Collegial Community or Exclusive Tribe?

Small independent colleges and universities pride themselves on being like a family—the prototypical community with a shared space, values, and goals.   Becoming integrated into that community is the experience of every freshman as he or she goes through orientation, matriculation, and settling into a routine.

Not long after this initial process, however, students—often with the encouragement and support of college staff and faculty—begin sorting themselves into smaller groups. If they are athletes, their "community" becomes the team. If they are drama students, their "community" becomes the cast of a show or fellow drama majors. As students identify a major, they begin to identify with other students with the same major. Some join fraternities, sororities, or clubs with specific interests—politics, the environment, religion. These campus clubs are largely self-governing, though most have faculty advisors.

These smaller groups or "communities" within the college or university provide important psychological, social, and intellectual support for students as they bond with one another and take on a new identity.

However, these groups can also limit a student's connections to the broader community. They can limit contact with "outsiders." They can become exclusive rather than inclusive.

Student Affairs personnel often deal with issues of unhappy students who have not found a group for themselves or who have been excluded from some group with which they sought affiliation.

The practice of the Student Affairs Staff has been not to interfere in club activities unless the groups openly break some rule or engage in prohibited behavior such as hazing. During the past academic year, the Student Affairs staff intervened only to help settle conflicts within the housing units; however, as the new year has begun, the same pattern of behavior has become evident, and conflicts have become more frequent.

As a campus leader and a dormitory resident, you are aware that a very strong club with a long and positive history on your campus is gaining a reputation for being very closed to outsiders and that these attitudes of club members are spilling over into dormitories, causing conflict among residents, including some of your personal friends.

Community and The Village Common

A small Southern town has sought ways to strengthen a sense of community among disparate citizens—different ethnic groups, long-time residents, an influx of retirees from out-of-state, and students at the nearby colleges.

A philanthropic group has gained possession of a two-block square area just one block from the heart of downtown. The group has proposed a public-private partnership to turn this area into a "common," a public park to be shared by the community. Most of the property is paved over and is used on occasion for overflow parking. Its outside perimeter is bounded on two sides by historic homes, on one side by a public library, and on the fourth side by a church.

The philanthropic group asserts that the common will draw citizens together for shared recreational experiences, art shows, musical performances, and other public functions. It will, in addition, provided needed green space near the business district. It will also include public restroom facilities. Finally, the philanthropic group has agreed to fund and oversee the planning and design of the common, though it has requested tax dollars from the city to implement the building of the common and to demonstrate the city's commitment to the plan.

The Chamber of Commerce and several civic clubs have offered vocal support for the proposal, and the city manager has agreed that the city budget should provide some of the funds, particularly for infrastructure such as water and sewage facilities.

However, the plan has met with some opposition. Nearby residents have expressed a fear that the common will attract more homeless people to the area, will become a location for drug deals. They have also expressed concerns that the common will be difficult and expensive to police and to keep clean and attractive. They note that other green spaces in the city have experienced these kinds of problems. The residents have also made it plain that the city itself has a vested interest in maintaining the value of residential properties inasmuch as they provide a tax base for the city budget.

Assume that you are a resident whose home borders the proposed common.

Community Policing vs. Vigilantism

On June 14, 2017, James T. Hodgkinson opened fire on members of congress and staff at a baseball practice in Alexandria, Virginia. As information about the assailant became public, records revealed that, though he had never voiced direct threats against the victims, he had been cited for numerous traffic violations and at least once for domestic abuse. In addition, he had expressed strong opposition to Republican policies and politicians on social media.

Commentators noted that most people who commit violent attacks have "come to the attention of someone in the community" because of their words or actions before the violent attack actually occurs. In response, ABC News anchor George Stephanopoulus suggested that this fact might mean that we need to expand the concept of "community policing" and that citizens should be more proactive in warning officials about such persons.   Some police officials seconded this view and asked for more community involvement in alerting officials about such perceived dangers.

The failure to "police the community" in this way results from many factors. First, some citizens fear the police.   Some fear being summoned to court as a witness. Still others fear those who express the violent threats. Some simply do not want to get involved.

On the other hand, this private form of "community policing" poses its own risks. One such risk is the possibility of wrongly identifying innocent persons or deliberately accusing a personal enemy as a threat to the public.

In American history, we have experienced numerous instances of "community policing" becoming outright vigilantism, particularly in frontier areas where criminals preyed upon citizens with impunity. Vigilantes have also launched "police action" in opposition to the social, political, moral, or ethnic values and traditions of minority groups.

For example, public opposition to Mormons resulted in the imprisonment of Joseph Smith in Carthage, Illinois, where he was killed when a mob stormed the jailhouse. In 1851 and 1856, the San Francisco Vigilance Movement sought to eliminate crime, but an element of this movement focused on Australian and Irish immigrants.   On October 9, 2013, the FBI apprehended members of a rabbinical gang that administered extrajudicial beatings and torture to Jewish husbands who were accused of various crimes or sins. In all these instances, public groups sought to defend their communities in the name of justice.[i]

---

[i] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/vigilante

Cyber Communities and Ethical Relationships

Apps inviting computer users to join a "cyber community" abound: Twitter, Instagram, Linkedin, YouTube, Facebook, Reddit, Pintrest, Tumblr, and Flickr are just a few of the choices available.   In August, 2017, Wikipedia listed 85 such websites that had more than a million users each.[i] They seem to fill a need that people have to form friendships or romantic relationships with others with similar interests.

Almost daily, news media report cases of deception, deceit, or criminal activity issuing from such cyber communities. Cyber-bullying resulting in trauma or suicide, the transmission of sexually explicit photos, the kidnapping of naïve teens are the more common abuses arising from these cyber communities.

Most of these websites require users to create an account providing their name, their username, and a password; and they sometimes ask users to meet a minimal age requirement.   With few exceptions, real names and other information may be falsified; in other cases, the cyber communities guarantee anonymity.   Some users carefully and deliberately create false identities and develop alternative personas for use within the cyber community.

Cyber communities clearly have the power to enrich or endanger lives, but do they have ethical standards similar to actual or face-to-face communities?

When joining actual or face-to-face communities, persons are often asking to join other members with whom they already have relationships. These relationships are often based on a common belief system or a code of behavior based on some perceived ethical values. For example, Rotary International, a network of 1.2 million members, asks members to honor the club's motto: "Service Above Self"; and one of the club's stated objects is to encourage and foster "high ethical standards in business and professions."

Local political groups invite people to affiliate with them based on a platform or statement of goals or social principles.   Religious groups ask members to affirm a creedal statement or to honor ethical traditions such as The Ten Commandments. Volunteer groups—even temporary volunteer groups—usually are united around a service project such as building a Habitat for Humanity House or raising money to fight a specific disease.

Clearly, members of actual communities sometimes fail to honor the ethical codes espoused by the community, but most cyber communities ordinarily ask for no such commitment from the individual.

[ii] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_virtual_communities_with_more_than_1_million_users

Divided Loyalties

Jacob Schulz is a sixteen-year-old member of a separatist religious sect, which, along with other such sects, are collectively called Mennonites. Jacob is the youngest of four brothers; he has three younger sisters. The older brothers own their own farms and also operate their father's farm as he is now too old to do so. Jacob's mother suffers from a debilitating disease which will eventually result in her death.

From early childhood, Jacob demonstrated an unusual artistic talent. His excellent drawings of farm life and domestic animals were acknowledged by his family, but their tradition avoided excessive praise or the singling out of one person's accomplishments.

While on vacation the previous summer, Ivan Schlemmer, a New York City art dealer visited the Mennonite area. Upon revealing his profession to a local merchant, Ivan was told by the merchant that a member of the community was a gifted artist. Ivan decided to visit Jacob's home to see his work and was impressed with Jacob's talent. Jacob gladly gave some of his drawings to Mr. Schlemmer.

Late in the summer, Jacob received a letter from Mr. Schlemmer offering him a scholarship at a New York City art school. Jacob was flattered but hesitant to discuss the letter with his family. When he finally did so, the reaction was much as he expected. His older brothers suggested that his duty was to begin to take over his father's farm and relieve them of some of the responsibility, and influential elders in the community affirmed this opinion. His sisters suggested that his duty was to stay to assist them with the care of their aging and ailing parents. His parents themselves expressed great fear that he would be unable to cope with city life and deemed the city extremely dangerous and corrupting. To leave the community was virtually unheard of within this sect.

Yet Jacob loved drawing. He did his duty on the farm but was not drawn to farming as a vocation or life-style. He loved his parents but knew that the extended family and church friends would provide them with loving care and meet their needs. He, too, was fearful of the city and the radical change that living there would require; but he was self-confident and strong, and his heart leaned toward expanding his artistic ability. He rationalized that he could always return to the Mennonite community if things didn't work out.

Homeless in Seattle

"Seattle is among a number of cities in which the tech boom is driving up the cost of living. The highly paid tech workers there are expected to pay a new city income tax to help those who make less.

"It almost seems inevitable. If a city undergoes a tech boom, the cost of living soars. City leaders in Seattle are struggling to confront this. First came a controversial $15 minimum wage. Now they're trying to raise taxes on the rich."

Carolyn Adolph, a reporter for KUOW public radio in Seattle reported on the circumstances and the people affected by them in the modern urban dilemma:

"Late afternoon, and thousands of Amazon workers are ending their day. They're streaming out of the company's ever-expanding compound of glassy, glossy office buildings in the South Lake Union neighborhood—heading for the Whole Foods or running for the streetcar. This is the world of young techies Kate and John Walter."

Kate says, "We're in this situation where we're living in a small apartment just to make ends meet right now." John adds that he is thinking about "using the experience here, going somewhere where rent isn't so astronomical and could only get worse."

Adolph reports: "John likes Seattle's latest idea—tax the people who make more than $250,000 a year to raise $140 million a year for things like affordable housing, services for the homeless and transit, so people can get to work from places where they can afford to live." John adds that he would be glad to pay the tax if he were making more than $250,000 because Seattle at present has no income tax.

Kate, on the other hand, isn't sure that she would want to be singled out for such a tax were she to make $250,000 per year. She says, "Why is it fair that I work so hard to get to that point, and now I'm forced to pay more?"

A software engineer testified before the city council on the new tax. He stated: "I . . . make so much money that I could afford seven apartments . . . . I don't want seven apartments. I actually think that anyone who wants to live here should be able to."

After weeks of discussion and hours of debate, the City Council is now ready to vote on the issue.

Individual Rights Within a Covenanted Community

Since the 1960's, "the fastest-growing form of housing in the United States . . . are [sic] common-interest developments (CID's), a category that includes planned unit developments of single-family homes, condominiums, and cooperative apartments."[i] Increasingly, these developments have been governed by a homeowner's association (HOA). Persons who buy property in these developments must become a member of the HOA and agree to abide by its restrictions or covenants.

The HOA's purport to protect the value of properties by providing some maintenance of the properties such as grounds-keeping in common areas and by requiring uniform standards of appearance of the properties. Each property owner has a right to vote on any changes to these standards.

Too often these standards become a source of dispute within the association.

For example, "The Marine combat veteran who wants to raise a flagpole on which to fly an American flag on his property [in Rock Hill, South Carolina] has been denied approval by the homeowners [sic] association of his neighborhood. But Gary Pittman is vowing to build the flagpole anyway, and he's preparing to fight another battle—this one in court."[ii]

Residents of the HOA respect Mr. Pittman's military service as demonstrated in their discussions of this case. However, some fear that allowing Mr. Pittman to erect a flagpole to fly flags or banners would be considered offensive to other residents. Indeed, in a similar case in Cary, NC, an HOA ordered a homeowner to take down a Confederate Battle flag being flown in violation of a rule that prevents flags being flown without permission of the HOA.[iii]

U.S. courts have affirmed the right to fly the American flag.   They have not ruled on the right to erect a flag pole.

Mr. Pittmann has indeed taken his case to District Court. As elected Chair of the HOA, you have been called to testify on behalf of the community.

---

[i] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Homeowner_association

[ii] "HOA Denies Rock Hill Disabled Vet Pole for American Flag," *The Charlotte Observer*, 5 Aug 2017. http://www.charlotteobserver.com/news/local/article30018390.html

[iii] "Cary Man Fighting HOA to fly Confederate Flag," posted August 17,2015.
 http:/www.wral.com/cary-man-fighting-hoa-to-fly-confederate flag/14837217

Participation as an Ethical Obligation in Community

Traditionally, U. S. political policy has favored stability and participation as essential-—even ethical—components of an effective democracy.   The preamble to the Constitution laid out goals of a "more perfect union," "domestic tranquility," the "common welfare" as principles necessary to the survival of the nation. These phrases clearly imply that stability and unity were ideals of the Founders.

These ideals were often achieved through participation in mediating institutions—schools, churches, fraternal organizations, professional associations or economic groups. These mediating institutions conveyed the norms and values of a society to individuals and socialized and integrated those individuals into that society or community.

Various acts of Congress promoted and supported social institutions that re-enforced social stability and integration of individuals into communities. Even before the Constitution was ratified, the Congress of the Confederation granted every township a section for the maintenance of public schools. These schools often served as the center of community life as well as providing an education for the young. States licensed marriages because it was believed that marriage was a stabilizing social institution. The Constitution encouraged religious institutions by protecting them from government interference or separating them from the state and freeing them of the tax obligations common in Europe.

Once Jefferson's Louisiana Purchase was made, Congress sought to populate and settle the west.   The Homestead Act made land ownership and family farms an ideal means of establishing communities; it granted adult heads of families 160 acres of surveyed public land for a minimal fee and five years of continual residence on that land. The Morrill Act established land-grant institutions and asserted the national value of practical education. Clearly, "mediating institutions"—families, schools, churches—were regarded as supportive of the goals expressed in the Preamble, and commitment to these institutions was regarded as a mark of good citizenship.

Are these institutions still valued as essential to the survival of democracy, specifically by the generation labeled as "Millennials," defined by the U. S. census bureau as persons having been born between 1980 and 2000?

Kirsten Mikesell recently asserted that Millennials have "commitment issues." Specifically, she asserted, Millennials are choosing the single life over marriage, are job-hopping, are moving frequently from one city to another, are unattached to politics and religion, and fear ownership of homes.[1]   Oliver Jeges has called Millennials "Generation Maybe."

---

[1] Kirsten Mikesell, "It's True: Many Millennials are Noncommittal." At Valparaiso University (Nov. 5, 2015). https://www.theodysseyonline.com/its-true-millenials-are-noncommittal

The motto on the Great Seal of the United States reads: *E Pluribus Unum*—Out of many, one. In her poem "The New Colossus," Emma Lazarus called the Statue of Liberty the "Mother of Exiles" who cried: "Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free." Yet despite these idealistic expressions, America has not always welcomed immigrants—legal or otherwise.

Today, we face a new dilemma regarding the status of immigrants—particularly, "undocumented" immigrants. Specific cases best illustrate this dilemma.

> Denisse Rojas arrived in the United States when she was just 10 months old, brought here from Mexico . . . . This young woman is the human face of a federal program called Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals. This program temporarily halts the threat of deportation for young people who arrived before their 16th birthday and provides them with a work permit and documents needed to enroll in college. Today, Rojas is enrolled at the New York's Icahn School of Medicine at Mt. Sinai where she's on track to earn her degree in 2019. She intends to specialize in emergency medicine and work in low-income communities to provide health care to families like her own that would otherwise go without treatment.[1]

Without the protection of DACA, Rojas might never have achieved her dream. Others still live in jeopardy. In a graduation speech at Harvard, Mark Zuckerberg teared up as he recounted a conversation with a high school student who was also an undocumented immigrant. Zuckerberg said: "'He wasn't sure if the country he calls home, the only one he's ever known, was going to deny him his dream of going to college' because of his immigration status."[2]

Another immigration case demonstrated the impact of the dilemma on families. In August, 2017, a Mexican immigrant mom with three U.S. citizen children boarded a plane from Michigan to be deported to a country she had not seen in 20 years.

> For the past seven years, Salazar Bautista had gone to her local ICE office to receive a stay of removal as part of her check-in process to temporarily defer her deportation. At her latest check-in in March . . . she was told she would be removed in early August . . . . according to new policies.
>
> As a contributing member in her community and a U.S. taxpayer, Salazar Bautista says that her children would suffer the most if she's deported. Her two younger children, who are unfamiliar with Mexico, would permanently leave with her. They have been fiercely resistant to the move. And while her oldest daughter will come with them for a week, she would return to continue her studies at Michigan State University.[3]

---

[1] Diane Feinstein, "Dreamers Fear Deportation," *The San Francisco Chronicle* (7 Dec 2016). http://www.sfchronicle.com/opinion/openforum/article/Dreamers-fear-deportation-10781531.

[2] https://www.cnbc.com/2017/05/25/mark-zuckerberg-cries-during-harvard-commencement-speech.html

[3] https://thinkprogress.org/lourdes-salazar-bautista-ice-d442b2f05162

When Ethical Standards and Cultural Values Collide

Picture a strikingly good-looking, olive-skinned young man in his twenties wearing blue jeans, a tee shirt, a ballcap and sneakers. He is facing the corner of a tube car in central London with his arms extended to the walls at the end and the side of the car. He is facing a woman in the corner dressed from head to toe in a black Niqab (ne-kab). Only her dark eyes are visible through a slit in her head covering.

To tourists and others on the car, he seems to be shielding her from the eyes of on-lookers. But his stance might also be seen as imprisoning her. The stark contrast in their clothing is impossible to ignore. As the tube stops at a station, they exit into the streets near the Houses of Parliament and Westminster.

The status of women in the Middle East is often a matter of concern to Westerners. Freedoms enjoyed by Western women—access to co-ed education, freedom to drive automobiles, freedom to move freely in society unaccompanied by men—are often denied to women in Islamic societies. Though Islamic scholars differ as to the permissibility of covering the face, modes of dress of other cultures frequently become symbolic of these cultural differences and become intertwined with what we regard as ethical issues.

Pierre Tristam commented on this issue: "As the Muslim population expands into Western countries, the debate is taking new turns as well. A number of countries throughout Europe, Asia, and Africa have banned some form of veil, burqa, or women's full covering."[i] For example:

> In 2004, the French parliament passed a law to regulate "the wearing of symbols indicating religious affiliation in public educational establishments." This law forbids all emblems that outwardly express a specific religious belief to be worn in French public schools. . . .

> In 2010, the National Assembly in France passed . . . [an act that] outlawed the wearing of clothing that covers one's face in any public space. Violators of the ban on veils and coverings are liable to fines of up to 150 Euros and mandatory classes on French citizenship. Anyone found to have forced a woman to wear a religious covering faces up to two years in prison as well as a 60,000 Euro fine.

> The French laws have been extremely controversial. The then president of France, Nicholas Sarkozy public stated: "The burqa is not welcome in France because it is contrary to our values and the ideals we have of a woman's dignity."[ii]

Mr. Sarkozy thus sees the ethical values and traditions of the French people as contradictory to the cultural practices of some Muslims.

---

[i] Pierre Tristam, "What is the Niqab Worn by Muslim Women? (17 Jan. 2017).
https://www.thoughtco.com/what-is-a-niqab-2353520
[ii] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Niq%C4%81b