



The Wallet Exercise

What kinds of groups are you a member of? What kinds of communities do you belong to? One way to look at this is to see what social organizations you belong to.

How? Take a look at the cards you carry in your wallet, and on your key chain. By looking at those cards, we can examine one classification that anthropologists use to categorize people and group them into communities: the formal organization.

Formal organizations are groups you belong to that have some kind of formal structure. They have "badges" or other indicators of membership. They meet regularly, they may have membership lists, they organize activities.

What formal organizations do you belong to? Take 2 minutes and write them down.

What does your list tell you?

Many of us carry cards from communities that show how we like to spend our time (athletic club cards, for instance); they show what we like to buy (coffee cards, a Great Harvest bread card) and where we like to shop (supermarkets with membership cards).

They're one way to glimpse the complexity of communities we belong to.