LEVELS OF ANALYSIS AND CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION IN COMMUNITY ATTACHMENT AND SATISFACTION RESEARCH: CONNECTIONS TO COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

By Gene L. Theodori

ABSTRACT

Two conceptual concerns in the community attachment and satisfaction literature are addressed here: (1) identification and utilization of a proper level of analysis, and (2) clarification of the meanings of community attachment and satisfaction. First, each conceptual issue is introduced and justification provided for the attention paid to these concerns. Next, theoretical, methodological, and measurement issues associated with these concerns are identified and discussed. Lastly, illustrations of how each issue relates to the practice of community development are provided, as are suggestions for future research.

INTRODUCTION

Despite the fact that defining “community” has been and continues to be a difficult and arduous task (e.g., Arensberg, 1955, 1961; Effrat, 1973; Freilich, 1963; Gusfield, 1975; Hillery, 1955, 1968; McMillan & Chavis, 1986; Poplin, 1972; Sutton & Kolaja, 1960), there exists an extensive body of literature in the social sciences generally referred to as “community studies.” Such a label, though, is somewhat ambiguous. The overwhelming majority of community studies research should not be labeled “studies of community.” Instead, given that these investigations are generally empirical examinations of a particular aspect in the community, a more appropriate classification might be “studies in community.” In essence, what community academicians have created is a rather large, community-related-topics literature.1
Two community-related topics of continuing interest to community scholars are satisfaction and attachment. While numerous researchers have reported individuals’ levels of community satisfaction and attachment, the usefulness and meaningfulness of their findings for social scientists and policy makers were not always clear. In fact, Ladewig and McCann (1980) recognized that several conceptual matters needed to be addressed in the community satisfaction literature before the measurement of community satisfaction could make a relevant contribution to the formation of public policy. These matters included:

... [the] development of a common frame of reference, utilization of a meaningful measure of the structural concept ‘community’ that has relevance to public policy, and development of a conceptual framework that accounts for the transient nature of satisfaction and the formation of salient standards for gauging such satisfaction (Ladewig & McCann, 1980, p. 113).

Building upon Ladewig and McCann’s (1980) work, I propose that two conceptual concerns need to be addressed in both the community satisfaction and community attachment literature before results from such studies can contribute to policy formation and applied efforts associated with community development. These concerns include (1) identification and utilization of a proper level of analysis, and (2) clarification of the meanings of community satisfaction and attachment. First each conceptual issue is introduced and justification provided for the attention paid to these concerns. Theoretical, methodological, and measurement issues which are related to these concerns are identified and discussed. Lastly, how these concerns relate to the practice of community development and conclude with suggested directions for future research are explained.

**CONCEPTUAL CONCERNS**

**Identification of a Proper Level of Analysis**

Following Ladewig and McCann (1980), it is first proposed that researchers adopt a common frame of reference when considering community satisfaction and community attachment. For the purpose of this paper, “frame of reference” is synonymous with “level of analysis.” It is important to note that the level of analysis is distinguishable from the more vernacular notion of “unit of analysis.” The unit of analysis refers to what or whom researchers study. The unit of analysis may be an individual, a household, a group, an organization, a community, or any number of other things including social objects (e.g., books, journal articles, poems, paintings, automobiles, etc.) and social interactions (e.g.,
weddings, friendship choices, divorces, fist fights, etc.) (Babbie, 1983; Bailey, 1994). Conversely, the level of analysis refers to where researchers conduct their study. At a minimum, the level of analysis addresses the question of whether the researcher is studying a problem at the micro or macro level (Blau, 1960; Galtung, 1967; Hannan, 1991; Homans, 1961; Riley, 1963; Wagner, 1964). All too often, researchers studying community-related topics ignore the level of analysis, confuse the unit of analysis with the level of analysis, or commit a “fallacy” of some form.

Methodological strategies and procedures lacking rigor and logic commonly have been referred to as “fallacies” (Hannan, 1991). One type of fallacy, which became known as the “ecological fallacy,” was proposed by Robinson (1950) in his renowned paper on ecological correlations and the behaviors of individuals. Robinson demonstrated that correlations between variables at the aggregate level varied widely from correlations between the same variables at the individual level. Thus, he proposed that researchers should not use aggregate-level data to make inferences about individuals. Converse to the ecological fallacy are the problems involved with upward cross-level inferences, or the use of individual-level data to make inferences about aggregate-level effects. This fallacy became known as the “atomistic fallacy” (Riley, 1963; Zito, 1975) or “individualistic fallacy” (Scheuch, 1969).

Galtung (1967) simplified the complex issues surrounding disaggregation (the ecological fallacy) and aggregation (the atomistic fallacy) in social science research with his formulation of “the fallacy of the wrong level.” According to Galtung (1967, p. 45):

... the “fallacy of the wrong level” consists not in making inferences from one level of analysis to another, but in making direct translation of properties or relations from one level to another, i.e., making too simple inferences. The fallacy can be committed working downwards, by projecting from groups or categories to individuals, or upwards, by projecting from individuals to higher units [italics in original].

Galtung’s “fallacy of the wrong level” is closely aligned with Wagner’s (1964) “fallacy of displaced scope.” According to Wagner (1964, p. 583), the fallacy of displaced scope “is committed whenever a theorist assumes, without further ado, that theoretical schemes or models worked out on the basis of macrosociological considerations fit microsociological interpretations, or vice versa.” Wagner believed that macrosociological, general-systems theorists (e.g., Talcott Parsons and Robert Bales) espoused what he labeled “the thesis of homology” (see also Hannan, 1971) and had the tendency to commit the fallacy of displaced scope. In his article, Wagner’s primary concern centered around the theoretical and methodological problems inherent in the “thesis of homology.”
The homology thesis posits the idea of consistency across levels of analysis. Theoretical continuity, an idea emphasized by Parsons (1967) in his analysis of the relation between the small group and the larger social system, is an underlying assumption of the homology-across-levels assertion. Disavowing the homology thesis, microsociological theorists such as Peter Blau and George Homans advocated an alternative position, a “discontinuity thesis” (Hannan, 1991). In contradistinction to the homology thesis, the core tenet of the thesis of discontinuity is that what holds at one level of analysis does not necessarily hold at another.

Confusion concerning levels of analysis has resulted in miscommunication when considering biological phenomena (e.g., Alcock, 1987; Gould, 1987a, b; Jamieson, 1989; Sherman, 1988, 1989), psychological phenomena (e.g., Chan, 1998; Glick, 1985; Ostroff, 1993), and, as I will show below, sociocultural phenomena (cf., Beckley, 1998). In the social sciences, such confusion has impeded the development of a coherent literature on community satisfaction and community attachment. A review of this literature revealed studies addressing the concepts at different areal levels, or varying frames of reference. As shown in Table 1, the unit of analysis for each of the selected studies of community satisfaction and/or attachment was the individual, with the exception of Cowell and Green’s (1994) work where the unit was the household. The level of analysis in the studies reported in Table 1 ranged from urban neighborhoods and/or suburbs (Austin & Baba, 1990; Fried, 1982, 1984; Guest & Lee, 1983a; Herting & Guest, 1985; Miller et al., 1980; Rigby & Vreugdenhil, 1987; Riger & Lavrakas, 1981; St. John, Austin, & Baba, 1986; Taylor, Gottfredson, & Brower, 1985) to communities (Bardo & Bardo, 1983; Bardo & Hughey, 1984; Beggs, Hurlbert, & Haines, 1996; Brown, 1993; Buttel, Martinson, & Wilkening, 1979; Cowell & Green, 1994; Davies, 1945; Fernandez & Dillman, 1979; Filkins, Allen, & Cordes, 2000; Goudy, 1977, 1982, 1990; Jesser, 1967; Kasarda & Janowitz, 1974; Liu et al., 1998; Miller & Crader, 1979; Murdock & Schriner, 1979; Rojek, Clemente, & Summers, 1975; Stinner & Toney, 1980; Stinner et al., 1990; Theodori & Luloff, 2000; Wasserman, 1982) to counties (Ladewig & McCann, 1980).

The level of analysis for each study shown in Table 1 was derived using a two-step decision rule. First, the research design of each study was reviewed to determine the study site(s) from which the data were collected. An examination of the methodological procedures revealed that data were obtained from survey respondents sampled from a wide array of spatial configurations. Data were gathered from surveys of neighborhood, community, county, state, and nation residents. The areal arrangements were then compared to the empirical measures reported in the article before determination was made with respect to that particular study’s level of analysis. Of primary consideration was the wording of the survey item(s) used to assess the level of community attachment and/or satisfaction. The research articles that reported data drawn from urban neighborhoods and used (a) the words “neighborhood” and “community”
Table 1. Units and Levels of Analysis for Selected Community Satisfaction and/or Attachment Studies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author(s)</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Unit of Analysis</th>
<th>Level of Analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Austin &amp; Baba</td>
<td>1990</td>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>Neighborhood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bardo &amp; Bardo</td>
<td>1983</td>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>Community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bardo &amp; Hughey</td>
<td>1984</td>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>Community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beggs, Hurlbert, &amp; Haines</td>
<td>1996</td>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>Community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brown</td>
<td>1993</td>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>Community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buttel, Martinson, &amp; Wilkening</td>
<td>1979</td>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>Community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cowell &amp; Green</td>
<td>1994</td>
<td>Household</td>
<td>Community</td>
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<tr>
<td>Davies</td>
<td>1945</td>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>Community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fernandez &amp; Dillman</td>
<td>1979</td>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>Community</td>
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<tr>
<td>Filkins, Allen, &amp; Cordes</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>Community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fried</td>
<td>1982</td>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>Neighborhood</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fried</td>
<td>1984</td>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>Neighborhood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goudy</td>
<td>1977</td>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>Community</td>
</tr>
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<td>Goudy</td>
<td>1982</td>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>Community</td>
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<tr>
<td>Goudy</td>
<td>1990</td>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>Community</td>
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<tr>
<td>Guest &amp; Lee</td>
<td>1983a</td>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>Neighborhood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Herting &amp; Guest</td>
<td>1985</td>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>Neighborhood</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jesser</td>
<td>1967</td>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>Community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kasarda &amp; Janowitz</td>
<td>1974</td>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>Community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ladewig &amp; McCann</td>
<td>1980</td>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>County</td>
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<tr>
<td>Liu, Ryan, Aubach, &amp; Besser</td>
<td>1998</td>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>Community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miller &amp; Crader</td>
<td>1979</td>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>Community</td>
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<tr>
<td>Miller, Tseberis, Malia, &amp; Grega</td>
<td>1980</td>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>Neighborhood</td>
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<tr>
<td>Murdock &amp; Shriner</td>
<td>1979</td>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>Community</td>
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<td>Rigby &amp; Vreugdenhil</td>
<td>1987</td>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>Neighborhood</td>
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<tr>
<td>Riger &amp; Lavrakas</td>
<td>1981</td>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>Neighborhood</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rojek, Clemente, &amp; Summers</td>
<td>1975</td>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>Community</td>
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<tr>
<td>St. John, Austin, &amp; Baba</td>
<td>1986</td>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>Neighborhood</td>
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<tr>
<td>Stinner &amp; Toney</td>
<td>1980</td>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>Community</td>
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<tr>
<td>Stinner, Van Loon, Chung, &amp; Byun</td>
<td>1990</td>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>Community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taylor, Gottfredson, &amp; Brower</td>
<td>1985</td>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>Neighborhood</td>
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<tr>
<td>Thoedori &amp; Luloff</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>Community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wasserman</td>
<td>1982</td>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>Community</td>
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</table>
interchangeably throughout the manuscript, or (b) the word “community” in the survey question(s) were coded as neighborhood-level investigations. The studies that used data drawn from community, county, state, and nationwide surveys and used the terms “neighborhood” or “community” in the survey item(s) were coded as neighborhood- and community-level analyses, respectively. Additionally, one study reported data drawn from counties and used the term “county” when referring to community satisfaction; thus, it was coded as a county-level analysis.

A caveat is in order concerning the level of analysis for each study reported in Table 1, especially with respect to those classified at neighborhood and community levels. At issue are the complexities surrounding the epistemic correlations between the conceptual definitions of neighborhood and community and their respective empirical manifestations used as settings for the study of satisfaction and/or attachment. Unlike counties, neighborhoods and communities normally are not characterized by formal jurisdictional boundaries. With regard to neighborhoods, the literature suggests that “they are social constructions named and bounded differently by different individuals” (Lee, Oropesa, & Kanan, 1994, p. 252; see also Guest & Lee, 1984; Haney & Knowles, 1978; Lee & Campbell, 1997). Communities also are largely socially constructed and, as will be explained below, transcend territorial boundaries.

Rarely, if ever, are the terms “neighborhood” or “community” defined for survey participants in social science research (cf., Lee & Campbell, 1997). Instead, investigators tend to use a priori definitions in their studies. These definitions, which are generally deduced from objective indicators, may have little in common with the subjective interpretations held by neighborhood and community residents. A conventional practice in community research is to define a community by delineating place (e.g., hamlet, village) and/or municipal (e.g., township, town, borough, city) boundaries. This procedure was used in the majority of studies classified at the community level in Table 1. Factors such as the cost of data collection and availability of secondary data, along with the fact that places and municipalities can be depicted geographically, are among the many reasons why researchers continue to use municipal borders to define communities.

Despite numerous warnings (Riley, 1963; Robinson, 1950; Scheuch, 1969; see also Luloff & Greenwood, 1980; Luloff & Wilkinson, 1977), researchers continue to employ in community studies data that have been collected at and/or aggregated to an areal level that differs from their level of interest. Notwithstanding the limited advantages associated with defining and equating counties with communities (Bonjean, Browning, & Carter, 1969; Overdevest & Green, 1995), such practices unfortunately cause confusion in the levels of analysis of community research. Consider Bonjean et al.’s (1969) position on equating communities with counties. Building upon Jonassen and Peres’ (1960) work, Bonjean et al. (p. 160) proposed that the county is a useful measure of community for several reasons. These included:
(1) The county is the one administrative unit below the level of the state for which the greatest amount of comparable data are available;

(2) The use of city data alone eliminates the rural population and would prohibit the measurement of the effect of the urban-rural determinants within the community system. Furthermore, even if some more precise ‘locality’ designation would be preferable (city, town, village, etc.), comparable data are readily available only for cities larger than 25,000; and,

(3) The political, social, economic, cultural, and functional boundaries of cities and villages are no more sharply delineated than are those of counties.

Moreover, Overdevest and Green (1995, p. 115) stated, “For most purposes, the county is an appropriate political, economic and social unit to analyze community issues.” However, in an examination of the potential consequences of working with data aggregated to the county level in community research, Greenwood and Luloff (1979, p. 46) noted that “if the concept of community is not conterminous with county lines then the results derived from county observations are misleading since the results may or may not be supported solely because of the effect of aggregation.”

Now consider equating neighborhoods with communities. While a neighborhood by definition is only part of a community (Wilkinson, 1991), much of the literature associated with the “question of community” theme equates neighborhood with community (Gans, 1962; Greer, 1962; Hunter, 1975; Janowitz, 1967; Liebow, 1967; Oliver, 1988; Suttles, 1972; Taub et al., 1977; Webber, 1963; Wellman, 1979; Wellman & Leighton, 1979; Whyte, 1955). For example, in 1974, Hunter (1975) replicated Foley’s (1952) 1949 empirical examination of a “loss of community.” Hunter, like Foley, investigated three dimensions of community. These dimensions included (1) functional/ecological (the use of local facilities); (2) social (informal neighboring); and (3) symbolic-cultural (sense of community). If the loss of community hypothesis were supported, Hunter (pp. 538-539) asserted that “one would expect a decline in the primary relationships of informal neighboring . . . [and] one would expect cognitive identification of and affective identification with the local community—in short, ‘sense of community’—to decline.” His findings revealed a loss of community in the functional/ecological dimension; however, the social and symbolic-cultural dimensions did not decline. In fact, the latter increased.

Foley was concerned with the degree to which city dwellers in Rochester expressed local neighborhood orientations. As Hunter (p. 537) noted, Foley’s “concern grew out of a central hypothesis within urban sociology that the outcome of continuing urbanization in modern industrial society would be the loss or eclipse of the local territorial community as a meaningful unit of social organization.” While Hunter recognized that the eclipse of community generated much attention (cf., Brownell, 1950; Morgan, 1957; Nisbet, 1953; Stein, 1960),
he claimed that numerous studies on the loss of community were misleading. Hunter (p. 538) noted that “the hypothesized ‘loss of community’ was itself not tested directly because (1) community itself was not the focus of analysis and (2) the studies did not explore directly the dynamics of community change over time.”

Neither Hunter’s study, nor Foley’s work of twenty-five years earlier, adequately distinguished between neighborhood and community. Confusing levels of analysis, Hunter (p. 540) stated that the purpose of the present study was “to replicate Foley’s study of twenty-five years ago—in the same inner-city neighborhood of Rochester, New York—to test the dynamic, causal propositions of the ecological, social and cultural-symbolic ‘loss of community’” [emphasis added].

By definition, a community should be capable of meeting the broad range of human needs (Konig, 1968; MacIver, 1931, 1937; Wilkinson, 1991). With that in mind, as Luloff and Wilkinson (1977) pointed out, the Rochester neighborhood studied by Hunter in 1974 was not a community, nor was it a community in 1949 when it was first studied by Foley. As revealed by the data, the community serving as the relatively complete local society was the larger metropolitan field. Only 17 percent of the respondents worked in the neighborhood in 1949, while only 11.4 percent of the respondents did so in 1974. More importantly, the data revealed that most of the major institutional functions were organized at the city level. As Luloff and Wilkinson (p. 827) noted:

> The finding that neighboring and place identification were weakly related to use of local facilities in 1949 and in 1974 shows that these are neighborhood rather than community phenomena. With functional integration removed to the larger field, these measures simply show persistence of association among neighbors in common activities of household and family life.

Such confusion underlies the question of how one assimilates the substantial literature of community studies in general and, in particular, the vast array of community satisfaction and/or community attachment research conducted at various levels of analysis. As illustrated in the general community and in the community satisfaction and attachment literature, findings at either the neighborhood or the county level need not generalize to the community.

**Clarification of the Meanings of Community Satisfaction and Attachment**

The second conceptual concern focuses on the clarification of the concepts of satisfaction and attachment. The community satisfaction and attachment literature is difficult to summarize, partly because it does not adequately define
what constitutes satisfaction and/or attachment or how each should be measured.

Over the years, several dimensions of community satisfaction have been explored, including measures of general satisfaction (Campbell, Converse, Rodgers, 1976; Filkins et al., 2000; Rigby & Vreugdenhil, 1987), domain-specific satisfaction (Campbell et al., 1976), satisfaction with the environment (Wasserman, 1982), satisfaction with services (Fried, 1984; Molnar & Smith, 1982; Murdock & Schriner, 1979; Rojek et al., 1975; Stinner & Toney, 1980), interpersonal satisfaction (Fried, 1984; Miller & Crader, 1979; Stinner & Toney, 1980), economic satisfaction (Miller & Crader, 1979), political satisfaction (Fried, 1982, 1984), and various social dimensions of satisfaction (Goudy, 1977).

Likewise, dimensions of community attachment that have been examined include community attitudes and sentiments (Austin & Baba, 1990; Beggs et al., 1996; Cowell & Green, 1994; Goudy, 1982, 1990; Guest & Lee, 1983a; Kasarda & Janowitz, 1974; St. John et al., 1986; Theodori & Luloff, 2000), local social bonds (Austin & Baba, 1990; Beggs et al., 1996; Cowell & Green, 1994; Goudy, 1990; Kasarda & Janowitz, 1974; Riger & Lavrakas, 1981; St. John et al., 1986), community solidarity (Buttel et al., 1979), interest in community (Theodori & Luloff, 2000), physical rootedness (Riger & Lavrakas, 1981; Taylor et al., 1985), social interactions, sense of fit in the community, or degree of commonness (Brown, 1993; O’Brien & Hassinger, 1992), community involvement and community amity (Stinner et al., 1990), and reliability of neighbors in times of need, total number of organizational memberships, and density of acquaintanceship (Barfield, 1995).

Research on community satisfaction and attachment is generally subsumed under a larger “quality of life” heading as both concepts are commonly used to tap well-being. Despite the lack of consensus on what constitutes attachment and satisfaction and how each is best measured, several researchers (Connerly & Marans, 1985; Guest & Lee, 1983a, b; St. John et al., 1986) asserted that attachment and satisfaction, although related, have different conceptual bases.

Guest and Lee’s (1983a, b) work on neighborhood life demonstrated how the concepts of satisfaction (evaluation) and attachment (sentiment) differ. Guest and Lee (1983a) showed that while satisfaction and attachment were positively correlated, there were noticeable differences in the subjective and objective predictors of each. These and other results led Guest and Lee (1983b, p. 234) to conclude:

Satisfaction with an area is believed to reflect its utilitarian value for meeting certain basic needs, such as adequate shelter and safety, while sentiment indicates a less rational and more gut-level emotional feeling.

Paralleling Guest and Lee (1983a, b), Connerly and Marans (1985) asserted that neighborhood satisfaction could be distinguished from attachment by the
degree to which each relates to the cognitive and/or affective quality of life components. Although neither attachment nor satisfaction exclusively tapped either cognition or affect, attachment, for Connerly and Marans, was viewed as being an indicator of the affective quality of life dimension, while satisfaction was viewed as being an indicator of the cognitive component. Attachment indicated emotions (i.e., happiness, pleasure, feeling at home); a sense of rootedness to a specific place was meant to be equivalent to community attachment. Conversely, satisfaction implied an evaluative judgment of achievements and aspirations.

St. John et al. (1986) also pointed to the conceptual distinctiveness between attachment and satisfaction, suggesting that attachment was a function of satisfaction. In their study, St. John et al. compared the effects of satisfaction with specific neighborhood attributes and integration into the neighborhood on neighborhood attachment. Their findings indicated that satisfaction or evaluation with neighborhood attributes was a significant indicator of attachment, although integration into the neighborhood had a stronger effect. Based on their results, St. John et al. (pp. 425-426) concluded:

\[
\text{. . . that the more socially integrated into a community people are, the greater their attachment to it. However . . . that evaluation of certain neighborhood or community attributes also is an important determinant of attachment.}
\]

In short, these authors asserted that satisfaction, although correlated with attachment, addressed evaluative factors, while attachment focused on sentiments. Thus, researchers who have used the two concepts interchangeably without providing any theoretical justification have added obscurity to a literature beset with confusion (see Beggs et al., 1996; Buttel et al., 1979; Fried, 1982; Stinner et al., 1990; Wasserman, 1982). Following Brown (1993), I assert that in future studies, community attachment and satisfaction must be viewed as separate yet related phenomena. Additional research focusing on the analytical distinctiveness between the two concepts is warranted.

DISCUSSION

To this point I have identified two conceptual concerns in the community satisfaction and attachment literature. First, a review of the extant research subsumed under the titles of community satisfaction and/or attachment revealed the continued blurring of distinctions between levels and units of analysis. As I have indicated, there is no impunity in such misuse. Researchers must be cognizant of the separation between levels and units of analysis. The failure to recognize and employ this differentiation both theoretically and empirically has resulted in a hodgepodge literature on community satisfaction and attachment.
Theodori

Second, I have suggested that there is a need to clarify the meanings of attachment and satisfaction and keep them distinct in empirical work. Although related, attachment and satisfaction are not two sides of the same coin. As proposed by several authors (Brown, 1993; Connerly & Marans, 1985; Guest & Lee, 1983a, b; St. John et al., 1986), satisfaction is rooted primarily in evaluation, while attachment is generally grounded in sentiment. However, additional empirical research rooted in community theory is needed to further the current state of knowledge with respect to the different yet related analytical bases of community satisfaction and attachment. Accordingly, I have asserted that there is a desperate need for researchers to continually clarify and refine the meanings of community satisfaction and attachment in future studies. Next I discuss theoretical, methodological, and measurement issues related to these concerns. I then illustrate how these concerns relate to the practice of community development.

**Theoretical, Methodological, and Measurement Issues**

For purposes of presentation, I have treated independently the shortcomings associated with the use of improper levels of analysis and the lack of conceptual clarity in the community attachment and satisfaction literature. Undoubtedly though, the two concerns are intimately related. Clarification of the meanings of community attachment and satisfaction, along with an increased understanding of the degree to which each relates to the cognitive and/or affective quality of life dimensions, must occur at the appropriate level of analysis.

Theoretically, the community is the most appropriate level of analysis for the study of community-level issues such as community satisfaction and attachment. Although it may sound very simplistic or elementary, the following statement needs to be reiterated. *Community-level inferences concerning satisfaction and/or attachment should be made at the community level, not at the neighborhood, place, municipality, or county levels.* However, as manifested in the satisfaction and attachment literature, an abundance of findings at various levels have been generalized to the community level. Ultimately, this has created confusion in a literature beset with obscurity.

While neighborhood-, place-, municipality-, and county-level analyses of satisfaction and attachment are justifiably worthy, they become problematic when the findings are inferred to communities. By no means am I advocating that investigators stop conducting analyses at these levels; nor am I recommending that researchers discredit the results from such studies. Instead, I am suggesting that researchers recognize neighborhood-, place-, municipality-, and county-level findings for what they ultimately are (i.e., findings from studies conducted in neighborhoods, places, municipalities, or counties) and generalize at the appropriate level.

So what distinguishes the community level from other levels of analysis? The search for possible answers to this question begins with a theoretical
perspective of community. I will put forth an answer to this question using a concept of community based on an interactional approach to the study of social and personal organization (Kaufman, 1959, 1985; Wilkinson, 1991). From an interactional perspective, community is a phenomenon that occurs in local societies. According to Wilkinson (p. 2) “a local society is a comprehensive network of associations for meeting common needs and expressing common interests.” Furthermore, “a local society is the organization of social institutions and associations in the social life of the local population” (Wilkinson, p. 27).

Three features inherent to any local society include: (1) a geographic dimension (i.e., locality); (2) human life dimension (i.e., people living there); and (3) relatively complete organization (i.e., institutions and patterns of behavior that cover the broad range of human interests). Each feature is a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for community. Only where these three elements exist does the potential exist for community.

An understanding of the notion of field and recognition of the distinction between a social field and a community field are central to the comprehension of the interactional conception of community. A field, according to Wilkinson (1970b), contains the following four elements. First, a field is a holistic interaction nexus. The parts influence one another and include both causes and consequences of focal objects or events. Second, a field is unbounded. However, it is characterized by its distinguishable focus or core of field-relevant properties. Third, a field is dynamic. It is in a continuous state of change. Fourth, a field is emergent. It is not governed entirely by its constituent parts, but rather is the outcome of the interaction of these parts.

A social field can be conceptualized as an arena of social organization. As Wilkinson (1970b, p. 317) noted, a social field is “a process of interaction through time, with direction toward some more or less distinctive outcome and with constantly changing elements and structure.” Social fields emerge through the interaction of actors and associations in a given locality. Locality-oriented social fields consist of local groups, which represent the interests of local residents, engaging in public, as opposed to private, action (Wilkinson, 1970a). In any local society, there are multiple social fields or arenas of social organization. Examples include the political arena, the educational arena, the social services arena, the economic development arena, and the health care arena. Where social fields in various interest areas converge or overlap, the potential to form a community field exists. The central feature distinguishing a community field, a special field among other social fields, is the ability to generalize across interest lines (Wilkinson, 1991). The interest that guides the community field is an interest *sui generis*.

With that in mind, I now distinguish conceptually the community level from the levels of neighborhood, municipality, and county. First, all neighborhoods satisfy two of the three aforementioned conditions necessary for community; they contain both geographic and human dimensions. However, neighborhoods are only components of communities because they generally lack
the range of social institutions and associations necessary to meet the daily needs of residents (cf., Wilkinson, 1986, 1991). On the other hand, municipalities and counties do meet the three criteria necessary for community. A major problem, though, associated with using a municipality or a county as a proxy for community is that unlike a municipality or county, the community is not territorially bound. The interactional approach views social interaction as the substantive element of community, yet it recognizes that community occurs in local settlements or places and is locality-oriented. The place itself, though, does not constitute the community. Instead, it is the interaction among the actors and associations that defines community, not territorial or jurisdictional boundaries. Thus, it makes little sense to assume, as many community researchers too often do, that a community coincides with municipality or county boundaries. Recognizing this, Bridger and Luloff (1999, p. 383) noted:

. . . the search for sociologically meaningful community boundaries is an inductive task, not something that can be established a priori. Analysis might begin at the municipal level, but community boundaries can only be determined by tracing the territorial scope of the ‘. . . actions and connections among people’ (Wilkinson, 1991, p. 24).

Concomitantly, a related methodological concern associated with equating communities with neighborhoods, municipalities, and/or counties involves sampling and its link to the generalizability of survey results. Sampling, which has its roots in modern statistics and probability theory, refers to “the methods and techniques of selecting samples whose results may be projected to larger populations” (Frankel, 1983, p. 21). Researchers interested in generalizing from a sample to a particular population or to populations in similar situations should sample units that are representative of the whole (Lohr, 1999; Som, 1996). A representative sample depicts as closely as possible the characteristics of interest in the population (Lohr, 1999). The more representative the sampling unit (i.e., the single element or collection of elements) is, the more likely the findings will have external validity (Henry, 1990). As will be illustrated below, drawing a community-level sample from a neighborhood, municipality, or county poses potential problems with regard to the representativeness of the sample and the transferability of survey findings.

Consider, for example, a common research scenario where the individual denotes the unit of analysis and the community depicts the desired level of analysis. A sample of individuals drawn solely from a neighborhood or municipality undoubtedly will include members of a community. However, recognizing that a neighborhood is only part of a community and that communities transcend territorial and municipal boundaries, the potentiality for such samples to be biased and underrepresentative of the community is very likely. In other words, a sample of individuals selected from a neighborhood or municipality
may not consist of people who adequately represent the various social fields within the interactional boundaries of the community.

A sample of individuals drawn from a county also may portray a biased or under-representative picture of the community. This could happen if the county were solely contained within a larger interactional community boundary. While such a situation is entirely possible, it would be highly unlikely to occur in most areas of the country, considering that the majority of counties in the United States contain more than one community. In all likelihood, a sample of individuals drawn from a county will contain people from more than one community, thus producing an unrepresentative or inappropriate community-level sample from which to make generalizations.

In addition to theoretical and methodological concerns, measurement issues with respect to the extant community satisfaction and attachment literature also warrant attention. First, with respect to studies of community satisfaction, researchers generally have placed emphasis on one dimension of satisfaction, either emphasizing objective indicators of satisfaction such as local programs and services (see Herting & Guest, 1985; Johnson & Knop, 1970; Ladewig & McCann, 1980; Molnar & Smith, 1982; Murdock & Schriner, 1979; Rojek et al., 1975; Stinner & Van Loon, 1992; Theodori, 1999) or subjective dimensions of satisfaction such as beliefs and aspirations (Bardo & Bardo, 1983; Bardo & Hughey, 1984; Brown, 1993). Rarely have empirical studies combined both objectively and subjectively perceived dimensions of community satisfaction (cf., Goudy, 1977; Gutek et al., 1983).

Moreover, left unanswered in the extant literature on community attachment and satisfaction are crucial questions concerning the meanings of the concepts as understood by the general population. All too often researchers have imposed a prior conception of community satisfaction and attachment upon survey respondents. Similarly, the “traditional” items used to measure community attachment (i.e., the degree to which one feels at home in the community, one’s degree of sorrow if he/she had to leave the community, and one’s level of interest in the community) (see Cowell & Green, 1994; Goudy, 1977, 1990; Jacob, 1997; Kasarda & Janowitz, 1974; Theodori, 1999; Theodori & Luloff, 2000) may not be the most appropriate measures of the concept. Recent work revealed little variation in the distribution of responses to these measures of community attachment (Theodori, 1999; Theodori & Luloff, 2000). Undoubtedly, measurement refinements with respect to community satisfaction and attachment, and methodologies that incorporate objective and subjectively perceived components of each concept are needed if work in these areas is to be viewed as useful, meaningful, and practical.

How Do These Concerns Relate to Community Development?

To reiterate, communities, unlike municipalities or counties, are not defined territorially; however, the territorial element is an essential part of most definitions
of community. From the interactional perspective to social and personal organization, community occurs in local territories or places and is locality-oriented, but the place itself does not constitute the community. Instead, the community is a natural process of interrelated, ongoing locality-oriented social interactions “through which residents express their common interests in the local society” (Wilkinson, 1991, p. 2). Interactions at the local level provide the basis for locality-oriented collective actions. Collective actions, or purposive actions taken in the community field, occur when actors and associations from the differentiated special interest fields in a local society come together and interact on matters concerning the common good.

Locality-oriented collective actions are crucial for issues related to community development because they act as catalysts in creating and/or altering the community structure so as to improve the overall quality of life of local residents. From an interactional framework, community development is a process of building and strengthening the community field (Luloff & Wilkinson, 1990; Wilkinson, 1970a, 1972, 1989a, 1989b, 1991). As a process, community development places precedence on development of community (i.e., the horizontal linkages) rather than on development in community (i.e., the vertical linkages) (Wilkinson, 1989a, 1989b; see also Summers, 1986). Consequently, a distinction between development in community and development of community must be made when trying to understand how communities change and develop (Kaufman, 1959; Summers, 1986; Wilkinson, 1989a, 1991).

Development in the community refers primarily to economic growth, such as job development, leadership development, and service development. This type of development, which views locality merely as a setting, may produce material gains for certain segments of the local population. On the other hand, development of community is a much broader concept. It refers to strengthening the social and economic vitality of the community field through patterns of interaction. Development of community involves purposive efforts by people in a locality to articulate and maintain community as a collective experience among themselves. According to Wilkinson (1989a, p. 340), this kind of development “means building the capacity of local people to work together to address their common interests in the local society.”

A number of investigators (i.e., Lloyd & Wilkinson, 1985; Luloff & Chittenden, 1984; Luloff & Wilkinson, 1990; Martin & Wilkinson, 1984) have illustrated how community action influences development in some situations. Research has shown that when community action becomes manifest in community development it tends to be induced locally (cf., Swanson & Luloff, 1990). Successful community development generally occurs when local actors express their shared interests in their locality and interact with the intent of solving their community problems, improving their quality of life, and shaping their future well-being.

Despite this information, little research has examined (a) the effects of community attachment and/or satisfaction on community action, and (b) the
substantive implications of community attachment and/or satisfaction on community development. Although it has been asserted that community attachment promotes community action (cf. Beggs et al., 1996), few investigators have examined empirically the link between community attachment and/or satisfaction and actions at the community level. Most researchers who have incorporated measures of community-level interaction into their study designs either have (a) used them as surrogates for community attachment and/or satisfaction, or (b) examined the effects of community action on community attachment and/or satisfaction, not the reverse (Beggs et al., 1996; Brown, 1993; Buttel et al., 1979; Fernandez & Dillman, 1979; Goudy, 1982, 1990; Kasarda & Janowitz, 1974; O’Brien & Hassinger, 1992; Rojek et al., 1975; Stinner & Van Loon, 1992; Stinner et al., 1990; Theodori & Luloff, 2000, Wasserman, 1982; Zhao, 1996). Several researchers (e.g., Beggs et al., 1996; Fernandez & Dillman, 1979; Goudy, 1990; Kasarda & Janowitz, 1974; Stinner et al., 1990) have used variables considered to be indicative of community-level action as measures of community attachment. Other investigators (e.g., Brown, 1993; Buttel et al., 1979; Goudy, 1982; O’Brien & Hassinger, 1992; Rojek et al., 1975; Stinner & Van Loon, 1992; Theodori & Luloff, 2000; Wasserman, 1982; Zhao, 1996) have used measures of community-level action as either independent or control variables in their examinations of community satisfaction and/or attachment.

One recent analysis, however, did explore the effects of community satisfaction and attachment on a measure of community-level interaction (i.e., the number of hours spent per month taking part in organized or planned group activities that involved other members of the community) (Theodori, 1999). In the study, community satisfaction was assessed with three items—satisfaction with local programs, satisfaction with place, and satisfaction with medical and health services. Community attachment was measured by two items—interest in community and degree of sorrow anticipated if one had to leave his/her community. The regression of the community-level measure on community satisfaction, community attachment, and several control variables revealed that while all three community satisfaction measures failed to reach statistical significance, each of the community attachment measures was positively and significantly related to engaging in organized community activities. Additional research is needed, though, before conclusions can be made about the effects of community satisfaction and attachment on community action.

In essence, an increased understanding of (a) the meanings of community attachment and satisfaction and (b) the consequences of each with respect to community action have direct applications for the practice of community development and policy formation. One possible reason why there has been limited justification for development and policy programs directed at strengthening community satisfaction and/or attachment might be because little is known about their potential impacts on community-level action. Working from an interactional perspective, I contend that the consequences of varying
levels of community satisfaction and attachment must be evaluated to determine whether different degrees of each promote or retard the emergence of the interactional community and, concomitantly, efforts toward community development.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

In brief, the purpose of this paper was not to chastise previous researchers who have examined the concepts of community satisfaction and/or attachment. Instead, my primary intention was to show that many earlier analyses have been conceptually incomplete. First, while individual-, neighborhood-, place-, and county-level analyses of satisfaction and attachment are justifiably worthy, they become problematic when the findings are generalized to the community level. This principle also applies to investigations of other community-related topics (e.g., participation, action, well-being). In addition, definitional issues, along with previous attempts to use the concepts of community satisfaction and attachment interchangeably, have posed conceptual limitations in the existing literature. Since it has been suggested that community satisfaction and attachment share similar qualities (i.e., evaluation and sentiment), additional basic and applied studies addressing the cognitive and affective components both within and between the concepts of community satisfaction and attachment are warranted. Such efforts are necessary if researchers, particularly those working in the field of community development, wish to distinguish analytically between the two concepts and assess their practicality empirically.

NOTES

1. See Wilkinson (1991, pp. 49-50) for a review of community topics from recent research in rural sociology.

2. Firebaugh (1978) dealt with the issue of inferring individual-level relationships from aggregate data and introduced a decision rule under which downward cross-level inference could be made without bias. According to Firebaugh, aggregate-level data provide unbiased estimates of individual-level relationships when the group mean of the independent variable has no net effect on the dependent variable.

3. Cowell and Green (1994, p. 642) stated that they “chose counties rather than cities or towns as the unit of analysis.” In reality, though, the unit of analysis in their study (the what or whom of interest) was the household. Their level of analysis (where they conducted their study) was the county.

4. Although it is recognized that differences exist between neighborhoods and suburbs in terms of size and spatial location (suburbs tend to be larger and located outside of the political boundaries of large central cities), a decision was made to equate the neighborhood and suburb levels of analysis. Evidence suggests that neighborhoods and suburbs are generally recognized by local residents as parts of, or localities within, a larger metropolitan area (Guest & Lee, 1983c). For purposes of presentation in this paper, both are referred to as the “neighborhood level.”

5. It is important to recognize that Connerly and Marans’ (1985) work dealt with neighborhood attachment and satisfaction, and that their conclusions were formulated at the
neighborhood level. Unlike the other neighborhood-level studies reviewed in this paper, Connerly and Marans did not distort their levels of analysis.

6. Certain sampling methods will produce either probability samples or nonprobability samples. In probability sampling, each unit in the population is given a known nonzero probability of being selected into the sample. Adherence to this basic principle of probability sampling assures that statistical inference may be validly applied when projecting sample results to larger populations. In nonprobability sampling, the probability of selection is not known. While the use of nonprobability sampling does not rule out statistical inference, it does greatly limit the generalization of findings beyond the specific sample studied (see Bailey, 1994; Frankel, 1983). In this paper, the term sampling refers to probability sampling.

REFERENCES


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