every community in which I have worked or lived I have noticed a variety of divisive interfaces that lend themselves to dis-integrative connections between community groups. These interfaces act like tension-laden fault lines that separate one segment of a community from another, by virtue of role, position, membership, or other characteristic. It has long been recognized by social scientists and community based professionals that those who stand on opposite sides of these collective fault lines are prone to perceive one another as deficient in

some essential respect. They have become less than fully human in one another's eyes. These invidious comparisons are stereotypic in nature. They involve we-they contrasts. Typically they are reinforced by public debates, hearings, press conferences, and other such forums. And they are further held in place by the lack of opportunities for corrective personal contacts and conversations outside of the public arena. Across these fault lines groups are prone to project invidious perceptions of one other. These projective connections illustrate the old adage, "Where you sit is where you stand."

So far in my analysis, six major kinds of community fault lines stand out in my mind: (1) Differences in Collective Identities; (2) Issue-oriented Opposition; (3) Intra MetaSystem Differences; (4) Inter-Network Separations; (5) Service Delivery System Barriers; and (6) Downtown - Neighborhood Dysjunctions.

Differences in collective identities

Differences in collective identities are both explicit and implicit. They include race, caste, sex, ethnicity, religion, gender, and social class. Each such collective identity is defined both by those qualities that describe the identity and the "not us" qualities that differentiate the identity group from one or more other groups.

Issue-oriented oppositional situations

These situations involve community factions that are opposed to one another regarding specific social issues. Such situations predisposes the parties involved to project undesirable qualities on those with whom they disagree. In such issue-oriented situations groups often form impressions of one another via the media rather than direct contact. In the absence of information that such contacts might provide, with the help of the media most of us have little difficulty explaining the motives, ethical values, and character structures of highly visible public figures, especially those who oppose our most cherished projects and values.

Intra MetaSystem Differences

The term "meta-system" refers to the array of component autonomous groups that combine to provide major service functions in the community. Examples are the agencies and professionals having to do with criminal justice, public health, and education. The component entities of such meta-systems are interdependent but in limited contact with one another. They often depend on different sources of funding, provide different types and kinds of services, and exist within separate public or private administrative configurations. Despite the fact that they are profoundly affected by one another's internal decisions and actions, they almost never come together to address priorities, create joint programs or future plans, coordinate their efforts, or resolve differences.

Inter-Network Separations

Such separations involve relationships in which there are few, if any, links between different informally interrelated clusters of individuals. It is likely that someone who functions within one such network – for example, individuals who get to know and relate to one another because they exist within the network of staff members and sponsors of nonprofit social agencies -- will have few, if any, connections with people who know and relate to one another

because they are part of the network of small business owners, local Chamber of Commerce members, and those who belong to Rotary and other service clubs.

Service Delivery System Barriers

Service delivery barriers refer to differences in needs, perceptions, and understanding that often occur between consumers and providers of a variety of community services, including health, education, welfare, and public safety. The possibility for cleavage is especially high in those relationships in which neither provider nor consumer chooses one another.

Downtown-Neighborhood Dysjunctions

The relationships between community officials and civic leaders, on the one hand, and neighborhood activists and concerned neighborhood residents, on the other hand, often involve very different and clashing perspectives. Government officials and community leaders think in terms of the overall community and deal with establishing priorities and allocating scarce resources. Neighborhood leaders and social activists, by contrast, are advocates for their own local needs and concerns. Because they stand in very different places with respect to their view of the community, their perceptions of the community are so different that they typically misunderstand and talk at cross purposes with one another.

Approaches to Developing Integrative Connections

While on Sabbatical leave from The Union Institute in 1998 I conducted a reconnaissance of programs that were designed to create social glue by fostering integrative connections in localities. I uncovered more than one-hundred over one-hundred general approaches, organized methods, and specific techniques that can be used to help develop integrative connections across these various fault lines. Some of these approaches go back many years. At the multi-disciplinary Human Relations Center at Boston University in the early 1960s, for example, I was told by my colleague Max Birnbaum, a seasoned veteran in the field of intergroup relations, that experts in that field prior to World War II had begun to encourage public officials to sponsor fairs and festivals featuring the history, customs, costumes, and foods of major ethnic groups in their communities. Designed to create inter-neighborhood understanding and respect, such public events are still annual fixtures in many communities today. I have assembled my inventory of ways into the following rough and often over-lapping categories:

> *Celebrations*: Fairs, festivals, and ritual events in honor of significant historical happenings or ethnic groups.
> *Civic Journalism*: Use of public media to explore civic needs, increase citizen knowledge about issues, and create understanding of varying viewpoints.
> *Cohort leadership training*: Local and regional programs of leadership development sponsored by Chambers of Commerce, colleges, and other organizations, which bring together diverse groups of actual or potential leaders from widely different backgrounds in their communities.
> *Dialogue*: Carefully designed opportunities for those in disagreement with one another to talk together in settings that provide a sense of safety, encourage listening, and discourage personal attacks or attempts to persuade one another of the rightness of their views;

Forums: Community meetings that bring together people from different backgrounds and viewpoints to address areas of common concern;

Intermediary Organizations: Community institutions whose purpose is to create connections between individuals and groups in such a way that needed resources are brought to bear on areas of community need and concern.

Large Group Methods: Approaches that bring together people with different roles and perspectives in order to address specific tasks or concerns, unleash creative resources, or develop common visions and goals for the community.

Linkers/Bridgers: Identification and support of individual citizens who, without official roles and responsibilities, have developed relationships with a wide range of individuals in the community, who are trusted by people from different factions, and who are often able to bring individual protagonists together, form workable liaisons, and create mutual respect and understanding between opposing factions that otherwise would not exist.

Participatory Inquiry: Methods of research into local community needs, concerns, structures, and processes that involve local residents as active partners in the inquiry process, up to and including design of studies, data gathering, and interpretation of findings.

Performatory Methods: Sociodrama, role playing, Theatre of the Oppressed, Playback Theater, and other performance methods in which audience members enact approaches in order to explore differing viewpoints and increase understanding of groups unlike themselves.

Public Spaces: Parks, malls, and other physical settings that are designed to serve as safe spaces in which celebrations and gatherings can occur in ways that .generate harmony and fellow feeling among participants.

Small Group Approaches: The use of face-to-face meetings of community stakeholders to explore common needs, discover areas of agreement, establish a sense of community, brainstorm possibilities, and give voice to concerns in ways that can be heard and understood.

Story Telling: Approaches that encourage protagonists from both sides of a community fault line to tell the stories of their lives and describe their experience of specific situations and interactions;

Programs that Create Social Glue

In recent years a number of sustained, deliberate efforts to bolster integrative infrastructures have been developed in communities throughout the United States. I have selected an array of several examples to include in this presentation. They underscore two facts: first, these programs are emerging from widely different bodies of theory, professional orientation, and practice; second, groups who recognize the need to work deliberately and planfully on creating social glue in today's communities do so via a fascinating variety of methods and approaches.

Community Connection

In Pennsylvania the state League of Women Voters Citizen Education Fund has developed Community Connection, a statewide program that supports collaborative processes and problem-solving in at the local community level (League of Women Voters, 1996.) The program has implemented a series of projects aimed at enabling community members and groups "to intervene in the early stages of community decision-making processes, i.e., **before** an issue has become divisive and confrontational. Community Connection provided seed money for the projects and offers support services, including

consultation, technical assistance, an informational clearinghouse and database; orientation and training workshops; and periodic evaluation for purposes of on-course project improvement.

Although those involved in Community Connection have not themselves used the term, they have developed an intriguingly simple model for creating social glue in local communities. Rather than intervening in disputes, the program is an effort to build the capacities of local communities to engage in constructive dialogue and collaboration on important community concerns. The nearest analogy that comes to mind is the Organization Development (OD) team within a major corporation that is charged with the responsibility of helping management to improve communications between different parts of the organization; create more effective work teams; manage differences in creative ways; and make changes needed to increase the quality of work life while, at the same time, improving productivity.

The Jackson CommUnity Transformation Project

Funded by the W. K. Kellogg Foundation, the Jackson CommUnity Transformation Project: project is engaged in a multi-faceted effort to transform an entire county in Michigan. It is based on a partnership between the local Community College and the Jackson Area Quality Initiative, which represents an effort to adapt basic principles of Total Quality Management (Deming, 1986; Schmidt & Finnigan, 1992) to a comprehensive community-building process (Schwinn, et. al., 1996.) The Project's highly interactive "whole-systems" approach has made extensive use of ways to involve people in the analysis of the systems in which they live and work. They have engaged citizens in a series of conversations across lines of class, ethnicity, race, gender, and sexual orientation about how to design and implement efforts to achieve their vision of an ideal county. These conversations have been carried out in large working conferences, orientation meetings, and small face-to-face design teams. The Project also entered into cooperative relationships with a large number of community-wide change activities.[2]

I came away from a visit to Jackson excited by what has been accomplished by adapting principles of Total Quality Management, systems thinking, learning, and visioning to a local community situation. Responding to opportunities to participate, they have crossed lines of organization, socioeconomic status, roles, and responsibilities to have meaningful conversations with one another and to design changes in specific components of their community. They have become part of a whole systems approach that is grounded in opportunities to learn at each step of the way, to take leadership responsibilities as individuals rather than as advocates of specific solutions, to engage in a process of continuous improvement, and, most importantly, to develop their ability as citizens to work with others to meet their own needs. It remains to be seen whether the Jackson approach represents a kind of temporary jump start that creates connections and sets in motion transformative processes that will subside over time, or whether it can be maintained as an on-going resource for community transformation.

The Urban Strategies Council

The Urban Strategies Council was formed in 1987 in Oakland, California as part of a Rockefeller Foundation initiative in six cities. The Council serves as what has become generally well-known in community development circles as a "community based intermediary." It works in various ways to build bridges between service providers and those who are the recipients of their services. Angela Glover Blackwell, a public interest lawyer, began the Council by convening what has been described as a

volatile working group to focus on developing a blueprint for expanding early childhood   programs. Her aim was to create the context needed to promote effective working relationships between all those with a stake in such programs.

The Council is staffed by an intermediary group of generalists with the expertise needed to generate useful information, to convene and facilitate gatherings of diverse groups of stakeholders, to ensure that recommended changes would be implemented, to secure funding from foundations and public agencies, and to conduct meaningful assessments that could be used both to monitor and improve community services. The Council has "pioneered new ways of bringing low-income residents into the process, with focus groups, community meetings, working groups, and structured interviews" (Walsh, 1997, p. 20.)

The idea of the community based intermediary has turned out to be an important exportable idea. Responding to requests from other communities, the Oakland group has taken it to a number of cities to help them understand the concept and develop the skill sets needed to serve as intermediaries in their local situations. The Oakland group also has played an important role in staffing the National Community Building Network. Created initially as a network of neighborhood initiatives supported by three major national foundations in twenty one cities, it has now grown to over forty cities. Although differing from one another in many ways, according to Henry Azumazaki, formerly a staff member in Oakland, " ... they all share the conviction that *it is essential for community well-being to create bridges of understanding and respect between groups that otherwise might view one another with suspicion and contempt"* (Azumazaki, 1999.)[3]

Study Circles

A study circle is a face-to-face group of from eight to twelve people who meet regularly over a period of weeks or months to explore a specific public issue in a way that encourages exchange of views, discussion rather than debate, and exploration of possible areas of agreement and common ground. The aim of the Study Circles movement is to encourage community-wide programs in which hundreds or even thousands of residents become involved in small groups, all of which are exploring the same public issue, such as education, public safety, and race relations. Study circles are intended to educate participants, to mobilize them with regard to issues, to stimulate them to think about their communities, and to empower them as citizens able to address community problems. The underlying aim appears to be to create social glue. As one leaflet put it, "They discover common ground and a greater desire and ability to work together -- as individuals, as members of small groups, and as voters and members of large organizations in the community."

The widespread use of study circles has been promoted by the Topsfield Foundation "as a way to engage citizens in dialogue and problem solving" (McCoy & Sherman, 1994.) A Study Circles Resource Center funded by the Foundation creates guides for organizing study circle programs, distributes free discussion materials on a variety of issues, and provides free technical assistance to those who organize study circle programs and convene individual study circles. In several communities, study circles have been used by public officials and citizen coalitions to engage large numbers of people in dialogue about important social and political issues in an effort to find collaborative ways to address them. The first such community-wide undertaking was carried out in Lima, Ohio in 1992 as a way to address racial tensions that surfaced following the Rodney King verdicts (McCoy & Sherman, 1994.)[4]

Public Conversations Project

Based in Watertown, Massachusetts, the Public Conversations Project promotes conversations and relationships among people who take opposing positions on divisive public issues. Initiated in 1996, the Project was created by family therapists from the Family Institute of Cambridge, who in 1989 began to brainstorm about applications of family therapy approaches to issues in the public arena (Chasin, et. al., 1996.) The Project works with interested groups to create constructive dialogue between advocates from opposing sides of polarized issues.

The Project began with a year-and-a-half effort in which partisans in the abortion controversy were involved in a series of six-person groups, each of which met for a single evening's dialogue on the subject. Initiated by the Project staff itself, the abortion work was an experiment to see if it was possible to bring pro-choice and pro-life people together. Encouraged by what was achieved even within such a limited time period, the group moved to other issues, worked with larger face-to-face groups, and increased the amount of time they spend in dialogue with one another, including in at least one instance two-and-one-half day retreats. Issues have included disputes over forest use in northern New England, conflicts over homosexuality within a religious denomination, divisions over women's health and rights, and tensions related to differences in social class (Herzig, 1998.) .For many people, participation in a Public Conversations group has been an extraordinary opportunity to meet with and get to know their opponents in a non-adversarial atmosphere.

Promising approaches include structured "go-rounds" in which each participant can take a few minutes to respond to questions introduced by the facilitator; to discuss possible gray areas in their thinking about an issue; to list their visions for the future; and to identify stereotypes they believe others hold about people on their side of the controversy. Most importantly, participants speak as individuals from their own personal experiences, including those that may differ in some respects from others who share their position. They are encouraged to express uncertainties, to ask questions in order to gain new information and insights, and to explore the complexities of the issue.

The Public Conversations Project is part of a family of dialogic conflict resolution and mediation approaches grounded in the field of Applied Behavioral Science (ABS) that began during World War II with the study of small group dynamics. Including t-group methodology and approaches to laboratory learning about group behavior developed by NTL Institute for Applied Behavioral Science (formerly the National Training Laboratories) (Bradford, et. al., 1964) and the psychoanalytic approach to small group behavior developed at the Tavistock Institute in London (Bion, 1991), these approaches have taken many forms and are taken for granted in many parts of our society. In whatever form and under whatever label, these approaches represent a significant shift towards recognizing how essential it is to create what might be called *safe spaces for connection* that may help to counteract more familiar patterns of polarized position-taking. The success of Public Conversations and similar projects may rest to some extent on a generalized recognition of the importance of creating such spaces,. even on the part of the most passionate advocates of pro and anti positions on major community issues.

Conclusions

What might we conclude from such an array of differing programs?

First, there is general recognition of the need to reduce polarization between groups, to

create the conditions whereby dysfunctional we-they projections are reduced, and to support integrative connections that eliminate dangerous deficits of social glue in today's communities.

Second, it is striking that the inspiration for developing such integrative connections has arisen independently in a number of different groups, each of which brings its own professional perspectives and tools to the task.

Third, equally striking is the fact that many of the efforts are being mounted from within the framework of professional groups, among them family therapy, total quality management, and applied behavioral science., that are not ordinarily associated with a Community building orientation.

Fourth, until now there has been so little, if any, exchange of ideas and experiences across these different networks of practice and theory-building.

Fifth, these several programs differ considerably in the extent to which the development of integrative connections is embedded within a larger context of Community development. On the one extreme are those, such as the ones in Oakland and Jackson, in which the effort to generate integrative connections is part of a larger process of Community problem-solving, generating social capital, and creating viable frameworks within which Community-building can proceed.. On the other extreme are those, such as Public Conversations and Study Circles, in which the focus on specific Community problems or issues is not part of a larger Community-building process, but is viewed, rather, as a vehicle for overcoming intergroup barriers and biases. Finally, in the League of Women Voters project in Pennsylvania the idea of creating integrative connections is used as the entry point for helping to build the capacities of local communities to engage in constructive dialogue and collaboration on important local concerns.

Sixth, I suggest there is a need to enlarge the Community Development field to embrace programs that support, stimulate, and initiate a variety of approaches designed to create integrative connections in localities. By generating and maintaining sufficient amounts of social glue, such programs would lay the foundational bed-rock on which successful Community problem-solving and Community building efforts could stand.

This paper represents a modest first step towards advocating serious consideration of creating more such locally based, integrating organizations. To carry this work further, it is clear that further study and comparative analyses of various initiatives is needed. The aim would be both to determine which models appear to be most promising and to explore whether it would be worthwhile to encourage the adoption of such approaches in major urban centers. Meanwhile, as a modest contribution to the work of generating social glue, I am currently engaged in developing a compendium that brings together in one publication the many promising approaches, methods, and techniques that are available for use in efforts to generate social glue that I believe is so badly needed in urban centers today.

Notes

1.   Although the project has reached out with considerable success to involve a vast array of Community organizations of various kinds, emphasis is placed on participation as individual citizens, rather than delegates from constituent organizations. Funded in 1995, the Project had involved upwards of 5,000 citizens and 200 organizations as active participants by 1998. When I visited the project in 1999 Community design teams were completing work on components of a transformed county, including Planning and Justice, Community Support, Community Learning, Citizen Participation, Economic Development, External Connections, and a coordinative Community Council. Plans also were underway to install a computerized fiber-optic Community Network intended to connect citizens and organizations to local resources (Cook, 1999.)

2.   The Urban Strategies Council intermediary approach is important in several respects. It is an attempt to change the very nature of the meta-systems involved in providing early childhood education, health care, police protection, and a host of other essential services. It offers a model that appears to be capable of helping to orchestrate essential elements of such meta-systems. The fact that is gaining widespread acceptance among those involved in Community-building activities is encouraging. It remains to be seen whether the intermediary approach can be institutionalized as a resource in individual communities in ways that enable it to continue to be effective over time.

3.   The idea of Study Circles was foreshadowed by the Chautauqua movement in the United States, the popular adult education activity that by the late 1800s provided opportunities for discussions in local communities of political and economic issues as well as literature, religion, and scientific discoveries.

       Discussion in a study circle typically begins with discussion of personal experiences (in response to the question, "How does the issue affect me?) Later sessions encourage a broader perspective (in response to the question, "What are others saying about the issue?) The sequence ends with a session on possibilities for action (in response to the question, "What can we do about the issue here?)

4.   Project staff members contact participants in advance, usually by telephone, to introduce themselves; to solicit questions about the approach; to understand what participants will bring to meetings in the way of hopes and fears; to increase staff's understanding of the controversy; and to brief participants about what to expect in the way of procedures and overall approach. From the staff's point of view, "Most of the work done on any dialogue usually occurs before the meeting takes place" (Chasin, et. al., 1996, p. 330.) In some cases, in advance of the actual dialogue sessions participants have received summaries of major areas of concern or tension gained from these preparatory conversations. An essential part of pre-meeting planning and preparation:

       As in family therapy, the facilitator must be viewed by the participants as, if not neutral with respect to the controversy, at least fair and impartial. A major aim of the facilitator is to create a context that discourages old, familiar patterns of acrimonious exchange. To begin with, the facilitator gets agreement on ground rules that create a safe space in which frank, passionate, and yet respectful exchanges are possible. Then he or she formulates questions and introduces

structures that make it possible for participants to speak personally about their concerns and yearnings without getting into familiar patterns of win-lose debate.

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