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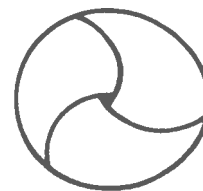
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Institute of Urban & Regional Development
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SUBURBAN LIFE

Powerlessness and Need for Affiliation

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In the past few decades there have been a series of controversies concerning the different effects of urban and suburban environments on the individual. While many of the questions concerning the behavioral differences between urbanites and suburbanites have been answered, we will discuss the residual argument concerning personality variation. We examined data collected circa 1965 to determine if suburban residents would score higher on "need for affiliation" items and city dwellers would score higher on "powerlessness" items. The work of urbanists in the past would suggest that the environments will produce personality differences in these directions.

Classic essays such as Wirth (1938) and Simmel (1970) speak of powerlessness as if it were a basic element of city life. Urbanites are considered to be normless, de-individuated, and are characterized as having a lack of control over their lives.¹ Furthermore, life in the metropolis is supposed to comprise

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largely secondary relationships. This causes individuals to feel lonely, isolated, and perpetuates expressions of anonymity (see Fischer, 1973).

A good deal of the suburban literature of the 1950s stated that suburban living was distinctively different from central city life style. Fava (1958) reported that there were urban-suburban differences in neighboring. Suburbanites, she explained, were a select population of former urbanites, drawn to the suburbs in a "quest for community," and particularly in an attempt to make new friends. Bell (1958) also argued that there was a selective migration from the cities to the suburbs. Those individuals who were interested in escaping the pains of city life, while optimizing familial and community interests, moved to the suburbs. Riesman (1970) saw this phenomenon as dangerous, because the end product of this migration would be a suburban subculture with "mindless neighboring," likemindedness, and conformity. Martin (1958) probably best summarized the viewpoint of suburban studies of that time when he stated that social relations in the suburbs are indeed different from those occurring in urban areas. He attributed this to demography (e.g., social class and life-cycle), commuting, access to cities, similar attitudes, homogeneity, and *selectivity*.

While the work of Donaldson (1969) and others made social scientists question the popular generalizations that were being formulated on urban-suburban differences, Gans (1967) provided the most thorough empirical research contradicting "the suburban myth." In a study of Levittown, New Jersey, he found that people moved to the suburbs not for social reasons, but merely to live in a house with more space—or, at least, so they said. Social change was not a motive for their leaving the city, nor were their lives significantly altered after their move. Though his and other studies reported some increase in neighboring with suburbanism, Gans concluded that urban or suburban environments do not have major behavioral effects, but largely reflect the class and life-cycle differences of their populations. In later work, Tallman (1969) and Marshall (1973) came to similar conclusions.

While the controversies concerning behavioral differences between suburban and urban residents seemingly have been resolved on the negative side for the time being, there is yet at least one other issue which has been left unanswered. Gans (1967) and others have shown that people report nonsocial reasons for moving to the suburbs, but these answers may actually be masking basic personality differences between individuals remaining in the cities and those moving to suburbia. That is, at some un verbalized (perhaps unconscious) level, those moving to suburbia may be highest in need for affiliation, a drive which may occasionally make the difference in the decision to move. Similarly, at such a latent level, suburbanites may be escaping a crushing powerlessness of urban life. The purpose here is to determine if this residual argument concerning selective migration to the suburbs on the basis of personality variations has any empirical support.

STUDY ONE

We first examined the Detroit Area Study conducted in 1965 and 1966 reported in detail by Laumann (1973).² It consists of 1,013 interviews with U.S. citizens who were white, married, male, and between the ages of twenty-one and sixty-four. Any member of the primary family meeting these qualifications was surveyed. The sample was chosen through a multistage probability sampling of dwelling units and eighty percent of the eligible households were interviewed.

Part of the questionnaire consisted of self-administered personality items. Of these, we chose three Likert-type questions relating to powerlessness³ and four dichotomous items indicating the need for affiliation.⁴ For the purposes of this analysis, the item scores were weighted and summed, yielding two personality scales. We divided the respondents into three categories of suburbanism: residents of the city of Detroit, residents of the suburban districts bordering the city, and residents of the outer suburban neighborhoods. We also

attempted to determine whether recency of move to the neighborhood had an interaction effect with suburbanism, so we divided length of residence in the neighborhood into six categories.

On the basis of the theories of urban-suburban differences, we tested the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis I: The more urban the locale, the greater the respondents' feelings of powerlessness.

Hypothesis II: The more suburban the locale, the greater the respondents' need for affiliation.

In examining the individual-level correlates of residence, length of time in that residence is certainly a fundamental factor to be controlled. This is particularly the case here, because the effects of suburbanism are often attributed to recency. In particular, two interactions between suburbanism and length of residence are suggested:

Hypothesis III: Since the oppressive effects of city life are assumed to be cumulative, urban-suburban differences in powerlessness should increase with increases in length of residence.

Hypothesis IV: The theories of suburban sociability discussed earlier emphasize self-selection. Therefore, a minimal requirement to support those theories is that suburbanites should show greater need for affiliation than city-dwellers among recently arrived residents.

(We are cognizant of the fact that suburbs are quite heterogeneous. The specific social context of a neighborhood—be it suburban estate or city block—will affect these variables. However, the concern here is with theory and fact about suburbia in general—that portion of a metropolis distant from the center which is usually marked by recently developed, low density residential areas. Are residents of those areas particularly unique?)

RESULTS

Two-way (place x length of residence) unweighted means analyses of variance were computed for both personality scales.⁵

The means in Table 1 indicate that there was a slight overall trend for urbanites to feel more powerless. New city residents showed slightly greater powerlessness than did recent suburban

TABLE 1
Respondents' Powerlessness Scores: Suburbanism and
Length of Residence in Neighborhood (Detroit Area Study)^a

Mean Scores	Suburbanism			Unweighted Mean
	City	Inner Suburbs	Outer Suburbs	
Length (in years)				
0-1	X=10.140 n=(36)	9.973 (38)	9.894 (25)	10.002
2-5	10.049 (58)	9.915 (46)	9.742 (55)	9.902
6-10	10.123 (52)	9.979 (58)	9.885 (92)	9.996
11-15	9.998 (68)	9.947 (60)	10.089 (65)	10.010
16-24	10.003 (58)	10.089 (59)	10.340 (51)	10.144
25+	10.095 (81)	9.825 (48)	9.979 (55)	9.967
Unweighted Mean	10.068	9.955	9.987	10.004
Unweighted Means Two-Way Analysis of Variance				
Effect	SS	df	MS	F
Recency	4.834	5	.967	1.780 (N.S.)
Suburbanism	2.109	2	1.055	1.942 (N.S.)
Recency by Suburbanism	9.000	10	.900	1.657 (N.S.)
Error	536.000	987	.543	

a. The higher the score, the higher the perceived powerlessness.

residents, but long-standing urban residents did not have the greatest powerlessness scores of the respondents, nor was there a trend toward greater powerlessness with more extended residence in the city. The analysis of variance shows that there were no statistically significant main or interaction effects (computed from the formula given by Winer, 1962: 241-244). On the chance that there might be suppressor effects, we corrected for covariates.⁶ As a result, the suburbanism trends were greatly reduced, while recency and recency by suburbanism were moderately weakened.

The mean scores in Table 2 show that there were no suburban-urban differences in need for affiliation. In fact, there

TABLE 2
Respondents' Need for Affiliation Scores: Suburbanism and
Length of Residence in Neighborhood (Detroit Area Study)^a

Mean Scores	Suburbanism			Unweighted Mean
	City	Inner Suburbs	Outer Suburbs	
Length (in years)				
0-1	X=9.951 n=(36)	10.011 (38)	9.973 (25)	9.978
2-5	10.085 (57)	10.070 (46)	10.047 (55)	10.067
6-10	9.957 (51)	9.977 (58)	10.208 (92)	10.047
11-15	9.915 (66)	10.090 (59)	9.966 (64)	9.990
16-24	9.903 (58)	9.950 (59)	9.897 (50)	9.917
25+	10.012 (81)	9.875 (48)	9.906 (55)	9.931
Unweighted Mean	9.971	9.996	9.998	9.988
Unweighted Means Two-Way Analysis of Variance				
Effect	SS	df	MS	F
Recency	2.837	5	.567	1.439 (N.S.)
Suburbanism	.155	2	.078	.197 (N.S.)
Recency by Suburbanism	3.456	10	.346	.878 (N.S.)
Error	386.625	980	.394	

a. The lower the score, the higher the perceived need for affiliation.

was a slight trend in the opposite direction of that expected. And, there were no meaningful differences among the most recent residents. The highest scores for the suburbs were instead located in those groups living in the same neighborhood for twenty-five years or longer. The analysis of variance shows that there were no statistically significant main effects and no interaction effects. Controlling for covariates did not alter the findings.

STUDY TWO

There are certain disadvantages to the Detroit Area survey—it is all male and consists of only one metropolitan region—which we sought to remedy by replicating the analysis in a survey conducted by the National Opinion Research Corporation (NORC) and reported in Bradburn et al. (1970). This is a national sample of integrated and matched segregated neighborhoods, within which families were sampled.⁷ From the total survey, we extracted white, non-Southern, urban respondents and conducted the following analysis separately for males ($n = 541$) and females ($n = 1,732$). There are, however, drawbacks to this survey: we are provided only with a city-suburb dichotomy (and have not yet retrieved original tract locations); and, we are provided with only a few single items relevant to our purposes, rather than with scales. Nevertheless, it is in conjunction with Study One that this analysis is informative.

For powerlessness, we employed an item which asked respondents, "In getting the good things you want out of life, how well do you think you are doing right now?" and provided a ten-point scale, from (9) "doing very well" to (0) "not doing well." (We reversed the scoring.) For males, though suburbanites tended to respond in a less powerless fashion, there were no significant ($p < .05$) main or interaction effects. However, as shown in Table 3, for females, there was a significant main effect such that city dwellers expressed more powerlessness

TABLE 3
Female Respondents' Powerlessness Scores: Suburbanism and
Length of Residence in Neighborhood (NORC)^a

Mean Scores	Suburbanism			
	City	Suburb	Unweighted Mean	
0-1	X=2.692 n=(107)	2.348 (141)	2.520	
2-5	2.407 (140)	2.159 (208)	2.283	
6-10	2.607 (140)	2.198 (248)	2.403	
11-15	2.360 (86)	1.980 (147)	2.170	
16-24	2.674 (129)	2.146 (164)	2.410	
25+	2.323 (133)	2.303 (89)	2.313	
Unweighted Mean	2.511	2.189	2.350	
Unweighted Means Two-Way Analysis of Variance				
Effect	SS	df	MS	F
Recency	23.243	5	4.649	1.179 (N.S.)
Suburbanism	46.203	1	46.203	11.720 p < .001
Recency by Suburbanism	11.204	5	2.241	.568 (N.S.)
Error	6781.084	1720	3.942	

a. The higher the score, the higher the perceived powerlessness. For item, see text.

than suburban residents. There was no interaction effect. When confounding variables were controlled, however, the suburban effect was erased.⁸ It is largely the higher family income of suburban women which accounted for the original difference. (One can also consider the data reported by Fischer [1973: Table 1] as another replication of this finding.)

On the issue of need for affiliation, we examined three items. One involved the responses individuals gave when asked why they had chosen their present homes. We scored 1 for those who gave a positive reference to neighbors as a first or second response, 0 for others. This variable was not significantly related

to any of the factors for males or females. (Indeed, that only about five percent gave that response reinforces the arguments that sociability is not a reason for residence choice.) Second, we examined responses to the following question, "How do you feel about meeting people you've never met before: Would you say that you enjoy meeting them very much, that you enjoy meeting them somewhat, or that you don't care much one way or the other?" We scored these responses 1 (enjoy very much), 2 (enjoy somewhat), and 3 (don't care). Once again, there were no differences for either sex. Third, we used the responses individuals gave when asked to rate themselves on a scale ranging from (0) "not at all sociable" to (9) "very sociable." Here, we found an effect, but not an expected one.

Table 4 shows that, among female respondents, there were no main effects, but there was an interaction effect—one accounting for two percent of the total variance. Examination of the table reveals that the interaction results from a slight, U-shaped, function for length of residence being more accentuated among city than among suburban respondents. The statistical consequence is that city persons residing in their neighborhoods 11-15 years report themselves less sociable than suburbanites of the same duration ($Z = 2.278$, $p < .01$). We were unable to explain the odd nature of the city-11-to-15 cell. Controlling for the standard variables, as well as others such as proportion of friends in the neighborhood, still left a partial correlation for a dummy variable representing that cell of about .07.

We are inclined to dismiss this result as a fluke for several reasons: it is not replicated among males (if anything, the pattern is reversed); the scale is of dubious validity (the standard background variables plus other controls account for less than one percent of the total variance); the finding is not replicated by other items. Most importantly, it is of little theoretical relevance since the main effect is not significant and the interaction effect is not placed to shed light on the issue of self-selection.

TABLE 4
Female Respondents' Sociability Scores: Suburbanism and
Length of Residence in Neighborhood (NORC)^a

Mean Scores	Suburbanism			
	City	Suburb	Unweighted Mean	
Length (in years)				
0-1	X=6.374 n=(107)	6.681 (141)	6.527	
2-5	6.543 (140)	6.332 (208)	6.437	
6-10	6.536 (138)	6.478 (249)	6.507	
11-15	5.930 (86)	6.568 (148)	6.249	
16-24	6.395 (129)	6.506 (164)	6.450	
25+	6.784 (134)	6.767 (90)	6.775	
Unweighted Mean	6.427	6.555	6.491	
Unweighted Means Two-Way Analysis of Variance				
Effect	SS	df	MS	F
Recency	38.870	5	7.774	2.056 (N.S.)
Suburbanism	6.594	1	6.594	1.744 (N.S.)
Recency by Suburbanism	131.680	5	26.336	6.967 p< .001
Error	6257.694	1722	3.780	

a. The higher the score, the higher the self-reported sociability. See text.

DISCUSSION

We may summarize the findings by stating that no substantial evidence was found for any of the hypotheses. The mild differences in powerlessness are essentially cancelled when covariates are taken into account, a finding which provides support for Gans' (1967) statement that many urban-suburban differences are actually life-cycle and social class differences. Regarding need for affiliation, the analysis revealed no effects of suburbanism or recency, and controlling for covariates

weakened any trends in that direction. New suburban residents were not found to have a particularly great need for affiliation as the selective migration literature had led us to expect. This suggests that the greater neighboring activities of suburbanites reported in the literature cannot be attributed to personality self-selection (see Fischer and Jackson, forthcoming).

As a general rule, negative results provide poor evidence for theoretical conclusions. In this case, however, we are discussing an important and popular theory that suburbanites not only differ ecologically, demographically, and occasionally behaviorally (e.g., in neighboring) from city dwellers, but that they also (and independently) differ in personality. Two studies reported in this paper of two important personality constructs fail to support that thesis. It leads us to conclude that explanations for suburban life style should be sought elsewhere.

NOTES

1. This is close to Seeman's (1959: 784) conception of powerlessness as the individual's expectancy that his own behavior cannot determine the rewards or outcomes he seeks.

2. We thank the Detroit Area Study, Professors Howard Schuman and Edward Laumann for access to their data.

3. The items on powerlessness were each given a score from one to four (Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree). The questions were: "Planning only makes a person unhappy since plans hardly ever work out anyway"; "There have always been good times and bad times, and there is nothing you can do that will change that. That is the way it is, and if you are smart, you will take it as it comes and do the best you can"; "Nowadays, with world conditions the way they are, the wise person lives for today and lets tomorrow take care of itself" (Laumann, 1973: 296). Interitem correlations were computed and Chronbach's Alpha = .5671 for the Powerlessness Scale. Robinson and Shaver (1969: 102-104) reported results using a scale similar to Laumann's. They report an average interitem correlation of .36 and that construct validity was achieved. Their items correlated strongly with strong-mindedness, trust in people, and trust in government.

4. The Need for Affiliation Scale had items scored one or two (Describes me pretty well, or Does not describe me very well). The questions were: "I become very attached to my friends"; "I make a point of keeping in close touch with the doing and interests of my friends"; "I feel uncomfortable if I have to be by myself for any

length of time"; "I enjoy working with others on the job more than working by myself" (Laumann, 1973: 297). Chronbach's Alpha = .3429. Though scale reliability is low, we feel that the dichotomous and skewed nature of the items cause this statistic to be an underestimate of both its reliability and validity.

5. As the reader is probably aware, analysis of variance and multiple regression are statistically equivalent techniques. We chose the former largely because it provides a more easily grasped display of main and interaction effects. We conducted multiple regressions in parallel with our analyses of variance, and, of course, they confirm the same conclusions.

6. We adjusted for covariates by stage-wise regressions. Analyses of variance for both dependent variables were performed on residuals after controlling for: age, education, income, occupational prestige, ethnoreligiosity (dummy variables), age of children at home, and size of place grew up. These are some of the standard demographic variables that have been shown to have effects on personality and to be related to suburban residence (see Gans, 1967).

7. We thank NORC for its permission to use the survey.

8. Residuals were computed from a predictive equation including age, family income, respondent's education, number of children under 20 years of age living at home, and whether the female was head of the household. We controlled for these variables for similar reasons as were given above.

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