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## **A Community to Call Mine Supportive Community Environment and Citizen Actions?**

**By  
Elizabeth Namakula Kamya<sup>1</sup>**

**ABSTRACT.** To what extent are supportive Community Environments and Citizen Actions needed to strengthen community attachment? The answers were explored among three distinctive communities across America (Thriving, Struggling, and Suffering) using a mixed methods design; analyses of secondary survey data from the 2010 Soul of The Community Survey were supplemented with qualitative insights from four community development professionals as well content analysis of select community development and affluent neighborhood initiatives. As predicted using Solari's Affluent Neighborhood Persistence Model, members of thriving communities were more likely to take ownership when there was a supportive social environment. But, citizen action, particularly through political activism, was most useful for community development mainly in suffering communities, partially supporting Powell and DiMaggio's New Institutionalism. These findings, corroborated with the narrative commentaries, contributed to the literature in the Sociology of communities as well community development and highlighted the need for tailoring tools for communities of different levels of affluence. Future research is warranted to identify and prioritize community initiatives around social fabric and political activism in community development practice.

### **INTRODUCTION**

At the heart of communities are the residents who call an area home. Community ownership is best encapsulated by an African proverb, "I am because we are." Collectively, individuals indeed make a community rich in beauty, character, and diversity. In the words of a Community Psychologist (Interviewee #4), with the idea of common goals and purpose, neighborhoods create cohesiveness to work together, thrive together, weep together, and celebrate together. The goal for every community should be to improve and prosper in the interests of their residents. However, figuring out how to build sustainable growth remains a puzzling challenge for many public officials, community organizers, and social workers.

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Currently there is not one set of best practices available to improve and transform communities into more prosperous environments. Besides, neighborhoods are uniquely varied and change is slow occurring over decades. The homology or cohesion between people, the built environment, and community symbols are an evolving set of processes. For example, changes, as in gentrification of communities, that seem apparent, emerge through multiple, uneven steps (Deener, 2012). Communities have diverse structures and are dense with opportunities, even if untapped, for fostering identity and attachment. Persistently affluent neighborhoods work to protect, maintain and renovate their structures to sustain their economic and social resources. In contrast poor neighborhoods are at a disadvantage and their capital is very much pulled apart through trying to make ends meet. As a result, understanding the complexity of communities, in which no two are exactly the same, is challenging.

In this research, an attempt was made to learn more about factors that foster residents' community attachment amongst communities of varied levels of affluence. Specifically, the comparative relevance of strength of community social fabric and citizen actions in nurturing attachment in thriving, struggling, and suffering communities were assessed. While members and activists in suffering communities are typically interested in community development those in more affluent communities focus on maintaining the status quo. These wealth disaggregated research findings will be of interest not only to academics of community development, but also to local government leaders, community organizing agencies, and others working in the field to engage communities. Because of the diversity of communities, there is need for context specific evidence on which to generate new methods and/or strategies tailored to building stronger communities.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

A community is a sociological construct in which shared meaning and cultural understanding are cultivated through interactions and attachment among its members. And communities grow, change, or persist by their own sets of principles. Resident participation in the community can be expected to be based on mutual expectation, values, beliefs, and shared perceptions within a community. Because of the resulting multidimensional complexity of communities, it is not easy to predict specifically how each community will respond to challenges they encounter. However, scholars have identified some common themes and related strategies in the lives of communities. Be they a strong social fabric or citizen participation in community life, the goal has been to unpack and understand the multidimensional glue that can hold a community together.

### **Community Attachment**

Community attachment has been an important area of study in which scholars have attempted to understand why individuals choose to live in a certain community, choose to stay, or sometimes move. The word attachment has become synonymous in its definition with satisfaction, sentiment, and bond to the community, and as such has

been used interchangeably. Irrespective of the diverse terminology, community attachment is viewed as the emotional and personal bond that ties a person to the collective. The satisfaction residents have with their neighborhood encompasses feelings of kinship, a sense of sodality, and measures community embeddedness (Boulianne and Brailey, 2014).

In an effort to conceptualize community attachment, Cross (2013) examined how a few dozen residents, in Nevada county, California, described their sentiments about the community in which they live. Four aspects stood out as distinguishing features of attachment: resources that make for an ideal community, experiencing a sense of belonging, identifying with a place or region, and plans for the future. Cross concluded that community attachment can be more than having an emotional connection to a place; identifying with the place was also key. Of course, not all residents are attached to, or identify with, the same dimensions, say social and/or physical, of a community. Besides, community attachment is multidimensional; residents, in Hidalgo and Hernandez's (2001) study of 177 people in communities in Spain, were attached to both the social and physical dimensions of places as well as their ability to develop different degrees of dependence, cognitive preference, satisfaction, and identification with their neighborhoods.

But community attachment is not only an outcome but also a process. Jaques (2008), who studied citizens in rural communities of Colorado, concluded that binding to a community is a basic social process of how people engage and fuse into an environment. From the collective experiences of citizens varying in ages 26-82, retrieved by Jaques from Glaser & Strauss, 1967, five stages of the social process were documented. Two particularly important stages were: first the processes by which people became involved and integrated into a community and second, the process by which people continued interaction through practicing community norms and rituals.

In short, any substantive exploration of communities should account for subjective and objective measures of community attachment. Subjective attachment was described by Garland (in a 2013 study of 400 adults) as an individual's sense of belonging in their community, which could be influenced by the individual's length of residence, involvement in their community, and the connections they have with other community members. Objective attachment refers to the more physical or tangible items in a community, as in police presence or an abundance of parks and areas for outdoor activity.

### **Keys to Community Attachment: Social Fabric and Citizen Engagement**

Although sociologists have tended to describe communities in terms of the strength of resident satisfaction or attachment, they have, in their more recent research, expanded their analyses to include the social environment of communities as a key to unlocking community attachment. The social fabric includes social ties with family, friends, and the

degree of integration into other social networks, and a resulting sense of safety that support attachment. “The struggle over the direction of the country is not just about economics or politics. It is a spiritual struggle over who we are and how we are connected” noted a Community Organizer interviewed for this research by the author (Interviewee #2). Researchers have also studied the active community residents, be it in their engagement in the political and/or civic life of their communities to strengthen and reinforce community life.

### Strength of Community Social Fabric

There is a fair amount of agreement in the scholarly and activist circles that satisfaction with one’s neighborhood is a result of both attitudinal and behavioral connections to the area. For example, strong social cohesion within a community has been found to have both direct and indirect positive effects on neighborhood attachment. Dassopoulos and Monnat (2011), in their analyses of the Los Angeles Family and Neighborhood Survey, suggested that perceptions of cohesion within one’s neighborhood was important because solidarity can become a tool to effect positive change through both formal and informal community organizing and problem-solving. These researchers, however, did not explore the mediating roles of social support and social control in the relationship between community participatory action and satisfaction. It would be advantageous to explore the type of events, places, and opportunities that allow individuals to socialize with one another and deepen their bonds.

Sense of Safety. Community satisfaction is also described as the product of feeling safe in the social location where one feels at home (Cross, 2013). For example, Dassopoulos and Monnat (2011) captured the link between security and satisfaction as follows: Los Angeles residents who reported that they feel safe in their neighborhood had 4.5 times the odds of being in a higher community satisfaction category ( $\exp(1.540) = 4.66$ ) than those who reported not feeling safe in their area. In other words, perceptions of safety significantly and substantially increased satisfaction with their community. Collective levels of satisfaction were also lowest in communities characterized by residential mobility, urbanization, a density of youth, a high victimization rate, and most importantly high levels of fear and distrust about local safety (Sampson, 1988). Fear of crime, among the 10,905 residents from England and Wales that Sampson studied, appeared to have negative consequences for collective community attachment and social participation. One socially adverse effect of perceived danger was that those who perceived crime to be high reduced their active leisure activities.

### Citizen Actions: Civic Engagement Versus Political Activism

Even if the social fabric and other structural elements of communities are vibrant, the many social, environmental, cultural, and safety challenges that communities face require the active attention and involvement of residents and their allies. Through citizen actions, as in collaborating with others, and getting engaged politically, residents can

seek to address challenges, create sustainable communities, and subsequently uplift their sense of community ownership.

Of course, not all community members can be expected to be equally engaged in all matters of their communities. For example, in a literature review of civic engagement and citizen participation in local governance, those with more socio-economic resources and personal as well as social capital were more politically active or civically engaged (Olimid, 2014). In the same vein of variability in citizen actions, the goals of citizen action can also vary. For example, in a study of 577 individuals who sought volunteering and community roles, Nix (2011) was able to relate the motivational desires of idealism and social status to members' desire to engage in a community to reaffirm and strengthen community values. Similarly, using data from 28 countries in four continents, a positive relationship between political activism and self-transcendence values with and openness to change were found (Vecchione et al., 2015).

There is also a case to be made for distinguishing between subjective (satisfaction) and objective (actions) measures of citizen actions as they contribute to community attachment. In a study of community attachment and citizen actions, in a random sample of 2000 students enrolled in a Canadian University, objective measures of community attachment were found to increase the possibility of voting but not of volunteering (Boulianne and Brailey, 2014). But when these researchers used subjective measures (agree or disagree responses) of community attachment, along with objective criteria, there was a positive relation between resident satisfaction and volunteering as well as voting (political actions). They made a case for more measurement accuracy by looking at both subjective and objective measures of community attachment. In the final analyses, the different mechanisms of resident involvement indicated that civic engagement and political activism must be treated as separate concepts rather than one unitary concept. As such, distinct initiatives are required to combat low rates of civic engagement and political activism.

Civic Engagement. Civic engagement can take many forms, with the two most common being volunteering (active engagement) and other passive involvement such as monetary donations (Olimid, 2014). Volunteering or doing service around one's community is a demanding form of civic engagement (Uslaner, 2002). It asks more of the individual than just donating money or being a shirker in an organization. Instead, volunteering requires sacrifice of time and dedication to the cause (Garland, 2013). Although many people associate their community engagement and work with organizations with their religion, researchers, like Uslaner (2002), explain that the most critical predictor of volunteering is the perception of a common bond or attachment with other people. But, even when accounting for perceptions of social cohesion and support, participating in a local business or civic organization was not associated with neighborhood satisfaction among 1,912 respondents in the Los Angeles County (Dassopoulos & Monnat, 2011).

Active involvement in the local community also provides residents with a sense of control (Dassopoulos and Monnat, 2011); individuals in Wales and England who were

socially integrated into their communities were more likely to trust other individuals. And involvement in community groups and organizations, as well as having a social network and attachment to one's community, improved community satisfaction (Wasserman, 1982).

Political Activism. Political activism, another form of citizen action, takes citizen actions to a different level, both in its locus as well outcomes. When political activism is collective, this form of activism in communities puts pressure on the local government to improve the quality of life for all residing in the area, including the less advantaged. Political activism can also strengthen collective efficacy, by activating or converting social bonds among community members in order to accomplish common goals. Communities with a higher average of collective efficacy usually share more of consensus about issues and challenges in the local area (Brunton-Smith, Sturgis, and Leckie, 2018). As with civic engagement, motivations for political activism also vary. In a study of the motivation for political activism in sample of 125 social work students, depending on whether they were liberals and conservatives, belonging to a community of activist and maintaining activist identities were crucial to different modes of activism. However, subjective measures of collective efficacy only influenced activism for electoral campaigns in a select sample of students (Swank, 2012).

With a political mind frame, people can be active participants and change agents for their constituencies on the issue for their wellbeing, noted a Community Based Psychologist who was interviewed for this paper (Interviewee #4). Community concerns in a global economy demand solutions, like, among others, political activism and collective efficacy, to bring about change (Glaser, Yeager, and Parker, 2006). Their comparisons, of responses of 5,970 registered community voters favoring Neighborhood-Based organizations with others in favor of Government based solutions, suggested that political activism amongst community members was a strong powerful way to create change instead of latently waiting on their local leaders to enact it. Community members' actions can work either in line with the government or in opposition to government. In any event, because political actions can drastically shift the lives of those less fortunate, it is just as important as civic engagement.

### **Summary and Suggestions for Future Research**

In conclusion, scholars have argued that creating a vibrant social fabric, political activism and civic engagement are effective strategies for communities to address the growing stressors they face and strengthen them (Henkin and Zapf, 2006-2007). But there was little research found in which citizen actions (political activism and civic engagement) were simultaneously evaluated with community social fabric for their unique impacts on fostering belongingness, attachment, and satisfaction with community. Besides, because of varied socioeconomic contexts of communities, there is a need to investigate the differential roles of citizen action and community social fabric in improving member satisfaction in communities with varying levels of economic

growth. Further, political activism, that very often get categorized as civic engagement, need to be treated as a distinct form of citizen action. To this effect, the relative net effects of community social fabric, social networks and social cohesion, on community satisfaction of residents will be assessed among thriving, struggling, and suffering communities.

## **RESEARCH QUESTION**

In this research, I investigated the differential impacts that social fabric, civic engagement and political activism have on an individual's community attachment in three distinctive sub groups of communities. These insights will add to previous research that showed a positive relationship of residents' civic engagement (helping others, volunteering, etc.) and political activism (voting and exhibiting local leadership) with community attachment (as in Boulianne and Brailey, 2014). I want to expand on this extant research by investigating how civic engagement, and political actions might differentially affect community attachment of residents living under different wealth constraints or access as the case might be. In addition, the role of community social fabric in shaping or altering this attachment will be explored, an issue that has not received full attention.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

The analyses, presented in this research, of strategies and resources for differential community attachment in thriving, struggling and suffering communities was framed within Giddens' Social Structuration (as outlined in Tagarirofa and David, 2013), neighborhood persistence, and the new institutionalist (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983:150; Powell and DiMaggio, 2012: Chapter1) community development paradigms. Community environment, in its dimensions of social fabric and sense of security, as well as citizen action, as they might color a resident's level of community satisfaction, are best understood within Giddens' social structuration framework. Giddens posited that the bases of structure and agents in social systems are neither absolute nor abiding and that social structures limit the actions of individual agents. That is, structure and action evolve in a manner that are mutually constraining. However, context specific variations in the importance of protecting the social environment and citizen actions to enact changes in the community are best addressed using Solari's Affluent neighborhood persistence (2012) and DiMaggio and Powell's New Institutional (1983:150) models for community development.

As per the Affluent Neighborhood Persistence model tested by Solari (2012), thriving communities protect and strengthen their affluence through a complex infrastructure of resources, protection, and social networks. These structural benefits create a supportive community environment that promotes a process of cumulative advantage. As affluent residents collectively build their community environment, they protect access to social spaces, strengthen neighborhood safety, and improve residents' overall wellbeing. The



resulting supportive community environment in the affluent communities work to elevate residents' feeling ownership of their community.

Ironically, persistent affluence in some neighborhoods comes at the expense of economic segregation, growing inequality, and persistent poverty in others at the other end of the economic spectrum. In the face of entrenched systemic poverty in communities, community development theorists have advocated for social action and community participation as potent tools to promote development that ensures more inclusive access to and equitable distribution of economic resources and power. However, citizens involvement in their local communities has to go beyond an interest in local involvement and also require actions that seek to confront, impede, promote or raise awareness about an issue or set of issues at different (external to the community) levels. DiMaggio and Powell (1983), in their theory of New Institutionalism (elaborated from Max Weber's conceptualization of the iron cage), came to understand that for civic actions to be effective they should be founded on an acknowledgement of community organizational structures and bureaucratic institutions in the government and state. Effective institutional change has to stem from both formal and informal pressures exerted on organizations by organizations that also fit the cultural expectations in society. To overcome the iron cage like constraints that communities face, organizations and communities can find attractive solutions to the problems they face through means of collective community effort and even sheer force. That is, coordinated citizen actions might be an effective tool available to enact community change and development. The resultant improvements in the social, environmental, economic and cultural infrastructures within their communities can ignite community members' passion and loyalty toward their place of residency.

Drawing from these theoretical paradigms, two sets of boundary-specifying hypotheses were postulated. In Hypothesis #1, a supportive community environment, more than citizen action, would be more relevant, on balance, to community attachment in thriving communities (Affluence Persistence). On the other hand, following New Institutionalist expectations, Hypothesis #2 would be that citizen actions (more than supportive community environment) would be the unique key to community attachment in the suffering communities. Both hypotheses were evaluated net of community member's socioeconomic status, age, sex, and length of residence.

## **METHODOLOGY**

A sequential mixed method design, of secondary quantitative data drawn from a secondary data source combined with primary qualitative narratives, were used. These mixed methods findings will provide a more comprehensive understanding of the research question posed in this paper. Supplemental qualitative information was gathered through interviews with professionals knowledgeable about citizen actions and a supportive community environment, as well as experiential infield experience working to strengthen community attachment.

## Secondary Data

The secondary quantitative data set I used to answer my research question was called the Soul of the Community; this data came from a 2010 study conducted by Gallup, Inc. of the 26 Knight Foundation communities across the United States. It was a purposeful survey to identify the factors that connect residents to their communities and the role of community attachment in an area's economic growth and well-being. Researchers used Random Digit Dialing (RDD) to reach a representative selection of private household telephone numbers in each of the defined areas; the adult interviewee (aged 18 or over) in each sampled household was also randomly selected. A random sample of at least 400 residents, aged 18 years and old in each of the eight resident communities in Akron, OH; Charlotte, NC; Detroit, MI; Macon, GA; Miami, FL; Philadelphia, PA; San Jose, CA; and St. Paul, MN. The total number of respondents for 2010 was 20,271<sup>2</sup>.

Community groups were categorized by Soul of the Community into Thriving, Struggling, and Suffering depending on the residents' rating of their life at the time of the survey and in the future. A person was considered to be living in a Thriving community if she/he rated both their life at present time and future to be positive. On the other hand, if individuals rated both their life at the present time and the future to be very low, they were classified as living in a Suffering community. In between were respondents who lived in Struggling communities<sup>3</sup>.

By design, the three communities varied substantially in the socioeconomic standing of their members (Appendix A). Residents of Thriving communities were the most educated and had the highest incomes. Half of individuals in the thriving communities' group had graduated college, or were pursuing post graduate work, and/or had achieved a post graduate degree. In contrast, a 1/3 in the suffering communities listed their highest educational achievement as completing high school.

In Thriving communities, over 40% of the respondents had an annual income of \$75,000 - \$99,999 or higher; with 2/3rds of them reporting six figures or more. On the other hand, in Suffering communities, almost 37.5% reported annual income below \$25,000. According to the United States Census Bureau, the 2010 poverty income threshold for a family of 4 with no children under 18 years of age was \$22,541, while for a family of 4 with 2 children under 18 it was \$22,162. A sizeable portion of respondents

<sup>2</sup> The original collector of the data, NADAC, or ICPSR, or the relevant funding agencies bear no responsibility for use of the data or the interpretations or inferences based on such uses.

<sup>3</sup> A respondent lived in a Thriving community if the ranked response to QN1A (Rating of life at present time: Please imagine a ladder with steps numbered from zero at the bottom to ten at the top. Suppose we say that the top of the ladder represents the best possible life for you and the bottom of the ladder represents the worst possible life for you. On which step of the ladder would you say you personally feel you stand at this time, assuming that the higher the step the better you feel about your life, and the lower the step the worse you feel about it? Which step comes closest to the way you feel? Is 7 or higher and the response to Q1B (Rating of Future Life: Just your best guess, on which step do you think you will stand in the future, say about five years from now?) is 8 or higher. A respondent is considered to be Suffering if the response to both QN1 and QN1B is 4 or lower. A respondent is considered to be Struggling if they have not been classified as thriving or suffering based on the stated criteria (NADAC 2010). The response rates were not available for this survey.

in suffering communities lived in poverty. Struggling community residents fell in between; a plurality (39.5%) of residents in Struggling Communities had incomes in the range of 25,000 - 54,999 that matched their education; 53% had completed high school or some college. Aside from the deep socioeconomic disparities, the three communities did not differ much in their demographic composition. Men and women were equally represented in all three communities. The residents of the community tended to be older; about 2/3 was 55 and older.

### **Qualitative Data**

I conducted four semi structured interviews over the phone with professionals who had expertise in the area of community development. The interviews were around 20 minutes long and as seen in Appendix B, voluntary participation and confidentiality were assured. The first interviewee (Interviewee #1), found through personal connections at an East Coast university, is a Social Work Professor who has been teaching the macro level of social work for over 20 years. Prior to becoming a professor, she was engaged in communities in her work at a public works organization in Boston. It is through this organization that she began to grapple with and help with the challenges facing different local neighborhoods. The second interviewee is the Director of an international community organizing nonprofit and started his career doing faith-based action in Oakland. I became acquainted with this Community Organizer through working in this nonprofit. As with Sociologist Interviewee #3, they have a vast knowledge in immigrant communities and how to create for a healthy environment. The last interviewee #4 was a psychologist based in Boston. This psychologist teaches at a local university and is specialized in peace and conflict mediation in communities across the globe.

It was important to include content analysis of case studies of different communities, personal experiences, and annual reports that were gathered. One case study centered in Los Angeles and mapped out the diverse framework of the Venice neighborhood in the County (Deener 2012). The author's personal experiences from time spent in LA (Kamya 2017) were another source, although the location was Boyle Heights. The annual report reviewed for this paper highlighted a suffering community in Michigan that is working to be a thriving neighborhood (UNI 2017). These sources of real and current community work helped to strengthen the methodology and theoretical framework in an effort to illustrate the impact of community attachment.

### **DATA ANALYSES: SURVEY and QUALITATIVE INSIGHTS**

Three levels of analyses, univariate, bivariate and multivariate were utilized to answer the research question posed above. In keeping with the research design, I disaggregated the analyses by the three types of communities, Thriving, Struggling, and Suffering communities, in which residents lived.

## Operationalization and Descriptive Analyses

A sense of community is important for determining a good and healthy lifestyle, opined the Sociologist interviewed for this research (Interviewee #3). Levels of resident community attachment, supportive social environment and citizen actions, varied, by the type of community in which they lived. Residents in thriving groups were most attached to their communities, reported the most supportive social fabric and highest levels of participatory activities, be they political action or civic engagement. Suffering communities were at the opposite end; not only were residents less attached than the more affluent residents, they did not have as supportive of a social fabric nor were as engaged in the civic political life of their communities. The descriptive findings pointed to clear boundary limiting conditions amongst thriving, struggling, and suffering groups, underscoring the need for accounting for conditional limitations of attachment in each community.

### Community Attachment

Community attachment can be defined as the thoughts and feelings of ownership an individual has towards the place in which they reside. The psychology professor (Interviewee #4) described it in simpler terms: "Attachment is like glue. When communities lack this glue, or their glue is spread too thin, a detachment from a common goal that would bring people together is created." Recommending their community to others and one's pride in their community all indicate satisfaction and creates the "glue" leading people to feel attached to their communities.

As see in Table 1.A, American's living in thriving communities, compared to suffering communities, were more attached to their community; The thriving communities group had the highest index of community attachment with a mean of 16.18 (sd=28.01) on a range of 4 – 100, followed by those that resided in struggling communities. The Suffering group had the lowest mean attachment index score of 37.01 (sd=31.99). For example, almost half the respondents living in thriving communities strongly felt proud to live in their community (48.5%), more than double the proportion that reported pride in suffering communities (22.4%). Also, more than 2/3s of people in both thriving and struggling communities reported high levels of satisfaction living in their communities; the corresponding proportion in suffering communities was only 1/3 (36.3%). In short, the descriptive data shed light on the disparities among the three communities. A plurality (40%) respondents in suffering communities reported extreme dissatisfaction and would not at all recommend their community to others (39.1%).

**Table 1.A. Community Attachment/belonging  
NADAC, 2010– Soul of The Community**

Concept	Dimensions	Indicators	Responses	Statistics		
				Thriving (n=9458)	Struggling (n= 5513)	Suffering (n= 379)
Community Satisfaction/ Belonging	Community Loyalty	QCE1	1. Not at all	3.2%	5.7%	19.3%***
		recode:	2	4.8	8.2	19.3
		Community	3	20.1	25.1	25.1
		as a place	4	39.5	34.4	19.6
		to live: How Satisfied?	5. Extremely (n)	32.5	26.6 (10314)	16.7
	Community Passion	QCE2	1. Not likely at all	6.9%	15.1%	39.1%***
		recode:	2	6.3	11.6	11.9
		Recommend	3	17.4	22.3	16.4
		community	4	29.7	26.2	15.6
		to others	5. Extremely likely	39.7	24.8	17.2
	Community Attachment <sup>1</sup>	Q3A	1.Strongly disagree	4.3%	8.7%	29.8%***
		recode:	2	4.4	10.2	15.0
		Proud to live	3	15.3	24.0	19.3
		in this	4	27.4	25.9	13.5
		community	5.Strongly agree	48.5	31.2	22.4
Community Attachment <sup>1</sup>	Q3B:	1.Strongly disagree	6.1%	13.3	35.1%***	
	Community	2	7.3	14.5	16.5	
	is perfect for	3	17.5	23.5	17.6	
	me	4	30.0	25.4	12.0	
		5.Strongly agree	39.1	23.2	18.9	
	Index of	Mean ( $\bar{x}$ )	66.18	52.09	37.01***	
	Community	Std. deviation (s)	28.01	29.42	31.99	
	Attachment <sup>1</sup>	Min-Max	4 - 100	4 – 100	4 - 100	

<sup>1</sup> Index of Community Attachment = (QCE1+QCE2)\*(Q3A+Q3B). The correlations among these indicators were: suffering communities between .858\*\*\* and .735\*\*\*; in the struggling communities between .799\*\*\* and .668\*\*\*; in the thriving communities between .802\*\*\* and .682\*\*\*; \*\*\* p <=.001.

### Community Environment

One potential explanation for stronger attachment in some communities and less so in others considered in this analysis was the social environment. A supportive community environment is important for residents to feel satisfied with their local communities. An important principle to distinguish in community development work is creating a social fabric that fosters self-reliance. For example, an environment that fosters a caring and safe group context where residents can come together to exchange knowledge, skills, and life experiences allow people to reach their own personal goals is an essential building block for attachment. In this supportive environment, community members can build connections and not feel isolated.

For example, a community that uplifts community members, regardless of their background or varying ability, will address individual and local needs through informal interactions. By finding a place where people can actually meet, even if it is just once a

week, residents are offered a forum for engagement and is a market place for ideas. A community that emphasizes inclusion will address safety issues by acknowledging that men and women may feel differently walking home alone. Identifying members' different needs to feel secure is instrumental in informing the planning and development of activities and programs.

Social Fabric, the first component of community environment considered here, involves formal and informal methods of networking. To develop connections within their local communities, residents align, collaborate, and work with individuals, groups and other agencies. In addition, the strength of the social fabric can also be distinguished by access and equity. A strong community will have centers that are accessible and welcoming; accessibility to particular social spaces and social events promotes equity and improves the social, environmental and cultural infrastructures within their communities. The social fabric of a community can be assessed using these distinguishing characteristics and by community participation.

As seen in Table 1.B, availability of events and spaces that allowed for social cohesion were of varying rates of quality in the three communities. Some examples are noted to identify these community differences. For example, a plurality of residents in the thriving communities rated the frequency of social community events offered to the community as very good (37.2%). On the other hand, more than half (54.8%) in suffering communities thought the availability of social community events to be average or worse. About ¼ (25.6%) in struggling communities expressed that the availability was okay.

Another example of the social fabric is the social settings in which people meet one another. Almost 2/3<sup>rd</sup>s (63.7%) of residents in thriving community reported that their community had an above average vibrant night life and more than 2/3<sup>rd</sup>s (68.3) said their community is a good place to meet people and make new friends. Corresponding ratings in suffering communities was only 39% (above average night life) and 36.5% (good place to meet people) respectively; for struggling communities it was 53% and 51.8% respectively. On balance, the social fabric was rated by residents to be the strongest in Thriving communities ( $\bar{x}$  on the social fabric index score was 27.79<sup>\*\*\*</sup> on a range of 6.0 - 60.0 while weakest in Suffering communities ( $\bar{x}$  = 26.39<sup>\*\*\*</sup>)

**Table 1.B. Social Fabric  
NADAC, 2010– Soul of The Community**

Concept	Indicators	Responses	Statistics		
			Thriving (n=8852)	Struggling (n=5153)	Suffering (n=345)
Social Fabric	Q7P: Availability of social community events	1. Very bad	2.0%	4.7%	9.3%***
		2	5.4	10.0	17.3
		3	19.5	25.6	28.2
		4	35.9	33.4	26.3
		5. Very good	37.2	26.3	18.9
	Q7A: Availability of parks and playgrounds	1. Very bad	2.0%	8.7%	12.4%***
		2	5.4	20.8	23.9
		3	15.1	32.7	28.0
		4	32.8	33.6	25.5
		5. Very good	44.6	4.2	10.2
	Q7O: Availability of arts and cultural opportunities	1. Very bad	3.5%	6.6%	14.2%***
		2	7.8	11.4	14.2
		3	20.7	23.2	27.9
		4	33.2	32.4	20.9
		5. Very good	34.9	26.4	22.8
	Q7I: Good place to meet people and make friends	1. Very bad	3.0%	6.7%	21.2%***
		2	6.8	12.0	14.5
		3	21.9	29.5	27.7
		4	37.4	31.7	22.3
		5. Very good	30.9	20.1	14.2
	Q7H: Vibrant nightlife - restaurants, clubs, bars, etc.	1. Very bad	4.3%	7.3%	17.7%***
		2	8.7	11.9	16.6
		3	23.4	27.7	26.2
		4	33.1	29.8	20.4
		5. Very good	30.6	23.2	19.1
	Q7M: People care about each other	1. Very bad	4.8%	9.5%	20.6%***
		2	9.9	16.7	22.0
		3	32.2	35.7	28.5
4		36.5	27.2	19.5	
5. Very good		16.7	10.9	9.5	
Q22F: Attended a local event	1. Yes	78.2%	68.1%	56.8%***	
	2. No	21.8	31.9	43.2	
		Mean ( $\bar{x}$ )	27.79	27.48	26.39***
		Std. deviation (s)	10.61	11.36	12.05
		Min-Max	6.0 - 60.0	6.0 - 60.0	6.0 - 60.0

<sup>1</sup> Index of Social Fabric= Q7O + Q7P + Q7A + Q7H + Q7I + Q7M + DummyQ22F. The correlations among these indicators were: suffering communities between .586\*\*\* and .281\*\*\*; in the struggling communities between .510\*\*\* and .045\*\*\*; in the thriving communities between .522\*\*\* and .037\*\*\*; \*\*\* p<=.001

Sense of Safety, is the second component of community environment considered in this analyses (Table 1.C). In Thriving communities over a 1/3 of respondents reported feeling completely safe walking alone at night near their house (34.2%). But, about a 1/3 of respondents in suffering communities reported the opposite and shared that they did

not feel safe at all (29.3%). While the level of crime in the community generated little variance in the responses across the three groups, those in struggling and suffering reported a slightly higher level of crime. Other safety characteristics that helped distinguish these three groups was the change in local crime rates in the past year. While the majority of respondents in each community group said crime rates stayed the same, over 1/3 of respondents in both the struggling and suffering groups noticed an increase in crime (32.8% and 44.5% respectively). Besides, residents of suffering community reported that the effectiveness of the police was very bad (17.6%) which was 5 times more than reported in the thriving group (3.3%) and more than two times those in the struggling group (6.8%). On balance, the Sense of Safety was rated by residents to be the strongest in Thriving communities ( $\bar{x}$  on the social fabric index score was 12.98<sup>\*\*\*</sup> on a range of 4.0 -18.0 while weakest in Suffering communities ( $\bar{x}$  =10.57<sup>\*\*\*</sup>))

**Table 1.C. Sense of Safety  
NADAC, 2010– Soul of The Community**

Concept	Dimensions	Indicators	Responses	Statistics		
				Thriving (n=9242)	Struggling (n=5392)	Suffering (n=365)
Sense of Safety	Feeling safe	Q18: Feel safe walking alone at night near your home	1. Not safe at all	9.2%	16.0%	29.3%
			2	8.7	13.4	13.9
			3	17.0	20.2	17.6
			4	30.9	27.5	19.7
			5. Completely safe	34.2	22.9	19.5
	Crime Activity	Q19: Level of Crime in your Community	1. extremely high	7.2%	8.9%	15.1%
			2	12.2	15.9	17.5
			3	27.1	33.4	30.8
			4	30.2	26.7	21.5
			5 Extremely low	23.4	15.1	15.1
	Law Enforcement	Q20: Change in local crime level in past year	1. Increased	23.6%	32.8%	44.5%
			2. Stayed the same	65.7	58.1	48.2
Law Enforcement	Q7N: Effectiveness of Local Police	3. Decreased	10.7	9.1	7.3	
		1. Very bad	3.3%	6.8%	17.6%	
		2	5.9	10.0	16.0	
		3	20.2	25.3	24.1	
		4	40.1	35.5	25.7	
		5. Very good	30.5	22.4	16.6	
		Mean ( $\bar{x}$ )	12.98	11.83	10.57 <sup>***</sup>	
		Std. deviation	2.64	2.78	3.23	
		Min-Max	4.0 -18.0	4.0 -18.0	4.0 - 18.0	

<sup>1</sup> Index of Sense of Security = Q7N+Q18+Q19+Q20. The correlations among these indicators were: suffering communities between .391<sup>\*\*\*</sup> and .196<sup>\*\*\*</sup>; in the struggling communities between .327<sup>\*\*\*</sup> and .131<sup>\*\*\*</sup>; in the thriving communities between .335<sup>\*\*\*</sup> and .156<sup>\*\*\*</sup>; <sup>\*\*\*</sup> p<=.001.

### Citizen Actions

Human beings are political animals and as such they participate in various forms of civic engagement (Interviewee #4). The term citizen action was used to capture civic



engagement and political activism; they both involve and require an individual to voluntarily participate and collaborate in a social system to create some form of change. A person can be involved politically and partake in actions to ignite community growth and a person can also be involved civically and use voluntary actions to help others around them. With both types of engagement, residents enact their civic duty and are called to action, but the type of actions being executed and the types of outcomes will be quite different.

Civic Engagement, is an important component of Community Attachment because it is through service and dedication that residents can enact changes and make community member feel better about and become more connected to their neighborhood. Civic engagement is important for any healthy community because it can also strengthen and sustain the areas that need attention. For instance, volunteering and working with local organizations can be a form of engagement that individual partakes in to help others around them (Table 1.D). As might be expected, the thriving communities group had the highest levels of civic engagement with an engagement mean of 7.72 (on a range of 4-15) followed by the struggling communities. Suffering communities showed the lowest mean of civic engagement with a mean of 7.39 (sd= 1.38).

**Table 1.D. Citizen Action: Civic Engagement  
NADAC, 2010– Soul of The Community**

Concept	Indicators	Values and Responses	Statistics		
			Thriving (n=9400)	Struggling (n=5488)	Suffering (n=373)
Civic Engagement	Q22A:	1.Yes	58.7%	49.2%	37.3%***
	Performed local volunteer Work	2.No	41.3%	50.8	62.7%
	Q22D:	1.Yes	44.3%	37.9%	36.8%***
	Worked with others to change community	2. No	55.7	62.1	63.2
	DummyQ22G:	1.Yes	17.9%	26.8%	35.8%***
	Donated money to help a local organization	2. No	82.1	73.2	64.2
	Q22_A:	1. No impact at all	2.5%	6.2%	17.0%***
	Residents' impact on improving community	2. A small impact	18.9	29.4	39.0
		3. Moderate impact	43.9	42.7	28.4
		4. A big impact	34.6	21.6	15.6
	Index of Civic Engagement <sup>1</sup>	Mean ( $\bar{x}$ )	7.72	7.60	7.39***
		Std. deviation (s)	1.20	1.21	1.38
		Min-Max	4.0 - 15.0	4.0 - 15.0	4.0 - 14.0

<sup>1</sup> Index of Civic Engagement = Q22A + Q22D + Q22\_A + DummyQ22G. The correlations among these indicators were: suffering communities between .409\*\*\* and .130<sup>\*</sup>; in the struggling communities between .344\*\*\* and .156\*\*\*; in the thriving communities between .339\*\*\* and .143\*\*\*; \*\*\* p<=.001; \* p<=.05.

Some specifics on civic engagement activities in the three communities: In Suffering communities, residents (37.3%) were far less likely to engage in local volunteer work as opposed to those who lived in thriving communities (58.7%). However, in all three communities more than half did not attend local public meetings (62.7%, 66.1%, and 68%). When asked how often they worked with others to enact change in communities, more than half indicated infrequently. However, those in Thriving communities were the most evenly split, with a little less than half working with others to change the communities (yes=44.3% vs. no=55.7%). Besides, more than half the residents in the suffering group felt they can make a little to no impact in improving their communities (56%).

Political Activism, the second dimension of Citizen Actions, is also human empowered and offers people a voice against dominant political and societal structures. Citizen's participation and involvement in local government are essential for community attachment because it places responsibility both on the individual and on the collective. In the process of political activism, people come together, hold each other accountable, understand the complexity of problems, and find innovative strategies. Individuals' feelings about their local government and leaders paint a potential picture of past and present experiences living in the community. Political activities are ones that get people to think about their civic duties and change the dynamics and make-up of the community. The type of political activity in which individuals engage may vary depending on the individuals' level of trust and whether or not they have local leaders representing their interests. Voting and being registered to vote is one form of activism that has the potential to bring about developmental change within communities.

As seen in Table 1.E, political activism, that ultimately shapes the fate of a community, varied by whether the community was thriving, suffering or struggling. The thriving communities had the highest index of Political Activism at 19.33, on a range of 6 – 68, followed by the struggling community group. At the other end was the group of suffering communities which had the lowest index of political activism with a mean of 14.59 (sd = 8.31). But, all three communities had high proportions who had registered to vote (close to or over 90%). Additionally, all three groups had a high turnout rates in their local election. Those in Thriving communities had the highest turnout rate (80.3%) followed by the struggling community group (76.9) and then the suffering group (73.6%). Despite the uniformity in voting patterns, perceptions of local government and leaders conjured varied openness across communities. The majority of those residing in Suffering communities hardly ever had trust (44.8) in the local government, almost 3 times more than those in thriving communities who felt the same (14.7%). Also, two thirds in suffering communities admitted that local leadership was bad or very bad and a plurality strongly felt that their leaders failed to represent their interests (41.2%).

**Table 1.E. Citizen Action; Political Activism  
NADAC, 2010 – Soul of The Community**

Concept	Dimensions	Indicators	Values and Responses	Statistics		
				Thriving (n=9302)	Struggling (n=5411)	Suffering (n=370)
Political Activism	Assessment	Q7L: Local leadership of elected officials	1. Very bad	10.8%	19.7	40.9%***
			2	15.7	20.0	19.5
			3	33.7	31.9	19.2
			4	28.5	20.6	14.9
			5. Very good	11.3	7.8	5.4
		Q10A: Level of trust in local government	1. Hardly ever	14.7%	23.9%	44.8%***
			2. Only some of the time	41.3	47.4	39.8
			3. Most of the time	37.7	25.8	12.2
			4. Just about always	6.4	3.0	3.2
		Q15AB: Local leaders represent my interests	1. Strongly disagree	10.4%	10.4%	41.2%***
			2	17.1	17.1	25.0
			3	37.2	37.2	19.9
			4	26.0	26.0	8.2
			5. Strongly Agree	9.2	9.2	5.6
		Actions	Q21 Registered to vote	1. Yes	92.6%	90.4%
2. No	7.4			9.6	12.1	
Q22C: Voted in the local election	1. Yes		80.3%	76.9%	73.6%***	
		2. No	19.7	23.1	26.4	
	Q22B: Attended a local public meeting	1. Yes	37.3%	33.9%	32.0%***	
		2. No	62.7	66.1	68.0	
	Index of Political Activism <sup>1</sup>	Mean ( $\bar{x}$ )	19.33	17.29	14.59***	
		Std. deviation (s)	7.77	7.84	8.31	
		Min-Max	6.0 - 68.00	6.0 - 56.0	6.0 - 44.0	

<sup>1</sup> Index of Political Activism = Q7L + Q15AB + Q10A + DummyQ22C + DummyQ21 + DummyQ22B. The correlations among these indicators were: suffering communities between .691\*\*\* and .197\*\*\*; in the struggling communities between .580\*\*\* and .030\*; in the thriving communities between .667\*\*\* and -.047\*\*\*; \*\*\* p<=.001; \* p<=.05.

## Bivariate Analyses

In the second analytical step in the process of answering the empirical and theoretical questions raised in this paper, the empirical relationships of community attachment with supportive community environment and citizen actions were evaluated (Table 2 in

Appendix C). Based on these preliminary results, community social fabric had the strongest likelihood of strengthening residents' ownership of their communities, irrespective of whether they lived in struggling ( $r=.61^{***}$ ), thriving ( $r=.61^{***}$ ) or suffering communities ( $r=.61^{***}$ ). Sense of security was possibly a second, even if weaker than social fabric, predictor in all three communities; but, security was more important to community ownership in suffering communities ( $r=.45^{***}$ ), followed by residents in struggling communities ( $r=.39^{***}$ ), and least in thriving communities ( $r=.37^{***}$ ).

Of the two types of citizen actions considered, political activism appeared to have a stronger potential for strengthening community attachment than civic engagement. For example, political activism was most important to residents' attachment in suffering communities ( $r=.58^{***}$ ); thriving community residents ( $r=.49^{***}$ ) followed by struggling communities ( $r=.52^{***}$ ) seem to have used political activism to strengthen attachment to their communities. Civic engagement was also an important tool, even if less so than political activism, to strengthen community ownership first in suffering communities ( $r=.17^{***}$ ), followed by struggling ( $r=.15^{***}$ ) and last in thriving ( $r=.12^{***}$ ).

But, which of these mechanisms are the most effective in engendering community ownership? The unique roles that each of these tools played in strengthening community ownership were tested using multivariate analyses and are laid out in the next section. In keeping with the research design, the analyses were disaggregated by whether residents lived in Thriving, Struggling, or Suffering communities.

### **Multivariate Linear Regression Analyses and Qualitative Insights**

A series of one-step multivariate analyses were used, separately for the three community subgroups, to test the robustness of the correlational analyses and the research hypotheses; see Table 3 below. Overall, a supportive social environment was the strongest predictor of how satisfied their residents were in all three communities. However, not all environments were equal nor were they equally effective in different communities. A vibrant social fabric took precedence over members' sense of security. For example, the more supportive the social fabric was the more attached their members of the communities were ( $\beta=.45^{***}$  in Thriving,  $\beta=.41^{***}$  in Struggling, and  $\beta=.34^{***}$  in Suffering communities respectively). As per the Psychologist interviewee (Interviewee #4), when community members have a supportive environment, full of inclusion and security, they feel recognized, have a sense of purpose, and feel that their contributions to the community are actually elevated and noticed. These feelings, are a buy-in, and has a valuable impact on the communities as it creates a sense of commitment. Without a supportive environment, resident don't feel a buy-in and when their contributions are dismissed, they feel alienated. Such disjointedness ends up hurting the very people that live there.

**Table 3. Regression Analysis of Community Attachment<sup>1</sup>  
NADAC, 2010 – Soul of The Community.  $\beta$  Coefficients**

	Community Attachment		
	Thriving	Struggling	Suffering
<b>Community Environment:</b>			
<b>Social Fabric</b>	.45***	.41***	.34***
<b>Sense of Security</b>	.11***	.13***	.14**
<b>Citizen Actions:</b>			
<b>Political Activism</b>	.19***	.23***	.32***
<b>Civic Engagement</b>	.03**	.03*	.07
<b>Demographics:</b>			
<b>Age</b>	.09***	.09***	.04
<b>Gender</b>	.04***	.03*	-.05
<b>SES</b>	-.01	-.04***	-.05
<b>Length of residency</b>	-.01	-.01	-.03
<b>Model Statistics:</b>			
Constant	2.36***	2.87***	10.68***
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	.43***	.45***	.46***
DF 1 & 2	8 & 7534	8 & 4347	8 & 281

\*\*\*p $\leq$ .001; \*\*p $\leq$ .01; \*p $\leq$ .05

<sup>1</sup> Index of Community Attachment = Community as a place to live + Recommend community to others + Proud to live in this community + This community is perfect for me. Possible Ranges: 4 -100 for all groups;  
Index of Social Fabric = Availability of social community events + Availability of parks and playgrounds + Availability of arts and cultural opportunities + Good place to meet people and make friends + Vibrant nightlife - restaurants, clubs, bars, etc. + People care about each other + Attended a local event; 6 - 60 for all groups;  
Index of Sense of Security = Feel safe walking alone at night near your home + Level of Crime in your Community + Change in local crime level in past year + Effectiveness of Local Police; Possible Ranges: 4-18 for all groups;  
Index of Political Activism = Registered to vote + Voted in the local election + Leadership of elected officials + Local leaders represent my interests + Level of trust in local government + Attended a public meeting; Possible Ranges: 6 - 68 for thriving groups, 6 - 56 for struggling groups, 6 - 44 for suffering groups;  
Index of Civic Engagement = Performed local volunteer work + Worked with others to change community + Donated money to a local organization + Residents' impact on improving community. Possible Ranges: 4 -15 for struggling and thriving groups, 4 - 14 for suffering groups;  
Female (1) versus Male (0);  
Age: 1 = 18-24, 2 = 25-34, 3 = 35-44, 4 = 45-54, 5 = 55-64, 6 = 65 and older;  
Index of Socio-economic Status = Income Range \* Highest level of education completed; Range: 1- 48 for all groups;  
Length of Residency = 1-97 years.

Similarly, even though to a lesser extent, the more secure residents felt in their communities, the more satisfied they were with their communities (Suffering  $\beta$  = .145\*\*, Struggling  $\beta$  = .13\*\*\* and Thriving  $\beta$  = .11\*\*\*). That is, residents felt more ownership in

communities that were secure (supported by Interviewee #4). However, community context, whether thriving or not, also mattered. Of the different mechanisms considered here, a strong social fabric was the most important for residents of thriving communities<sup>4</sup>. And security was more relevant to member attachment in the Suffering ( $\beta=.145^{**}$ ) and Struggling ( $\beta=.13^{***}$ ) communities than in Thriving communities ( $\beta=.11^{***}$ ).

In addition to a supportive community environment, citizen actions were also a necessary set of options for strengthening community attachment. Civic Actions, particularly political activism but not civic engagement, was a critical element in member's satisfaction, most in Suffering communities<sup>5</sup> ( $\beta = .32^{***}$ ). Political activism was less relevant in the Struggling ( $\beta= .23^{***}$ ) and Thriving ( $\beta= .19^{***}$ ) in that order.

Two other noteworthy patterns were evident in the comparisons among the three communities. For one, of the three tools for building community attachment, strengthening the social fabric was by far the most important to members of Thriving ( $\beta=.45^{***}$ ) and Struggling ( $\beta=.41^{***}$ ) communities. On the other hand, members of the Suffering communities equally valued a strong social fabric ( $\beta=.34^{***}$ ) and political activism ( $\beta=.32^{***}$ ). Second, members of all three groups equally valued sense of security in their commitment to their communities (Thriving  $\beta=.11^{***}$ , Struggling  $\beta=.13^{***}$ , and Suffering  $\beta=.14^{**}$ ). But priorities in suffering communities were strong fabric and political activism.

While having a supportive social fabric is important for community attachment, significant differences across the three communities indicated that an affluent, lack thereof, social context matters. While affluent community conditions are prime for more social interactions (as in the Thriving Communities), others, as the Suffering group, have limited resources and opportunities to engage in social events. No doubt, residents in the Suffering communities, that have a large percentage living below the poverty line, also desire to cultivate in social connections. Nevertheless, their priorities to work and provide for their families might be more pressing. Advocating for their material needs and making sure their voices are heard is equally as important as the social fabric in their community, whereas in thriving communities there is less of a need for political activism perhaps because they are already being listened to. And while sense of security is important in all of the communities it is not a primary concern when looking at community satisfaction as compared to political activism and social fabric.

Political activism is critical because it is one of the most important ways individuals in a community can feel a sense of belonging and knowledge of how to access political leadership. It is important for any healthy community to discuss, critic their situation, and do some problem solving. In the process of having these conversations, a person is able to understand that some of the challenges they face can be addressed with some

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<sup>4</sup> Z Scores of the differences in unstandardized regression coefficients among all 3 groups were statistically significant at the .05 level.

<sup>5</sup> Z Scores of the differences in unstandardized regression coefficients among all 3 groups were statistically significant at the .05 level.

activism. “If you feel you are not alone and have some power to exercise your rights and access political influence you will feel better about you self and better about your neighborhood when it comes to change (Social Worker, Interviewee #1).” Feeling better about your community through political activism is confirmed from the multivariate findings. It’s strong positive influence on community attachment comes from the demands that political activism places on individuals to collaborate and interact.

The opportunities to interact is present a bit in civic engagement as well, but only in thriving ( $\beta=.03^{**}$ ) and struggling ( $\beta=.03^{**}$ ) communities. Civic engagement was not a viable option to strengthening community attachment in the suffering group; there was no empirical relationship to support civic engagement. Inquiring into why civic engagement might not be an appropriate strategy for strengthening community attachment in suffering communities, the Community Organizer (Interviewee #1) had this to say: with a sense alienation in some communities, there is less connection, and fewer opportunities, and consequently community attachment stays stagnant. This does not necessarily mean that they are avoiding a collective bond; it just indicates that it is not a priority amidst the financial stress and challenges of providing for their families. Civic engagement strengthened community attachment in thriving and struggling communities, but their economic conditions were less dire in these communities.

## **CONCLUDING REMARKS**

In the concluding sections, a synthesis of the study findings with theoretical premises and practical applications were explored. Some suggestions for future research, specifying additional conditional boundary limits of communities, were also outlined.

### **Empirical and Applied Implications**

There were clear boundary limiting conditions in what made residents of thriving, struggling, and suffering communities felt attached to and took ownership of their communities. In thriving communities, a supportive social fabric was the most important predictor of community attachment; political activism and sense of security were a distant second. In contrast, politically active residents along with a supportive social environment were the keys to strong sense of belonging for residents of suffering communities. Notable differences were also observed in the respective ranking of the three critical priorities in community attachment. In suffering communities, a resident’s sense of security can come only after a supportive social environment is established and citizens become politically engaged. On the other hand, in both thriving and struggling communities’ sense of security is less as priority than a strong social fabric. The sociologist (Interviewee #3) interviewed for this research placed these boundary limits in perspective thusly: If a community is very tight-knit, in the sense of offering ample opportunities for socialization, their residents can “socialize and thrive by introducing good lighting on the streets, creating open areas or spaces where people talk, and making sidewalks large enough for conversations to occur amidst the foot traffic. The way we design cities creates socialization and a deep sense of pride, but additionally can control for deviance”. He went on to explain that with a bustling social

fabric, it inadvertently reduces crime because criminals are not naïve; they are cognizant that if they are visibly seen or can't assure a quick escape then they will be caught. Therefore, security is less of a priority in these thriving communities considering that their social fabric mostly insulates residents from crime.

These findings about boundaries of community attachment could be useful to interested stakeholders, such as local government officials, social workers, and community organizing nonprofits/organizations, in developing tailored strategies for boosting community attachment amongst their citizens. Community attachment is conditional; one first must identify whether the community is thriving, struggling or suffering because the community building strategies or approaches to address any particular issue would and should be prioritized differently in each community. In all three groups, but particularly in suffering groups, political activism is a tool that stakeholders, including community residents, can use. No doubt, encouraging civic engagement by residents in struggling and thriving groups is important but until their socioeconomic conditions improve, especially in struggling communities, developing attachment through civic engagement will be a challenge. For example, in Suffering Communities, where a considerable percentage of their population live in poverty, unless their economic poverty situations are addressed, attempts at impactful changes will be of limited effectiveness.

One community organization that has already been taking efforts to strengthening the social fabric of their neighborhood is Michigan's Urban Neighborhood Initiative (UNI Annual Report, 2017). This non-profit's mission is to work with communities to develop safe and thriving environments, in the hopes that everyone will feel attached to the place where they work live and play. By taking on various projects in the town of Spring Wells and Detroit, Michigan citizens have seen their neighborhoods transform before their eyes. In their annual report they address targeting issues of youth development, land use economic development, and education. "By collaborating with the resident they reveal their attachment to the community and each other. Spring Wells and Detroit vacant lots, streets, and sidewalks were filled with memories of joy and love, and by tapping these residents on the street knowledge, these places are filled with hope and promise! (UNI Annual Report, 2017)" Testimonials like these provide a glance of the power that communities have when addressing major impactors of community attachment.

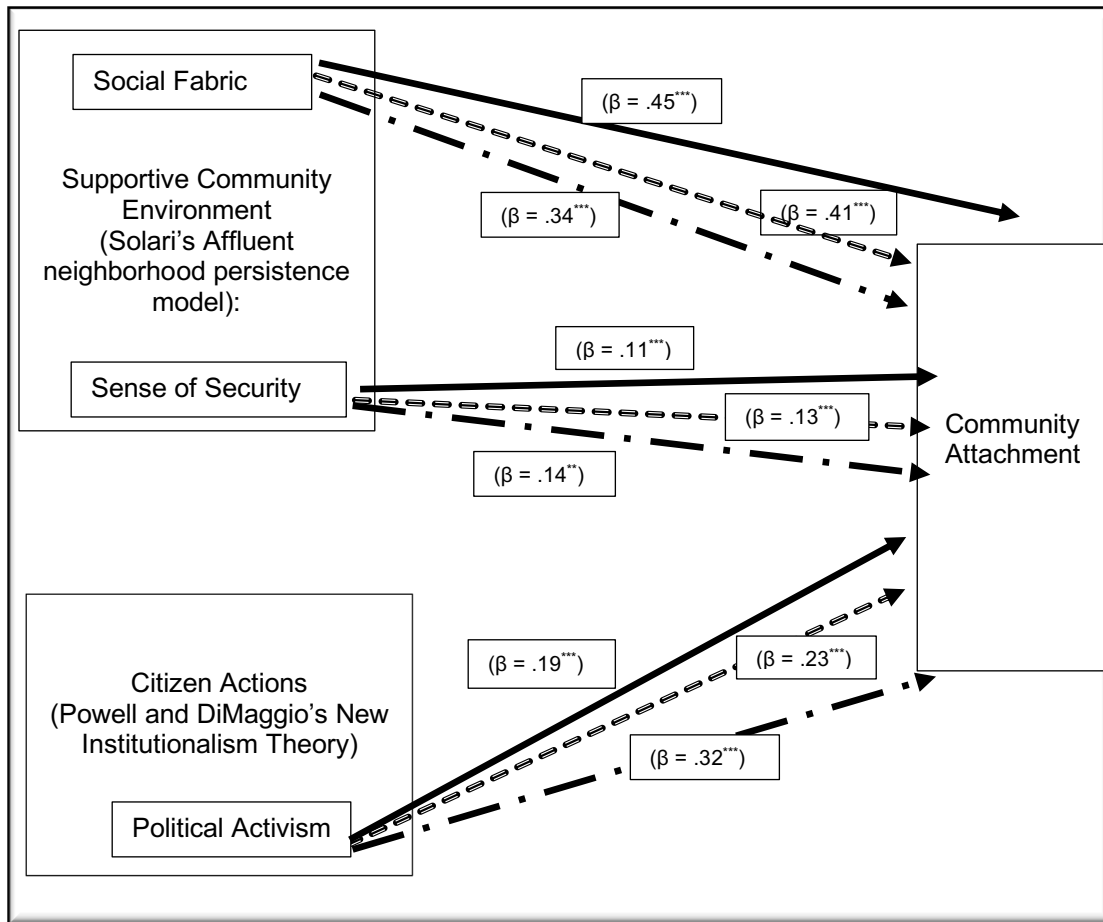
### **Theoretical implications**

From a theoretical point of view (Figure 1), the affluent persistence model was conditionally supported in this analysis; a supportive community environment was the most critical tool for attachment in the more affluent communities but not so strong in the less affluent neighborhoods. The wealth in a neighborhood shapes the opportunities, security, and social networks of the residents, which, in turn, improves their quality of life and overall wellbeing (Solari 2012). It is this overall satisfaction, independent of personal and family status, that generate and sustain strong ties



towards their collective community. Indicators of affluence are expressed not only in the high economic status of the neighborhood but also its unattainability for those on the outside. One of the clearest visual cues of social exclusion are gates and walls bordering wealthy communities. Affluent communities maintain their exclusive position and status of their neighborhood through social exclusion (Deener, 2010). In contrast, persistently poor neighborhoods, are not primarily concerned with the maintenance and renovation of their community. It is to be expected that their residents' attention is, first and foremost, to their families. While deteriorating buildings, increased crime, and disinvestment persist in suffering communities, so does the need for members to provide for their children. As a result, living in chronically distressed areas creates disadvantages that makes it increasingly difficult not only to exit poverty but also to build community attachment.

**Figure 1. Empirical and Theoretical Model of Community Attachment: Impacts on Civic Engagement and Political Activism NADAC, 2010– Soul of The Community<sup>1,2,3</sup>**



<sup>1</sup> Key: Thriving =  $\longrightarrow$  Struggling =  $\rightleftharpoons$  Suffering =  $\dashrightarrow$

<sup>2</sup> See Table 3 for index coding.

<sup>3</sup> Controls and Civic Engagement were not modeled because they did not have significant effect on community attachment.

Additionally, there was conditional support for the New Institutional theory in the most disadvantaged communities. Even if citizens in persistently poor neighborhoods might lack political power, they may find a collective identity and attachment through engaging in political activism. The Boyle Height Los Angeles community offers an excellent example (Kamya, 2017). In a community that suffers from a heavy presence and concentration of gang violence, the mothers came together as a community to address the issue of their children's safety on the streets. In a community forum, one mother recounted her story of spending the night lying on the street with the rest of the community. They laid on the ground where a child had previously been shot in a drive by and engaged in this protest to demand that the city of Los Angeles paves a speed bump on the road (a request that was multiply denied prior). Eventually the demand was met, demonstrating that when people connect to a mission, their community attachment and sense of ownership can be fostered and deepened.

However, while politically active citizenry was one of two most instrumental in creating community attachment in suffering communities (as per the Institutionalists), it might not be sufficient. There is also the need for a supportive social environment to foster community ownership. Even though residents in suffering communities might be interested in volunteering and contributing to the public good, their primary focus is on maintaining taking care of their families (e.g., paying the bill, mortgage, and providing for family). It is these competing priorities in suffering communities that might explain why civic engagement was not a relevant factor to community attachment.

### **Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research**

While the theoretical and empirical models of supportive environments and community actions considered in this analysis offered a coherent explanation (Adjusted  $R^2$  = over 0.40) of community ownership in communities, irrespective of their affluence or lack thereof, there is still much to be learned. Theoretically and programmatically, community engagement and ownership are also built on shared beliefs and traditions, both spiritual and ethnic. The Social Worker (Interviewee #1), interviewed for this research, noted the potential for local churches, neighborhood rituals/practices, and shared traditions to strengthen community attachment. More research is called for on how belonging to an ethnic niche, rich in traditions or to a community with similar (and divergent) religious beliefs and practices can encourage political activism, strengthen social fabric, and in the long run, build community attachment. Additionally, professional interviewees also pointed to race and immigration in communities; how do individuals of color and immigrants connect to their communities and how can those connections be strengthened?

Theoretically, further elucidation of the functional and power dynamics involved in creating and sustaining conditional boundaries of community ownership can offer advances in the field of sociology of communities. If societies and social systems are not equally functional or resilient in facing challenges and dealing with conflict (Powers

2004), it is a theoretical and programmatic imperative of scholars to clarify the internal (to the community) and external dynamics that facilitate or hamper healthy communities.

## APPENDICES

### Appendix A. Demographic and Socioeconomic Controls

#### Demographics: Sex and Age (Controls) NADAC, 2010– Soul of The Community

Concepts	Indicators	Values OR Responses	Statistics		
			Thriving	Struggling	Suffering
Demographics	SEX of Respondent	0. Male	42.5%	44.6%	48.9%***
		1 Female	57.5	55.4	51.1
	Age Range of Respondent	1. 18-24	7.4%	2.9%	3.7%***
		2. 25-34	9.0	5.1	5.0
		3. 35-44	12.6	12.2	7.4
		4. 45-54	17.3	20.0	20.5
		5. 55-64	21.3	23.2	27.1
		6. 65 and older	30.9	34.5	33.2
	Educational Achievement	1. Grade school or less.	0.8%	1.5%	3.2%***
		2. Some High school	3.4	4.2	8.0
		3. High School	16.4	21.1	24.1
		4. Some College or Technical School	28.1	31.8	32.6
		5. College Graduate	26.3	23.7	18.7
		6. Post Graduate work or degree	25.0	17.8	13.4
	Annual Income	1. under 15,000	5.2%	9.6%	19.2%***
		2. 15,000 to 24,999	6.9	11.9	18.3
		3. 25,000 to 34,999	9.7	14.7	15.5
		4. 35,000 to 44,999	9.8	13.0	11.9
		5. 45,000 to 54,999	11.1	11.8	7.9
		6. 55,000 to 74,999	16.2	14.9	11.3
		7. 75,000 to 99,999	13.9	10.6	6.7
		8. 100,000 or over	27.1	13.5	9.1
	Index of Socio-Economic Status <sup>1</sup>	Mean	26.36	20.52	15.98***
		Standard Deviation	13.74	12.98	12.51
		Minimum - Maximum	1-48	1-48	1-48
	Length of Residency	Mean	32.93	35.18	38.28***
		Standard Deviation	24.01	24.53	24.80
		Minimum - Maximum	1- All my Life	1- All my Life	1- All my Life

<sup>1</sup> Index of Socio-Economic Status = (QD9 \* QD7). Among These indicators correlational values are between .45\*\*\* to .48\*\*\* (\*\*p <= .001).

## Appendix B. Interview Protocol and Consent Forms

### *Letter of Consent*

Dear \_\_\_\_\_:

I am a Sociology Senior working on my Research Capstone Paper under the direction of Professor Marilyn Fernandez in the Department of Sociology at Santa Clara University. I am conducting my research on the differential impacts of community attachment in thriving, struggling and suffering communities.

You were selected for this interview, because of your knowledge of and experience working in the area of community development.

I am requesting your participation, which will involve responding to questions about civic engagement, political activism, and community attachment. The interview will last about 20 minutes. Your participation in this study is voluntary. You have the right to choose to not participate or to withdraw from the interview at any time. The results of the research study may be presented at SCU's Annual Anthropology/Sociology Undergraduate Research Conference and published (in a Sociology department publication). Pseudonyms will be used in lieu of your name and the name of your organization in the written paper. You will also not be asked (nor recorded) questions about your specific characteristics, such as age, race, sex, religion.

If you have any questions concerning the research study, please call/email me at \_\_\_\_ or Dr. Fernandez at mfernandez@scu.edu

Sincerely,  
Elizabeth Kamya

By signing below, you are giving consent to participate in the above study. (If the interviewee was contacted by email or phone, request an electronic message denoting consent).

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

If you have any questions about your rights as a subject/participant in this research, or if you feel you have been placed at risk, you can contact the Chair of the Human Subjects Committee, through Office of Research Compliance and Integrity at (408) 554-5591.

### *Interview Schedule for Supplemental Qualitative Interviews*

Interview Date and Time: \_\_\_\_\_

Respondent ID#: \_\_\_\_\_

1. What is the TYPE Agency/Organization/Association/Institution (NO NAME, please) where you learned about (and/or worked) with this issue: Establishing community attachment in thriving, struggling, and suffering communities?
2. What is your position in this organization? \_\_\_\_\_
3. How long have you been in this position and in this organization?
4. \_\_\_\_\_  
Based on what you know of community development, how crucial is attachment of community members? That is, typically, how attached are members to their communities?
5. Based on your experience what are some reasons why some community members are very attached while others are not? Could you expand a bit more?
6. How important are citizens actions to improve community attachment?
7. Could engagement improve resident's attachment to their communities? How so?
8. How important is a supportive community environment in regard to improving attachment?
9. In your opinion what makes for a supportive community environment?

10. In your opinion, what are some reasons that contribute to this problem (issue or concern)? (PROBE with: Could you expand a bit more?).
11. [If the respondent does not bring up your independent concepts as potential causes), PROBE:
  - a. How about Social Fabric
  - b. How about Sense of Security
  - c. How about Political Activism
  - d. How about Civic Engagement
12. Is there anything else about this issue/topic I should know more about?

Thank you very much for your time. If you wish to see a copy of my final paper, I would be glad to share it with you at the end of the winter quarter. If you have any further questions or comments for me, I can be contacted at ekamy@scu.edu. Or if you wish to speak to my faculty advisor, Dr. Marilyn Fernandez, she can be reached at mfernandez@scu.edu.

**Appendix C Table 2. Correlation Matrix (r)**  
**Table 2A.**

**Correlational Matrix of Thriving and Suffering communities: Indices of Community Attachment, Supportive Community Environment, Citizens Actions, Gender, Age, and Socio-economic Status, Length of Residency<sup>1,2</sup>**

	Index of Community Attachment	Index of Social Fabric	Index of sense of security	Index of Civic Political Activism	Index of Civic Engagement	Sex	Age	Index SES	Length of residency
<b>Index of Community Attachment</b>	1.00	.61***	.45***	.58***	.22***	-.02	.13**	.01	.04
<b>Index of Social Fabric</b>	.61***	1.00	.44***	.55***	.21***	-.01	.07	.12*	.09
<b>Index of Sense of Security</b>	.37***	.40***	1.00	.43***	.17***	-.20***	.04	.100	.06
<b>Index of Political Activism</b>	.49***	.52***	.39***	1.00	.20***	.12*	.15**	.01	.04
<b>Index of Civic Engagement</b>	.12***	.13***	.12***	.13***	1.00	.03	.04	.07	-.01
<b>Female vs. Male</b>	.08***	.07***	-.12***	.09***	.041***	1.00	.10	-.11*	.02
<b>Age</b>	.17***	.12***	.02	.17***	.015	.06***	1.00	-.02	.13**
<b>Index of SES</b>	-.02	-.03**	.13***	0.0	.02	-.13***	-.07***	1.00	-.12*
<b>Length of Residency</b>	.03**	.04***	-.04***	.05***	.00	.06***	.30***	-.18***	1.00

\*\*\*p≤.001;\*\*p≤.01;\*p≤.05

<sup>1</sup> Index of Community Attachment = Community as a place to live + Recommend community to others + Proud to live in this community + This community is perfect for me. Possible Ranges: 4.0-36.0;

Index of Social Fabric = Availability of social community events + Availability of parks and playgrounds + Availability of arts and cultural opportunities + Good place to meet people and make friends + Vibrant nightlife - restaurants, clubs, bars, etc. + People care about each other + Attended a local event. Possible Ranges: 6.0 - 60.0;

Index of Sense of Security = Feel safe walking alone at night near your home + Level of Crime in your Community + Change in local crime level in past year + Effectiveness of Local Police; Possible Ranges: 4.0 -18.0;

Index of Political Activism = Level of trust in local government + Local leaders represent my interests + Registered to vote + Voted in the local election. Possible Ranges: 6.0 - 68.00;

Index of Civic Engagement = Performed local volunteer work + Donated money to a local organization+ Worked with others to change community + Residents' impact on improving community. Possible Ranges: 4.0-12.0;

Sex: Male = 0, Female = 1;

Age: 1 = 18-24, 2 = 25-34, 3 = 35-44, 4 = 45-54, 5 = 55-64, 6 = 65 and older;

Index of Socio-economic Status = Income Range + Highest level of education completed; 1- 48 for all groups;

Length of Residency = 1= 1-5, 2= 6-10, 3= 11-20, 4= 21-30, 5= 31-40, 6=41-50, 7=51-60, 8=61-75, 9= 76 or more;

<sup>2</sup> Correlations above the value of 1 refer to thriving communities and correlations below the value of 1 refer to suffering groups.

**Table 2A.**  
**Correlational Matrix for Struggling communities: Indices of Community Attachment, Supportive Community Environment, Citizens Actions, Gender, Age, and Socio-economic Status, Length of Residency<sup>1,2</sup>**

	Index of Community Attachment	Index of Social Fabric	Index of sense of security	Index of Civic Political Activism	Index of Civic Engagement	Sex	Age	Index SES	Length of residency
<b>Index of Community Attachment</b>	1.00								
<b>Index of Social Fabric</b>	.61***	1.00							
<b>Index of Sense of Security</b>	.39***	.43**	1.00						
<b>Index of Political Activism</b>	.52***	.54***	.38***	1.00					
<b>Index of Civic Engagement</b>	.15**	.15***	.11***	.15***	1.00				
<b>Female vs. Male</b>	.06***	.06***	-.13***	.10***	.03*	1.00			
<b>Age</b>	.21***	.14***	.05***	.21***	.05**	.03**	1.00		
<b>Index of SES</b>	-.04**	-.01	.12***	-.00	.02	-.14***	-.00	1.00	
<b>Length of Residency</b>	.05***	.03**	-.03*	.08***	.00	.03**	.29***	-.12***	1.00

\*\*\*p≤.001;\*\*p≤.01;\*p≤.05

<sup>1</sup> Refer to table 2.A for Index Coding

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