

Cultural antecedents to community: An evaluation of community experience in the United States,
Thailand, and Vietnam

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Running Head: Cultural Antecedents to Community Experience

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ABSTRACT

To what extent does community experience differ between low context and high context societies? Prior literature theorizes that *community experience* consists of two separate, yet highly related concepts: *community attachment*, an individual's general *rootedness* to a place, and *community satisfaction*, how well an individual's community meets their societal needs. We test this conceptualization of community experience across communities in the US and two Southeast Asian nations: Thailand and Vietnam. We argue that Southeast Asian nations constitute "high context" societies with relatively high social integration and solidarity while the US is more individualized and less socially integrated and thus constitutes a "low context" society. Our results provide empirical evidence that individuals' experience of community varies between low and high context societies. These results demonstrate that cultural context continues to matter in regards to the lived experience of community and researchers need to remain vigilant in accounting for such differences as they seek to examine the concept of community more broadly.

Keywords

Community, Community Attachment, Community Satisfaction, Cultural Context

INTRODUCTION

The concept of community, one of "the most sociological of all topics" (Erikson, 1978, p. 13; Flaherty and Brown, 2010, p. 504), is principally founded on European and North American traditions of social and political analysis (Bender, 1982). Within this tradition, scholars have proposed many theoretical models of social phenomena related to the concept of community. However, social theorists have also commented on the tendency to impose these concepts onto other regions, societies, or peoples (Said, 1979). We question the validity of theoretical models for community when applied outside of European and North American contexts where they originated. Moreover, despite the importance of community in sociological inquiry, research on the lived experience of community has "by and large focused on individual-level causes and effects" while certain meso and macro level factors have

largely gone ignored (Cope et al., 2016, p. 4). It is for these reasons that we test the viability of a theoretical model of community experience (Brown, 1992, 1993; Brown et al., 2000) developed in the US in two Southeast Asian contexts: Thailand and Vietnam.

In seeking to better “understand the role of community in social life” (Cope et al., 2016, p. 3), Brown and colleagues (Brown, 1992, 1993; Brown et al., 2000) proposed a model of “community experience” in the context of a modern, industrialized US that is comprised of community attachment and community satisfaction. Other scholars conducting research on communities in the US have drawn on this theoretical model (Cope et al., 2015; Erickson, Call, and Brown, 2012; Flaherty and Brown, 2010; Goodsell et al., 2011; Theodori, 2004).

Despite the continued use of the concepts of community attachment and community satisfaction by contemporary researchers, there are certain aspects of these concepts that remain under-tested; e.g., meso and macro level factors affecting community experience (Cope et al., 2016, p. 4). Recent work by Cope et al. (2016) confront this issue by examining community-level effects in a multilevel analysis of voluntary participation. Our contribution goes a step further by examining culture as a potential macro-level factor affecting community experience. We examine the cross-national, cross-cultural validity of the Brown et al. (2000) model to determine whether cultural differences at the national, and perhaps regional, level alter the manner in which community is experienced. We employ data from Thailand and Vietnam that Dr. Brown collected specifically for this purpose and compare it to existing data from the US, where this model of community experience was originally theorized.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Community constitutes a critical concept within the social sciences. Bender (1982, p. 3) asserts that the discussion of community “has been central to the analysis of social and political life at least since Plato and Aristotle inquired into the character of the Greek polis.” Despite the prolonged incorporation of community scholarship in the social sciences, the conceptual precision of community remains an issue of debate and contemporary scholars continue to refine the operational and theoretical precision of the concept, as well as its application (Brown et al., 2000; Goodsell et al., 2011; Kasarda and Janowitz, 1974; Marans and Rodgers, 1975; Theodori, 2004). A recent dialogue in the journal *Rural Sociology* brings this ongoing debate into immediate focus (Cope et al., 2016; Flaherty and Cope, 2016; Theodori et al., 2016). In seeking to further refine the operational and theoretical precision of community, we review relevant concepts within the community literature (i.e., attachment, satisfaction, and experience) and then examine their legitimacy in a cross-national sample, outside of the contexts in which they were developed.

COMMUNITY EXPERIENCE

Although previously treated as conceptually synonymous (Buttel, Martinson, and Wilkening, 1979; Goudy, 1982; Landale and Guest, 1985), scholars in recent decades have argued that community

attachment and community satisfaction should be viewed as distinct, yet closely related concepts in relation to experiences of community (Brown et al., 2000; Theodori, 2004). Community attachment is a measure of how well an individual fits in a given locality and reflects a degree of “rootedness” to place (Brown et al., 2000, p. 430). In essence, it is an indicator of how encapsulated an individual feels in conjunction with others in their local community and is a measure of social connection and inclusion (Brown, 1993; Brown et al., 2000, p. 432). While community attachment is essentially local and assesses the degree to which an individual feels connected to others, community satisfaction represents a person’s perception of their overall position in the larger society (Brown et al., 2000, p. 433) and how well their community facilitates their successful social participation in the larger society outside of their community (Brown, 1993). This includes a person’s perceptions of their how well their community can assist them in successfully participating in the market-based, consumer economy of their society (Brown, 1993; Brown et al., 2000; Lee and Guest, 1983; Marans and Rodgers, 1975).

Brown et al. (2000) argue that in the context of the US, community attachment and community satisfaction became disjoint as a result of the transformation of society during and after the industrial revolution wherein economic and political life became separated from social life, thus separating satisfaction (dependent on fulfilling economic needs) from attachment, which is about social needs (Bender, 1982; Polanyi, 2001 [1944]). The implication of this bifurcation is that individuals in the US can be highly attached to their local communities and yet have very little satisfaction in living there if their community is unable to meet their economic needs and desires. Conversely, others may have little or no attachment to their local community, and yet be highly satisfied if they have the means to traverse their local confines and access the broader economic market.

We expect that theoretical concepts of community operate differently outside of the European and North American contexts where they were developed. This expectation is based on a large body of research documenting differences across societies in cultural perceptions of the self and one’s role in society, as outlined below.

HIGH AND LOW CONTEXT SOCIETIES

In his seminal work *Beyond Culture* published in 1976, anthropologist Edward T. Hall proposes that a large degree of societal diversity can be ascribed to differences in communication styles, in particular the level of context required to understand and follow ordinary discussion. “High context” societies are defined by the ascription of mutual significance to simple actions, messages, and places as well as frequent interaction and rapid disbursement of information among community members. Accordingly, Hall (1976) argues, an individual from a high context society has little, if any, significant identity independent from their families, friends, and broader communities (Hall, 1976, p. 203). Conversely, in “low context” societies a large amount of descriptive information is given in ordinary communication to make clear one’s point without reference to prior information or shared concepts. Based on this depiction, it follows that the individual is the unit from which identity is determined (Hall, 1976, p. 203). Hall (1976) explains that low context societies are defined by high levels of individuality, separation, and cultural fragmentation, leading to greater needs for explicit definitions and clarification in communication due to relatively less frequent interaction with other

members of the same community. Cope et al. (2016) concur with Hall (1976), arguing that the lived experience of community in the US is now “characterized by the removal of most of our daily social interactions from primary ties and local solidarities, and thus from within the boundaries of moral proximity... [thus] fragmented and deeply if not irretrievably woven into the fabric of the global marketplace” (see also Goodsell et al. (2014)).

Hall's (1976) definitions of high and low context societies shares similarity with another theory of societal diversity proposed by Geert F. Hofstede only a few years later in 1980. Hofstede (2001 [1980]) conceptualizes cultural differentiation based on a continuum between the degree of individualism or collectivism expressed in the cultural practices common to a society. Both Hall (1976) and Hofstede (2001 [1980]) suggest that low context or individualistic societies provide individuals with fractured, segmented views of reality such that individuals compartmentalize themselves, their relations, and other interactions while high context or collectivist societies espouse a view of the world in which everything fits together as part of a whole and consequently cannot, or do not, necessitate individual separation from a larger social body in order for individual understanding.

Hall's and Hofstede's theories can also be likened to other mainstream theories in sociology. Tönnies' (2011 [1887]) concept of *gemeinschaft-gesellschaft*, Durkheim's (1997 [1893]) ideas about mechanical and organic solidarity, and Parsons' (1964) theories about particularistic-ascriptive and universalistic-achievement societies are similar to Hall's continuum (Djursaa, 1994). However, whereas Durkheim and Parsons are more concerned with social transformation in societies during what Parsons calls “stages of modernization” (Nisbet, 1969), Tönnies and Hall shift their outlook toward cultural differences. Their approach is not founded on functionalist explanations of social change or normative judgments about universal standards of societal progress, rather it is concerned with explaining the cultural differentiation across societies.

Primarily relying on linguistic analyses, Hall (1976) argues that European and North American nations are more indicative of low context societies and that South and East Asian nations resemble high context societies. This broad categorization scheme finds general support in empirical studies from social psychology and cultural neuroscience examining differences in human behavior and perception across members of these different societies (Han et al., 2013; Kitayama and Tompson, 2010; Nisbett, 2004; Salamon, 2003; Wirtz and Chi-yue, 2008). Hoshino-Browne et al. (2005), for example, analyze individuals' level of cognitive dissonance when making decisions that affect other people, and find that Japanese and Canadians of East Asian descent experience greater cognitive dissonance than Canadians of European background about how their decisions will impact others. In other studies, social psychologists find that when individuals comment about a photograph, Americans of European descent generally make remarks about the most prominent object, while those from East Asian countries discuss the context in which the object is situated (Ji, Peng, and Nisbett, 2000; Masuda and Nisbett, 2001; Nisbett and Miyamoto, 2005). Other studies show that Americans place priority on individual rather than group goals (Goodsell et al., 2011; Markus and Kitayama, 1991), whereas for East Asians, a “well-adjusted, mature individual is one who is skilled at

maintaining harmonious social relationships and aspires to fulfill social roles and obligations” (Wirtz and Chi-yue, 2008, pp. 150–51).

We posit that these differences significantly affect how individuals experience community in terms of satisfaction and attachment. In the low context societies of North America and Europe, individuals can have high community satisfaction and little or no community attachment because the broader cultural norms do not require a strong sense of local connection to others for the individual to feel satisfied. Conversely, for individuals in the high context societies of Asia, their level of community satisfaction is not an economic matter, but rather depends upon their perception of their ties to others, i.e. their level of community attachment. As such, we suspect that in high context societies, community satisfaction and attachment are intertwined rather than distinguishable concepts. Accordingly, we hypothesize that bifurcated theoretical models of community experience based on community attachment and satisfaction will not work in the high context societies of Thailand and Vietnam as it does in the low context society of the US. Before testing this hypothesis, we present arguments supporting our classification of the US as low context and Thailand and Vietnam as high context.

The US—a low context society

Cultural trends in the US place greater value on individuality than communal structures, characteristic of low context societies (Bauman, 2007; Bender, 1982; Freie, 1998; Goodsell et al., 2011; Hall, 1976; Salamon, 2003). Historically, there was greater variability in the degree to which different regions of the US were indicative of low context societies. For example, rural towns in the US were historically more characteristic of a high context social environment while urban cities were more characteristic of a low context environment (Hall, 1976; Salamon, 2003). Today, the place of the collective is increasingly marginalized as the individual is assumed to be central (Goodsell et al., 2011).

A number of scholars have associated Tönnies’ *gemeinschaft-gesellschaft* theory with rural and urban differences in the US (Lichter and Brown, 2011; Loomis and Beegle, 1950). Rural communities are traditionally thought to have small populations and low population density relative to cities; to be more economically dependent on the industries of agriculture, food production, and natural resource extraction; to be socially more homogenous; and to possess stronger ties of solidarity relative to cities (Sorokin and Zimmerman, 1929). However, more recent research calls this stark dichotomy into question. Lichter and Brown (2011) assert that old boundaries between rural and urban America are falling away as a result of significant changes in the spatial and social landscape. Rural and urban areas in America are becoming increasingly interdependent on each other, and new technologies have made travel and communication simpler than before. In fact, the differences between “rural” and “urban” Americans appears to not only be diminishing quickly, but to arguably be near non-existent (Cloke, 2006; Friedland, 1982, 2002).

Among other characteristics, contemporary rural communities have lost their strong sense of identity and solidarity that made them different from urban areas (Flaherty and Brown, 2010). Furthermore, while traits typical of high context societies such as “an interconnectedness created by strong connections built from repeated interactions based on shared norms” (Salamon, 2003, p. 7) existed in pre-suburbanized rural America, this is no longer the case absolutely. These communities are experiencing cultural shifts due to social changes associated with various forms of in-migration

(Salamon, 2003). Accordingly, rural communities in the US that previously reflected characteristics of a high context environment are now reflective of a mixture of high and low context, with an increasing trend toward low context interactions (Salamon, 2003, p. 9). This shift suggests that while some aspects of the traditionally high context life style of rural communities may still exist, both rural and urban regions within the US can increasingly be characterized as low context.

Thailand and Vietnam—high context societies

The case for Thailand and Vietnam as high context societies requires additional support as, unlike the US, it was not a principal region of study by Hall (1976), who focused instead on East Asian nations, particularly Japan. In addition, most of the social psychology research cited earlier does the same, usually employing samples from China, Japan, and Taiwan. We justify our labeling of Thailand and Vietnam as high context societies with evidence from linguistic patterns, social relations, and politics. We discuss evidence of high context society in the linguistic patterns of these nations because of Hall's (1976) emphasis on language as a primary medium and indicator of social organization.

Language is a significant structural element in human experience and is one potential measure of whether a society falls into high or low context categories (Goodsell et al., 2011; Hall, 1976; Sapir, 1931). Sapir (1931) argues that language defines human experience by imposing conceptual categories, vocabulary, and grammatical structure. These impositions consequently structure interactions and thus mediate experience as language systems extend beyond the isolated individual to permeate every aspect of social interaction. Others recognize that while language can be indicative of culture, it is also subject to manipulation (Goodsell et al., 2011), with individuals utilizing language in ways that fit a given situation or accomplish a particular task (Bourdieu, 1991; Sewell, 2008, pp. 584–89; Swidler, 2003). This dialectic suggests that analyzing how a society uses language can give significant insight into the culture of that society.

An analysis of Southeast Asian languages, including Thai and Vietnamese, provides evidence of high context communication styles. In most Southeast Asian communities, the cultural norm is to linguistically “imagine” (Anderson, 1983) everyone, strangers included, as family. For instance, Southeast Asians avoid using socially detached pronouns for addressing another person whenever possible; rather, they prefer to use pronouns which immediately communicate a perceived relationship. “Older Brother/Older Sister” and “Little Brother/Little Sister” are common forms of address depending upon whether the speaker is conversing with an individual who is older or younger than themselves independent of actual blood relation. These terms of address immediately communicate a set of social expectations, thus empowering everyone to immediately know their relative status and proscribed role. Through imposing grammatical rules and vocabulary that foster social integration and communicate social and economic status, the languages of Southeast Asia match Hall's (1976) conceptualization of high context societies.

Beyond linguistics, additional evidence of Southeast Asian societies exhibiting high context or collectivist characteristics is demonstrated in studies of contemporary social interactions among Southeast Asians with respect to communal solidarity (Clammer, 2002; King, 2008). In Thailand,

relationships with business associates are more likely to lead to benefits for consumers than they are in the US, suggesting the comparative importance of social relations (Patterson and Smith, 2001). Other studies show differences in individuals' conceptions of the self in relation to others, again consistent with high context characteristics (Cohen and Gunz, 2002; Markus and Kitayama, 1991).

Some recent political movements in Southeast Asia also demonstrate desires to challenge foreign influence, especially influence from low context societies. The formation of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), of which Thailand and Vietnam are a part, is one such attempt to maintain and secure a unique regional cultural identity and to selectively participate in an emerging world culture (Ibrahim, 1996, p. 97). Souchow (2001) argues that these political movements stem from neo-tribalist desires to secure self-identity in an ever-changing world by claiming "moral authenticity based on tradition and communal solidarity" (p. 17). These regional political movements are reflective of collectivist mentality because they subvert foreign influence from low context societies through the reification of a basic cultural characteristic of high context societies: group solidarity.

The above evidence suggests that Thailand and Vietnam are characteristic of high context societies, thus lending credence to our hypothesis that individuals living in these two countries will experience community differently than individuals living within the low context society of the US. We expect that in Southeast Asia, community attachment and community satisfaction will not load into a bifurcated model of community experience. Rather, we hypothesize that in Southeast Asia, community satisfaction is dependent upon and follows from community attachment, and thus will load onto a single latent construct. Below, we present the data and methods we use to test our hypotheses empirically.

DATA

Our analysis uses data obtained from twelve rural communities in the US and two communities in Southeast Asia. The survey instruments used to gather this data were specifically designed by Dr. Ralph B. Brown to examine respondents' community attachment and satisfaction. The US data were collected by Dr. Brown and colleagues from communities in Alabama, Massachusetts, Mississippi, and Utah between 1990 and 2007. Data collection was carried out by trained interviewers or research assistants through face to face interviews, phone interviews, and/or mailed questionnaires. For detailed descriptions of the US data see Brown et al. (1998), Brown et al. (2000), Cope et al. (2015), and Goodsell et al. (2008). The Southeast Asian portion of our data were collected through survey interviews in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam and Chiang Mai, Thailand. For these data, the original survey questionnaires were translated to Thai or Vietnamese by native speakers. Back translation, to verify the validity of the original translations, was carried out by research assistants who were fluent in either Thai or Vietnamese (see online Appendix A for the English, Thai, and Vietnamese versions of the questions as used in the survey instruments and online Appendix B for etymological descriptions of the term(s) community in Thailand and Vietnam and their historical development). In the field, the data were collected in face to face interviews by trained research assistants who were either native speakers or fluent in either Thai or Vietnamese. In summary, all data collection, in both the US and Southeast Asia took place under the supervision of Dr. Ralph B. Brown, and all survey instruments were developed by, or in collaboration with Dr. Brown.

Our measures follow the same design used in Brown et al. (2000). Community attachment is indicated by two variables: how well do respondents feel they fit in to the community (*fit*), and how much do respondents perceive they have in common with others in the community (*common*). Community satisfaction is also indicated by two variables: how closely respondents' present community fits their idea of the ideal community (*ideal*), and general satisfaction with their community (*satcom*). All four variables were measured on 5-point ordinal-level scales, with higher values corresponding to higher levels of attachment or satisfaction (see table 1).

[INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE—DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS]

Returning to the assertions of Hall (1976) and Salamon (2003), we anticipate that rural towns in the US are relatively less low-context as compared to urban cities in the US and urban cities in Southeast Asia are relatively less high-context as compared to rural towns in Southeast Asia. Thus, on a continuum from low context to high context, rural towns in the US should lie relatively closer to urban cities in Southeast Asia. Our US data come from rural localities while the Southeast Asian data were gathered in a variety of localities, e.g. rural, suburban, and urban. Consequently, our data allow for a conservative test of differences between high and low context societies; consequently, the resulting estimates likely represent a lower bound of probable differences between the two types of societies.

Our period of observation ranges from 1990-2000 in the US data to 2005-2006 in the Thailand and Vietnam data. Given congruent trends of suburbanization in the rural towns of the US (Salamon, 2003) and globalization within the urban cities of Southeast Asia (Gottdiener and Hutchison, 2010), this relatively small time difference is likely inconsequential and at worst will increase the relative proximity on the high and low context continuum of the communities sampled in the US with Ho Chi Minh City and Chiang Mai, working against our hypotheses. Moreover, while the US data is more dated, the social and economic changes that led to a low context culture in the US began during the industrial revolution (Bender, 1982; Polanyi, 2001[1944]) and, following other scholars (Brown et al., 2000; Salamon, 2003), we expect that little change has come to that trajectory since. This assertion is tested empirically in our analyses, as we have data over time for communities in the US and therefore can assess whether or not there a change is evident over time.

METHODS

We use a two-step process in comparing community experience in the US and Southeast Asia (represented with Thailand and Vietnam). First, we find the best-fitting model in each data set. Based on previous scholarship (Brown et al., 2000) we use confirmatory factor analysis in a structural equation modeling framework (Bollen, 1989) and measure community satisfaction and community attachment as latent variables. We expect a two-factor solution distinguishing community attachment from community satisfaction to offer the best fit to the US data, and a one-factor solution to offer the best fit with the Southeast Asia data. In short we are testing the dimensionality of community experience, i.e. if community experience represents a single latent dimension or two latent dimensions, in each region. Second, we test for measurement invariance across communities

in both the US and Southeast Asia. This allows us to explicitly measure the relative homogeneity of individuals' experiences of community within each region. Finally, we test for invariance across regions. Measurement invariance indicates the extent to which a variable maintains its meaning across groups (Vlachopoulos, 2008). This analytic strategy is analogous to that used by Bollen and Hoyle (1990) in their investigation of the latent dimensionality of perceived cohesion between two samples, one from colleges and one from cities. Our argument is that community experience, due to differing cultural contexts between the US and Southeast Asia, has a different meaning in the US versus Southeast Asia; consequently, we expect to find significant levels of non-invariance when the two regions are compared.

RESULTS

CONFIRMATORY FACTOR ANALYSIS

Our first step is to establish the factor structure, or latent dimensionality, that best represents the data within each region. We accomplish this by testing two models of community experience for each region as a whole and each community within the two regions individually. For a description of the models used see Figure 1. The first model is the simplest, assuming that all four indicators load on a single underlying latent dimension—*community experience*. The second model represents the consequences of a bifurcation of society wherein the economic and social aspects of life were separated (Bender, 1982; Brown et al., 2000). In this model, *fit* and *common* are indicators of the first latent dimension—community attachment—while *satcom* and *ideal* are indicators of a second latent dimension—community satisfaction. This bifurcated model of community experience is organized to reflect the cultural context of the US (Brown et al., 2000).

[INSERT FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE—ONE- AND TWO-FACTOR SOLUTIONS]

Table 2 provides a summary of the fit statistics for both models depicted in Figure 1 for all the communities used in this analysis as well as the results for the data combined by region. Both the fit of the one- and two-dimensional models are provided for each community. Based on the insignificant χ^2 values for the two-dimensional model and the significant change-in- χ^2 scores combined with the poor fit of the single-dimensional solutions, we conclude that the two-dimensional solution is superior in every case among the twelve US communities. This is confirmed by the Comparative Fit Index (CFI), the Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI), the Akaike Information Criterion (AIC), and the Bayesian Information Criterion (BIC) scores. Note that the BIC reported here follows the calculation and interpretation of BIC scores presented by Raftery (1995), such that negative values indicate that the hypothesized model fits the data better than a fully saturated model. The root mean squared error of approximation (RMSEA), presented in Table 2 as 1-RMSEA in order to harmonize its interpretation with the CFI and TLI such that a value closer to 1 indicates better fit, provides mixed results for the two-dimensional model, but are generally consistent with the other measures of model fit indicating the superiority of the two-dimensional solution in the case of US communities. Over all the results confirm Brown et al.'s (2000) argument that community experience, within the US, is made up of two separate constructs—community attachment and community satisfaction.

[INSERT TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE]

In Southeast Asia, the models for Ho Chi Minh City show that unidimensional model represents the best fit to the data. Specifically, the χ^2 test indicates a slight preference of the unidimensional model and change-in- χ^2 shows there is no significant difference between the single- and two-dimensional solutions, suggesting that the more restricted model, i.e. the unidimensional model, is preferred. The BIC also indicates that the one dimensional solution is preferred over a two-dimensional model. Additionally, the TLI and RMSEA suggest moderately better fit for the one-dimensional solution. Finally, with the two-dimensional solution, the estimated correlation between factors is 1.041 lending further evidence in favor of a single-factor solution. Combined, this evidence suggests that in Ho Chi Minh City, the preferred model is that in which community experience is represented by a single underlying latent dimension.

The evidence for Chiang Mai on the other hand is more nuanced. For Chiang Mai's a two-dimensional model does fit slightly better, as indicated by the χ^2 value and the change-in- χ^2 test, but the perfect values for the CFI, TLI, and RMSEA are suspicious. Rarely, do models receive perfect fit values on model fit indices; and when they do, it's often a signal that something may be wrong with the model. The BIC on the other hand does show that the unidimensional solution is a better fit to the data than the two-dimensional model with a more negative value for the unidimensional solution. Given that both the one- and two-dimensional solutions fit well based on the model- χ^2 test, the better fit according to the BIC, and the anomalous values for the other model fit statistics for the two-dimensional model, the evidence suggests that a model in which community experience is represented as a single underlying latent dimension represents the preferred model in the case of Chiang Mai. Pooling this evidence, we conclude that in both Southeast Asian communities, the unidimensional model represents the best fit of the data.

Based on these findings, the underlying latent dimensionality of community experience appears to differ between the US and Southeast Asia. In the US communities, a two-dimensional solution provides the best fit for the data, while in Thailand and Vietnam, a unidimensional model is preferable. This suggests an important difference between these two regions in the experience of community. In the last stage of our analysis we conduct a series of measurement invariance tests across and within these regions (Bollen, 1989). This is a two step process in which we first investigate if and/or the degree of measurement invariance between communities within each of the two regions, and then test the measurement invariance of the models between US and Southeast Asian communities.

INVARIANCE TESTS ACROSS COMMUNITIES

Measurement invariance exists along a continuum, from total invariance, in which factor structure (i.e. the number of factors), factor loadings, residuals, and factor variances and covariances are invariant across groups, to complete non-invariance, in which even the factor structure varies between groups (Bollen, 1989). We have already established that a two-dimensional model fits best for each US community. Our next analysis will further establish the extent to which that model is invariant across the communities from which we have data in the US.

Invariance Models. Table 3 provides the results of the multiple group analysis of US communities. From left to right, the columns of fit statistics indicate the relative model fit of increasingly invariant models to the data. In Model 1, only the factor structure is held to be invariant. In other words, the only assumption involved is that community experience is best represented as a two-dimensional construct across all twelve communities in our data from the US. Model 2 adds to the invariant factor structure invariant factor loadings. The theoretical implications of constraining the factor loadings to be invariant across communities hypothesizes that the relationship between the observed variables and the latent variables are equal for each US community. Model 3 further constrains the residuals of the observed variables to be equal across communities. Finally, Model 4 tests the strictest level of measurement invariance by implementing all of the above constraints and also constraining the variances and covariance of the latent variables to be equal across communities within the US.

[INSERT TABLE 3 HERE—UNITED STATES MEASUREMENT INVARIANCE]

Model 1, which constrains only the factor structure to be invariant across communities, displays a good fit to the data, supporting the hypothesis that across US communities community experience is best represented as a two-dimensional construct. Model 2 also fits reasonably well according to the majority of the fit indices, and represents a better fit to the data than Model 1 according to the BIC, suggesting that the relationship between the underlying latent measures of community attachment and community satisfaction and the observed indicators are not significantly different between US communities. Model 3, the best fitting model in the series according to the BIC, indicates that the size of the residuals of the observed variables across communities in the US are invariant, suggesting that the model is robust to community differences in the degree to which community attachment and community satisfaction explain variation in the observed indicators. Model 4, which imposes the strictest form of invariance, does not fit the data well. The results from Model 4 suggest that the factor variances and covariance cannot be assumed to be equal across all twelve US communities. The results of these invariant tests show that the measurement model for the US data, which describes a community experience that is bifurcated into separate constructs of community attachment and community satisfaction, is invariant across communities in factor structure, the factor loadings of the observed variables, as well as residuals of the observed variables. This is a relatively high level of invariance, as invariance in the factor structure and factor loadings is accepted as sufficient evidence to allow for the assumption that the same constructs are being measured across groups (Byrne, Shavelson, and Muthén, 1989); thus, we can comfortably argue that the model of community experience in the US is consistent across the 12 communities from which we have data and confirms Brown et al.'s (2000) assertion of the bifurcation of community experience in the US

Southeast Asia Invariance Models.

We already established that a one-dimensional solution best represents the experience of community in both Ho Chi Minh City and Chiang Mai; thus in table 4, we present the results of the analogous invariance test outlined above for the US, with the only difference being that we are testing the various degrees of invariance based on the unidimensional model of community experience as depicted in panel b of Figure 1.

[INSERT TABLE 4 ABOUT HERE—SOUTHEAST ASIA MEASUREMENT INVARIANCE]

As with the invariance tests for US data, Model 1 is a statistical test of invariance in factor form (i.e. the number of factors). The results suggest that this model fits the data quite well, offering support to the conclusion that community experience is best represented as a single latent dimension for both Southeast Asian communities. Model 2 constrains all factor loadings to be invariant. The fit for this model is not bad, but there is a decline in overall model fit relative to Model 1. Model 3 constrains all the factor loadings to be invariant across Ho Chi Minh City and Chiang Mai, as well as the residuals of the observed indicators. Model 4 adds to Model 3 and constrains the factor variances and covariances to be invariant across communities. Neither Model 3 nor Model 4 fit the data well. From these results we conclude that the level of invariance between the two Southeast Asia communities is not as high as that amongst the US communities, but there is adequate proof of statistical invariance in the underlying latent dimensionality as well as the size and direction of the estimated relationships between the latent constructs and the observed variables, suggesting that the same constructs are being measured across communities in Southeast Asia.

Invariance tests across regions

Above we establish that there is a substantial level of invariance between US communities, thus, supporting a two-dimensional model of community-experience in the US; analogously, we find that there is significant evidence of invariance between Ho Chi Minh City and Chiang Mai supporting a unidimensional model of community experience. The empirical evidence so far supports the argument that the experience of community is qualitatively different between the US and Southeast Asia. In this section, we directly measure that difference quantitatively by testing for measurement invariance across regions. In order to test invariance across regions we must use the same model for each region, and test the various levels of invariance as done above within the US and Southeast Asian sample. In the analyses that follow we assume a one-factor solution for communities in both the US and Southeast Asia, thus allowing us to test invariance in community experience across regions. Table 5 presents the results of those invariance tests.

Following the same analytic procedure as the invariance tests within region, the results of the invariance tests between regions suggests that none of the models fit the data well. Specifically, Model 1, which only assumes invariance in the factor structure, yields a CFI of .879 and a 1-RMSEA .791. Additionally, the BIC of Model 1 is very large and positive, 871.39, suggesting that the fully saturated model represents a much better fit to the data than the hypothesized model. Given that this first test of invariance failed to show good, or even moderate, fit to the data it is no surprise that model stringent tests of invariance also performed poorly.

As an additional robustness check, the same invariance tests were estimated assuming a two-dimensional model of community experience (not shown). As expected the fit statistics for a two-dimensional model in both regions were not within acceptable standards of good fit.

The above analyses provide strong empirical evidence that community experience is a different phenomenon in the US and Southeast Asia. In the US, community experience is made up of two separate constructs—community attachment and community satisfaction—while in Southeast Asia,

community experience represents a single construct, in which community attachment and community satisfaction are indistinguishable.

[INSERT TABLE 5 ABOUT HERE]

DISCUSSION

Our results provide empirical evidence that individuals' experience of community varies between societies. In the US, individuals are capable of being satisfied with their community, irrespective of their level of attachment to their community. In Thailand and Vietnam, that same distinction may not be within the scope of individuals' perceptions of community or their place in it. Rather, community satisfaction in these high context societies is intrinsically linked to community attachment; i.e., community satisfaction and community attachment are so closely connected that they are empirically indistinguishable. These results support Hall's (1976) theory of the distinctiveness of low and high context societies, as well as Hofstede's (2001 [1980]) theory of societal variation due to collectivism and individualism, adding community experience to a large list of social phenomena that vary across these unique cultural contexts.

Our findings further suggest that the cultural environment of Thailand and Vietnam, and potentially other high context societies, are unique from the cultural environments of other societies that have undergone major economic transformations, and are thereby indicative of alternative, non-liquid (Bauman, 2007), forms of "modernity" (Eisenstadt, 2002). Unlike low context societies, the urban cities of Ho Chi Minh City and Chiang Mai appear to be operating without the detachment of the economy from the broader social fabric as Karl Polanyi articulated in *The Great Transformation* (2001 [1944]). While we do not wish to deny the role of economic growth in bringing about social change in Thailand or Vietnam, we highlight that despite such changes, we do not observe the same bifurcation of community experience that resulted from the "great transformation" of North America and Europe. This is in stark contrast to the lived experience of community in the US that Cope et al. (2016, p. 31; Goodsell et al., 2014) argue is now "characterized by the removal of most of our daily social interactions from primary ties and local solidarities, and thus from within the boundaries of moral proximity... [thus] fragmented and deeply if not irretrievably woven into the fabric of the global marketplace." Cultural context continues to matter—perhaps it is providing a protective barrier to the fragmentation of community in these societies—and researchers need to be aware of such differences as they seek to "approach community more broadly" (Cope et al. 2016, p. 31).

As the economies of Thailand and Vietnam continue to grow, further research should test whether individuals in these countries continue to experience community differently or if they gradually converge toward North American and European models of community experience. The vast amount of economic change that has already occurred in these countries suggests that community experience will remain distinct, but future research, exploring longitudinal analyses of the change over time, is needed.

Our findings are limited based on small samples from selected areas of the US, Thailand, and Vietnam, but the results of our analyses provide the conceptual and methodological framework for future research when larger samples become available. We strongly urge future research to draw

upon these empirical results as motivation for testing for differences in community experience, among other social phenomena, across unique regions of the world and between different cultural environments.

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Table 1. Descriptive statistics

Variable Name	Survey Question	US		SEA	
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD
<i>Fit</i>	On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being poorly and 5 being well, you feel that you fit into your community?	3.98	0.015	3.73	0.033
<i>Common</i>	On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being nothing and 5 being much do you have in common with most of the people in your community?	3.45	0.015	3.34	0.034
<i>Ideal</i>	Imagine the ideal community in which you would like to live. On a scale from 1 to 5, with 1 being farthest from your your ideal, where would you rank your present community?	3.60	0.015	3.40	0.034
<i>Satcom</i>	On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being dissatisfied and 5 being satisfied, how satisfied are you with living in your	4.11	0.015	3.53	0.033

Table 2. Summary of Confirmatory Factor Analyses for Community Experience by Culture and Community.

Models	Model χ^2	<i>d</i> <i>f</i>	<i>p</i>	$\Delta\chi^2$	Δd <i>f</i>	<i>p</i>	CFI	TLI	1 - RMSEA A	1 - RMSEA 90% CI	AIC	BIC
United States Combined												
<i>(N=5,254)</i>												
One Factor	750.542	2	<0.001				0.892	0.676	0.733	0.749	55,397.12	733.41
Two Factor	58.5	1	<0.001	692.042	1	<0.001	0.992	0.95	0.895	0.917	54,751.14	49.93
Vance, AL (N=441)												
One Factor	47.566	2	<0.001				0.926	0.777	0.773	0.826	4,493.25	35.39
Two Factor	6.186	1	0.013	41.38	1	<0.001	0.992	0.949	0.892	0.963	4,453.87	0.10
Ashfield, MA (N=100)												
One Factor	9.527	2	0.009				0.95	0.87	0.806	0.91	767.22	0.32

or							7	2		7	5		
Two Factor	2.172	1	0.141	7.355	1	0.007	0.993	0.96	0.892	1	0.688	761.864	-2.43
Conway, MA (N=99)													
One Factor	24.093	2	<0.001				0.839	0.516	0.666	0.777	0.541	836.156	14.90
Two Factor	2.057	1	0.152	22.036	1	<0.001	0.992	0.954	0.897	1	0.691	816.12	-2.54
Charleston, MS (N=318)													
One Factor	19.555	2	<0.001				0.933	0.798	0.834	0.896	0.763	3,738.95	8.03
Two Factor	4.039	1	0.045	15.516	1	<0.001	0.988	0.93	0.902	0.987	0.795	3,725.44	-1.72
Marks, MS (N=230)													
One Factor	26.56	2	<0.001				0.847	0.542	0.769	0.842	0.687	2,713.29	15.68
Two Factor	11.055	1	0.001	15.505	1	<0.001	0.937	0.625	0.791	0.889	0.672	2,699.78	5.62
Charleston, UT (N=127)a													
One Factor	56.801	2	<0.001				0.768	0.304	0.536	0.635	0.428	1,246.19	47.11
Two Factor	3.478	1	1.76	53.323	0	—	0.994	0.981	0.924	1	0.793	1,192.87	-1.37
Daniel, UT (N=152)													
One Factor	25.706	2	<0.001				0.872	0.616	0.721	0.811	0.62	1,566.62	15.66
Two Factor	0.555	1	0.456	25.15	1	0.007	1	1	1	1	0.80	1,543.4	-4.47

or				1							7	7	
Geneva, UT (N=613)													
One Factor	92.626	2	<0.001				0.92	0.761	0.728	0.774	0.68	5,952.78	79.79
Two Factor	1.1	1	0.294	91.526	1	<0.001	1	0.999	0.987	1	0.891	5,863.26	-5.32

Table 2. Continued.

Model	Model χ^2	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>	$\Delta\chi^2$	Δdf	<i>p</i>	CFI	TLI	1 - RMSEA	1 - RMSEA 90% CI	AIC	BIC	
Heber, UT (N=2,164)													
One Factor	288.563	2	<0.001				0.901	0.703	0.743	0.767	0.717	22,723.65	273.20
Two Factor	10.123	1	0.002	278.44	1	<0.001	0.997	0.981	0.935	0.967	0.896	22,447.21	2.44
Springville, UT (N=212)													
One Factor	21.63	2	<0.001				0.924	0.771	0.785	0.861	0.699	2,263.34	10.92
Two Factor	3.263	1	0.071	18.367	1	<0.001	0.991	0.947	0.897	1	0.763	2,246.97	-2.09
Wallsburg, UT (N=107)													
One Factor	8.507	2	0.014				0.923	0.768	0.826	0.934	0.698	949.675	-0.84
Two Factor	0.017	1	0.896	8.49	1	0.004	1	1	1	1	0.883	943.185	-4.66

Southeast Asia													
Combined (N=787)													
One	52.844	2	<0.001				0.933	0.798	0.820	0.860	0.777	7,707.47	39.51

Factor													
Two Factor	47.919	1	<0.001	4.925	1	0.026	0.938	0.628	0.756	0.812	0.695	7,704.54	41.25
Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam (N=399)													
One Factor	8.063	2	0.018				0.983	0.948	0.913	0.969	0.846	3,800.20	-3.91
Two Factor	7.652	1	0.006	0.411	1	0.521	0.981	0.886	0.871	0.944	0.779	3,801.79	1.66
Chiang Mai, Thailand (N=388)													
One Factor	4.271	2	0.118				0.996	0.989	0.946	1	0.874	3,507.98	-7.65
Two Factor	0.061	1	0.806	4.21	1	0.04	1	1	1	1	0.916	3,505.77	-5.90

Table 3. Multiple Group Tests Between US Communities--Two-Factor Solution.

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
	$x = \Lambda x\xi + \delta$	Λ	$\Lambda\Theta$	$\Lambda\Theta\Phi$
χ^2	48.132	138.006	291.914	855.856
df	13	34	67	111
p	<0.001	<0.001	<0.001	<0.001
CFI	0.995	0.984	0.966	0.889
TLI	0.971	0.967	0.964	0.928
l - RMSEA	0.92	0.915	0.911	0.874
l - RMSEA 90% CI +	0.944	0.93	0.921	0.882
l - RMSEA 90% CI -	0.896	0.9	0.901	0.866
AIC	52,163.18	52,211.05	52,298.96	52,774.90
BIC	63.24	153.26	282.06	

Note: $x = \Lambda x\xi + \delta$ = invariant factor structure; Λ = invariant factor structure and invariant factor loadings; $\Lambda\Theta$ = invariant factor structure, invariant factor loadings, invariant residuals; $\Lambda\Theta\Phi$ = invariant factor structure, invariant factor loadings, invariant residuals, and invariant factor variances and covariance.

Table 4. Multiple Group Tests Between SEA Communities--One-Factor Solution.

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Fit Statistic	$x = \Lambda x\xi + \delta$	Λ	$\Lambda\Theta$	$\Lambda\Theta\Phi$
χ^2	12.535	33.15	92.455	98.415
df	4	7	11	12
p	0.014	<.001	<.001	<.001
CFI	0.991	0.972	0.912	0.907
TLI	0.972	0.952	0.904	0.907
1 - RMSEA	0.926	0.901	0.861	0.863
1 - RMSEA 90% CI +	0.97	0.934	0.887	0.887
1 - RMSEA 90% CI -	0.877	0.867	0.834	0.837
AIC	7,177.27	7191.888	7243.193	7,247.15
BIC	-14.14	-13.53	19.10	18.40

Note: $x = \Lambda x\xi + \delta$ = invariant factor structure; Λ = invariant factor structure and invariant factor loadings; $\Lambda\Theta$ = invariant factor structure, invariant factor loadings, invariant residuals; $\Lambda\Theta\Phi$ = invariant factor structure, invariant factor loadings, invariant residuals, and invariant factor variance.

a. Common and Satcom are constrained to be invariant, while Fit and Ideal are allowed to vary.

Table 5. Multiple Group Tests Between Cultures--One-Factor Solution.

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Fit Statistic	$x = \Lambda x\xi + \delta$	Λ	$\Lambda\Theta$	$\Lambda\Theta\Phi$
χ^2	932.331	959.676	977.871	1015.812
df	7	10	14	15
p	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001
CFI	0.879	0.876	0.874	0.87
TLI	0.793	0.852	0.892	0.896
1 - RMSEA	0.791	0.823	0.849	0.851
1 - RMSEA 90% CI +	0.802	0.832	0.857	0.859
1 - RMSEA 90% CI -	0.779	0.813	0.841	0.844
AIC	63,227.53	63,248.88	63,259.07	63,295.01
BIC	871.39	872.61	855.98	885.22

Note: These tests pool the US communities together and the SE Asian communities together resulting in a combined sample size of 6,041. $x = \Lambda x\xi + \delta$ = invariant factor structure; Λ = invariant factor structure and invariant factor loadings; $\Lambda\Theta$ = invariant factor structure, invariant factor loadings, invariant residuals; $\Lambda\Theta\Phi$ = invariant factor structure, invariant factor loadings, invariant residuals, and invariant factor variance

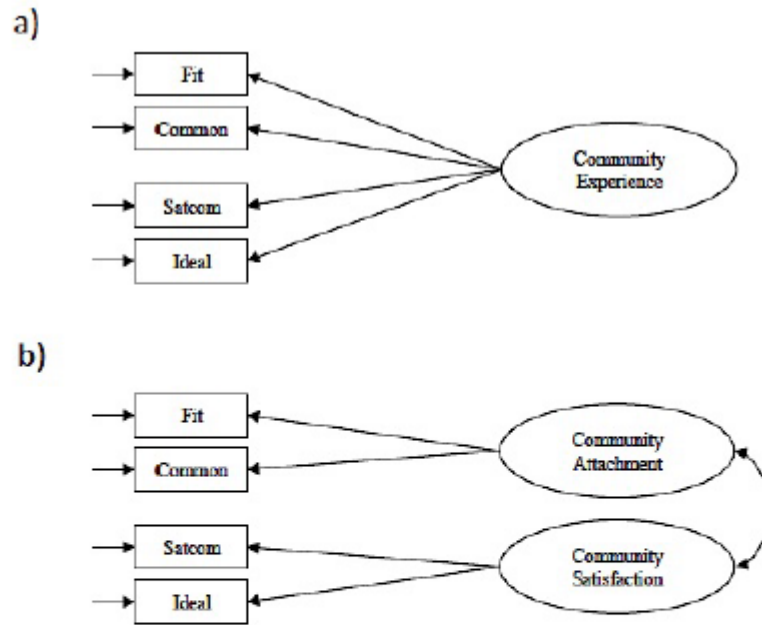


Figure 1. Alternative expressions of community experience. Panel a) represents community experience in a non-bifurcated or high context society. Panel b) represents Brown et al.'s (2000) United States based model of community experience.