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■ ■ COLLECTIVE EFFICACY

Collective efficacy is a variable feature of communities that refers to the capacity of residents to achieve social control over the environment and to engage in collective action for the common good. The theory of collective efficacy was designed to go beyond the emphasis in traditional community research on compositional characteristics, such as poverty and race, and the idea that dense friendship ties are the major source of community strength. Strong ties among neighbors are no longer the norm in modern urban communities, where friends and social networks are decreasingly organized in a geographically restricted, local fashion. Weaker ties based on relatively infrequent interaction may be more efficient for securing resources because they integrate the community by bringing together otherwise disconnected subgroups.

Recent work has specifically proposed collective efficacy as a community-level concept defined by the linkage of socially cohesive relationships with shared expectations for intervention on behalf of the community. Just as an individual's self-efficacy varies with the situation (one has self-efficacy relative to a particular task; it is not an absolute quality), a neighborhood's efficacy exists relative to specific tasks, such as maintaining public order or safety for children. The term *collective efficacy* is meant to signify an emphasis on shared beliefs in a neighborhood's conjoint capability for action to achieve an intended effect, and hence an active sense of engagement and cohesion on the part of residents. The meaning of *efficacy* is thus captured in residents' expectations about the willingness and ability of their neighbors to exercise social control in achieving public goods such as a lower crime rate and better schools. Distinguishing between the resource potential

represented by dense friendship ties, on the one hand, and the shared expectations for action represented by collective efficacy, on the other, clarifies how the role of communities has changed in modern society. Today, social networks foster the conditions under which collective efficacy may flourish, but they are not sufficient for the exercise of control.

Collective efficacy is typically measured in community surveys by asking residents about the willingness of their neighbors to help one another, the degree of mutual trust, and shared expectations of intervention to promote neighborhood safety and support local services. A number of recent studies have linked higher levels of collective efficacy to the general well-being of children and lower rates of crime and violence. Concentrated poverty and residential instability also predict lower levels of collective efficacy, suggesting indirect pathways through which structural community characteristics influence crime and other features of social life.

In sum, the theory of collective efficacy holds that while collective capacity for action may depend on a working trust, it does not require deep personal ties. The theory claims that we do not need communities so much to satisfy private and personal needs, which are usually met elsewhere, nor even to meet sustenance needs. (For example, we do not need to do our shopping and banking in a community context.) Rather, collective efficacy theory argues that the local community remains essential as a site for the realization of public or social goods that benefit everyone, such as public safety, clean environments, and education for children.

—Robert J. Sampson

Further Reading

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■ ■ COLLEGES

In North America, the word *college* commonly refers to an instrumental community devoted to the residentially based education of a defined cohort of young people. In that context, a college is usually either a free-standing tertiary (that is, postsecondary) institution or a