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### Community as an Agent of Control in Hawthorne, Kingston, and Hall

To a young child, community is simply the world that exists outside the front door. Community is people; community is places. It's the soccer game on Saturday afternoon; it's the music teacher at the elementary school. Community is the bubble in which every individual functions and develops. It's the safe place, the known territory that we all navigate without a second thought. What that young child does not comprehend is that the same community that brings us security and comfort also thrusts upon us a vicious system of control that can be as harmful as any medieval torture device. Community is the subtle and psychological agent of control that permeates all aspects of our living. When the community exists in a positive atmosphere, then the benefits of that community are plentiful. Neighbors and friends work together toward the common good. People are happy; people are helpful. However, when danger approaches the community, then the community, like a virulent organism, protects itself. The means and the results can be subtle, or not. In the cases of Hawthorne's Hester Prynne, Kingston's "non-existent" aunt, and Hall's frightened sixteen-year-old self, the organism of the community engages in various forms of social laceration and excoriation in order to save itself.

From the moment that Hester Prynne steps out across the threshold of her Puritan prison, the social organism turns its machinery upon her: "Mistress Prynne shall be set where man, woman, and child may have a fair sight of her..." (Hawthorne 50). Hester has moved from being a full and protected member of the collective to being a lone entity on display for ridicule and judgment. Her only human connection at this time is the infant crying at her breast. No other person, including her co-conspirator, will stand with the newly branded sinner. It's as

though physical proximity to the transgressor will infect the rest of the community. Distance from the individual is necessary to save the whole. To further set Hester apart, the community demands that she don a permanent mark of her sin in the form of a scarlet letter upon her bosom.