

SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF COMMUNITY INTERACTION WITH POTENTIAL PERCEIVED ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH RELATED RISK

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Erin Marie Montgomery, Karen and Gail of Fertile Ground Guesthouse,
Other Community Members and Organizations (as future objectives dictate).

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Synopsis: An examination into the collective social aspects of community, beginning with Olympia, WA (in context of the Puget Sound Region), and expanding out to other contrasting community analyses. Connecting community Environmental Health risk perception and interaction to other social factors: education, socio-economic status (e.g., per capita income), availability of social services, sense of place and connection to land and landscape, in order to determine those social factors most greatly influencing a community's relative perception of a potential EH related risk and their reaction to (or action's resulting from) the perceived risk, resulting in either mobilization and/or paralysis.

Learning Objectives: To acquire an understanding of the differences and similarities between communities affected by a potential EH health risk in reaction to that risk. To gain a grasp of those social factors that may presuppose certain generalized EH risk interactions in order to predict and potentially prevent community paralysis. To gain an understanding of how to teach or influence paralyzed communities about the benefits of mobilization.

Potential Impact: Could provide background information used in order to predict and mitigate social community paralysis resulting from a potential perceived EH risk. Could provide a greater understanding of Olympia, Washington, in its uniqueness as a community.

OBJECTIVES AND OVERVIEWS

Other than to fulfill an academic curiosity, the general purpose of this project is to pinpoint why certain communities differ in their interactions/reactions to Environmental contamination or Environmental Health related risk exposure(s). In carrying out this project, I aim to uncover the key social factors relating or contributing to such differences, and to either dispel or confirm the possible myths related to differences in social equity on a community-wide scale. Others may gain an understanding of the ways in which communities handle EH crises in order to better administer aid and support, or to better communicate about the issue; the manner in which an outsider approaches a certain community will vary depending on that particular community's social construct. Outsiders, in particular, must alter their messages to fit the recipients [the community's] various needs and expectations. Initially, the project will be more analytic, especially in the research portions of both **Phase One** and **Phase Two** [see explanation under "The Plan"]. The analytic terrain will consist of a thorough exploration of key social issues related to community risk perception, analysis, and interaction (mobilization and/or paralysis). The experiential terrain will consist of initial collaboration with Fertile Ground Guesthouse during **Phase One**, in addition to interviews and exploration of other community organizations that foster and contribute to the community of Olympia, Washington (in the context of the greater Puget Sound region). What will be the most significant about this project is the resulting community analysis of Olympia, WA [**Phase One**], the community that is home to most of those individuals or organizations supporting, collaborating, and/or reviewing this project. **Phase Two** will examine other community's interactions with potential perceived risk(s), namely communities that differ in social construct, geographic location, and general socio-economic status. It will offer a comparison/contrast of these communities with the community analysis carried out in **Phase One**, in order for the citizens of Olympia to gain a better understanding of the uniqueness of their own community (its differences, similarities, weaknesses, strengths). Others can expect a thorough analysis of this issue, fairly objective and unbiased (to the best of my ability)—they can expect a solid piece of material to potentially be used in later community analyses relating to Environmental Health, for the community of Olympia, WA, and other communities. Obviously, the analysis relates to EH in that will examine community reaction and interaction to perceived Environmental Health related risks.

BACKGROUND/FOUNDATION

The "essential knowledge base" from which I am drawing for this work is that of a very broad, yet incomplete undergraduate educational experience. Although that experience has lead me to examine several issues of the social sciences related to the environment. I will be drawing upon a background of population studies, resource use, elements of social change, land use planning, sociology of agriculture, agroecology, landscape studies, geology, cultural anthropology, and public policy. Already, I have learned a great deal of information relating to Environmental Health—from actual accounts of risk exposure to current legislation, locally active community based groups, Environmental Health communication/outreach, and potential avenues for further study. My "essential mentors" may be my professor, Lin Nelson, another professor at The Evergreen State College, Martha Henderson Tubesing, who emphasizes in landscape

studies [although I have yet to contact her], Karen and Gail of Fertile Ground Guesthouse, and other whom I might encounter along the way. My learning allies may be Washington Toxics Coalition, WashPirg, EnviroCitizen [with whom I *may* be working closely], The Bureau of Public Affairs, People for Puget Sound, The Sustainable Community Roundtable, Thurston County Parks and Recreation, Friends of Olympia, Media Island, Olympia Community Center, etc. I need to find out if there are any other community-based groups whom I may contact or with whom I may work. I also need to find out if Martha Henderson Tubesing's work would pertain to mine and, if so, whether or not she'd be willing to work with me. I am also seeking feedback from my peers on the scope of this project, and accepting suggestions concerning its length and approach. Is the project too broad? Unclear? There are several complexities at stake (for instance, I may be trying to tie in too many social issues and geographical locations), but the most prevalent is that of providing a clear and unbiased community analysis of Olympia, WA, and other communities related to their interactions with potential perceived risk(s), and adequately drawing conclusions from the cross-community comparison/contrast.

THE PLAN

I will be using both elite and participatory modes of enquiry in examining this issue: there is analytic value to be uncovered in both scientific and people-centered knowledge. I'm essentially looking at community interaction with potential perceived EH related risk(s).

- ❖ Where does this issue of social injustice play in?
 - The idea of corporate strongholds in a community (i.e., in the San Joaquin Valley, CA, farmers cannot get a bank loan without a "pesticide plan").
 - Structural Violence: inflicted by social, political, and economic forces
- ❖ What are the key social factors that may presuppose or determine a community's general interaction with a potential perceived risk: both in perception of risk and reaction to the various perceptions.
 - *I hypothesize that perception of and interaction with a potential perceived risk is the result of several combined factors: a community's socio-economic status, available social services, and connection to land and landscape (which essentially fosters a sense of place, belong, and connection to a certain community—urban, suburban, or rural).*
- ❖ What about risk perception? Does it differ depending upon level of education, connection to place, or certain socio-economic factors?
 - Proximity to risk
 - Magnitude of risk
 - Trust in government or institutional officials
 - Personal choice of exposure

In **Phase One** of the project, I will be working closely with Fertile Ground Guesthouse, in downtown Olympia, helping the proprietors to set up a Foundation and a Land Trust. I will be relating this work to auxiliary *Community Based Research*, examining: potential perceived environmental health related risk(s) in Olympia (in its context of the Puget Sound region); existing community networks (institutions,

establishments, NGO's, Not for Profits, Co-Operatives, action groups, public campaigns) carried out by the community to mitigate perceived risks; sense of place in Puget Sound—what connects people to land and landscape (urban, suburban, or rural) and why? Is it unique?

In **Phase Two**, after having gained a foundation in community analysis through the work of **Phase One**, I will be taking analyses to other communities, outside of Olympia, WA. Ideally, I will examine both an urban and rural community in the South East United States. I have chosen two communities in particular: Lexington, Kentucky, and Ashland, Kentucky. Lexington is a more fiscally and politically conservative community than Olympia, WA. It has a larger population (400,000 inhabitants), where the general socio-economic status is middle-to upper class. Yet my perception has been that, in Lexington, people are generally unaware of EH risks. They appear to be too concerned with the private sector to worry about the public or common “good”—citizens there appear to have a lesser sense of public responsibility. I aim to divulge the myths from the realities by carrying out a thorough analysis of those aspects of Lexington that foster community, through analytic analysis as well as human subjects review. This community was my home for several years, and I was raised just one hour away. Apparently there is a Hazardous Waste/Weapons storage facility very near by, yet never in my life was this facility mentioned or discussed; I wager that the majority of Lexingtonians are also unaware of this facility's existence. I'm eager to discover whether my hypothesis is true, that: *higher socio-economic classes are generally less connected to their communities, and are more concerned with the private sector to wage worry over public concerns.*

Ashland, conversely, is an extremely conservative town consisting primarily of low socio-economic status residents. Both its political and fiscal policies are deeply imbedded in the rigors of fundamental Baptist religion. This may well affect the community's sense and perception of potential EH related risk(s). Analysis of Ashland will provide an excellent comparison, as it is home to the well-known oil refinery, *Ashland Oil*. Yet there appears to be little alarm among the citizens of the dangers associated with proximity to this risk. What is the relationship between the community and the company, and how does this affect their perception of danger, safety, mobilization, etc. Does the lack of alternative occupation foster community paralysis?

Throughout these examinations I will be relating community interaction to both ***mobilization*** and ***paralysis***, establishing the foundations for and contributing factors to both.

Phase Two will not be carried out during spring quarter, but at a later date in time, perhaps during the summer of a subsequent quarter, time permitting.

CONNECTIONS/COLLABORATIONS

The only community I've begun solidifying is that between Fertile Ground Guesthouse and myself. I'm unsure whether it is/will be necessary or applicable to pertain “informed consent” under Human Subjects Review, which is why I haven't filled out a form as of yet. I do imagine this would be necessary, although I would appreciate feedback concerning this issue. The project will be gratifying for Fertile Ground in that I

will be helping them to further establish themselves as a stronghold in the community, in perpetuity. A resting place may be the Sustainable Community Roundtable, or the Center for Community Based Learning?—the archives at The Evergreen State College. I will have to collaborate with various institutions to see who is interested.

RESOURCES/APPENDIXES

Freire, Mila, et al. Connecting Cities with Macroeconomics: The Missing Link. The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development/The World Bank, 2003.

Gaventer, John. Power and Powerlessness.

Eco Justice: Linking Human Rights to the Environment. Worldwatch Paper #127.

The Handbook on Private Foundations

Inspired Philanthropy

Hofrichter, Richard. Reclaiming the Environmental Debate: The Politics of Health in a Toxic Culture. Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2000.

Hofrichter, Richard, ed. Health and Social Justice: Politics, Ideology, and Inequality in the Distribution of Disease—A Public Health Reader. Jossey-Bass, San Francisco. 2003.

Kemis, Daniel. Community and the Politics of Place. University of Oklahoma Press. 1990.

Field, Donald R. and William R. Burch Jr. Rural Sociology and the Environment. 2nd ed. Social Ecology Press, 1990.

Edelstein, Michael R. Contaminated Communities: Coping with Residential Toxic Exposure. 2nd ed. Westview Press. Boulder, CO. 2004.

Schellenberg, James A. An Introduction to Social Psychology. Random House, New York. 1970.

Gudorf, Christine E. and James E Huchingson. Boundaries: A Casebook in Environmental Ethics. George Washington University Press. Washington D.C. 2003.

Environmental Epidemiology: Use of the Gray Literature. NAS 1997.

Smelser, Neil J. Theory of Collective Behavior. The Free Press, NY. 1962.

Percival, Robert V. and Dorothy C. Alevizatos. Law and the Environment. Temple University Press. Philadelphia. 1997.

Movies:

Go With the Flow
Area of Contention
Turning the Tide
Kids and Chemicals
Chemical Valley
Environmentalists Under Fire
Witness to the Future

Web Resources:

- PugetSound.org
- EnvironmentalistsAgainstWar.org
- DefendtheEarth.org
- Ewg.org
- CommunityCoalitionforEnvironmentalJustice.org
- PeopleforPugetSound.org
- FriendsOfOlympia.org
- Ertk.org
- PublicCitizen.org
- EnviroCitizen.org
- Scorecard.org
- Cfra.org
- WA Toxics Coalition
- WashPirg.org

** I'd also like to attend the Environmental Health Conference held at UW on April 24th, 2004.