EMILE DURKHEIM AND COMMUNITY

Sociologist Emile Durkheim (1858-1917) agreed with much of Ferdinand Tonnies' theory about community and society. Unlike Tonnies however, Durkheim believed that cities do not lack social bonds. He believed that they organised social life in a different way from rural communities. Durkheim outlined two different forms of community. They either reflected the 'mechanical solidarity' of traditional society or 'organic solidarity' present within modern societies.

MECHANICAL SOLIDARITY

Durkheim believed that pre-industrial societies were united by mechanical solidarity, or shared moral beliefs. Members of traditional communities viewed each other as being similar in terms of work, values and social connections. Durkheim's concept of mechanical solidarity is very similar to Tonnies' Gemeinschaft community. Durkheim suggested that the unity generated within the traditional community comes from having the shared culture and maintaining regular face to face contact.

ORGANIC SOLIDARITY

Durkheim was more optimistic than Tonnies about the shift in community types as a result of urbanisation. Durkheim outlined a new type of social connection which he called 'organic solidarity', involving social bonds based on specialisation (division of labour) and interdependence. While this concept has some similarity to Tonnies' Gesellschaft groups, there are important differences. Both sociologists felt that the expansion of industrial cities had the potential to undermine tradition, but Durkheim was able to see how social life was based on difference. For Durkheim, urban society offered more personal choice, tolerance and privacy than was found in traditional communities. Durkheim's theory of social change, however, warned about the potential for increasing organic solidarity and its associated individualism, to cause a reduction in the involvement of communal activities. Instead of combining their efforts, individuals might allow selfish interests and competitiveness to divide them. This in turn could lead to social disorder and 'anomie' (a society without norms). As a result, people could become increasingly isolated and dissatisfied. Durkheim saw anomie as the cause of the rising rate of suicide, crime and social disorder in urban society at the time.

Hello; I am Emile Durkheim. I am here to answer your question:

What is ANOMIE?

Anomie thus refers to a breakdown of social norms and it is a condition where norms no longer control the activities of members in society. Individuals cannot find their place in society without clear rules to help guide them. Changing conditions as well as adjustment of life leads to dissatisfaction, conflict, and deviance. I have observed that social periods of disruption (economic depression, for instance) brought about greater anomie and higher rates of crime, suicide, and deviance.
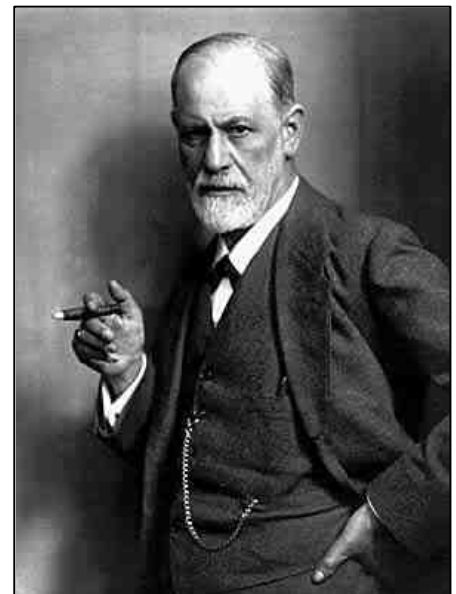
COMMUNITY OVER TIME

Much of the theory about community refers to a shift in the structure and experience of groups over time. The following is a summary of the key elements of traditional and modern community:

Features of traditional communities include:

- They are geographically based. People lived, worked and socialised in a community that was defined by its location (e.g. a small country town).
- They often relied upon close family ties (kinship) and were conservative in their values and structure.
- They were vulnerable to changes in social attitudes and technological advances.
- They were also easily affected by government policies (e.g. closing schools or hospitals in the region) and urbanisation (the process of people moving from the country and settling in the city.

Features of modern communities include:

- They are interest-based. Members share a common interest or activity but do not necessarily live in the same area.
- They often comprise loose groups of individuals who are only connected by the activity or interest that they have in common.
- Their members do come from different suburbs, different towns or even different countries.
- Examples include sporting clubs, internet based groups such as chat rooms or fan clubs and political or social movements such as Get Up!
- They cope well with change as people can move around and still remain connected to the group.
- These communities have been assisted by advances in technology (e.g. transport and methods of communication like the internet) and by urbanisation.

There are common features of traditional and modern communities as both aim to provide the same benefits for their members. These include:

- A sense of belonging-being a valued member of the group.
- Identity-a way of defining and identifying individual members of that group.
- Security-a sense of safety and support.
- Social interaction and participation-a connection with other people with whom an individual can relate.

The following factors have contributed to the shift from traditional to modern community:

- Industrialisation-the move from agricultural economy to one dominated by manufacturing.
- Feminism-higher participation of women in the workplace and communities because of feminist movement.
- Work-number and types of work communities have increased dramatically in the last 50 years.
- Urbanisation-the development of rural/natural land in to urban areas as a result of population growth.
- Educational opportunities-more people involved in education today, particularly in rural/regional areas.
- Multiculturalism-since abolition of the White Australia policy number of cultural communities in Australia has increased dramatically.
- Travel-ease and opportunity for movement allows people to move from community to community or to participate in multiple communities.
- Advances in technology-the current shift from manufacturing to service industries (e.g. financial, information and communications technology (ICT) and education)