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9 Personal Mediated Communication and the Concept of Community in Theory and Practice

JAMES E. KATZ  
RONALD E. RICE  
SOPHIA ACORD  
KIKU DASGUPTA  
KALPANA DAVID  
Rutgers University

This chapter has three purposes: first, to review theoretical and practical aspects of the concept of community that may be relevant to a better understanding of relationships between mediated communication and community; second, to explore how personal mediated communication may be affecting the creation, processes, and fates of communities; and third, to consider how the power of mediated communication technologies might alter traditional theories of communities. The chapter begins with a review of the concept of community, discussing positive and negative perspectives on the relationship between mediated communication and community. Then the chapter examines mediated communications, especially the Internet and mobile phone technology, and their potential impact on social relationships within communities. Next, the chapter considers the prospect of virtual mobile communication-based communities becoming an effective source of social capital. Interwoven with these considerations are suggestions for modifications in traditional community theory-building in light of these new technologies. Mobiles are a special focus because so much of the world's population is using them and the number of users and the extent of their use are expected to continue to grow rapidly.

Community as an intellectual construct and as a component of social life has long commanded interest among social scientists and philosophers in general, and communication scholars in particular, as the other chapters in this volume amply demonstrate. Here we wish to highlight how mediated technologies have affected, and are likely to affect, our notions and experiences of

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Correspondence: James E. Katz, School of Communication, Information, and Library Studies, Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, 4 Huntington Street, New Brunswick, New Jersey 08901-1071; email: jinkatz@scils.rutgers.edu
community. Our focus is not mass media such as radio, newspapers, and TV, but rather mediated personal communication technology. By mediated personal communication technology, we refer especially to the mobile phone and the Internet, but also include in our definition (though cannot say much about them in our analysis) Personal Digital Assistants (PDAs) and civilian band (CB) and similar radio technology. All these are individual-to-individual or individual-to-group technologies, as opposed to mass media, which can be thought of as organization-to-mass communication technologies. The mediated communication perspective has much to offer because, for instance, mobile phones now outnumber TV sets, and Internet usage has become a major activity for millions around the globe. Even those who are illiterate find themselves relying on mobile phones for important communication, especially in developing countries (Katz & Aakhus, 2002).

Mobile phones have become ubiquitous in many societies, especially among the young, and in several areas such as Finland, Hong Kong, and Taiwan, there are more active handsets than there are people. Understandably, the mobile phone has become an important part of many social networks, which are comprised of kin, friends, and workmates (Katz, 2001; Ling 2001). At the same time, conventional communicative practices have been eroded due to the extensive use of mobile phones. Use of public space and responses to others in one’s vicinity clearly seem to have been affected by mobile phone usage. De Gournay (2002) claimed conventional codes of conduct regarding communicative behavior in public spaces are fast disappearing owing to the seemingly random use of mobile phones. On a larger scale, Katz and Aakhus (2002) held that the mobile phone reflects a broader sociological effect involving aspirations to perpetual contact with family, friends, people of potential interest, and information sources. At the very least, as suggested above, even mobiles are part of a larger set of new communication technologies that interplay with various human communication needs generally and human community in particular. With this perspective on the changing format of interpersonal communication, we turn to the theoretical construct of community so that we will then have a foundation upon which to examine mediated communication’s potential consequences to community as praxis and as lived experience.

THE CONCEPT OF COMMUNITY

Definitions of Community

Denotatively and connotatively, community has been used to characterize participants in aboriginal villages (Morgan, 1942), tight-knit urban neighborhoods (Gans, 1962), members of a specific industry such as butchers (Wenger, 1998), as well as more exotic settings such as string theory researchers, eBay’s global auctions, and computer programming teams (Rheingold, 2000). Despite the plethora of uses, some careful attention has been directed towards analyzing the term’s

Arensberg and Kimball (1965) identified three elements to the concept: environment, social form, and patterned behavior. Sanders (1966) argued for four: a place to live, a spatial unit, a way of life, and a social system. Eirifi (1974) said that communities can be analyzed at the levels of distinct residential groups, solidarity institutions, and interactions of interpersonal and informal relations. Looking at the concept from an historical perspective, Poplin (1979) found three phases: first, as a territorial definition; second, as a unit of social organization; and, more recently, as a set of psycho-cultural bonds. Several scholars have tried crosscutting analysis. Hillery’s 1982 comprehensive analysis of 94 definitions of community yielded the three most frequently invoked elements: social interaction, common ties, and physical colocation. More recently, Jones (1995) found that the majority of constructs rely on social involvement and interaction; in essence, community is a social system.

Meyrowitz (1985, 1989) has argued that communities can be viewed in a context that is both upward to institutions and downward to social roles. He analyzed social roles and identities in terms of information systems that are comprised of patterns of access to social information, determined by the mix of physical settings, media, and mental constructs. Regarding mental constructs, he extended Mead’s notion of the generalized other to the mediated generalized other. He described how people gain a sense of who they are in part by imagining how others, both live and mediated, view them. Additionally, he anticipated much discussion of virtual life by advancing the notion of the generalized elsewhere, wherein one imagines how distant others imagine one’s own city and general environment. In this way, he added the important element of media and mediation to the theoretical development of community.

Turning from the definitional to the analytical, in this section we would argue that the construct might be usefully discussed along several dimensions or axes. First, we will briefly review the idealized utopia of community and then present common theoretical conception of this utopian community as a lost or unrealized entity. Theorists have often compared real communities, those one might actually have experienced, to potentially realizable ones on either a physical or a virtual plane. To depict these elements, we will propose an analytic matrix and suggest the extent to which various definitive characteristics overlap. Finally, we will juxtapose several authors’ analyses to compare potential aspects of physical and virtual communities. In this context, as we will show, those who see community life as sadly diminished in the contemporary world often rely on social capital (to be defined) to rejuvenate the idealized conception of community.

IDEALIZED VISIONS OF COMMUNITY

Many theorists conceive of community as a moral entity that transforms the individual through group pressure (Calhoun. 1980; Nisbett 1966; Porlén 1979).
Slove, 1995). As Cobb (1996) noted, community allows the individual to transcend himself and find partnership with humanity. Classical philosophers such as Kant, June, Rousseau, Hegel, and Locke underscore the moral component of community relative to the innate attributes of humankind. As we will show, these idealized conceptions of community also inform current arguments about the nature of community.

Kant held that community, which he dubbed “The Kingdom of Ends,” was an inherently moral force that would ultimately be able to save humankind from itself. All would be treated with respect, and as worthy in their own right, rather than as means to selfish ends. Such a community would be based on dynamic reciprocity and responsibility and, though it was not conceived of such at the time, would be the fountainhead of social capital, a concept that will be discussed later.

Jung introduced the notion of the collective unconscious, namely that there is a set of universal symbols, responses, and mental conditions that all human beings share. Even though we are unaware of any credible evidence that anything approaching this complex but unseen innate world exists, the concept of a joint cultural inheritance, manifested through the psyche, remains a compelling one for many scholars. This idea forms the basis for many definitions of physical community, notably that physical community is based on intrinsic, natural solidarity among people (Schmalenbach, 1977). This idea of community as being hardwired, rather than created, is the essence of the spontaneous, natural, and traditional community.

The French romantic philosopher Rousseau saw community deriving from the vast interior reality of the human life cycle. In its natural primitive state, community exuded great concern and altruism, and evil was the result only of the corrupting influence of civilization. In contrast to community, Rousseau viewed social life as the result of corrosive associations, the distorted views that arise when social tools are provided for aggregations of individuals to pursue their egocentric means. In fact, Rousseau’s conception of the general will expressed a community’s common interests and values, which transcend the different wills of individuality. In coming together to recognize their common will, a group of individuals is revealed as a community. Many proponents of virtual community argue that this common will is the basis of communities of interest that form online (Rheingold, 2000; Slevin, 2000; Stone, 1991). Interestingly, some have earlier claimed that prior mediated communication technologies (e.g., rural and party line telephones, ham radio, and CB radio) gave rise to communities (as discussed in Katz, 1999). However, proponents of physical community argue that this common will can exist only with reference to locality and face-to-face (F2F) interaction, and must permanently subsume all other personal interests (Morgan, 1942; Tönnies, 1957).

For Locke, the power of community was in humanity, as a natural right or state, and thus humans would pursue innately moral lives in natural justice without the invasion of civil society. As with Rousseau, this distinction between natural community and civil society prefigures Tönnies’s distinction between gemeinschaft and gesellschaft. This distinction is often applied to physical communities and virtual communities, as the former are viewed as whole, positive entities (König, 1968), the latter are seen as impersonal illusions of community (Kolko & Reid, 1998). As with Rousseau’s general will, Locke introduced the social contract to explain how men and women come together for the common good. The social contract shows that people coming together in community can accomplish far more than any aggregate of individual action. Again, this prefigures notions of social capital through spontaneous and voluntary participation (Coleman, 1986). Nevertheless, viewing the community as having a greater existence than the individual lends substance to critics’ claims that social networks erode community by elevating individuals’ interests above those of the community (Jacobs, 1961).

Hegel saw community as the basic cell from which society evolves, like many others (Arendsberg & Kimball, 1965; Edwards & Jones, 1976; Jacobs, 1961; König, 1968; Morgan, 1942; Park, 1952). Like Kant, Hegel views community as a necessarily ethical environment, shaping a national culture (like Coleman, 1954; Etzioni, 2001; Morgan, 1942; Schmalenbach, 1977; Tönnies, 1957). The most useful of Hegel’s constructions for us here is his view of dialectics. For Hegel, each sociohistorical situation could be seen as having its own internal logic as well as a dialectical relationship with earlier periods. Building on Hegel, we may see communities in the same light: Modernity met physical needs, but fractionated previously vital social ties in the physical community; this brought about its antithesis in the virtual community. Even though this may lead to its own antithesis, as suggested by Jacobs (1961) and others in urban renewal movements, this may also lead to an ultimate synthesis, such as is suggested by Katz and Rice, with their model of Syntopia (Katz & Rice, 2002). (As to their neologism Syntopia, Katz & Rice hold that people build multidimensional sets of relationships and develop them online and off, with smooth integration across relationships and media.) Other theorists are also attempting to find a synthesis of the two worlds (Castells, 2000; Etzioni, 2001; Giddens, 1994; Poster, 2001, 1995; Sennett, 1971; Slevin, 2000; Walls, 1993).

Habermas (1989) has made repeated attempts to devise schemata that would integrate the antipodal elements of the private and the public continuum and mesh these with an understanding of communication and political processes. To the extent he achieved this, Habermas has been as cited widely as he has been difficult to interpret, and his thoughts have evolved over the decades. Here we can pin him down by saying that he conceived of the public sphere as a space independent of government and partisan interests and dedicated to rational, inclusive, and general debate. To be more specific, the public sphere is intrinsically private, as it is formed by private people coming together as a public. It is, in other words, a vehicle for enhanced democracy, but of a form not yet experienced by mortals.

In essence, the intimacy and subjectivity emanating from the private sphere have prevented public authority from taking control of the entire public sphere. As a result, Habermas envisioned a separation between the sphere of the state and public authority vis-à-vis the public sphere of society. The true public sphere thus remains private in the sense that it responds to the citizens and not to authority.

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**Personal Mediated Communication**
Within the public sphere then, there is the realm of letters, markets of culture, and political realm; these of course are all public places where private citizens interact.

The political realm in the public sphere is pivotal because it represents this appropriation of public authority by private citizens. Habermas found that the private citizens make certain matters (e.g., authoritative, church, and court) topics of common and hence public concern. In other words, the sociocultural product hence becomes a private commodity and object of general and democratic discussion. The political realm functions entirely through discourse, as people discuss these common concerns and reach agreement. As a result, the necessity for this consensus is that the public realm both be entirely inclusive and offer universal access (Habermas, 1989). Accordingly, the public sphere for political discourse finds a consensus over what is necessary for the lives of all, a kind of negotiated general will. It is this focus on consensus and necessity that constituted the very publicity of public authority and state organs that now have to answer to the public opinion of private consensus.

Habermas further pointed out that this notion of the public was actually generated through the same shift that produced political discourse. In other words, the public sphere was created under conditions identical to those when the artistic endeavor became democratized (previously patronized, in the original sense of the word), and the concept of audience developed (where previously the audience for “professional” musicians was not public, but rather had consisted of the commissioned musicians playing only for private courts and rich families). Again, we see that the public realm necessarily appropriates a limited commodity from the public authority and turns it into a public (social) good. Habermas, in a bow to Hegel, wrote that indeed the public sphere represents the subjection of domination to reason, through a democratic appropriation (not revolution).

Originally, Habermas modeled the public sphere using two fictitious roles played by private individuals: the role of the property owner and the role of the human being. In this model, as the role of private property and the bourgeois declined, people had autonomy only in their sense as human beings. They therefore used the political realm of the public sphere to establish decency and privacy based on simply being a human being.

At this point, Habermas highlighted the notion of solidarity as an essential ingredient in moral community formation. By solidarity he referred to a general concern on the part of each citizen for the well-being of others and the general integrity of the community and sphere of shared life. Solidarity is created by the political discourse in the public realm, as publicity is able to bridge politics and morality (similarly to Kant; Habermas, 1989).

Unfortunately, Habermas felt that the public sphere is increasingly separating from the private realm. Consequently, political discourse, so important to forming solidarity and moral community, is ceasing to be exclusively part of the private domain. Political discourses in the public realm, such as the press, have become commercialized, and public consumer services (e.g., advertising) have taken the place of private men and women of letters who previously (supposedly) were rationally debating the common good and forming a bulwark against excessive public authority.

Even though Habermas provided an excellent framework to view the separation of community from authority, as well as visualize the ways in which community forms spontaneously and self-regulates, Poster (2001) appropriately pointed out some limitations. Poster maintained that Habermas viewed the public sphere as an idealized Greek agora: It is logocentric and not dependent on the space and time deferrals of print. Rather, any mediation in the public sphere is unnatural and precludes reasoned discussion. As we will see in the next section, however, the national identity that brings people together in the public sphere is itself mediated. Public authority must rely on the press to communicate with the public. There can be no ideal agora. Hence, the Internet remains incomplete and partial as a potential proxy for the agora, despite the fact that Habermas proposed that it can be a new source of solidarity.

In short, the idealized conceptions of community, drawn from philosophical analysis, form the backdrop of contemporary views of technology and modern social relations. Despite their impressive historical pedigrees, these visions of community as regimes of sentiment or as innately just are idealized and utopian (Suttles, 1972). The resulting contradiction between the ideal community as a sought-after but unattainable vision, and its sense that it existed to some degree at a prior time, yield a continually reemerging theme of the lost community. "Paradise lost" remains as popular and pervasive in recent contemporary social theory as it had been for prior generations of theoreticians (and theologians).

COMMUNITY OR SOCIETY

The Oxford Dictionary of the Social Sciences observes that definitions of community almost exclusively privilege localized attributes relative to universal or cosmopolitan ones. They esteem aspects such as boundedness, affective ties, face-to-face contact, openness to those who are inside the community (at the tacit cost of excluding those who are outside), and other values typically associated with traditional agrarian ways of life. These necessarily contrast the ideals of community with other forms of social organization that encompass impersonal relations and larger numbers of mobile and often unknown participants. This latter form may be thought of as society, which can also stand in for modernism’s impact and infringement upon the traditional community, or in brief, life under industrialization. As a result of a global master trend to move away from agrarianism and local isolation and toward industrialization and communication, the ever-diminishing local world helps create the perception that community is an endangered mode of social organization and interaction. An understandable impulse for nostalgia and overseers’ selective recall can quickly give rise to a sense that real-life community
is fast disappearing. We will examine this notion before exploring alternative (and positive) theories of postmodern prospect for community.

In this context, a leading exponent of the perennial analytical/critical device of a lost golden-pastoral age has been Tönnes (1957). He characterized the transition from community to society as dynamism between gemeinschaft and gesellschaft. Gemeinschaft represents real, organic, intimate, and private life, folk beliefs, kinship and friendship relations; in a sense, it was the rural village. Prominent processes were the common will, which created and enforced consensus. In contrast, gesellschaft is the immense instrumental structure, the public world that one goes out into from the home and hearth. It encompasses commodification, in the Marxist and Benthamite senses. Everything, from social ties to labor, and from sentiment to body parts, is treated as a means to an end (zwecksrationalität), with little regard for the ends themselves (Veblen, 1934). This progression is often compared to Durkheim’s concept of mechanical and organic solidarity (i.e., association through sameness versus association through difference, see his The Division of Labor in Society (1893/1984). Society’s exploitation of the individual is, in both cases, detrimental to a sense of traditional community or gemeinschaft. The intimate, natural basis of human life is swept away forever in the modernist rush of technology, which not only alienates individuals from each other, but also from their species being. For Tönnes, there is no community in or after society.

Marx is not examined in this analytical landscape; however, his influence on Tönnes and other social philosophers is inescapable. According to Marx and Engels (1975) money is the alienated ability of mankind. Money, in having an exchange value, alienates workers from the goods that they are producing. Additionally, the competitive sphere of wage-labor alienates a person from other people. As humans are by nature social beings, whose essence is that of production, their isolation from their work and peers alienates each individual from herself or himself. Thus, all hope of community in society is lost.

A conundrum arises: Relatively few participants in modern life report feeling isolated. Hence, the question naturally arises as to how critical theorists are able to integrate inconvenient facts with their elegant efforts. A clever dodge has been that people are really alienated, but they just do not know it. Different theories can account for it, of course: In Marxist terms, it is called false consciousness; in Freudian terms, repression. Anderson (1983), for his part, responded that current social organizations are neither real nor communal, but rather are imagined communities. That is, our traditional communities have become so large and dispersed, that the collective social bond must be imagined and created in the mind of each of its participants, rather than directly experienced through direct contact. Our conceptions of a community must be imagined because we conceive of them as sovereign, limited, and having a horizontal equality among members. In real life, however, communities are constantly challenged, have only arbitrarily chosen boundaries, and hierarchical structures. Thus, real community grounded in intimate, personal contact and concrete issues of integration has vanished, replaced by a

mental construct. Poster (2001) agreed that the nation is a historical construct, but said as soon as we realize this we will cease to be threatened by its disappearance. It is important to realize, according to Poster, that all that is virtual is actually real, once we understand the imaginary component inherent in all psychic phenomena.

Nancy (1991) also found that all of the essential attributes of physical community are merely mythical supports, produced to create and sustain power in the political community. In reality, there is no natural identity; the formation of a community identity instead serves to obscure the real political powers that shape community. For Nancy, the only thing we really share is “being in common” (1991, p. 6). The mere existence of community is determined from our simply being in a common place, space, and time. Nancy’s real community is thus the absence of community: a collection of fragmented identities that all point to one another (Poster, 1995). In a similar theory, Suttles (1972) saw the formation of a master identity as an illusion of sentiment that creates a defended community. For Anderson, Nancy, and Suttles, the common identity and sameness ties of the community are social constructions, which obscure (or compensate for) our real, physical coexistence.

Following Merton (1946), Beniger (1987) argued for a second way in which what we think of as real community is in fact trompe l’oeil. Our social forms have transformed from interpersonal communities to systems of mass communication. From here, they have progressed to a further level: pseudocommunity. Pseudo-community provides an ersatz simulation of the high levels of intimacy that supposedly mark real, physical communities. Sincerity, a strong indicator of intimacy, is artificially constructed by the mass media or other propagandists, such as governments and corporations, or mass mailing advertisers who can make the most automated factory-produced entreaty exquisitely personalized, down to a friendly cursive signature. As Habermas (1989) argued, the public sphere is beginning to override private functions; the fabricated sincerity, seen by Beniger, fools us into thinking that we are indeed in real communities. In reality, we are living in pseudocommunities.

Beniger’s essay is of course derivative of Merton’s powerful work on pseudogemeinschaft (1946). By this term, Merton referred to “the feigning of personal concern with the other fellow in order to manipulate him the better” (1946, p. 142). This fooling effect is achieved by appeals to sincerity and genuineness, as well as through computerized databases and printing representations of individual creation. As a result, the acting out of rudimentary affective ties of community through, for instance, neighborhood pride or antilitter campaigns, does not produce real community. Rather, this produces a false sense of strong traditional community without any base of physical interaction to accompany the subjective feeling.

The above critics portray a world that has exhausted the reservoirs required for community, as defined by its local and sentimental existence. They also reinforce the point that the communities that may be perceived as concrete ties and structures, and thus physically real, are actually virtual, immaterial, and created by social
work and technologies of communication, and thus constantly subject to immediate negation or obliteration (Garfinkel, 1967).

PHYSICAL VERSUS VIRTUAL COMMUNITIES

Just as Tönnies viewed community and society as distinct forms, it is also easy to consider physical and virtual communities as mutually exclusive forms of social organization. More analytical traction may be possible if, instead of treating each social form as if it objectively and separately existed, the virtual community and the physical community are considered ideal types (in a Weberian understanding), each possessing certain general characteristics.

Physical community, as its name denotes, can exist only by virtue of physical colocation in space. On the far end of this definition are the ecologists, who, like Park (1952), view community as solely physical and not social at all. Community thus has a biological definition: It is a "population group defined by the space that it occupies" (Park, 1952, p. 182).

This emphasis on a physical basis for community has been prevalent throughout the 20th century. As Arenberg and Kimball (1965) asserted, every community occupies its own physical setting and is spatially surrounded by others. Although many consider the sense of belonging to be important to forming a community, the basic physicality of community formation has to do only with a group of people who exercise local autonomy in meeting their needs in a specific locality (Edwards & Jones, 1976). Other theorists also include physical locality as necessary for community (Jacobs, 1961; König, 1968; Park, 1952; Tönnies, 1957).

The members of the physical community live in mutual interdependence and solidarity. Their social ties are thus marked by universal, residential solidarity; unplanned stability (spontaneous creation); and sentimental ties (Suttles, 1972). Like gemeinschaft, physical community is based on people's natural association through sameness and by exclusion of otherness.

Drawing the discussion of physical community together, we can cluster several lines of thought. Table 1 shows selected theorists and, in reference to our discussion here, highlights in one quadrant the attributes they identify with physical community.

A few millennia ago, thinkers such as Plato and social movements such as the Essenes sought alternative forms of social organization. This search continues today as both social organizational and technological conditions change. With the rise of computer-mediated technology, there has been a concomitant desire to find a new, fulfilling form within cyberspace, also known as the virtual community (Baym, 1997; Stone, 1991). The term originally referred to communities that were mediated through electronic communication technologies. Although Rheingold (1993) and other popularizers of the term were speaking of virtual communities as existing purely online, such as through multiuser domains (MUD), Internet relay

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Proponent(s)</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Borders/wholeness/exclusion of others</td>
<td>(Kolko &amp; Reid, 1998; Meyrowitz, 1997; Sanders, 1966)/(König, 1968)/(Etzioni, 2001; Jacobs, 1961)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crisscrossing, interpersonal bonds</td>
<td>(Morgan, 1942; Poplin, 1979; Tönnies, 1957; Wallis, 1993)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Face-to-face communication</td>
<td>(Beniger, 1987)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High social influence on human action</td>
<td>(Beniger, 1987; Calhoun, 1980)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information driven</td>
<td>(Meyrowitz, 1985, 1989)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intimacy ties/sentiment</td>
<td>(Etzioni, 2001; Kolko &amp; Reid, 1998; Maffesoli, 1996; Merton, 1946; Morgan, 1942; Sclove, 1995; Tönnies, 1957)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Involuntary participation of members</td>
<td>(Ahlerbrandt, 1984)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Requires embodied selves</td>
<td>(Kolko &amp; Reid, 1998; Nisbet, 1966)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small in size</td>
<td>(Beniger, 1987; Coleman, 1954; Morgan, 1942)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stability/sustained interaction among members</td>
<td>(Coleman, 1986; Sclove, 1995)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust/sincerity</td>
<td>(Giddens, 1994; Merton, 1946)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Common:
- Background and memory (Bellah et al., 1985; Dirkszen & Smit, 2002; Morgan, 1942)
- Equality
- Identity
- Needs
- Sameness
- Values (Morgan, 1942; Schmulewitz, 1977; Tönnies, 1957)

memberships, virtual communities are also sustained through personal communication technologies such as mobile phones, text messaging, and email devices. Virtual communities merit consideration as communities because of the term's definition, although they are independent of geospatial location. That is, they have been denoted as "large groups of individuals [who] may be linked together to share information, ideas, feelings, and desires" (Calhoun, 2002).

The virtual community, in juxtaposition to the concept of physical community,
ties, and homogeneity by interest (Wellman & Gulia, 1999). Rather than being locally isolated from the seeming oppression of society, as is the case of physical communities, the virtual community looks out to society as an enhancement of affective and social ties. As Wellman observed, community becomes "a metaphor for the primary ties outside of households that provide us with larger social systems" (1982a). Gesellschaft and public society, therefore, need not entail the end of community. The virtual community can create and preserve ties among people who are physically separate (Stone, 1991).

The virtual community sees the physical community of proximity as potentially repressive, as it ignores despatialized interests (Rice, 1987; Wellman, 1971). Instead, virtual communities attempt to break through some of the boundaries of race, gender, ethnicity, and geographic location established in physical communities (Katz & Rice, 2002). Depending on the politics of the observer, virtual communities may be celebrated as ways that individuals can express their identities and beliefs in a manner that is true to their internal self, or condemned as systems through which individuals are cut adrift from cardinal values that allow them to engage in unfortunate and even dangerous and evil practices. Thus, the encouragement of White Power or homosexual teen dating services may be seen as either community benefits or liabilities of the Internet (Katz, 1998). Ultimately, virtual communities are based on shared social practices and interests whereas physical communities are based on shared social and physical boundaries.

Poster (2001) held that the "salient trait of the virtual is community" (p. 131). He was not talking about "helmet-and-glove computer-generated worlds, but rather IRCs, chatrooms, MUDs, and other forms of communication over electronic mediums." Virtuality itself then refers simply to "all electronically mediated exchanges of symbols, images, and sound, so that a second world is constituted over and against the ‘real’ world of sensory proximity" (Poster, 2001, p. 131). The only thing virtual about virtual community is that it provides simultaneity without physical presence.

As a result of this point of view, most of the ways analysts distinguish virtual communities from physical ones are merely reversed statements of physicality. That is, they are communities without physical limitations. There are also some novel aspects. Table 2 is an inventory of claims about virtual community. Part A are those that are the nonphysical items of traditional community, and part B are ones that to us appear as novel claims of virtual communities. Exponents of the particular characteristic are also listed alongside the items. Table 2 implies that physical and virtual communities are clearly distinguishable and are treated so by some theorists (Bayn, 1995; Beniger, 1987; Carey, 1993); thus, we consider them as ends of a continuum.

Notions of space and place are important when considering virtual community. Aakhus pointed out: "[O]ur sense of place is negotiated regardless of our physical presence" (2003, p. 39). It is easy to fall prey to the assumptions of virtual life so that one loses sight of the physical reality in which users must actually operate

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Proponent(s)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Absence of institutional authority</td>
<td>(Steinmaeller, 2002; Sternberg, 2001)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Based in information exchange</td>
<td>(Carey, 1993; Steinmaeller, 2002; Walls, 1993)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Characterized by links more so than relationships</td>
<td>(Steinmaeller, 2002)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Common interest</td>
<td>(Wellman, 1971, Wellman &amp; Gulia, 1999)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emerge from technology</td>
<td>(Rheingold, 2000)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reconfiguring the nature of physical communities</td>
<td>(Meyrowitz, 1985, 1989, 1997)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-organized</td>
<td>(Dorksen &amp; Smit, 2002; Katz &amp; Rice, 2002)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voluntary participation by members</td>
<td>(Ahlbrandt, 1984; Steinmaeller, 2002)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Common beliefs and practices</td>
<td>(Coleman, 1954; Etzioni, 2001; Morgan, 1942)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>—(Stone, 1991)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Common purpose</td>
<td>(Putnam, 1993; Slevin, 2000; Tönnies, 1957; Wenger, 1998)—(Bayn, 1995; Rheingold, 2000)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informal conversation</td>
<td>(Coleman, 1986)—(Rheingold, 2000)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intergroup bonds</td>
<td>(Etzioni, 2001)—(Bayn, 1995)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mediated &quot;generalized other&quot;</td>
<td>(Meyrowitz, 1985, 1997)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reciprocity</td>
<td>(Giddens, 1994; Putnam, 1993)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>—(Wellman &amp; Gulia, 1999)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sense of belonging/community feeling</td>
<td>(Anderson, 1983; Morgan, 1942; Tönnies, 1957)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>—(Dorksen &amp; Smit, 2002; Wellman, 2001)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spontaneous formation</td>
<td>(Morgan, 1942; Sutliff, 1972)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>—(Rheingold, 2000; Katz &amp; Rice, 2002)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supported by meaningful communication</td>
<td>(Poster, 2001; Sanders, 1966)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>—(Turkle, 1995; Walls, 1993; Wenger, 1998)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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NOTE: In Part B, the first analyst(s) under each characteristic refers to those who emphasized that characteristic in physical community, and the proponent(s) of the character in a virtual context comes after a dash.

(Wynn & Katz, 1997). This is perhaps a mistake to which Turkle and Stone fell prey: Analysts become so enraptured with the idea of virtual community that we forget that the action is actually happening somewhere: someone typing on a keyboard, someone talking on a phone, someone in a studio speaking into a camera. Ultimately, as Terkenli (1995) argued, humans occupy a space and use symbols to transform it into a place.
In essence, then, the differences between physical and virtual communities cannot be based on constructions and place, but rather must focus on the existence of totally embodied, physical and social presence and simultaneous meeting in space and time. This difference of interpretation is especially important when we return to our notion of Syntopia as we integrate the effects of personal communication technology into our models of community.

RELATIONSHIP OF COMMUNITY TYPES AND THEORISTS

To display the interrelationships among ideal types and theorists, a matrix may be a helpful analytical device. In Figure 1, the x-axis represents the virtual-physical dimension of the community concept. The left end of the x-coordinate represents the purely spatial, geographic, and locality-based conception of community (physical proximity, small size, embodied individuals, face-to-face communication, and kinship groups). The right end of the x-coordinate represents the concept of community operating without physical location (by means of technologically mediated communication devices). It is marked by lack of necessary colocation or the immediate prospect of physical contact, and membership that tends to be large and fragmented with unstructured social ties. Those in the middle are a mix of the two types.

As commented above, the concept of physical place alone is insufficient to distinguish between the theorists’ conceptions of physical and virtual communities. Hence, Figure 1 adds a y-axis to represent the dimension of emotional commitment that characterizes the ideal types. The upper y-axis includes the extreme individually centered attributes of the virtual community, such as personal development, voluntary association, private relations, and association by interest. The lower portion of the y-axis depicts public and group focus. These concern issues such as community development, professional association, public relations, political causes, social capital, or even virtual neighborhoods. They share an emphasis on belonging in space. Again, mixed types appear toward the middle of the axis.

This analytic tool exhibits the theorists in multidimensional relationships to the objective and subjective aspects of community. It shows, for instance, the ways in which a theorist may proclaim traditional, physical community to be the only real community, but then associate the physical base with subjective attributes common to virtual communities. In other words, by showing the spread of theorists across this matrix we can argue that community need not be lost with technological mediation and may even be aided by it. Further, significant ties of community are not necessarily bound either to physicality or technological mediation, and physical community may be highly exclusionary and constrained.

Each quadrant allows one of four ideal types of community, each briefly described; the theorists relevant to social capital and distance issues are discussed later and not included on this matrix.
Traditional Community

Those theorists in the lower left quadrant favor the traditional conception of community, as represented by residential areas and villages. This is perhaps what most people think of when they use the term physical community. Community is strongly grounded in physical space and consists of conservative ties of sentiment, codependency, and a moral sense of belonging. As König (1968) argued, community is the basic form of social life. It is a complete whole, encompassing all social relationships, a pure totality of life.

Social critics fault advocates of virtual communities because they see such communities as bleeding off commitment to the more important real life, physical community. Indeed, they have argued that only physicality can produce the interpersonal congruence, or sameness, through which members turn inwards to the group to focus on each other and by necessity exclude outsiders (Jacobs, 1961). Likewise, a community of people must have a common purpose, but this purpose must also be founded in a local initiative. Ultimately, in this view, community cannot be achieved without the collocated space in which to found and nourish this connection.

The patterned behavior of traditional communities is often linked to a sense of strong intimacy and sentimental ties. The sentimentality attached to the local community is the reason why the small, traditional community remains the idealized form of human social organization. Morgan argued that community is “an association of individuals and families that, out of inclination, habit, custom, and mutual interest, act in concert as a unit in meeting their needs” (1942, p. 20). Nevertheless, these needs are common needs of the community as a whole. The traditionalist conception of community thus does not endorse the therapeutic conception of community, which sees social life as an arrangement to fulfill the needs of the individual (Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, & Tipton, 1985). This distinction applies to later, social networks. Rather, Morgan emphasized that community must be spontaneously created, requiring intimate firsthand acquaintance and community feeling in which individual interests are subsumed.

For Bellah et al. (1985), this intimacy is fundamentally linked to a common identity. Their development of the term community of memory represents the common history and identity of a people. It is essential to the definition of community as an all-inclusive whole of interdependence, participation, and shared practices. Too much freedom yields not the personal fulfillment from which one can reenter the community, but instead a sense of arbitrariness, tentativeness, and anomic (Slater, 1970). Rather, as Terkenli (1995) believed, one’s identity can only be found by a return to the original community.

Similarly to Terkenli, Selove saw the local community as the important base for commonality, shared ethical principles, and moral agency required for democratic foundations. In this regard, he wrote that local communities provide distinctive and inescapable physical and moral interdependencies that arise at the local level, territorial grounding of political jurisdiction, and the distinctive quality of mutual understanding, learning, and personal growth that can take place through sustained, contextually situated, face to face discourse and interaction (Selove, 1995, p. 40).

Selove further held that virtual communities cannot replace real communities without a careful examination of their focal dimensions. The human warmth, stability, and coherence so necessary in community is lost with electronically-mediated communication. In fact, it is impossible to escape the fact that one’s body is locally situated, so any interaction in a virtual community is necessarily also embodied.

With this ideal of traditional community, it is little wonder that many scholars have been highly critical of technology and virtual communities and seen them as inherently opposed to real community values and systems. Putnam argued in Bowling Alone (2000) that TV draws people away from their initial environment and alienates them from their compatriot families and peers. Suburban sprawl is seen as the real enemy here, as it causes people to leave their local community for both work and leisure time, leading to a 40% reduction in group involvement on the local level. Nevertheless, as to the Internet, Putnam himself asserted he is “agnostic”—that is, it is not necessarily so that the Internet (or any other mediated technology, such as the telephone or TV) has these effects. He held that it is the way people use the technology, not the technology itself, that is the problem (personal communication, August 22, 2003). Hence, the Internet could be used to displace or erode social capital and networks or strengthen and reinforce the sense of community. The work of Katz and Rice (2002) confirmed this, in that they found that Internet use overall does not appear to have deleterious consequences on social capital and even appears beneficial to it.

Social Network

Theorists favor the sociocultural network conception of community (see the upper right quadrant). This conception is most similar to the common definition of virtual community, as it is sustained by personal communication technologies and cyberspace and deviates widely in its social implications from the traditional community.

Wellman claimed that the definition of community has transformed from a spatial basis to a base of social networks (1999). Community has never been the pastoral myth or ideal type. Instead, as noted earlier, community ties have long been geographically dispersed, specialized, and connected by telecommunications and transportation technologies. As a result, we must cease to mourn for community life, as the idealized version never existed, and begin to think of the personal community, every individual’s social network. Only in this way can we see computer-mediated technology as a panacea for, rather than an exacerbation of, the loss of community. Thus, community describes relations that provide a sense of belonging, not a group in physical proximity. In other words, “[W]e haven’t lost community . . . it is just liberated from the traditional boundaries of the neighborhood and the kinship group” (Wellman, 1999, online).
With Wellman’s social network, community relations have been moved to the private sphere, rather than the public sphere. (Mobile phones may contradict Wellman’s social network ideas: Whereas the Internet might make us bring our public communities to our homes, mobiles allow us to bring our private communities into the public sphere of action; we will address that later). The essence of the community is one of networked individualism, in which we all choose our own communities, rather than be tied with others into them involuntarily (Rice, 1987; Wellman, 2001). This is similar to Ahlbrandt’s “community of limited liability,” which also implies voluntary relations, weaker social ties, and an individual-centered existence (1984, p. 2). Within the community of limited liability, attachment is a function of residents’ economic and social investments in a community. Whereas the traditional community required the suppression of the individual for the common good, the social network elevates the individual as the peak and root of his own community. Community is no longer a localized phenomenon of interpersonal links that all cross, but an individual network of informal links that fits into a larger social structure (Wellman, 1988b). In other words, we are social on a larger scale than the physical community allows (Hiltz & Turoff, 1995; Rice, 1987).

Nonetheless, there do seem to be clear cognitive and social bounds as to how large a community can grow. Moreover, there are paradoxes that stem from these kinds of network growth. Meyrowitz (1997) emphasized: “[T]here is a limit to the number of people with whom one can feel truly connected. Electronic media, therefore, foster a broader, but also a shallower sense of ‘us.’” (p. 66). In the same article, he also described the resulting macrolevel homogenization of identities that is, ironically, accompanied by microlevel fragmentation within traditional communities and families. Hence, he imagined the effects of personal mediated communication as weakening senses of local belongingness and physical community even as they increase delocalized levels of social capital (as defined by Putnam).

Cellular or, more generally, mobile communication is an important part of the individual basis of the social network. In contrast to traditional societies, which exert morality through common will and purpose, the voluntary nature of cellular communication places individual interest before that of the community—though it can also develop and activate communities much faster than can physical communities (see Rheingold, 2002). As mobile phone users ignore their physical peers and communicate with their distant social ties, mobile phones are typically an impediment to society’s moral project as unified whole and totality. This is precisely the point made by Gergen in his project on Technology, Self, and the Moral (Gergen, 2003). Fortunati (2002) likewise raised this concern regarding intimacy. Instead of having intimate relations with our entire community, we have intimate relations with our social network. Intimacy is not a general sentiment, but rather a guarded function.

Whereas the traditional community requires a whole, embodied self, the social network lends itself to fragmentation. (Mary Douglas’s Natural Symbols, 1970, unfolded the idea that the body is a model for bounded systems. If our social net- Turkle’s discursive analysis of the technological interface fostered a conception of identity and the self as multiple. Just as Stone (1991) argued that virtual communities create a duality of person, Turkle argued that they offer us infinite divisions of the self. Wellman and Gula noted that our personal communities are engaged in widespread social networks (1999), and Turkle added that these points of engagement can be accessed simultaneously through multiple windows on a computer. Similarly, Fortunati observed that some Italian women carry separate mobile phones for communicating with the husband and with the lover (2002). Technology sustains a conception of community as multiple and personal, in contrast to the stable identity and limited set of possibilities provided by face-to-face, physical communities. Indeed, communication technologies in general, but computer-based ones in particular, allow the “satisfaction of self,” whereby a person can engage in all one’s various possible identities, rather than be bounded by the traditional, single-location identity (Gergen, 1991).

For Stone, the virtual community is in cyberspace. It is a “passage point for collections of common beliefs and practices that united those who were physically separate” (1991, p. 85). Likewise, Baym believes that communities are based on coming together to share a common interest (1997). In her research on the USENET group r.a.t.s (rec.arts.tv.soaps; threaded postings about soap operas) Baym concluded that communities develop understood conventions, rather than objective patterns of organization. Even though they might not bear ties of sentiment or intimacy, virtual communities are fostered by forms of expression with group-specific meanings, specific identities, interpersonal relationships, and behavioral norms linked to the purpose of the group (Baym, 1995).

Early speculations concerning the way of life online were generally utopian in the extreme. There was much discussion of hacker ethos and other ways in which the social life in the virtual world would operate along new lines. Early reports supported this notion and many believed that a new dawn of utopian egalitarianism was at hand, and many were persuaded by such a hopeful portrait (Laurel, 2001). Such reports, in retrospect, were premature at best. Most evidence now points to the striking parallels between the way norms are created and enforced online and off. (See Sternberg, 2001, for an analysis of how virtual communities evolve toward regulating behavior similarly to face-to-face ones. Particularly striking in her analysis are the parallels in terms of how people govern transactions with strangers.)

An important difference between the two worlds is the degree of latitude one has in choosing communication partners and venues. In contrast to the involuntary nature of physical proximity, Steinmueller focused on the importance of voluntary association in defining virtual communities. He conceived that virtual communities exist when it is possible for a group of individuals to voluntarily interact and meet in cyberspace (Steinmueller, 2002). These social networks could be considered communities of intention.

Ultimately, Poster suggested that there is too much pessimism in predictions about
true that the Internet will indeed determine the fate of groups in our world, but it will affect them only as they are currently constituted (Poster, 2001). The Internet is characterized as a threat to “general types of practice that are characterized as human,” such as face-to-face communication, but everything that comes between human presence does not detract from the human condition, and it is a mistake to see it that way (Poster, 2001, p. 4). Rather, we must embrace the innovation of the Internet. Although mediated life does not and will never equal real life, mediated life is here to stay and is thus real for us as social actors. In sum, Poster stated that “one can expect . . . the birth of a monster, of a human-machine assemblage whose encounters may be feared as those of an alien but who surely will be yet another incarnation of ourselves” (2001, p. 128).

Pseudocommunity

The lower right quadrant represents those theorists who view community by its subjectively traditional connotations, yet do not require it to have a physical locality. These definitions of community resemble Merton’s and Beniger’s pseudocommunity. They might also represent the communities of ethnic or interest groups dispersed in society (Effrat, 1974). In other words, they imitate many of the mental, social, and interpersonal conceptions of traditional community, but have no stable geographic base. These socially constructed spaces are thus imitations (or, as their strong advocates claim, instantiations) of Gemeinschaft, sustained through exterior means.

For Rheingold, there was no question that community can exist through the use of Internet technologies. This community has nothing to do with our common conceptions of virtual communities. Rather, Rheingold defined community by the collective good; it is indeed a matter of emotions (2000). The collective good it fosters is information and knowledge sharing. It arises spontaneously, actually creating itself (2002). In this regard, it has a group memory preserved by computers. Virtual communities are not exclusive of relationships, but rather entail a many-to-many communication. As Rheingold explained, mobile phones create a self-conscious community (2002). They are based on everyone receiving similar information through their personal communication technologies. Like Anderson’s definition of an imagined community, Rheingold construed person-to-person technologies of virtual communities as resulting in a horizontal community. If this is not true, which is what Poster found, then Rheingold’s democratic and glorious virtual community is a mere simulacrum (2001). Rheingold is positioned under the context of pseudocommunity, because he interpreted virtual communities in terms of his conceptions of real, physical ones.

Like Rheingold, Nisbet (1966) held that the important concepts of community transcend locality and physical boundaries. For him, community is an innately moral concept, fused with intimacy. Community must conceive of the wholeness of man, and not simply one of his many roles. Nisbet thus shares many of the connotations of traditional community. However, whereas the traditional theorists link these sentiments to geographic community, Nisbet argued that they come from elsewhere and are independent of this limitation.

As with the pseudocommunity, Dirkse and Smit (2002) remarked that virtual communities engage in a great deal of the practices endorsed by idealists. Community is formed mentally and not physically, like imagined communities, but they emphasize the sense of belonging and having something in common. Community is created by people’s attachment to it and being in it. Like traditional communities, the virtual community is spontaneous. This spontaneity, however, is actually a false sense of achievement, as it also requires sporadic and direct intervention to sustain the community, or at least reduce somewhat its potential ephemerality (Rice, 1987).

Imagined Community

The upper left quadrant deals with conceptions of community that share many of the industrial, modern subjective characteristics of virtual communities, yet still link community to a spatial location. These definitions resemble Anderson’s imagined community, or perhaps modern neighborhoods (Effrat, 1974). These communities have a local base, but ultimately create their own reality through the autonomous and interest-laden ties common to the virtual community. It is necessary to unearth the created identities and essences in order to discover the root of the community in local life. Even in postmodern relationships, distinguished by fragmented identities and multiplicity (Gergen, 1991), geographical embedding is fundamental to forming a functional community (Kolko & Reid, 1998). If we fragment space, we fragment ourselves, and thus prevent effective, embodied community (Meyrowitz, 1985). Virtual expression is rooted in an embodied identity, which requires geographical situation (Kolko & Reid, 1998).

Poster (2001), although not promoting a theory of imagined community, did offer an excellent framework for understanding how it is easy to fall into the trap of theorizing the imagined community. As he presented it, the introduction of the nation-state required people to change their local, kinship identification and related instead to a less geographically immediate, but still intensely identified nation-state. The media played a huge part in this transition, and thus print was responsible for extracting the citizen from the face-to-face community. This transformation had a side effect on the individual: The individual necessarily had to emerge as an autonomous creature in order to connect successfully with the nation, which then bonded itself to the citizen through the text. With the decline of the nation-state in global importance, due to the general cultural globalization supported by the Internet and communication technologies, the citizen of the nation-state has furthered this individuation and become simply a person, who joins with others in virtual communities. Thus, this is exactly why the imagined community is one in which geography remains important, but it is inhabited by postmodern, disjointed individuals who imagine
Finally, in the wake of modernization, territorial groups struggle to build neighborhoods and communities of locality in order to build their own collective representations (Suttles, 1972). This local community is not naturally based on sentimentality, but rather is a symbol of what its members want to be. In other words, Suttles (1972) sees how the physical, face-to-face nature of the local community works to create an imagined community of sentiment, based on its opposition to outsiders.

Having examined these various models of community using quadrants, it is now time to explore how new, often mobile, mediated communication technologies affects community formation, development, and survival.

HOW MEDIATED COMMUNICATION INTERACTS WITH COMMUNITY

Working upon the foundation that every community is mediated to some extent, this section’s central goal is to examine how extreme forms of virtuality and mediated communication, especially mobile phones, might affect theoretical constructions of community.

Transformation of the Community Concept

The community matrix, and its subsequent breakdown into quadrants, were meant to illustrate the overlapping theoretical tendencies of physical and virtual communities. Now that we have offered a broad, theoretical grasp on the concept of community, it is time to deflate the commonly perceived real/virtual dialectic of community. Like Wellman and Gulia (1999), Poster viewed what is currently perceived to be the loss of local community due to computers to be instead the continuation of a pre-existing process of liberating “the mind from the force of hierarchical relations” (Poster, 2001, p. 108). As he concluded, “we have a current tendency to bemoan the loss of community” due to computers, but would we feel the same way about it if the man were reading a book? (2001, p. 108). In order to overcome this dichotomy, Poster said it is necessary to replace Anderson’s term “imagined” with the term “mediated.” It is not that we are engaged in hyperreal, illusory communities of our own creation, but rather, that our real communities are now mediated through technology (per above, on a continuum from none to completely). Ultimately, Poster argued that it is media and print that make possible the public sphere; they do not detract from it as noted earlier by Habermas. As a result, the idealization of Habermas’s homogenous public sphere of symmetrical relations and reason is denied by electronic mediation, and thus is not of any service to further analysis (Poster, 2001).

Other theorists believe that we need a concrete synthesis of virtual and physical communities in order to truly inhabit our experiences. Castells (2000) held that experience is related to place, and we thus need a bridge between physical and virtual places in order to unify our experience. Virtual communities deal only in fragmented individuals when they are opposed to real life.

Still others believe that only in bridging the dialectic can we hope to construct good communities in the present and future. For Etzioni (2001), the best communities are hybrids of physical and virtual communities. Likewise, Walls (1993), Etzioni (2001), and Katz and Rice (2002) viewed the ideal community as virtual communities enhancing physical communities. In addition, Slevin (2000) asked us to recognize that individuals are intelligent agents and are consciously looking to create meaning and new forms of human association online. The importance here is to cease the divide of virtual and physical cultures, allowing for a progression, rather than abandonment, of the notion of community. The concept of social capital is, thus, fundamental in examining the ways in which mediated communication, and cell phones in particular, provide this bridge.

Social Capital

Coleman, who originated the term social capital, defined it as a common set of expectations, a set of shared values, and a sense of trust among people (1986, p. 306). Social capital is based on the fact that trust will allow a community to accomplish more with their physical and mental capacities than can individuals alone. Coleman (1988) thus had a very individualistic interpretation of social capital, as it is a social function that individuals can use to achieve their own interests. In a more social interpretation, Bourdieu (1986) saw social capital as provided to members of actual social systems.

Putnam has described social capital as “networks, norms, and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit” (2000, p. 66). More specifically, he has said:

Social capital is simply social networks plus the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them. Period. There’s nothing in that definition that requires FTF [face-to-face], although as an empirical matter FTF is probably correlated with density of ties and with degree of reciprocity. (personal communication, August 22, 2003)

Colleagues of Putnam have inquired deeply into his definition to find that it has two components: social contact and civic engagement (Wellman & Quan-Haase, in press). To this double definition, Quan-Haase, Wellman, Witte, and Hampton (2002) added a third component: a feeling of community, the attitudinal side of social capital. Its essential yardstick is sentiment, which refers to an individual’s emotional attachment to a community (Bolan, 1997). Ultimately, social capital in this view is best sustained by simple community involvement.

It is easy to see how this common definition of social capital favors the traditional community. It promotes face-to-face contact, physical reciprocity, and intimate social trust. We have seen, however, that even virtual communities share in
social capital, as they celebrate their ability to promote widespread community involvement and interaction in virtual space. More fundamentally, Wellman’s open social network integrates trust on a wider scale that is not limited to a defended community. This concept of community allows trust, and social capital, to be fostered on a larger scale, rather than as a private commodity. Thus, large-scale communities of interest can be activated for specific events in ways simply not possible through physical communities, limited in space and time and bound to known others (Katz & Rice, 2002).

Additionally, social capital can also explain the imagined community and pseudo-community. Suttles (1972) believes that the local community is necessarily a defended community in order to preserve its social capital. The sentimentality of the natural community may be simply a way to store and guard social capital. Against whom is the community guarding itself? The answer is people and other communities it does not trust. People imagine themselves as an intimate, physical community simply because they fear interaction with a larger network.

In Beniger’s pseudocommunity (1987), these ties of trust and intimacy are not imagined, but rather are fostered by impersonal agents; thus, social capital itself is imitated. An example of this is seen when an Internet user provides an email address and cell number to a website, and thus receives spam mail and phone solicitations, who cater their advertisements to a user’s recorded interests and habits, thus purporting to be helpful. The pseudocommunity is “pseudo” because this social capital is not present in interpersonal communion and active involvement, but merely fabricated for its conversion into economic capital (Merton, 1946).

Ultimately, those attributes of community that are shared by physical and virtual communities (near the middle of the dimensional axis of Figure 2) tend to involve the highest amounts of social capital. As a result, it is these attributes that will come into play in the next section.

AREAS OF INTEREST: COMMUNITY BUILDING AND COMMUNITY REDUCING

The concrete application of social capital to virtuality and mobile phones explains the ways in which mediated communication can be said to both strengthen and harm concepts of community. This section will examine the ways in which mediated communication affects community, as well as how community considerations affect the use of mediated communication. In order to do so, it will focus on various components of social capital, breaking them down into the positive and negative roles of mediated communication.

Interactions in the Physical Sphere

Advantage: Mediated communication extends real communities. Wellman and Gulia (1999) criticized Rheingold’s glorification of virtual community precisely because he views the Internet as a separate reality. Rheingold did note that although his virtual community of interest, the WELL (Whole Earth ’lectric Link), fosters relationships both online and offline, he perceived them as distinct environments. In contrast, Wellman and Gulia (1999) sought to transform the conception of community to unify these realities. Rather than abandon the notion of community in today’s world, they chose to look at how it has evolved into the social network. In “Net Surfers Don’t Ride Alone” (1999), they noted the important fact that community is not a zero sum game. An increase in virtual social relations does not entail a decrease in real-life relationships. Rather, the Internet can supplement and extend community relations. For example, text messaging can be used to coordinate face-to-face meetings. Overall, Katz and Rice (2002) summarized this view asserting that individuals with a greater sense of belonging are more likely to surf the Internet, according to a 1995 national survey that has been followed up in subsequent years.

Mediated communication thus allows us to reach out to more people, but also to reinforce and reassemble community relations (Etzioni, 2001). Social network theory provided the basis for Blanchard and Horan (2000), when they concluded that social capital is enhanced when virtual communities develop around and extend physical communities. The functions of virtual communities to foster communities of interest, information spread, and equality of status all work to enhance social capital, despite their lack of direct physical orientation.

If the Internet and other communication technologies actually do increase social capital, then they will be accompanied by a rise in offline contact, civic engagement, and a sense of community, and the other traditional forms of social capital formulated by Coleman and Bourdieu. Indeed, Katz and Rice (2002) found exactly that: Internet users (compared to nonusers) were more likely to be politically involved (both offline and, of course, online), to be involved in community organizations, and to communicate with friends and family. In a 1996 survey, they found that although Internet use does not predict voting behavior, neither does it diminish offline political behavior. Instead, between 10% and 25% of Internet users participate in some political/civic activity online and the amount of use is proportional with this activity. Later, in a 2000 survey, they found that 28% of Internet users belonged to a community organization, versus only 14.2% of nonusers (this distinction did not apply to religious or leisure organizations).

This position of Katz and Rice (2002) supported the transformists’ position that the best communities combine physical proximity and mediated communication. We may think, then, of mediated communities as a supplement to physical communities rather than as complete substitutes. Figallo (1995), for example, conceptualized the Internet as a link between regionally based electronic communities and as an information resource for those communities. Ultimately, Katz and Rice (2002) saw no decline in community involvement due to the Internet; age, education, and income remain much stronger predictors of community involvement. They believed instead that the Internet encourages the weaving for information.
and association evident in further examples, and thus social capital is increased through Internet use.

The San Francisco-based WELL and the New York East Coast Hang Out (ECHO) (Horn, 1998) public conferencing and email systems are exemplars of integrated online and physical community. Horn’s (1998) account of ECHO, the New York-based virtual salon, showed how online communities can reinforce and complement, even create and foster, physical communities and interest in local culture. As with the WELL in Berkeley, ECHO participants get together at different New York settings for social gatherings, and conversation and relations blend together their online and offline lives. Slack and Williams (2000) studied the Craigmiller Community Information Service (CCIS), developed for a town outside of Edinburgh where many civilians are poor and underemployed. Before the CCIS, Craigmiller exhibited no sense of community feeling, no motivation to socialize, and offered no social or cultural activities. By means of the CCIS, however, “Craigmiller has...doped a strategy of self-presentation that counters external representations and which works by being grounded in the highly spatialized notion of a tightly knit community” (p. 322). Quan-Haase, Wellman, Witte, & Hampton (2001) found, in their study of a leading-edge, broadband-wired suburb near Toronto called Netville, that online users are more active neighbors (knowing about 25 neighbors) than are nonusers (about 8), and their contacts range more widely throughout the neighborhood. Hampton (2000) found increased social network, social capital, and local community involvement associated with the Netville online infrastructure. From a community action perspective, the system allowed Netville members to react to the local housing developer about housing problem, through faster organizing, and a greater number of active members. This allowed them to achieve greater concessions from the developer and blocked a second development.

Similarly, the Big Sky Telegraph network in Montana, begun in 1988, connected the teachers, students, families, and communities of dispersed schools throughout Montana (Uncapher, 1999). The residents of the Jervey low-income public housing development in Wilmington, NC (mostly African American women) used the Internet as a tool to support their collective action of resisting proposed demolition and reconstruction of the development by housing authority officials (Mele, 1999). Shapiro and Leone (1999) described the effectiveness of a supplemental community network in Blacksburg, Virginia, where over 60% of the citizens participate. Parents and teachers communicated online and citizens participated in surveys regarding municipal government. While much attention is paid to the exotic and social aspects of online communities, they also represent consequential social policy issues, such as supporting neighborhood and community relations, local school systems, and public access to government services and information (Doheny-Farina, 1998), especially health information and services (Rice & Katz, 2001).

Despite the fact that mainstream communication scholars have, until recently, generally ignored mobile phones, there has nonetheless developed a small but robust set of studies that suggest how mobile communication technology has been modifying the web of social relations. The bulk of research seems to support the notion that mobiles improve relationships. Although these conclusions are plausible, numerous methodological questions that remain unanswered prevent a firm conclusion in this regard. Among the studies are:

1. A 2000 national random sample survey (Rice & Katz, 2003) found that only about 1 in 7 respondents reported that mobiles had caused problems in their primary relationship, and a much larger proportion thought that mobile phones improved their relationships.

2. Palen, Salzman, and Young (2001) concluded that 19 new mobile phone users found themselves more accessible to their social network; much communication was affect-oriented and psychologically pleasurable.

3. Oksman and colleagues at the Finnish University of Tampere have shown that mobile communication practices have become central to the construction and maintenance of teens’ (and preteens’) social networks (Oksman & Rautiainen, 2002).

4. Henderson, Taylor, and Thomson’s (2002) studies in the United Kingdom and Northern Ireland demonstrated that mobile phones affect young people’s sociality. They describe sociality as a practice that contributes to the securing of social capital, or resources based on connections and group membership. First, phones operated as commodities within a material economy and second, phones operated as a medium for social capital.

5. Blinkoff and Blinkoff (2002) claimed, based on ethnographic research of 160 mobile users in six countries (U.S., Italy, Sweden, Brazil, Australia, and China), that mobile devices are primarily a relationship tool. A consistent element in the mobile users stories he collected was that people see the mobile as a way to maintain relationships in a rewarding manner. This need was particularly important, he found, due to the perceived growing complexity of daily life.

Studies such as the one by Katz (1999) suggest that the mobile phone strengthens the user’s existing social ties. Elliott (2003) studied the use of mobile phones by networks of New York cab drivers. She concluded that “days and nights spent in dozens of cabs, where conversations were recorded and translated, have revealed a spectacular alternate work of words beamed from cellphones to invisible audiences around the city and planet” (2003, p. A1). The cab itself, of course, is an interesting social convergence of the public and private, and now cab drivers maintain and develop their professional, ethnic, and social networks while driving strangers around town. One particularly interesting mediated community: “the group of Sherpa drivers who went to the same high school in Nepal and now debate, on a cell phone family plan, the Maoist guerrilla occupation of their hometown” (p. A1). This invisible communication network also provides much more immediate and practical social capital for the cabbie community: business location, traffic and weather conditions, and maintenance contact with the family during long hours, sometimes simply to reassure the spouse that they have not been robbed or attacked. The mediated community support seems to be more valuable than in older ways.
when, cabbie lore has it, there was much more conversation between driver and passenger—another possible indicator of the overall decline in social capital.

**Disadvantage: Mediated communication disrupts real communities.** Even though the above cab example showed how mediated communication has the potential to correct and counteract the general decline in social capital, there is evidence that it often works in an equally negative way. Mediated communication may strengthen participation in one’s community of choice, but often at the expense of the physical community at hand. To continue the preceding example, Elliott (2003) noted that cab drivers can become distracted, confused, or embarrassed when passengers talk, often loudly, on their cell phones on topics ranging from business deals to sexual exploits.

In response, there is a general dystopic concern that mediated communications, especially Internet use, lead to a decline in physical involvement in community (Baudrillard, 1983; Beniger, 1987; Calhoun, 1986; Gergen, 1991; Kiesler, Siegel, & McGuire 1984; Turkle, 1995). Moreover, Stoll (1995), Noll (1997), and Nie (2001) viewed the Internet as specifically taking away interactions in real-life communities, which are necessarily more meaningful than virtual communities (cited in Katz & Rice, 2002). Likewise, Shapiro & Leone (1999) viewed online interactions as indirectly proportional to offline interactions, working in the context of community as zero sum game. Katz and Rice (2002) further expounded on additional disruptions caused by the Internet, such as addiction, dependencies, violence, hate groups, and stalking.

As a result of this pessimistic perspective, many researchers have observed how the relation of individuals and space has changed as a result of mobile communication devices. Fortunati (2002) claimed that individuals now have the possibility of choosing more easily between the physical space and the psychological space of the intimacy of their social network. One has the possibility of choosing between public space (streets, bus stops) and private space (friends one decides to call using mobile phone). She concluded that when an individual uses the mobile phone in a public space, he or she is only half-present. The individual is present in body but not in the attention, mind, and senses.

Palen, Salzman, and Young (2001) commented on the conflict of social spaces. They were attempted to answer why the public use of a mobile phone is so offensive to some people: Talking on a mobile phone in a public place is in part a matter of a conflict of social spaces in which people assume different faces. When a call is received via the mobile, the individual needs to figure out what face takes precedence. When a mobile phone user is on the phone, the individual is simultaneously in two spaces: the physical space and the virtual space of the mobile communication. Choosing to be behaviorally present in a different space from one’s physical location may be perceived as inconsiderate by those in the physical space. What is apparent to the public is that the face one presents on the phone is different from the face assumed just before the phone call. Fortunati (2000) argued that mobile phones have facilitated a preference for interacting with those who are distant as from experiencing public sites. This can be observed in most public settings such as a train station or a bus stop in which people engaged in a mobile phone conversation are most often unmindful of their surroundings. An effect of mobile phones is to privatize communication, isolating the mobile user socially from the public world where he or she is physically located, while also imposing that private communication (usually just one half of it, except in the increasingly distressing context of mobile walkie-talkies) onto the public realm (Fortunati, 2002; Rice & Katz, 2003). Far from being invisible connectors (Chayko, 2002), phones, especially mobile phones, are very visible entities and can be extremely intrusive when used in a shared space.

The physical and sensory space of both mobile phone users and others within sight and hearing is often violated by a mobile phone call (Rice & Katz, 2003). The user cannot continue with the task at hand when he or she receives a call. Even if the individual chooses not to accept the call, the ringing still causes a disruption of the current activity (such as in a classroom or movie theatre). Outcomes such as these led Morse (1998) to conclude that electronic communications disrupt community and undermine face-to-face relations. Licoppe and Heurtin (2002) found that people refrained from using their mobile phones in bars and restaurants but didn’t think twice about using them on the street or at a bus stop. This could be perhaps because in an enclosed setting, everything is magnified and one tends to feel part of a smaller group engaged in similar activities. However, on the street, there is a lot of space and each one is engaged in different activities. Rice and Katz (2003) reported that a national survey showed that by far the most unacceptable mobile courtesy was when automobile drivers were using their mobile phones, presumably because the consequences of this may be highly significant and damaging to many others in public spaces.

People have devised many methods of dealing with these constant interruptions. Most often people just turn off their mobile phones when they do not wish to be disturbed. At other times, people hurry through a phone call or step out of a setting, such as a queue, to take the call (Licoppe & Heurtin, 2002). When a mobile phone rings in a public setting, it gets everyone’s attention. People not only check their own phones, but also look to see whose phone it is. When the call is answered, people tend to look away or stare at nothing in particular. They look anywhere except at the person who is engaged in a mobile phone call. When a person chooses not to answer the phone, there are also reactions—most often, people offer an inquiring look. This discussion of conflicts of space is a perfect illustration of how our considerations of community impact our attitudes towards mediated communication, and mobile phones in particular.

**Community Composition**

**Advantage: Mediated communication develops heterogeneous communities.** What Van Dijk (1999) called an organic community (comprised of face-to-face interactions) is made up of a relatively homogeneous group of people because they
have several interests in common, whereas a virtual community is relatively heterogeneous because only one interest links the participants in that community (though, of course, they may participate in multiple communities, each with its own focused interest). What might appear as online communities are really people who share some (usually single) category, whether it is a special interest or an easily generalized identity, not people bound across multiple activities or social differences (Jones, 1999). As a result, his reasoning followed, a physical (organic) community has a better chance of building and maintaining its own culture and identity than does a virtual community. Virtual and mediated communities, however, also work to overcome exclusionary barriers of race, gender, ethnicity, class, and sexual orientation that are often pervasive in the physical sphere. An analysis of the nearly 3,000 respondents to the 2000 General Social Survey data by Robinson at the University of Maryland (Young, 1996) found that Internet users are more likely to be socially tolerant and accept a wider diversity of opinions and social identities. Mediated communication and virtuality require one to exit a local sphere of comfort and engage in a wider scope of community formation with many more variables at hand.

Even though social conflicts in mediated communities are inescapable, they act as physical communities do to enhance their social cohesion by responding to controversies and differences in community-building ways. Only “all-powerful love” and dedication keeps the virtual community together, just as in the idealized physical community (Rheingold, 2000, p. 41).

As stated earlier, Morgan (1942) observed that real communities are based on coming together for the common good, something greater than each individual, and not on meeting individual needs through offering services in a heterogeneous environment. To the contrary, Rheingold (2000) has shown that virtual communities indeed are formed around the basis of a common good. For example, both Putnam (1993) and Rheingold (2000) viewed the public or common good as a key expression and reservoir of social capital. In this regard, the common good, although not subsuming all other personal interests, does indeed seem to drive community visitors towards an organic unity.

Social capital is marked by equality of community relations. Poster (2001) noted that although new technology does not cancel out traces of face-to-face power relations virtual communities do exhibit a decrease in hierarchies of race, class, age, status, and gender. As a result, these more heterogeneous communities exhibit social capital, resisting inequalities in modern society. They function as Habermas’ proposed public sphere, without actually being so or intending it (see Katz & Rice, 2001, for further statistics on Internet use as increasing involvement and tolerance).

Sennett and Giddens both discovered opportunities for the transformation of community in nontechnological ways, although they are strong proponents of the traditional community. In *The Fall of the Public Man*, Sennett (1977, 1995) echoed Tönnies in bemoaning the loss of Gemeinschaft and the true collective being. He noted that community is inherently anticyclic and is instead a reactive withdrawal.

**Uses of Disorder,** Sennett emphasized that a community is “a social group in which men believe that they share something together . . . a common identity” (1971, p. 31). Community is thus an act of will and not experience. This draws obvious parallels to the imagined community, discussed above. Even though Sennett missed the we feeling of community, he also realized that in expelling deviants who vary from the sameness of Gemeinschaft, we are alienating ourselves from our species being. The solution instead is to find a community of otherness, much like Durkheim’s organic solidarity. Likewise, Giddens (1994) called for an interreliance and communion through difference. This acceptance of the community as a mixed salad, rather than melting pot, is threatening to traditional identity-based societies, such as France (Poster, 2001). In doing so, it is important to create a new sense of place where people can discover a purpose for their lives and cope with the global economy (state of disorder). Neither Sennett nor Giddens were willing to forgo space as a base for community, but they were willing to see community outside of Gemeinschaft.

**Disadvantage: Mediated communication supports exclusionary, homogenous communities.** Tepper (1997) noted that in order to enforce community standards and cohesions virtual communities can also apply exclusion. Just like real communities, boundary demarcation can be important to virtual community identity as well. One way this happens is through trolling, as a USENET community’s information managers and some members ostracize an outsider’s post by replying to it with flaming or harsh language. Tepper remarked that people also seek to maintain private communities in public space. Rheingold (1993) noted that community is not a conflict-free environment and thus, that the occasional flaming, gossip, or argument that occurs in virtual communities can enhance, rather than detract, from the feeling of community. Indeed, some USENET groups specifically advocate and practice the art of flaming as their main purpose. Although mediated communication and virtuality can provide an outlet for certain repressed margins of society, they also foster exclusionary tactics.

As a result of these claims, Gurak (1997) pointed out that virtual communities work to squash opposing viewpoints and exaggerate their own claims. Likewise, Sunstein (2001) pointed out that participation in virtual communities online brings about the creation of a more egotistical individual, who takes comfort in his ability to live without confronting opposing views. In addition, Calhoun (1986, p. 389) believed that the compartmentalization of communities of interest runs directly counter to Habermas’ public sphere. These considerations led Katz and Rice (2002) to muse that unfettered communication may not necessarily foster health and socially beneficial communities. Nonetheless, even among these homogeneous communities, these technologies’ ability to create easy communication and shared information remains a vital common good and ingredient of Putnam’s (2000) social capital.

**Size**

**Advantage: Mediated communication increases contacts in the social network.**
corollary would be that size ipso facto exerts a powerful influence on its creation and use. Indeed, the concept of positive network externality posits that social capital, such as the value of belonging to a network or community, grows much more rapidly than the number of participants \( N \), because it is the total number of possible relationships \( N \times (N-1) \) that generates potential resources (see Katz & Rice, 2002; Rice, 1982, 1990).

**Disadvantage:** Mediated communication increases social distance, reducing social capital. On the other hand, Coleman (1986) claimed that social capital decreases when communities become quite large because, due to the permutation of interaction partners, individuals can defect from a group (in game-theoretic terms), capturing for themselves the benefits without having to bear the cost of reciprocation. Small communities that exert high social pressure are rich in social capital. In addition, Calhoun (1980) held that community cannot be defined purely by members' location in a common locality or members' abstract sense of belonging together. Rather, his concept of community examined the ways in which members actually change their actions based on their relations to their community.

Commenting on social capital and education, Coleman and Hoffer (1987) recognized that community more strongly influences educational success than do variations in schools. The wholeness and integrity of the local community therefore must be preserved in order to enhance the social capital of its members, a greater public good.

Spontaneous, Voluntary, and Frequent Communication

**Advantage:** Mediated communication creates local, spontaneous bulwark of community association. Putnam (1993, 2000) noted that social capital fosters spontaneous, voluntary cooperation due to the forms of reciprocity, norms, and networks of civil engagement inherent in social capital. Putnam observed:

Some technologies (e.g., the telephone) seem in practice to be used primarily to reinforce close, FTF ties. (Except for phone sex, people don’t normally make new friends on the telephone.) The internet can certainly be used to reinforce close ties. . . . However, some aspects of internet technology can also be used in principle to reinforce weak ties (e.g., among long-lost school classmates). What I’m most skeptical about is the idea (now less common, of course) that the internet would create “virtual communities” entirely untheorized by any FTF links.

E-mail seems to me an unmitigated positive for social capital in the sense I defined it, and is probably very good for both strong ties and weak ties. . . . I don’t know about instant messaging, although a student of mine did a preliminary study that suggested it was much better for maintaining strong ties (and ties that were rooted in FTF ties) than for creating new weak ties. (He tried using instant messaging to contact strangers and found that far fewer than one percent responded favorably.) I’m less sure about internet-based gaming or chat rooms. I don’t see any reason in principle to think that mobile phones will have a different sort of impact than imobile phones, which was (I take it from Claude Fisher’s work) mostly positive, but not transformative. I’m skeptical about broad generalizations about technology’s impact, since different technologies are likely to have different effects. However, one broad trend over the last 100 years . . . has been the use of technology to privatize and individualize entertainment (TV, of center”). I would not argue that all the effects of that master trend have been evil—I definitely do not like being or being thought to be a cultural groaner—but I do think that the privatization of leisure time is a very real and powerful trend that has thinned our social connections with other people. (Personal communication, August 22, 2003)

As these remarks suggest, Putnam’s theorizing about social capital is readily applicable to mobile phones, as reciprocity norms are found in peoples’ tendency to return calls and text messages, as well as informal dinner invitations over the mobile. We can also see networks of voluntary, spontaneous civic engagement in the ever-evolving field of mobile phone etiquette. At the same time, concerns about the loss of public civility in the pursuit of private pleasures, as implied in Putnam’s comment above, certainly seem to hold true concerning mobile phone use (Katz, 2003; Rice & Katz, 2003).

Shareware also exemplifies reciprocity in virtual communities (Stone, 1998), as does participation within and across computer-mediated conference groups (Rice, 1982). Further, Turkle claimed that MUD Object Oriented (MOO) and MUDs “honor people’s desires to connect and not to be lonely, and to form community” (in Bollier, 1995, p. 27). Overall, Poster (2001) noted that the Internet is a general economy of sharing that is not specific to barter or commodity exchange, but rather returns to the primordial social act.

Coleman (1986) noted the basis of affectual community is frequent informal communication. This is exactly the essence of the cellular, virtual community. Mobile phones provide an ideal case for this region of overlap, because the mobile phone call is less disembodied than other forms of computer-mediated communication technologies. The mobile phone includes the voice (and, recently, a video image and/or personal ring tones). This added sense of personality allows the mobile phone to connect different social networks and create a sense of belonging (Johnsen, 2003). The informal and perpetual nature of the mobile phone, its perpetual presence (Gergen, 2003; Katz & Aakhus, 2002), allows constant gift reciprocity and gossip that nurture social ties. Johnsen (2003) constructed the Internet, at least the noncommercial sites, as primarily a gift economy involving participants in ongoing relations, rather than a site for commodity transactions among self-interested, independent actors. Givers gain self-efficacy in online relationships and prestige as informed sources, the information gifts become public goods shared by (i.e., cannot be kept from) all other members of the distribution list, newsgroup or Web forum, and the economies of scale derived from having many participants typically generate positive network externalities. We can see that mobile phones are not stand-alone technologies, but rather are integrated in the larger domain of social networks.

In fact, some argue that it is the frequency and continuity of conversation flow via mobile phones, not the content itself, that guarantees strength of relation (Lipcoppe, 2003). Likewise, Rheingold (2002) stated that text messaging is often more effective than a phone call in coordinating people and maintaining regular,
happens when you are in a public place and having a private mobile phone conversation. One can text message in front of the world without disclosing any one-sided conversations or imposing one’s privacy on the public. It is thus a more private technology, potentially, than the mobile phone (Rice & Katz, 2003).

Likewise, Fortunati (2002) described mobile phones as a device that lets one contact somebody of his or her intimate circle in order to activate the feeling of familiarity when in an environment perceived to be extraneous. She explained that mobile is used by people to strengthen communicative immediacy with their social networks when faced with the lack of informative immediacy of the place. She concluded that people are more interested in chosen sociality rather than chance sociality.

The frequency of mediated communication also helps to retain important social ties of community. Fischer (1982, p. 176) also found that local ties were not more intimate or crucial than distant ones; people kept distant associates in their networks because they were crucial or intimate. Frequency of contact as a cause for intimacy was not supported clearly and it could indeed be, as suggested by Fischer (1982), that frequency of contact is a consequence as opposed to a cause of closeness.

**Disadvantage**: Mediated communication relies on voluntary participation, neglecting involuntary association. Voluntary and spontaneous cooperation are tied together by the notion of social capital; however, they do imply an inherent contradiction. Many theorists hold that communities cannot be ordered into existence; they must arise spontaneously. This makes it especially problematic to determine the basis for community feeling online, as it is, in some sense, self-created. Mediated communication offers few possibilities to become involuntarily involved in community formation. In fact, in those few cases in which mediated communication does surpass our intentions, perhaps when a mobile phone picks up another’s wavelength, or we mistakenly subscribe to an online newsletter, we become frustrated by our involvement in another community.

The intentionality inherent in mediated communication allows for the relaxed form of non-task-based communication that fosters face-to-face feelings of intimacy. Fortunati (2002), however, noted that mobile phones can at the same time frustrate communication, as people use them for short, information-eliciting conversations, or conversely, as an occupational mechanism while bored. Do we perhaps construct our feelings of spontaneous intimacy and attempts at informal conversation based on our desire to have a voluntary choice in our community formation?

Unfortunately, the information overload that results from mediated communication, as well as the general feeling that we are isolated when not plugged in, leads to what has been called the New Economy Depression Syndrome, or NEDS (Soto, 2003). Even though this is a variant on an old theme, the problem seems to be growing as gadgetry proliferates.

**Interpersonal Bonds and Network Formation**

**Advantage**: Mediated communication creates strong and widespread interpersonal ties. Social capital increased through the use of information technologies, which connect distant and local communities and thus increase interpersonal bonds. Wellman viewed the Internet as very different from the television: It is less individually immersive and more actively and socially engaging. Likewise, Poster (2001) saw broadcast media as rigidly determined, whereas the Internet offers avenues for action and interpretation. In increasing social interaction and civic involvement, Wellman (like Katz & Rice, 2002) conceptualized the Internet and other virtual communities as increasing social capital. Ultimately, for Wellman and Gula (1999), it was the very fears of virtual community that so trouble commentators that revealed just how important online connections are becoming. Turkle disputed the argument that Internet communities promote only secondary relationships. For example, she provided the example of one SeniorNet member who received dozens of calls and cards from her cyber friends as she lay dying in the hospital (in Bolliger, 1995). Overall, there is a considerable body of scholars who, like Shapiro & Leone (1999), believe that the existence of virtual communities online reflects the desire for a more connected way of living.

Cyberspace involvement can create alternative communities that are as valuable and useful as our familiar, physically located communities (Preece, 2000; Rheingold, 1993; Sudweeks, McLaughlin, & Rafaeli, 1998). The weak ties that online communities enable may provide better and different kinds of resources than strong, familial ties. For example, online communities of patients with various kinds of terminal or serious illnesses can supply both the anonymity and objectivity that patients cannot or may not receive from family and friends, who may try to protect the patient by not providing complete feedback, or who may feel neither comfortable nor experienced enough to provide insight about the patient’s condition (Rice & Katz, 2001). The Internet’s potential to support such communities is largely due to a combination of several factors: increased bandwidth, continuous access, wireless portability, anonymity, globalized connectivity, and personalization (such as collaborative filtering and content associated by shared users, individual email profiles and Web portals, and online communities of interests).

Calhoun (1986) took the position that the Internet encourages indirect relations with people, which although less meaningful, are nonetheless productive and work to enhance real-life relations. Granovetter (1973) argued that an innovation can be diffused can reach a larger number of people and traverse greater social distance when passed through weak ties as opposed to strong ties. Fischer (1982) argued that local ties, which are viewed as being superior to spatially dispersed ties, are in fact superior only by virtue of the fact that they are cheaper. He contended that distance is a cost of a social interaction like any other cost. Alternative ties are becoming cheaper through rapid transportation and new technologies such as mobile phones and the Internet. People are forming relationships across greater distances for relevant purposes based on the type of community to which they belong. This chapter, however, does not contend that one has to be the member of only one community. The more communities one is a part of, the more time is invested in
A study conducted by Kim (2002) in Korea showed that Korean youth felt the need to be a part of the social network and felt that this could be achieved by being in touch with one another at any time and in any place. People must be members of multiple groups, as these groups are formed on selective basis such as hometown, family name, or school attended. It would be fair to say that multiple groups would take up greater involvement via the mobile phone if being the member of one such group demanded time and energy (Kim, 2002). This is in agreement with Granovetter's (1973) hypothesis that if the tie between two individuals is strong, then the likelihood of these individuals knowing an overlapping number of people in a larger social milieu is more likely than if they had a weak tie.

The effect that a mobile phone will have on ties depends also on what kind of tie is being studied. Weak ties between women may have different characteristics from weak ties between men, or between adults and adolescents. The tie could also be between a superior and a subordinate at work, or between extroverts and introverts. It is not merely involvement with a group or a set of groups but also the fact that the mobile phone helps to establish bonds over space and time. It could be argued that long-lasting, bond-nurturing home phone calls could establish strong ties and that short goal-oriented phone calls establish weak ties. It is not, however, the length of the phone call alone that has an impact on the nature of the bond. A series of brief phone calls could also strengthen weak ties and establish and strengthen strong ties. For example, a mother who calls her teenager to find out where he or she is makes a brief, goal-oriented call, and yet this strengthens the trust that she shares with her child.

Disadvantage: Mediated communication ignores local ties and interactions. How does this newfound mobility affect social capital? Magdol and Bessel (2003) noted that social capital theory requires physical proximity and residential stability as prerequisites for a good community. In their study, they found that the availability of emotional and financial support was not affected by mobility distance, but that tangible favors and companionship were. As kin exchanges are affected by distance, nonkin exchanges increase, suggesting the replacement of kin by closer, nonkin in the social network. Social capital thus decreases as weak ties replace former strong, kinship-based ones (Magdol & Bessel, 2003). In contrast, Wellman and Hampton (2001b) noted that distance affects friend ties much more than kin ties. One's friends tend to be localized, which enhances the physical proximity requirement of social capital, but not the residential stability requirement that involves maintaining the same close ties with one's relatives through one's life. Likewise, online ties are likely to be more ephemeral, less sustainable, and easily excitable, compared to physical community relations (Jones, 1999; Rice, 1987; Shapiro & Leone, 1999).

Even though mobile devices assist in strengthening the individual's social network, some researchers claim that mobile devices are not used by individuals to expand their networks. Geser (2003), for example, claimed that mobile phones may support tendencies towards social closure rather than tendencies to open up predictable, and self-controlled social relationships. As a result, although the chances of interacting with strangers can be reduced, circles of established friendships can be deepened.

This is supported further by the fact that mobile phone numbers are usually communicated to a narrow circle of self-chosen friends and acquaintances so that no calls from unpredictable new sources have to be expected. People do not generally divulge their mobile telephone number except to people with whom they have very close relationships, or strong ties, as Granovetter defined it. The mobile phone thus creates a message to other people, who are accepted members of a particular individual's close circle of friends or family (Licoppe & Herit, 2002). This is not just a matter of trust but also of exclusivity. As Fortunati (2002) conceived of it, chance socialness is reduced. This theme is explored at length in Ling (in press), who describes the process as walled gardens. Ling envisions the net effect of strengthening the emotional content and thus the robustness of within-group social linkages, at the expense of more far-flung and cross-group or out-group networks.

Ling (2003) discussed how mobile phones can affect social capital at various levels. Mobile phones can be used in a particular social network such as a circle of friends to maintain a sense of connectedness (e.g., in terms of location or current news). He distinguished between this and emotionally based interaction, in which coordination is not the focus as much as interaction. The distinction could then be stretched to mobile conversations that strengthen weak ties and strong ties. He also stated that the coordinating talk can result in distancing one's self from people in the immediate vicinity or, as it was earlier defined, people who share a public space. It can be hypothesized that then that strengthening weak ties through mobile phone usage almost eliminates possible ties with those in one's shared physical space. If one starts ignoring members of society who are copresent, because one is a member of another virtual community connected through the mobile phone, there could be some extensive negative ramifications, including the reduction in feelings of social integration, if not necessarily any reduction in social capital (Katz, 2003b).

Mediated communication can thus work to promote exclusion on a physical basis. For Wellman and Gulia (1999), the effect of distance on community produces geographically dispersed, specialized ties that are connected by telecommunications. Community becomes transformed into a personal-based, social network. Actual local communities then become loosely bound and sparsely knit (2001). As a result, neighborhoods have not disappeared. Wellman noted, however, that we have responded to the loose social network by engaging in selective neighboring, much like the community of limited liability. In response to this perceived social and physical distance, local neighborhoods work to increase services and reinforce security and a general sense of belonging (Wellman, 1988a).

Meaningful Communication, Trust, and Intimacy

Advantage: Mediated communication supports the effective base of commu-
real. The inverse must also be true. In this way, the role of communication as meaningful and value-based in virtual communities also works to construct real communities. Sanders further stated that community is "a system of social interaction and communication," and the two are interchangeable (1966, p. 347). What physical communities do through face-to-face communication to maintain their identity, virtual communities do through mediated communication. They are one and the same.

Strong community ties are linked to intimacy, voluntary involvement, frequency of communication, feelings of companionship, knowing each other in multiple contexts, enduring ties, mutual ties, having one's needs met, and shared social characteristics (Wellman & Gulia, 1999). Virtual communities and online environments deliver all of these, some argue, except emotional expression, intimacy, and multiple contexts. Ultimately, however, people base intimacy on shared interests and not shared social characteristics, such as in real-life communities. Wellman and Gulia noted that relational development takes longer online due to the lower bandwidth, its asynchronicity, and the lack of physical cues; however, intimacy is not precluded. Walther (1996) indeed showed that mediated relational development could achieve levels of face-to-face relational development given sufficient time. Straus (1997) and Walther (1996) went so far as to claim that computer-mediated communication is as or more personal than face-to-face interactions. In addition, A. D. Smith (1999) noted that the physical distance and anonymity actually gives users support for intimacy in their relations. Unlike physical communities, the anonymity of online communities actually makes people more willing to help each other (Wellman & Gulia, 1999). This led Uslaner (2000) to claim that Internet use gradually produces environs of trust for its users.

On the other hand, Steimrueller (2002) claimed that virtual communities exhibit the full range of human emotion. One way that this seeming paradox is possible is through the employment of emoticons and emoting. Emoticons are an important way that the emotional embodied individual feels a sense of online community, despite narrow broadband (Baym, 1997; Curtis, 1996). Likewise, emoting is a replacement for real-life nonverbal behavior (Curtis, 1996; Kollock & Smith, 1999; Rheingold, 2000). High bandwidth also allows the addition of avatars and real-time video and audio streaming, which enhances community in realistic ways (Kollock & Smith, 1999). Kodama (2001) asserted that VideoNet technology actually provides the empathy and solidarity necessary for community formation and found in face-to-face communication. These emotional expressions on the Internet make it possible to understand the development of affectual communities online. The affectual community often links to a common memory and identity. Just as Bellah et al. (1985) spoke of the community of memory as being key to community identity and sentiment formation, personal Web pages allow people to share in their own communities of memory (Hozic, 2001). Additionally, online health support communities can exhibit high and consistent degrees of empathy for others (Preece & Ghozati, 2001). In the importance of virtual communication as substituting for communities resemble physical communities in their formations of sentiment and community feeling.

For Wilbur (2000), a sense of virtual community requires a space of communication shared with others and an immersive connection with others (through which we create our own simulation of community in our heads, similar to the imagined community). Likewise, Baym (1995) perceived the shared norms of communicative practice as being the resource that brings everyone together to share in the meaning-making of a community. For example, online senses of social or shared interest distance can be measured in what Kendall (2003) calls "e-distance." Here, the distance from one place or one personal Web page to another is the number of clicks that it takes to get to them. One- and two-click e-distance imply a strong sense of community and cooperation among the actors creating and using those Web pages, just as Wellman's social network functions in real life.

The vastly increased ability to share information and reduce e-distance is a crucial factor in community formation. Jones (1999) emphasized that new media facilitate increased choice: The information highway will allow us to "forge our own places from among the many that exist, not by creating new places but by simply choosing from the menu of those available" (p. 220). For example, the Cultural Access Group's (2001) study of ethnic differences among online users reported that 59% of their African American and 73% of their Hispanic respondents reported that the Internet keeps them connected to their ethnic community, and find that the content on African American (79%) or Hispanic (69%) Web sites is meaningful to them. The link between online involvement and diversity may go even deeper than manifestations of particular groups of users.

Community is not built into residential life, but rather into the value-laden access of other people, the ability of moral and trustworthy communication (Etzioni, 2001). This expression of social capital as meaningful communication parallels Rheingold (1993), for whom knowledge sharing is a form and resource of social capital. Developments of trust are essential to determining meaningful communication, and trust is also a key component of social capital (Giddens, 1994). An example of trust building in a virtual community is the reputation system critiqued by Baym (1997). Members of online soap opera communities, as well as other virtual communities such as eBay, have the ability to rate other members and their posts according to their work and value, thus providing a trustworthiness database for all to see.

Cerulo (1997), somewhat rejecting Beniger's (1987) critique of the pseudo-community created by digital mass media, argued that we need to reconceptualize community due to the rise of new communication technologies, based on evidence about social interaction and social bonding (see also Rice, 1987) in settings such as parasocial interaction with mediated personalities, call-in radio shows, and emotional support in online discussion groups. Systems such as the Internet can "sustain forms of ongoing and improvisational group life where interactions cannot easily or routinely be face-to-face—including among members of discredited..."
Disadvantage: Mediated communication builds pseudocommunities. The idea of distance and physical community can also work to explain the pseudocommunity. As noted earlier, virtual communities still work around references to real-life images of space (Kollock & Smith, 1999; Stone, 1991). We require these images to create our affectual and emotional attachments to virtual communities. However, Rice (1987) and Shapiro and Lenone (1999) pointed out that virtual communities and the ties found within them are ephemeral, less sustainable, and much more easily excitatable than in physical communities.

Just as with the pseudocommunity, Jeffres, Atkin, and Neuendorf (2002) noted that the distance of small communities from the center city is proportional to their dependence on the media versus their interpersonal influence in the political arena. The pseudocommunity emerges again to be one created by the media, which exploits the distance of its members and their yearning for small community. This is problematic, as Wright (2000) noted that city populations are dropping due to the resurgence of the suburban, small town: In 1970, 25% of Americans lived in cities, compared with 21% in 1990.

In Bowling Alone (2000) Putnam maintained, as seen above, that social capital is the glue that holds a livable society together. Without it, communities suffer: Crime rates balloon, social services wither, and people become depressed or sick or even die. With its ability to provide both one-way information and two-way communication, the Internet and mobile communication technologies provide an interesting potential. Putnam was equivocal and allowed for future improvements; however, he concluded that mediated communication inhibits interpersonal collaboration and trust (Putnam, 2000, p. 176).

Even though our communities are no longer our neighborhoods or our geographic locations, we create them instead in the social circles we come to inhabit (Fuentes, 2000). Perhaps, this all comes down to the fact that the further one gets away from the traditional community and home, the more one misses it (Fuentes, 2000; Terkenli, 1995). Mediated communities are thus not seen as real communities, but rather our imagined ways to deal with the social consequences of our chosen life paths. If we tend to imagine our virtual communities in terms of our idealized physical communities, those few aspects of virtual community that deviate from this mold may show the potential for a real transformation and synthesis of the community concept.

Distance

Advantage: Mediated communication keeps communities alive over distances. Communication technologies and the Internet are landed for their ability to make distance irrelevant (Fuentes, 2000; M. J. Smith, 1999; Walmsley, 2000). It is in the virtual reduction of the friction of distance that Walmsley (2000) viewed as helping strengthen physical communities. In this context, Katz and Rice (2002) found that the social communities of Internet users are more dispersed than those telephone calls, according to their 1995 survey. The Internet is thus correlated, rather than causal, of breakdowns in physical community.

The mobile phone may be central in re-establishing the norms of community. Deriving from the works of Aronson (1971), Poole (1981), Fischer (1982), and Katz (1999), one can argue that the wire-line telephone is an ideal tool because it counteracts social distance and reinforces local ties. The work of Fischer and Katz is but the tip of a substantial body of literature on the telephone that, in all cases with which we are familiar, shows that the telephone is indeed a tremendously powerful stimulant, preserver, and enhancer of community. Pertinent examples beyond those just mentioned above include Dimnick, Jaspreet, and Patterson (1994), Fortunati (1993), Rakow (1991), and Umble (1992). It is plausible to anticipate that the mobile phone would extend these communal benefits.

Disadvantage: Mediated communication inflames the negative effects of distance on community. The traditionalists would presumably argue that distance (included mediated interaction) leads to community fragmentation and dissolution. Distance constrains communication, something necessary and important for all communities (Wellman & Hampton, 2001b). Communities dominated by mediated technology cannot be a source of real community (Baudrillard, 1983; Beniger, 1987; Gergen, 1991; Turkle, 1996). The use of online systems to communicate with more distant others may reduce the vitality and integration of physical communities (Calhoun, 1986).

Proponents of physical communities note that physical and social distance ruptures community fabric (Crow, Allen, & Summers, 2002). There are also positive relationships between emotional closeness and physical proximity, duration and emotional closeness, and face-to-face interaction and proximity (Adams, 1985). Physical distance determines our passive contacts, and thus proximity is a major determinant for relations in homogenous, high-interaction communities (Darke & Darke, 1969). The good physical neighbor is thus one who is warm and inviting, but can respect your privacy—one who maintains "friendly distance" (Crow et al., 2002).

As a result, Putnam (2000) conceived of suburban sprawl and the resulting increased distance from centralized foci of interaction as problematic for social capital and community formation. One might argue from this that all forms of mobility in fact undermine civic engagement and social capital, as communities that experience rapid turnover are overall less integrated.

If physical distance negatively affects the traditional community by turning it into a social network, what effect does distance have on the latter? Mobility distance is a predictor of network distance, according to Magdol (2000). People who move longer distances from their community have more dispersed networks, whereas local movers have more proximate networks. In his study of sentiment and moving, Bolan (1997) found that people who devoted more time to a move, moved for housing needs or stayed in the same census level experienced higher levels of community attachment. (In other words, these people experienced duration, necessity, and commonality in their local community, all components of the
any two people is the minimum number of steps in the network needed to go from one to the other (White, 2003). Clusters of one-to-one ties thus illustrate a strong sense of community. As noted above, mediated communication involves building widespread and diverse networks, not associating only with common or nearby groups of people.

Speed

**Advantage: Choices between synchronous and asynchronous interactions allow mediated communication to imitate face-to-face communities.** The face-to-face norm of constant, informal interaction contributes to the sense of community among online groups. Quan-Haase, Wellman, Witte, and Hampton (2002) noted that frequent email users have a greater sense of online community. In fact, rapid delivery email directly enhances community, according to Nig (2001). Likewise, LaRose, Eastin, and Gregg (2001) claimed that Internet use, especially email, creates more social support for its users, leading to a reduction in stress and feelings of isolation.

Real-time chatting is likewise strongly associated with a feeling of community, much more so than asynchronous forms of communication (Quan-Haase et al., 2002). Quan-Haase et al. additionally noted that frequent online communication with friends gives people a strong sense of online community whereas online communication with kin is thought of as merely a good device to maintain ties. Real-time chatting is also lauded by Rheingold (2000) in his treatment of text messaging, MUDs, IRCs, and other chatrooms, which are predominant in the literature of virtual community, are marked by real-time chat (Curtis, 1996; Klock and Smith, 1999; Stone, 1998). As Turkle (1995) agreed, virtual communities exist only among their members when they are logged in; the real-time nature of community ceases at the point of logging off. Absent the development of social capital as an enduring potential resource, the same could be argued for physical communities. Proponents of real-life communities argue that the random encounter is a key step in community building. Likewise, the turnover of players in a MUD during the day allows for a freshness of encounter and a similar phenomenon (Curtis, 1996). Informal communication, real-time interaction, speed, emotion, exclusion, conflict, and randomness represent ways in which the community-building components of virtual community reflect those in the physical community.

Speed indeed seems to influence sentiments of community feeling. Broadband is the single most powerful statistical predictor of the time devoted to Internet use. Broadband users are also more likely than dial-up users to feel that the Internet has had a positive connection on their community of family (71% vs. 58%) and friends (76% vs. 68%). Wellman and Hampton (2001b) also noted that high-speed networks allow people to enhance their social relations, especially their distant ones. According to Rheingold (2002), broadband will see its ultimate achievement in wireless technology, as physical locality is completely eliminated (i.e., one does not even need to be in a particular physical location to access connectivity or utilize.

In his list of requirements for community, Eitzioni (2001) found that among other things, communities require interactive broadcasting, access, and cooling-off mechanisms. Computer-mediated communication approximates this well through its ability to reach more people, availability of email and bulletin-board style feedback, and the small delays built into email programs and other "Are you sure now?" messages that precede information dissemination online. Other theorists have noted that asynchronous communication does not disrupt community, but rather enhances it in different ways (Baym, 1997; M. J. Smith, 1999). Curtis (1996) noted that the delays in conversation, due to bandwidth and typing, allow multiple, overlapping threads of discourse in any one conversation, as well as the ability to talk with many people simultaneously.

**Disadvantage: Speed issues cause mediated communication to frustrate face-to-face community.** Nell (1997) and Stoll (1995) held that face-to-face communication provides a depth of communication and speed of feedback that is basic to forming community and sentiment ties. In contrast, they portrayed computer-mediated communication as task-focused, depersonalized, filled with psychological distance, and lacking social cues. Additionally, as Wellman and Gulia (1999) stated, there is a constant worry that the reduced bandwidth of the Internet and communication technologies will undermine the supportive community because it can lead to misinterpretations of words and actions, as well as impede immediate conversational repair.

Constructions of Time and the Self

**Advantage: Mediated communication contributes to a new construction of the self.** Wellman (2001) maintained that the adoption of a distributed social network is one way to counteract the loss of community idea. Turkle and Stone have pointed out that mediated communications and virtual communities lead to fractured and fragmented selves, which they view as positive because it opens up many new groups in which to participate. The saturated self-concept (Gergen, 1991) is another way in which we deal with the fragmentation of self idea.

Maffesoli (1996) adopted the term *neo-tribes* to explain the relationship between the individual and mass communication/society. In the face of the unification of authority in mass society, our individualism is defined by our individual interactions with different groups. Neo-tribes are defined as "instantaneous conversions" (p. 76): They are unstable, self-defined communities marked by fluidity and dispersal. The neo-tribe is an excellent metaphor to show how our selves can be multifaceted, without being accompanied by social isolation.

Another useful metaphor is the invisible mouse developed by Katz and Rice (2002). Just as Adam Smith's invisible hand explained the way that self-motivated individualistic action contributed to the well-being of the common good, the invisible mouse explains how individuals acting in self-interest online and using mediated communications actually produce notions of social altruism and community.
other virtual networks as examples of this phenomenon. The Internet thus “neither directly creates nor diminishes social capital... but social capital is created as a by-product of people motivated by their own interests” (p. 199). Collective interaction far outweighs the development of introspection resulting from individual information seeking.

Mobile phones also can help users create identity. Sending text messages and talking on the mobile phone gives users an opportunity to be a part of a social network and this communication becomes a part of a daily routine in which the user is continually sending a stream of signals to the surroundings (Johnsen, 2003). In his ethnographic study of Norwegian teenagers, Johnsen (2003) found that the mobile phone gives a young user the ability to confirm her social status and be a part of a social network. He stated that she indulges in small talk and feeds the network gossip as and when the situation arises and stressed the fact that the content is not as important as the fact that communication occurs. His study found that even a third person who was mentioned in a mobile phone conversation was part of the same social network and inferred that the phone worked to strengthen these existent ties instead of isolating certain members of the group (see also work by Skog, 2002, on identity formation and mobile phones).

Many researchers have attempted to examine how the relation of individuals and time has changed with the spread of the mobile. With respect to social coordination with others, researchers Ling and Ytri (2002) noted that mobile phones soften time. In other words, mobile users tend to feel comfortable about refining schedules via mobile phones when coordinating to meet up with others as they approach an agreed-upon time. Schedules are constantly negotiable according to the changing situation, thereby causing the rearranged structure of everyday life to become more obscure. Zernicke (2003) also reported several studies that indicate that being late is becoming more acceptable than it used to be. After interviewing numerous mobile-using teenagers in Tokyo, Rheingold (2002) concluded that for this group, as long as everybody is reachable by SMS (short messaging service, or text messaging), being late is not an issue.

Disadvantage: Mediated communication works to fragment and isolate the self. Some researchers have focused on how mobiles reduce individuals’ self-reliance, which in turn erodes their ability to react adaptively to unpredictable encounters. Geser (2003), for instance, claimed that mobile phones can cause individuals to become less prone to develop certain social competencies. This is because of the constant availability of external communication partners (as sources of opinion and advice) as mobile phones enable people to retain primary social relationships over distance. This affects people’s self-reliance, making them unable to operate alone and leaving them dependent on the mobile phone as a source of assistance and advice. Witness, for example, increasing numbers of people using their cell phones while shopping in grocery stores or video rental shops, asking their family or partners what they should get.

In terms of the mobile phone as the device for filling unoccupied stretches of mobile phone is used to avoid being alone with one’s thoughts. In Japan, the traditional ways of killing time (e.g., reading books, comics, or newspapers) are losing out to mobile phones. Fortunati (2002) showed how the use of mobile phones has encouraged more productive use of time. For example, time spent in traffic, in waiting lines at the post office, and other situations where we usually consider time to be wasted is used to communicate with others via the mobile phone. Overall, our dependence on the cell phone leads us to consider time without the phone as time in social isolation.

As a result, Peters and Hulme (2002) stated that people consider the mobile phone to be an extension of the self. The loss of a mobile phone would be comparable to physical disintegration. Moseley (2002) commented on how people go out without their mobile phones and feel as if there is something missing: “A human with a mobile in the pocket is appreciably different from the human without one” (Moseley, 2002, p. 37). Although people are “increasingly developing skills they wouldn’t have had before—for example, the ability to operate in two contexts at once” (Moseley, 2002, p. 37), each individual may be losing the skills to interact with his or her own self.

Similar to these complaints pertaining to cell phones, Kraut et al. (1998) reported that Internet use actually reduced personal network size and strength, as well as caused overall depression in its users. They found that the Internet worked to replace strong social ties with weak online ties, thus reducing meaningful relations. His research, however, has been criticized sharply as being based on modest effects being found in a few elements of a small convenience sample. Apropos of these criticisms, his subsequent analysis of additional data from the sample (Kraut et al., 2002) found that to whatever extent these effects may have existed in the first place, they were no longer present in the original sample.

Social Control

Advantage: Mediated communication allows flexible forms of social control.

Poster (2001) maintained that one of the most important attributes of mediated communication is that it is underdetermined, versus fixed forms of print and broadcast media. We learned above from Merton and Beniger’s pseudocommunity that fixed media have the ability to exert high forms of social control over the individual. In contrast, Poster noted that with mediated technologies, such as the Internet, individuals become real agents who are capable of resisting the world around them. Mediated communications are open to practice and are not closed to interpretation, thus allowing flexibility in identity, presence, and avoidance of strict social control.

Palen et al. (2001) came up with a list of factors that may impact the usage of a mobile phone, such as the mobility of one’s profession, the availability of other communications media at home or at the workplace, the number of roles one assumes (e.g., wife, mother, manager), the degree of integration across roles, degree of...
sharing, and additional factors such as agility. Taking note of these factors, Fortunati (2002) asserted that the mobile phone strengthens social control over others. She observed that women are more likely than men to phone to give their location and hypothesized that this could stem from factors such as a woman being compliant with the needs of men and children to know where she is, thus making herself reachable. Based on in-depth interviews, Fortunati (2002) found that some people chose to call others on their mobile phone, although they knew their home or office number, as a means of exercising a form of control by shifting the center of communications gravity in their favor. Similarly, parents often give cell phones to their teenagers in order to keep track of them.

The counterargument persists that people have the choice of answering the phone based on who is calling. A person may call one’s mobile phone, but one does not have to take the call. That is an exercise of power and being in control of the situation, experienced at an individual level. Likewise, Katz (1999) and Wynn and Katz (2000) argued that use of the mobile phone for intimate calls helps defend and develop young people’s sense of autonomy and identity and allows them to escape the social control of others.

In addition, the greater incursions of freedom through mediated communication are reminiscent of the ideal community. The ideal community, as noted, is symbolized by the horizontal nature of social ties. Likewise, online interactions and their feeling of community are amplified by their ability to bypass authority and experience horizontal equality, as well as devise their own rules. This perception is related to the notion that people feel that they are in a community when they perceive total freedom to set up their own way of life within it (Rheingold, 1993). This is consonant with Jones’s (1995) definition of community in which its members are totally free to act within them (cf. Wynn & Katz, 1997). Similarly, Curtis (1996) explained that the ability to interact with many people, or simply one person, in a MUD, as well as move around within it, is key to its sense of community. Finally, M. J. Smith (1999) stated that the potential audience existing online, as well as the all of ways of reaching them in a many-to-many form of communication, allows every person to access the larger community.

Disadvantage: Mediated communication can be easily manipulated, allowing for deceit. Studies have shown that parental control over telecommunication resources becomes a process of constant negotiation between the parents and children (Ling & Helmerson, 2000). Ling and Yttri (2002) found that youth devise various strategies to avoid being monitored by parents through mobile phones. Palen et al. (2001) found that the duration of incoming calls was longer than outgoing calls, although the average number of outgoing calls was larger than incoming calls. They hypothesized that this could be due to the user’s lack of control over an incoming call or because the user may not have revealed that he or she was using a mobile device, in the hopes of remaining ambiguous about the location. This is something that teenagers are likely to do especially when the mobile phone is used as a device for exercising parental control.

Mobile phone usage affects users’ perceptions of time and space, as noted above. The person who places a call or receives one on their mobile phone may not be able to assign either a social or a geographical identity to the other (Licoppe & Heurtein, 2002). This offers room for deception at various levels, and the location of the individual, especially in the case of teenagers trying to avoid detection by their parents, is likely to be common.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

In this chapter, the concept of community has been analyzed along two dimensions, yielding four ideal types. Each of these types has implications for the way in which people are expected to perceive themselves, as well as interact with group members and outsiders. Each type suggests the consequences for the viability and quality of community in light of the proliferation of new personal mediated technology, such as the Internet and the mobile phone.

After this analysis, we highlighted studies of virtuality and the mobile phone that showed how these devices are being used, and how they might be expected to affect community and social capital formation. We commented that, earlier eras, social ties were based on what Durkheim (1984) termed mechanical solidarity and were contingent on spatial proximity. More recently, relationships have become organic (again, in Durkheim’s term), because ties are based more on common ideas, interests, and occupations. With the popularization of mediated technologies such as the Internet and mobile phones, the trend seems to be accelerating. Finally, we considered plausible impacts on community from a variety of points of view. Most of these potential impacts were based on empirical studies of the mobile phone.

In light of this discussion, we advance some prerequisites for establishing ties in the putative mediated communities. These are (a) the existence of mobile phones and Internet functions (or their equivalent) as mediators of (b) people who have similar psychological or value orientations, or at a minimum a resonance of common ideas, and (c) a real or virtual place in which the interaction can occur.

Our analyses have implications for communication praxis. One is that the pessimists have overlooked many positives conferred by mediated communication. Rather than indulging in self-serving hand-wringing over the seemingly continual eroding of physical community and social capital, cynics may find it more useful to look at how the fundamental attributes of social capital are alive and well in virtual communities, and what might be done to foster them. Moreover, theorists of virtuality might benefit from a broader understanding of what is termed social capital. This might necessitate a conceptual transformation in their work.

The new mediated communication technologies—especially the mobile phone, it could be argued—will advance the dream of fulfilled individuals operating within their respective communities, which in turn tolerate other communities. This latter development would help bring about the millenarian ideal of community, so often
praised in the works of writers discussed above. The evidence is scant in support of
this view.

More plausibly, it seems that the new mediated communication technologies
will mean that it is no longer feasible to set as a social objective the pursuit of the
hoary and oft-praised physically based utopia. Instead we should turn to examine
ways in which mediated communication can itself be part of a positive social envi-
ronment. Even though we have used the term “real life” in contrast with “virtual”
communities to illustrate differences of theoretical interpretation throughout this
chapter, it is in a growing portion of the world, developed and developing, a
distinction without a difference. That is, it is no longer a necessarily meaningful
distinction in the conduct of one’s life or in the way one perceives the world (Katz,
2003a). Mediated communication is inherently part of real life in today’s world.
This trend shows only signs of growing. Ultimately, we need an operational syn-
thesis of virtual and physical communities in order to have fulfilling, embodied
experiences all of the time. It may well be that mobile phones embody this synthe-
sis. In this way, they would be a link to the virtual and mobile, located in a physical
setting.

In conclusion, there are some plausible reasons why mediated personal tech-
ology, such as the mobile phone, can help support and even create the smaller,
more intimate communities assumed to have existed in the pastoral world of our
ancestors. Mobile phones could also offer wider, more quickly assembled, if shorter
lasting, communities of activism. Further, they could produce richer interior lives
and provide a bulwark against the homogenizing and commoditized mass societ-
ies that have for so long been critiqued by scholars.

On the other hand, such communities might come at substantial cost. Ling (2003)
used the term “walled garden” to denote the rich interior world available only to
members of the mobile phone user’s social network. The obvious implication, of
course, is that the wall, while protecting those on the inside, seals out others. This
would be the privatization of the social sphere. This analogy, if applied to the
physical plane, suggests the experience of traversing a middle-class area of a city
in a traditional society. There are the faceless, hostile streets for the public with
lush, protected atriums for those with the right keys. If his analogy is correct, the
lesson is apparent.

There is also the necessity of considering the question of the extent these tech-
nologies can sustain and enrich the social experience of using public space. Part of
the answer is that, like the real-life venue of Putnam’s bowling leagues (Putnam,
2000) or the meeting halls of Lipset’s labor unions (Lipset, Coleman, & Trow,
1977), the mobile phone can give groups the setting needed to promote casual
social contact, democracy, and social capital.

At the same time, and perhaps even as a necessity, these devices will also make
our public places colder, more hostile environment, with many more intrusions of
other people’s community interactions into our own public and private commu-
nities. The centrally planned, centrally implemented vision of broad national com-
than they were a half century ago when, in the depth of the Great Depression, they
exercised so much appeal over public intellectuals.

Nevertheless, before we become too consumed with the promised benefits of
community, it is also prudent to consider the benefits of the opposite, namely pri-


NOTES

1. This distinction between community and association will be seen later in Tönnies’s often-in-
voked distinction between community and society, which forms the basis of Morgan’s 1942 develop-
ment of a community of sentiment.

2. Wellman & Hampton (2001a), however, asserted that the critics have it wrong.

3. The story appears different with mediated social networks (see Rice, 1982; Katz & Rice, 2002.)

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