Civic Engagement and Sense of Community in the Military

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ABSTRACT. In the context of current discussions among social commentators about the status and well being of community in American society, this article examines the nature of civic engagement and sense of community in the U.S. military. Framed by social disorganization theory, a conceptual model is developed and tested with a sample of married active duty Air Force (AF) members. Our analysis examines variations in perceptions of sense of community as a consequence of three indicators of civic engagement: community capacity, community connections, and community participation. The results suggest that community participation plays a particularly important role in influencing the sense of community that active duty members feel. Human service organizations

and unit leaders are discussed as critical resources in promoting civic engagement and strengthening the sense of community among AF members. *[Article copies available for a fee from The Haworth Document Delivery Service: 1-800-342-9678. E-mail address: <getinfo@haworthpressinc.com> Website: <http://www.HaworthPress.com> © 2001 by The Haworth Press, Inc. All rights reserved.]*

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A few years ago Robert Putnam (1995) noted that the so-called "vibrancy" of American civil society originally described by Alexis de Tocqueville seems to have faded during the final decade of the 20th Century. Putnam described the increasing tendency of individuals and families "to go it alone," lacking civic engagement in their communities and social connections with one another. Putnam documented his claim by reviewing national data showing a decline in overall organizational membership, lower voter turnouts, reduced participation in organized religion, lower membership in unions, less participation in parent-teacher associations, and a greater tendency to "bowl alone," as expressed by the title of his article. Putnam expressed concern about the consequences of the increasing insularity of individuals and families in American society for the functioning of community as a supportive context for human development and fulfillment.

A number of social commentators share Putnam's conclusions and concerns (Drucker, 1998; Schorr, 1997; Wilson, 1987). However, others disagree with Putnam's description of Americans as disengaged from one another and as shunning civic involvements and responsibilities. For example, Ladd (1999), Executive Director of the Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, has amassed a vast array of data that depict civic engagement as diversifying and expanding rather than declining. Wuthnow (1998) claims middle ground between Putnam and Ladd. He describes Americans as engaged in group affiliations but more "loosely connected" than in past times. Regardless of their position on the current level and future direction of civic engagement in our society, many social commentators agree with Drucker's conclusion that "human beings need community" (p. 4). In other words, people need both connections with other people and a sense of being connected to others.

The United States armed forces have not been exempt from this debate about the current state of community life in our society. Social scientists who study the military have begun to ask questions about the psychological sense of community and responsibility for mutual support within the armed forces and the associated military community–an institution whose members have traditionally viewed as and prided themselves for "taking care of our own" (Bowen & Martin, 1998; Moskos, 1988). Unfortunately, while many assumptions are held about the nature and importance of community, dialogue, planning, policies and practices based on a systematic inquiry about community life in the military are lacking.

This exploratory investigation is a step in addressing the relative absence of research on the nature of community life within the military services, especially the relationship between civic engagement and sense of community. Based on our ongoing collaboration with the U.S. Air Force (AF) Family Advocacy Division (FAD), we began our exploration with data from a convenience sample of married active duty service members from nine AF bases in the continental United States. Our attention is focused on four dimensions of AF community life: (a) the level of participation of service members and their families in community events and activities sponsored by the base (*community participation*), (b) the ease with which members and families make connections with one another (*community connections*), (c) the shared responsibility and collective competence members and families demonstrate in handling situations threatening the general welfare of the community and its members (*community capacity*), and (d) the strength of a sense of belonging to the AF community (*sense of community*). The first three dimensions are proposed as indicators of civic engagement, whereas sense of community is proposed as an outcome of this engagement.

We first examine demographic variations in these four dimensions of AF community life. We then test a model that proposes both direct and indirect paths of influence between the three indicators of civic engagement and the sense of community reported by sample respondents. The concept of community used in our model acknowledges the spatial settings in which AF members live and work. These settings include the AF installation and the local civilian community. The model incorporates the interactions among community members and includes psychological concepts such as sense of community and community capacity.

THE CONTEXT

Policy and Program Initiatives

This investigation's focus on civic engagement and sense of community is consistent with a recent call by senior Air Force leadership to discover and develop strategies for promoting a sense of community among active duty members and their families (U.S. Air Force, 1997, p. 23). In response to this call, agencies in the AF human service delivery system are aligning their program standards with the goal to strengthen families through community-based prevention activities. For example, the Air Mobility Command (one of the Air Force's major organizations and representing a number of individual bases across the United States) has committed funds to secure training in community building strategies and techniques for family support staff at the base level.

The Family Advocacy Division (FAD), the sponsor of this investigation, has encouraged base-level agencies to work collaboratively in developing strategies to promote civic engagement and to strengthen the capacity of informal networks as mechanisms of social care. Family Advocacy's mission includes the prevention of family violence by encouraging community organization initiatives and community development. The efforts of the FAD have been supported by the AF Surgeon General's strategic initiatives for "Building Healthy Communities" through prevention and intervention activities, as well as AF implementation of a base-level Integrated Delivery System (IDS) as a mechanism for facilitating greater interagency collaboration in support of building and sustaining healthy communities and the well-being of community members.

Unfortunately, research examining the sense of community in the AF, as well as research identifying indicators of civic engagement associated with its variation, have not kept pace with these policy and program initiatives, nor has research considered the changing nature of military duties, military family life, and the evolving 21st century military community. Such research is critically important to informing and monitoring intervention and prevention activities designed to promote the sense of community among AF members and their families.

The Military Community in the 21st Century: Trends and Challenges

Personnel issues, especially the recruitment and retention of qualified and capable men and women, are pressing concerns confronting

our armed services (Maze, 1999a). Military leaders and defense analysts also agree that sustaining the well-being of service members and their families represents a critical aspect of achieving and maintaining a fully capable military (GAO, 1999).

During the 1990s, the Department of Defense (DOD) drastically downsized the armed forces and closed numerous military bases worldwide. In the same decade, U.S. military forces found themselves increasingly committed around the globe in a variety of peacekeeping and peacemaking operations, and supporting numerous humanitarian missions. Today, the associated pace of military life places an enormous strain on service members and their families (Maze, 1999b). While improvements in pay, allowances, and various quality of life benefits may help, these actions alone are not likely to ensure the well being of our armed forces and their family members (CSIS, 2000).

The various personnel challenges confronting the DOD have a profound influence on the sense of community within the armed forces. Downsizing the armed forces in a period of sustained high operational tempo has resulted in frequent service member absence and enormous demands on military family members and military family life. Many military families report feeling overwhelmed by day-to-day life demands (Bowen, Martin, & Mancini, 1999). Under these conditions, it is easy to understand why participation in community life on base seems diminished (Maze, 1999b).

Military installations have also experienced organizational and operational changes influencing the sense of community within the armed forces. Base closures and associated consolidations have helped create a number of military mega-communities with thousands of service members and military families spread across adjoining towns, cities, and even states. AF bases now represent a significant component of these mega-base military communities.

At large and small installations alike, outsourcing and privatization of services have influenced community life by eroding the boundaries between military and civilian life. In medical care, for example, the historic and psychologically important identification and direct connection with a military service provider are no longer guaranteed. This is becoming true for all community services as civilian contractors increasingly perform a variety of agency functions (Knox & Price, 1999). This "military connection" is considered an important aspect of being identified as a member of special group–the military community– and many active duty members perceive these changes as a diminishment of the military's commitment to "caring for its own" (CSIS, 2000).

In addition to these broad shifts in the nature of military service and the structure of community life and support services, the military services continue to struggle with issues of racial and ethnic group balance, gender integration, and acceptance of gays and lesbians. African-Americans are overrepresented, Hispanics and women are underrepresented, and homosexuals remain the target of discrimination and oppression (cf. Armor, 1996; CSIS, 2000, Moore, 1991). The failure of the military services to achieve broad military representation from diverse groups in American society in the context of social prejudices against particular groups can lead to the social construction of "in groups" and "out groups," with the "in groups" having greater access to preferred status. Such processes create group tensions, challenge the development of shared community norms and values, and thwart efforts to build bridges between groups that promote a common sense of identification and purpose (Shaw & McKay, 1969).

In combination, these trends and challenges have substantially influenced the nature of military life and careers and represent core issues confronting the armed forces in the first decade of the twenty-first century. The meaning of "military community" is in the process of being renegotiated in the day-to-day experiences and interactions of military members and their families. The military "camp, post, station" that evolved after WWII into the "military company town" of the 1970s, 1980s, and even the early 1990s no longer exists in its traditional form; it is evident that additional changes will continue in this new century (Martin & Orthner, 1989; Twiss & Martin, 1999). These trends and developments frame this investigation of AF communities and the corresponding discussion about the desired nature and form for the next century's military community.

Recent Empirical Work Related to Sense of Community

This research on aspects of "community" in the armed forces is consistent with recent work by Van Laar (1999). Based on a comprehensive review of the literature, Van Laar identified sense of community as a quality of life dimension and developed a logic model that associated variation in sense of community with positive military-relevant outcomes, including individual and family adaptation, mission readiness, and retention. Van Laar focused her review on the potential contribution of personnel support programs to promoting a sense of community.

Our investigation complements Van Laar's review by examining potential community-level processes that may mediate the relationship be-

tween formal support mechanisms and sense of community. These community-level processes are consistent with principles identified by Van Laar for strengthening a sense of community in the military. Such investigations are important undertakings in the development of explanatory theory in the behavioral and social sciences. By opening up and examining the "black box" of informal support mechanisms (i.e., civic engagement), this investigation has implications for informing and monitoring community social work practice in the military.

Bowen and Orthner (2000) provide a community intervention logic model linking Van Laar's conceptual model with the current investigation and offering a means to connect study findings to practice. These authors draw a distinction between intermediate and distal results. Intermediate results are the direct consequences or benefits from community-level intervention and prevention activities, such as community building activities by formal support mechanisms. Distal results are the indirect consequences or benefits of practice interventions; they are influenced by variation in the intermediate results. In the present investigation, sense of community is defined as a distal result. Community participation, community connections, and community capacity are defined as intermediate results, which can be potentially influenced by targeted practice interventions. Although this investigation does not specify the role of formal support mechanisms in the model examined, its results have implications for informing practice interventions by identifying three modifiable community-level processes expected to have direct and indirect paths of influence on the sense of community.

CONCEPTUAL MODEL

Figure 1 illustrates the conceptual model tested in the current investigation, a model discussed in earlier publications (Bowen, Martin, Mancini, & Nelson, 2000; Bowen, Martin, & Mancini, 1999; Bowen & Martin, 1998). Sense of community is depicted in the model as the primary dependent outcome. Variations in the sense of community are shown in Figure 1 as reflecting variations in community capacity, community connections, and community participation, which are considered to be indicators of civic engagement. All relationships are hypothesized as linear and positive.

Although exploratory, support for the conceptual linkages depicted in Figure 1 are anchored in the tenets of social disorganization theory. Formulated in the 1940s by Shaw and McKay (1969) in their studies of

FIGURE 1. Expected Relationships Among Community Participation, Community Connections, Community Capacity, and Sense of Community
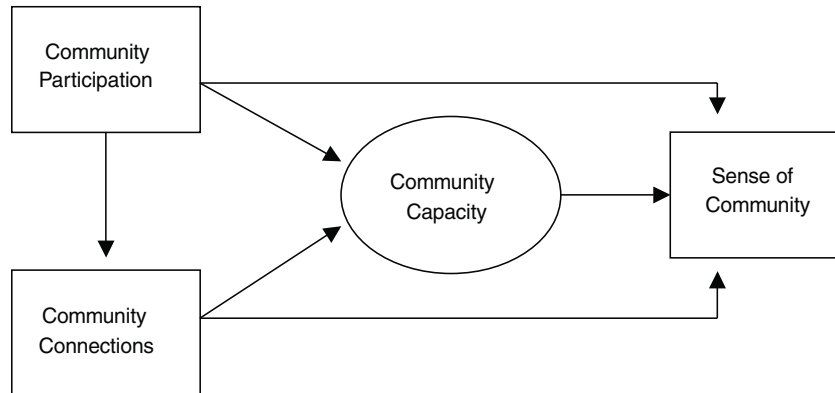
the relationship between neighborhood disadvantage and juvenile delinquency, the concept of social organization is central in the theory. In communities with high levels of social organization, residents are active participants in community life. They exhibit high levels of social integration and informal social control, and they demonstrate a readiness to act on situations threatening the well being of the community (Furstenberg & Hughes, 1997; Sampson, Raudenbush, & Earls, 1997). In the present analysis, we consider community participation, community connections, and community capacity to reflect social organizational processes in communities. Support for the model is also found in the social work practice literature on community mobilization and development (Ewalt, Freeman, & Poole, 1998; Johnson, 1998; Rothman, 1999; Sviridoff & Ryan, 1997; Weil, 1996)

Sense of community is a social psychological variable, which we define from a phenomenological perspective as reflecting the degree to which members feel a sense of common identity, esprit de corps, and camaraderie in the base community. This conceptualization is consistent with other definitions of sense of community emphasizing community identification and bonds of unity as important elements (see Van Laar, 1999 for a review). We agree with Pretty, Conroy, Dugay, Fowler, and Williams (1996) who distinguished sense of community from social support, which they defined as a correlate rather than an indicator of

sense of community. Research presented by Pretty et al. supports the distinctiveness of these two concepts.

In our model, community capacity is shown as having a direct and positive effect on members' perceptions toward the sense of community. We define community capacity as the extent to which service members and their families (a) demonstrate a sense of shared responsibility for the general welfare of the community and its members, and (b) demonstrate collective competence in taking advantage of opportunities for addressing community needs and confronting situations threatening the safety and well-being of community members. Although shared responsibility and collective competence cut across both formal and informal networks of social care, this discussion of community capacity focuses on its operation in informal networks. These informal networks may range in size and structure from small collections of concerned individuals within work units and neighborhoods to large groups that traverse the existing boundaries of military units and neighborhoods. In our view, community capacity represents actual behaviors rather than the potential for action, a perspective consistent with descriptions of community capacity in the social science literature (cf. Paine-Andrews, Fawcett, Richter, Harris, Lewis, Berkley-Patton, Fisher, Lopez, Francisco, & Williams, 1998).

The level of active participation of members and families in the base community (community participation) and the ease with which they connect with other service members and families in the community (community connections) are hypothesized in our model to exert direct effects, as well as indirect influence via community capacity, on members' perceptions toward the sense of community. We also hypothesize that community participation has positive implications for the ease with which members and families are able to make connections with other service members and families. Although the extent to which members and families are able to participate in the base community and establish connections with one another is constrained by forces in the larger physical and social context, the functioning and impact of this macro context is beyond the focus of the present investigation.

METHOD

Source of Data

Site visits were conducted during the months of March, April, and May of 1999 to nine AF bases in the continental United States. We se-

lected these bases in consultation with the study's sponsor to reflect variation in mission, size, location, operation of family advocacy prevention efforts, and levels of family adaptation as reported by active duty members in the 1997-1998 AF Needs Assessment. Given the exploratory nature of this investigation, special attention was given to ensuring variation in the targeted bases. The Family Advocacy Office at each base served as the point of contact for each site visit and had responsibility for recruiting respondents and for scheduling interviews and focus groups.

Interviews and focus groups were conducted with a broad range of respondents at each base, including civilian chiefs and directors of human service agencies in the base community, single and married active duty members, and civilian spouses (n = 433). The majority of respondents were married active duty members (59%). The views of these married active duty members are the focus of this investigation. The small number of civilian chiefs and directors, single active duty members, and civilian spouses of active duty members with complete data on the variables to be examined precluded comparative analysis.

Sample Profile

The sample for the analysis was limited to 180 married active duty members with complete data. Three-quarters of the sample were male (75%). In addition, more than half lived off base (58.9%). This parallels AF residential patterns for married active duty members who live in the continental United States. The sample was about evenly divided among those who had lived in the community for one year or less (35.0%), two or three years (35.6%), and more than three years (29.4%). Slightly more than half of the respondents were officers (52.2%), including 42 junior officers (Second Lieutenant to Captain) and 52 senior officers (Major to Colonel). About one-third (33.4%) were in the senior enlisted ranks (Technical Sergeant to Chief Master Sergeant), and a relatively small proportion (14.4%) of the sample was in the junior enlisted ranks (Airman Basic to Staff Sergeant).

Data Collection

A two-person site team conducted interviews and focus groups for two and a half days at each of the nine bases. An open-ended question interview guide provided structure and consistency in interviews and focus groups across bases. This guide was organized around the con-

ceptual domains identified in Figure 1: sense of community, community capacity, community connections, and community participation. It included questions about the operation of formal community networks of support, including base agencies and base and unit leadership. Interviews and focus groups were scheduled for one hour. Qualitative information from these interviews and focus group has been reported and discussed in a recent Air Force report titled, "Communities in Blue for the 21st Century" (Bowen, Martin, & Mancini, 1999).

During the course of the interview or focus group, respondents completed a six-item community rating form. The rating form was used to collect quantitative data on the conceptual domains tested in this study. On the same rating form, respondents provided demographic information, including their gender, marital status, length of residence in the community, current association with the military, location of residence, and pay grade. All respondent information was collected anonymously.

Measures

Four measures were derived from the six-item community rating form for purposes of testing the proposed model. Table 1 presents descriptive statistics and intercorrelations for these data.

The dependent variable, sense of community, was measured with a single item. Respondents were asked to rate the sense of community at their base on a 10-point scale from 1 ("very weak") to 10 ("very strong"). On average, respondents rated the sense of community at their base above the midpoint of the 10-point rating scale (M = 6.44).

The two-dimensional concept of community capacity was assessed by summing and averaging two items from the community rating form. Shared responsibility was measured by asking respondents to rate on a 10-point continuum from 1 ("very unlikely") to 10 ("very likely") the likelihood that members and families would pull together and respond as a community to situations threatening the general welfare of the community and its members.

Collective competence was assessed by asking respondents to rate on the same 10-point continuum the likelihood that members and families would be able to respond in such situations by meeting the challenge or solving the problem. In evaluating this second component, respondents were asked to assume that members and families would pull together and respond to situations as a community. As expected, the intercorrelation between these two items was high, which is reflected in the alpha reliability of this two-item summary measure (.74). Respondents felt strongly

TABLE 1. Descriptive Statistics and Bivariate Correlations for Measures (n = 180)

						Correlations		
Measure	Range	Mean	SD	Items	Alpha	2	3	4
1. Community Participation	1-10	6.05	1.61	2	.74	.14*	.28*	.47*
2. Community Connections	1-10	6.88	1.95	1	N/A		.24*	.41*
3. Community Capacity	1-10	8.23	1.48	2	.78			.40*
4. Sense of Community	1-10	6.44	1.88	1	N/A			

Note. All measures are coded from negative to positive.
*p < .05

confident in their respective communities' capacity to respond to adversity and positive challenge; the mean rating was 8.23 on the ten-point summary continuum.

Community connections were measured by a single item. Respondents were asked to rate the level of difficulty with which service members and families made connections with other service members and families on their base. Respondents evaluated this item on a 10-point scale from 1 ("very difficult") to 10 ("very easy"). The mean rating on this item was 6.88, which is above the midpoint of the 10-point rating scale.

The sum average of two items was used to access the community participation concept. One item asked respondents about the level of activity of service members in community events and activities sponsored by the base. A parallel question inquired about the level of activity of family members in base-sponsored community events and activities. Both items were assessed on a 10-point scale from 1 ("not at all active") to 10 ("very active"). The alpha reliability of this two-item measure was .74. This supports the decision to combine these items into a composite summary measure. Compared to other community-related measures in the analysis, the mean summary rating for community participation (M = 6.05) was lower but still above the midpoint.

Correlations between the four community-related measures ranged from a low of .14 between community participation and community connections to a high of .47 between community participation and sense of community. Generally low correlations were found among the three community-related measures (.14 to .28) expected to explain variation in respondents' perceptions toward the sense of community. However,

each measure had a moderate correlation with the dependent outcome (.40 to .47).

In addition to these measures, four single-item demographic variables were included in the first stage of the analysis to examine potential variation in the four community-related measures: gender (male, female), residence location (on base, off base), time in the community (1 year or less, 2 or 3 years, more than 3 years), and pay grade (reflecting junior enlisted, senior enlisted, junior officer, and senior officer status). Pay grade was included in the second stage of analysis but was recoded as a dummy variable (0 = other, 1 = senior officer). Pay grade is typically used as a proxy for socioeconomic status in studies using a military sample.

Data Analysis

Two stages of data analysis were conducted using SPSS. In the first stage, t-tests and one-way ANOVAs with pairwise contrasts (least-significant difference) were used to determine the significance of mean differences on the community-related measures among respondents grouped by gender, residence location, time in the community, and pay grade. Given the exploratory nature of this research, we did not have any specific expectations for differences related to these characteristics. A .05 (two-tailed) level of statistical significance was used in the analysis.

A series of multiple regressions was subsequently used to test the paths of influence among the four community-related measures. Pay grade was entered as a control variable in each multiple regression in the context of its importance in prior military studies as significant definer of military lifestyle and opportunities (e.g., Bowen, 1986). In the first regression, the dependent variable, sense of community, was regressed on pay grade, and the three antecedent variables: community participation, community connections, and community capacity. Next, community capacity was regressed on pay grade, community participation, and community connections. In the last regression, the direct effects of pay grade and community participation on community connections were estimated. A .05 (two-tailed) level of statistical significance was use to evaluate the results. Collinearity diagnostics revealed little dependence between independent and control variables in the analysis.

RESULTS

Stage 1 Analysis: Mean Comparisons

No statistically significant differences were found in respondents' perceptions toward the sense of community, community capacity, community connections, or community participation by their gender, residence location, time in community, or pay grade. Of the sixteen mean comparisons conducted in the first stage of the analysis, only one achieved statistical significance: respondents' perceptions about the ease of making community connections varied by their pay grade, $F(3, 176) = 4.52$, $p < .05$. The results from the pairwise contrasts revealed that senior officers ($M = 7.54$) perceived service members and families as having an easier time making connections with other service members and families than either junior enlisted members ($M = 6.21$) or junior officers ($M = 6.31$). The mean difference between senior officers and senior enlisted members ($M = 6.98$) was not statistically significant. The effect size of these mean differences as reflected by Eta-square was .07, which indicates that approximately 7% of the variance in community connections was associated with the respondents' pay grade.

Stage 2 Analysis: Multiple Regression

Table 2 shows the results of the regression analysis, including the standardized coefficients (p) of the predictor variables at each step in the analysis. Figure 2 shows the final path model, which specifies the indirect and direct paths leading to sense of community. In this figure each arrow denotes a significant path coefficient ($p < .05$). The numeric values above the arrow are standardized beta coefficients (p). In comparing Figure 2 with Figure 1, only one path of influence in the model failed to reach statistical significance. The expected relationship between community participation and community connections was not supported.

As anticipated, respondents were more likely to report a strong sense of community when they felt there was greater participation in base events and activities by members and families (community participation), when they felt that members and families experienced ease in connecting with others in the base community (community connections), and when they felt that there were higher levels of shared responsibility and collective competence in their community (community capacity). As interpreted from the size of their standardized path coeffi-

TABLE 2. Multiple Regression Results (Standardized Beta Coefficients)

Variable	Sense of Community	Community Capacity	Community Connections
Pay Grade (1 = 04-06)	.09	.12	.22*
Community Participation	.37*	.25*	.13
Community Connections	.28*	.18*	
Community Capacity	.22*		
Constant	2.39	5.79	5.63
Multiple R	.63	.37	.26
R squared	.39*	.13*	.07*
F	28.07	9.02	6.02
DF	4, 175	3, 176	2, 177

*$p < .05$

FIGURE 2. Path Relationships Among Community Participation, Community Connections, Community Capacity, and Sense of Community
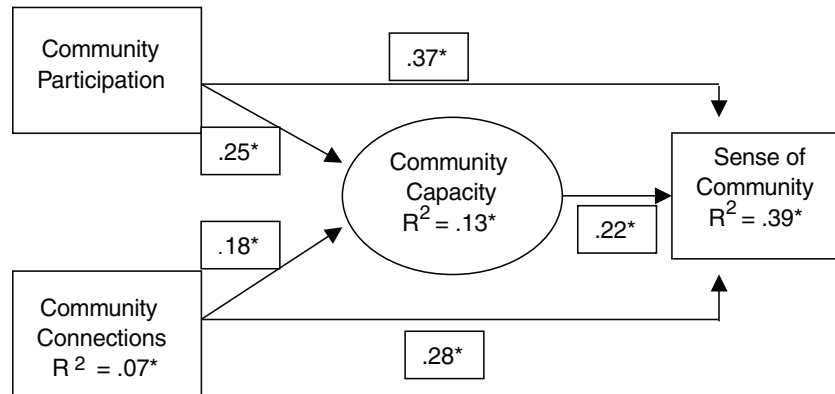
*$p < .05$

cients, community participation was the best direct predictor of a strong sense of community, followed by community connections and community capacity.

Community participation and community connections had an indirect effect on the sense of community through their positive and direct

effect on community capacity. As expected, respondents were more likely to report greater levels of community capacity when they perceived their community as working in other ways as well. These findings suggest that a sense of shared responsibility and collective competence among community members is facilitated when members and families are more active in their community and experience greater ease in making connections with one another. Of these two influences on community capacity, community participation had a greater effect than community connections as indicated by their respective path coefficients. When the direct and indirect effects of community participation and community connections on the sense of community are decomposed, community participation has a greater overall effect than community connections on the sense of community perceived by active duty members (total effects = .43 and .32, respectively).

As presented in Table 2, the three regression models explained between 7% and 39% of the variance in the respective endogenous variables: sense of community (R^2 = .39), community capacity (R^2 = .13), and community connections (R^2 = .07). The control variable, pay grade, was statistically significant only in the third regression analysis, which helps explain the statistical significance of the regression model in this step of analysis. Senior officers were more likely than their counterparts to perceive that members and families experience ease in making connections with other members and families in the community.

CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

Our examination of predictors of sense of community is based on the need to develop a systematic database on the role that community has in the 21st century Air Force. The concept of "community" presently enters into discussions about quality of life in the absence of an adequate research-oriented knowledge base. This study is connected to our work on conceptualizing community capacity (Bowen, Martin, Mancini, & Nelson, 2000) and is driven by AF leaders who desire the integration of formal and informal support mechanisms within the context of key community outcomes. Our discussion centers on the amount of research support for our model, next steps in research as they pertain to accounting for changes in military life, next steps in model development as they involve nuances in aspects of community, the growth or decline in community, the intersection of informal and formal support, the signifi-

cance of interagency collaboration, the necessity of specifying community outcomes, and the nature of dialogue on community issues.

Although the cross-sectional nature of these data precludes causal interpretations, the results are consistent with the proposed model. Only in the case concerning the relationship between community participation and community connections was there a lack of support for the model. Otherwise, the predicted relationships were supported by the data. The strongest direct effect was between community participation and sense of community. The strongest indirect effect, mediated through community capacity, also involved community participation. We conclude that an understanding of the sense of community people have is informed by what is known about how much participation there is in community activities, how easy it is to connect with others in the community, and by the shared responsibility and collective competence existing among community members. Consistent with Bowen and Orthner's (2000) community intervention logic model, each of these community factors is amenable as intermediate results to prevention and intervention efforts on the part of program professionals, and each reflects the significance of informal interaction and support within a community.

However, by no means is our model of the sense of community complete. Earlier we noted the many changes occurring in the life experiences of AF personnel and their families. In this particular investigation, the diversity of AF personnel and the multiple contexts in which they live were not fully addressed. For example, various structural and psychological aspects of family and community remain to be investigated. These include factors such as work demands, family size, the stage of the family life cycle, other competing demands on time, and individual preferences about community engagement. Bowen, Richman, and Bowen (2000) recently discussed the importance of examining the fit between families and communities at various stages of the family life cycle.

The study of community involves an examination of multiple layers and requires a "multiple context model" (Steinberg, Darling, & Fletcher, 1995). We began that process in our first level of analysis that included gender, residence, time in the community, and pay grade (proxy for SES). Only in the matter of pay grade did any of our contextual variables rise to importance (and it should be noted that pay grade was unrelated to our outcome variable, sense of community). However, this finding does suggest that within the AF community there are multiple sub-communities, one of which is defined by pay grade. Using this

finding as an example, pay grade as a contextual variable points to how status (both socioeconomic and status within the organization) and longevity make a difference in perceptions about the ease in making connections with others; it may point to differences in how the AF itself eases connections according to rank and status.

Additional research should provide more detail to the nuances of our factors in the model. For example, ease of community connections can be partitioned into the specific situations where connections are more likely to occur. Community capacity can be further refined to account for specific areas of collective competence (in a community those competencies may be stronger with regard to handling a natural disaster than to dealing with widespread crime). Community participation can be considered with regard to formal organization membership or in terms of volunteer activities. Sense of community itself may have various levels or aspects, such as those suggested by Unger and Wandersman (1985): social, cognitive, and affective. In sum, while our model is supported by the data, future work should include a greater accounting for multiple contexts and for refining the basic concepts in the model.

Earlier in this paper we discussed three views on the status and well-being of community, ranging from pessimism (Putnam, 1995), to optimism (Ladd, 1999), to a balance between the two (Wuthnow, 1998). Discussions about community change and well being parallel those that have often surrounded the family and that have been discussed for years (Mancini & Orthner, 1988). In this study we are not able to directly test these hypotheses of community decline, expansion, and change. However, our data speak to the processes underlying the well being of a particular community, or a subset of people within a community. For example, we find that sense of community is very much related to how people behave and use their time, when people feel that connecting with others is attainable, and when responsibility for one another is shared, and when that responsibility is actually evidenced by competent responses to issues.

Part of the answer to how well a community and its members are doing can be answered by examining whether people feel connected with others–by examining participation and interaction patterns in the community, and by assessing if the community feels it can successfully respond to adversity and positive challenges. The natural research questions that emerge from our data and that relate to community health, demise, or change include: What data are available to us that speak directly to community well being? Which community indicators

are most valid and come closest to representing people's lives? What is the best set of indicators that capture whether a community or a sense of community requires some sort of intervention?

Previously we discussed the intersection of informal and formal support within a community (Bowen, Martin, & Mancini, 1999). Our data have direct implications for both types of support. We have argued that formal support is important in facilitating informal networks and support. Within the military environment, two prominent formal support systems are unit leadership and the human service delivery system (including units dealing with health, family support, parent education, and so on). Historically these systems have not been intended to foster informal networks among military members and their families. Yet the potential for doing this is great, especially in context of military leadership's desire for families to be more self-sufficient and to have stronger community ties. Further, formal military-based systems are complemented by civilian systems (Knox & Price, 1999). The military unit is positioned to be a powerful ally for both human services agencies and for people themselves to further community participation (Bowen, 1998), which according to our analysis has a great deal to do with sense of community. The unit is a conduit by which military members and their families can establish connections with one another and gain access to agency-based programs and services. Our work suggests that some units do provide effective links between people and agencies and readily connect members and families with other members and families (Bowen, Martin, & Mancini, 1999).

Human service organizations have a role to play in fostering sense of community, as well as its correlates of community participation, community capacity, and community connections (Sviridoff & Ryan, 1997; Weil, 1996). This can take two forms, the first having to do with interagency collaboration and the second having to do with redefining agency outcomes to include community-building factors. Since "community" is a multilayered and integrated phenomenon, responses to community situations must be so as well. Consequently, interagency collaboration is a key ingredient in building community. An often heard term in the human services field is the "stovepipe" or "silo" approach–referring to agencies or organizations that singularly approach the community (or the families which comprise it) rather than operating in concert with one another. The AF Integrated Delivery System (IDS), while still in its infancy, is an example of an initiative designed to bring key family support agencies together. Though not necessarily easy to do, collaboration enables program professionals to accomplish goals

that otherwise they would never reach (Mancini & Marek, 1998; National Network on Collaboration, 1996).

Establishing community-oriented outcomes is another matter. In our study the outcome is sense of community–the feeling one has of being integrated with the community, feeling a part of the community, and belonging to the community. Service agencies could address other community-oriented outcomes. Our central point is that there is a set of community outcomes that can be supported by agency and inter-agency efforts. The history of human service agencies is the focus on individual-oriented results and sometimes on family-oriented outcomes. Extending results to a community level outcome is often lacking. In today's fast-paced and diverse culture, shifting the focus to the community level may provide the return on effort agencies have expected from outcomes focused solely on individuals and families.

Our results indicate that community building, as embodied in the sense of community, occurs through community connections, community capacity, and community participation. We believe that this model provides a roadmap for community prevention and intervention initiatives. One structure for this roadmap includes dialogue, planning, policies, and practices. All are important for making a difference in a community. If community change is to occur then dialogue must be intense, intentional, and diverse. Since community is multilayered by definition, dialogue about how to achieve certain community outcomes must include community-wide stakeholders. The dialogue should include a focus on community needs, conditions, assets, and potentials. In addition, dialogue about community building should be purposeful and oriented toward specific outcomes. Planning for community-building is a natural occurrence from dialogue and includes "backing-up" from the desired outcomes toward the various steps necessary for reaching them, including specific activities (Bowen & Orthner, 2000). Policies and practices are vehicles demonstrating that the dialogue and planning has been turned into action. A part of the planning could include an analysis of how current policies and practices are oriented toward community outcomes and processes. A number of questions reflect this kind of analysis flow from our model: Do policies and practices have a direct bearing on building sense of community? Do they foster a sense of shared responsibility and the accrual of collective competence? Do they increase opportunities for individuals and families to make connections and to participate in community activities? Can they be related to desired community-oriented outcomes?

Our study has examined a model of sense of community among active duty members of the U.S. Air Force. Key concepts included community participation, community connections, and community capacity. The data support this model and suggest implications for formal and informal networks. The model and supporting data have relevance for civilian communities as well. In both military and civilian communities the pace of life has quickened, mobility has increased, work demands are substantial, families are pulled by many demands on their time and energy, and people desire balance in their lives.

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