

UC Berkeley

IURD Working Paper Series

Title

Neighboring: Private Lives and Public Roles

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/4ns1n9ff>

Author

Silverman, Carol J.

Publication Date

1987-09-01

Peer reviewed

Neighboring: Private Lives and Public Roles

Carol J. Silverman
Department of Sociology

Working Paper No. 468

September 1987

Institute of Urban and Regional Development
University of California, Berkeley

I would like to thank Stephen Barton and Robert Dunn for their many thoughtful comments and suggestions.

NEIGHBORING: PRIVATE LIVES AND PUBLIC ROLES

ABSTRACT

Research on neighboring and neighborhood organization tends to oversimplify the defining characteristics of local social and political involvement. In this article, I discuss the neighborhood as the intersection of the public and private domains. Based upon case study materials, I argue that people differentially draw upon public and private aspects in constructing their relationships with neighbors. The political and social character of their involvement will depend upon whether people use only private claims to property or also recognize public interdependence as the foundation of the neighbor tie.

NEIGHBORING: PRIVATE LIVES AND PUBLIC ROLES

Citizens of modern Western society divide their lives into public and private identities attached to different spatial locations; the public world of commerce and politics is separated from the private world of home and neighborhood. Yet, these worlds are never entirely separate, and this is particularly true of the residential neighborhood which owes its existence to a wealth of laws and practices located in the public arena and whose relationships necessarily contain elements of both the public and private. Studies of neighboring and neighborhood organizations fail to understand the complex nature of public/private relations in neighborhood life. Those who study neighboring have adapted Toennies' notion of *gemeinschaft* to reflect the seeming private nature of the neighborhood, but in the process often ignore its public aspects (see, e.g., Shuval, 1956; Tsai and Sigelman, 1982; Zito, 1974). Those who study neighborhood mobilization either do not discuss the private side of neighborhood life (O'Brien, 1976; Heskin, 1983) or, more typically, assume it naturally enhances and is enhanced by political activity (Boyte, 1984; Cunningham and Kotler, 1983; Hunter, 1974). In this paper I argue that, mobilized or not, all neighborhoods contain elements of both the public and private worlds. I explore the implications of the neighborhood's dual identity and, based on case study materials, argue that contemporary U.S. neighboring behavior can best be understood as a resolution of tensions induced by the culturally supported desire to preserve the private world from the demands of the public. I further argue that this has implications for the types of public action generated within the neighborhood.

The Neighborhood as a Mixture of Public and Private

The large literature on local community involvement can be divided into work that focuses on private ties grounded in sentiment, and work that concentrates on public ties and political behavior. Neither strain adequately incorporates the other. Those who focus on sentiment typically draw upon the *gemeinschaft* tradition. Within this model, sentimental ties are defined as intimate and wholistic. While no one expects many to find their deepest friendships in the neighborhood, still friendship with discrete individuals becomes the model against which neighbor relationships are measured. So, typical measures of neighboring include items such as number of local friends, or amount of neighborhood informal visiting (Janowitz and Kasarda, 1974; Key, 1965, McGahan, 1972). Not surprisingly, such research shows that the modern neighborhood is not a *gemeinschaft* community but rather one where ties are of "limited liability" (Janowitz, 1952; Wellman, 1979).

Yet, while Toennies(1887) certainly included individual relationships and friendship in his discussion, his concept of the *gemeinschaft* community would ill-fit contemporary notions of friendship. Members of such a community were linked by a myriad of ties now relegated to the public sphere. They owned land in common and thus were institutionally linked and economically interdependent; they relied upon each other for the provision of services now typically supplied by public and commercial bodies. Indeed, the notion of friendship -- a discretionary relationship that occurs outside of the realm of employment or politics -- would be meaningless in such a community. The simple equation of *gemeinschaft* with the private world of friendship (and kin, although that falls outside of this discussion) is an effort to adapt Toennies' original work to the modern residential neighborhood. This effort captures a significant strain in cultural understandings of neighboring, but ignores the remaining public aspects of modern neighboring and provides a vocabulary only partially suited to describing public involvement within the neighborhood.

The contemporary neighborhood shares aspects with both the public and the private world, if not in the way it once did. By the public world, I mean something more basic than the institutionalized world of business and politics. Although this is its most obvious manifestation, when so defined, the term fails to encompass much that we clearly see as a part of the public realm. When we ride a bus, for example, we are in public; when we converse with a friend while driving, we are in private; when we turn our attention to the other drivers on the road, we are back in public. What is the difference? In private relationships, we are involved for the sake of the association with people we have chosen or who are related to us by kinship. In the public arena, our associations are not chosen but given by the situation or, as in the case of the choice of a garage and its mechanic, chosen for purely instrumental ends.¹

Public associations are not ends in themselves and are often not even matters of choice. They occur between often disparate individuals who lack affective bonds; therefore, a more formalized basis for negotiating differences and permitting ongoing interaction must be reached. This is the realm of traditional politics. It is also a necessary process in the neighborhood. Neighborhood residents need to deal both with outsiders such as businesses and government agencies and with each other. Studies of the political aspects of neighbor ties typically focus more on the former and look at neighborhood mobilization around conflicts with outsiders (Henig, 1982; Heskin, 1983). Discussion of internal social relations is more limited, and the model of involvement used often is similar to that of those who study sentimental ties. Neighborhood friendship and political involvement are seen as mutually reinforcing. Yet, although the evidence is mixed and very probably depends upon the types of locally-based organizations surveyed, a number of researchers have found that friendship is

not necessary for organization (Connerly, 1985; Crenson, 1983; Guest and Lee, 1983; Jeffres and Dobos, 1984; Warren, 1977).

Grounding neighborhood political behavior in sentiment may well prove to be empirically incorrect, but to argue that political ties are founded simply in instrumental behavior is also insufficient. It ignores the defining characteristics of the neighbor relationship, the residential proximity of possible strangers. It also ignores cultural understandings of the neighbor tie.

The community organization literature not only lacks a sufficient model of interpersonal relations, much of it fails to consider the internal public order of the neighborhood. This is an important omission since neighborhood organizations often are concerned with negotiating differences among neighbors (Fisher, 1984) and internal relations may affect a neighborhood's ability to mobilize (Henig, 1982). The small but important literature on public involvement among neighbors recognizes this. Schoenberg and Rosenbaum (1980) identify the maintenance of internal order as one element of a successful neighborhood, Crenson (1983) as an important form of political behavior. But, this literature stops short of providing a theoretical structure which accounts for the relationship between public and private aspects of neighbor involvement.

The literature, then, renders problematic different aspects of local community, but individual works fail to integrate the public and private spheres. In the following pages, I investigate the characteristics of, and linkages between sentimental ties, internal order and external mobilization.

Research

The following analysis is based upon interviews conducted in four neighborhoods located in the San Francisco Bay area. The neighborhoods were selected to be as similar as possible on a variety of population characteristics: although all displayed class, ethnic and racial variation, the typical inhabitant was a middle-class, native-born Caucasian. All neighborhoods contained residents of diverse ages and stages in the life-cycle. All were strictly residential areas with shopping facilities located within a short walk. However, the neighborhoods were selected to differ on two crosscutting dimensions -- two were located in a suburb, two in the city of San Francisco. Two neighborhoods, one urban and one suburban, contained single-family detached dwellings, two low-rise apartment buildings. The matching for population characteristics was not completely successful. There was more ethnic and racial variation in the San Francisco apartments and the urban residents, in general, were more likely to be elderly than the suburban. Further the urban homeowners were more affluent although not distinguishable by occupation from the other residents. (Median income was \$37,000 in

1980 dollars, as compared to the median income of \$22,000 to \$25,000 found in the other neighborhoods). A large part of this difference was due to the absence of single residents at the very beginning of their careers with accompanying lower incomes. Further details about the neighborhoods are provided in the following discussion and in Silverman, 1983.

In each neighborhood ten pairs of adjacent neighbors were interviewed, yielding a total sample size of 80. Residents were questioned in depth about their neighboring histories, relations with current neighbors and neighborhood organizational involvement.

I discuss the objective factors, both private and public, which structure the neighbor relationship and then show how respondents differentially incorporate these factors into their subjective understandings and accompanying behavior with and towards neighbors.

The Neighborhood and Private Life

Private life in contemporary North American society is identified largely with the worlds of family and selected friends, consumption and leisure pursuits. It is distinguished by the individual's or family's ability to withdraw from the public world, and to act freed from the constraints of any save chosen others. The home is its primary focus (Seeley, et al., 1956). The physical structure itself serves as a container for private life. There, the family conducts most of its activities as a family; there, consumer products are stored and displayed (Hayden, 1984; Wright, 1981). Yet, the house is far more than the physical locus of private life. At least for middle-class America, it physically maintains as well as symbolically manifests two of the values most associated with private life -- freedom and individuality. Deeply embedded within current U.S. culture is the notion that the true self is best displayed when distanced from society and involved in the private world of family and/or selected friends. The home is the space where this interaction can best be controlled, where the household is most legitimately able to choose whom they will see and what they will hear -- the very definition of private life. Lasch (1977) speaks of the "haven" of the home as the refuge from the institutional realm, but the outside also includes unchosen social relations in general.

Virtually all of the respondents stressed the importance of private life and its equation with the private space of a home throughout the interviews. The theme was clearest when they were asked whether they would prefer to live in a house or apartment. Virtually all chose a house (often altering the choice to that of a home) rather than an apartment precisely because they would have the greatest control over the use of its space. Control first involved the ability to use the space as desired without the intervention of an outside party. For this reason, apartments and condominiums were not

considered true homes.

[Why would you rather live in a house over an apartment?] The freedom. You can fix your home as you want while there are restrictions in an apartment. Definitely.

Control also meant the absence of interference by neighbors.

An apartment, you have obligations to the people not only above you but to the sides. Noise restrictions which entails a lot.... If you feel like getting up and sewing at midnight or living outside a regular nine to five existence, it is very difficult to do that.

[Why is the privacy of the home important to you?] I want to be able to do anything I like. I don't want to be afraid or scared people will talk.

The residential neighborhood is identified with private life because it is the location of the home and because it shares the home's physical separation from the worlds of commerce and politics. Private life need not end at the formal walls of the dwelling. Individually owned (or rented) lawns extend the private domain into the physically unprotected and visible space between buildings.

[Why would you rather live in a house than an apartment?] Because of the yard and space, you feel *more private, more individual*.

In an apartment, you are enclosed no matter how many rooms there are. You are locked in. You can't go out and putter around because it is not allowed. Sometimes, it does a lot for a person to just walk out there, walk around and look at your flowers and pull a bug off here and a bug off there. *Something for the human*.

Even shared entryways and streets may become part of the private world when households in general, and children in particular, occupy or feel attachment to the space.

This [shared entry] is our front entry. This is where people come to see us and we like to have it look as good as we can. We take care of it and that is where most apartment people don't.

Private life, then, is extended into the neighborhood insofar as its symbolic and real identification with the home is written onto the larger space. But other residents share this space. To the extent that the household feels its private life to include the neighborhood, neighbors are a part of it. Children may play, gardeners exchange tips over the lawnmower, and couples entertain.

Individuals in all four neighborhoods used the private relationship of friendship as their model for neighbor involvement, although to different degrees. The pattern was most obvious in the suburban houses. There, the neighborhood was clearly distanced from the public world of business and commerce -- most businesses in the community were geared to private consumption and services. There, most residents commuted some distance to work, reinforcing the separation in their mind between their occupational and personal lives. Since political issues concerned the town as a whole rather than the neighborhood, residents had no reason to use the neighborhood as the basis of any political identity. Instead, residents shared in a cultural legacy which equated suburbia with the good life of home, family and leisure -- i.e., private life.² As a result, residents used their shared interests

in home maintenance, leisure pursuits and children as the basis for establishing friendships with selected individuals. This was particularly evident in the past when the neighborhood was more residentially stable and a smaller percentage of the women worked at paying jobs outside the home.

In the early years, the neighbors -- they had Christmas parties. Everyone made Christmas cookies and we'd bring them and we had kids' parties and we did that for a number of years -- took turns.... Most of the neighbors who have moved away, we still are friends.

Virtually all of the residents who had lived there for five years or more spoke of their close friendships with neighbors, friendships which often persisted after the household left the immediate area. Today, the number of local friendships and, by extension, the amount of neighboring activity is much less. Women work outside the home and are no longer tied by the pressures of children to select local friends.

Well, people have friends already and neighbors don't have to be important, because you have a car and can go and drive and see someone.

If anything, unlike the past when women formed the nucleus of neighborhood activity, men do so today. Casual conversations across the lawnmower or helpful hands with a recalcitrant automobile furnish the substance of much neighboring activity. The model is choice and friendship. Relationships are grounded in homogeneity, accessibility and the need, in the case of the women tied to the home by young children, for adult companionship. Today, as in the past, residents only have much to do with those who are perceived as similar to themselves.

We met the next door neighbors right after we moved in. They came over to ask if we played bridge. We don't, so that's pretty much the last we saw of them.

When we meet people [neighbors] it's one of those things. You feel the vibes I guess. There are a couple of people on the block that are not really bad neighbors but they are not congenial. They go their ways and we go ours.

The private style of neighboring, then, is selective; a relationship is formed only when there is both a need and a suitable neighbor.

The Neighborhood and Public Life

Neighbors are also public ties; they rarely are chosen, but come along with the purchase or lease of a home. While the necessity for interaction is less than in premodern society, it still exists. In part, extra-local factors form the bases for connection. Neighbors are similarly affected by issues with a localized component, be they a local wave of burglaries, a condominium conversion, highway construction or the quality of the local schools. These sorts of issues usually are transitory and affect some neighborhoods more than others. All neighborhoods have to deal with the continuing problem of maintaining internal public order, of negotiating standards of behavior among individuals who are

not linked by sentimental ties. The need for public order is especially important because of the permanence of the association. An individual can sever connections of proximity with neighbors only by taking major actions: moving or forcing them to move. Thus, neighbors have to deal with one another on an ongoing basis.

Public order is a problem for all social groups, but the public order of the neighborhood obtains its special character from the high expectations governing private life in the home. Neighbors are the most likely intruders. Precisely because they share boundaries with surrounding homes, neighbors are in a position of continual potential encroachment. Intrusions need not be deliberate: sound may carry through thin walls, trees grow to block a view, weeds spread, dogs or children roam freely over property lines. In order to preserve the privacy of the home, neighborhood standards for acceptable behavior, be they explicit or implicit, must be reached and maintained.

The public aspect of neighborhood life generally is not well recognized. In part, this reflects the highly individualized culture which equates social relations with ties of choice (Bellah et al., 1985). In part, it reflects the tacit nature of public negotiations of difference. Because of the homogeneity of many neighborhood populations, residents share standards of acceptable behavior and differences are less likely to arise. However, in large part this is because the neighborhood is the location of the site most associated with the private sphere, the home, and, as in the suburban homes, this colors people's understandings of the neighbor relationship.

Only in the neighborhood of San Francisco houses was there a strongly defined public neighboring ethic which extended to all residents. These residents differed from those in suburbia in having a clear sense of themselves as living in a neighborhood distinct from other neighborhoods. They engaged in organized conflicts with external organizations: a business wishing to expand into their neighborhood, a bus company rerouting a line to serve a different area.

We are having a fight about [local construction] and we've had petitions. Now this is where it comes in wonderful to have a property association. It was brought up before them and we went from home to home to have people sign it and we are fighting it.

Residents extended their sense of themselves as a community set apart from other communities to their definition of the appropriate behavior among themselves. They felt the neighborhood to be an interdependent group with a need to work together against other neighborhoods and outsiders who were sometimes thought to be dangerous..

The local property owners' association formalized this.

They have meetings once a month and you can go and bring them your problems. They have a bulletin which lists the problems and asks for your help. They go to city hall and lobby.

Much of the behavior was also informal.

Even by myself, I'm not afraid. Really, I mean it. We all look out for one another. Like, I watch the home here for example [can see into the next home from back window] and get up and look into it. You see it's a ranch type home. The people are working now. The reason for the drapes being open like that is so I can keep my eye on their home and if anything happens, I'm to call the police. I can see and that is what we are doing for one another. Right here we watch out for one another.

Unlike the suburban neighborhood, there was a clear understanding that neighboring involved the need to maintain a public order. For this reason, the long-term residents informed new-comers of the appropriate behaviors for the neighborhood, while also seeing it as their role to help newcomers maintain this order. When troubles arose, it was felt that they should be handled in such a manner as to minimize face-to-face confrontation and unpleasantness.

Well, as an example that I'm sure happens in every neighborhood, about three, four years ago, from time to time, we would smell garbage burning and it's an unpleasant odor. We had no idea who was doing it. It turned out that one of the neighbors down the street was having even more trouble. Not only was there garbage burning and driving him crazy but their whole garden and everything was covered by ash. And so, he went over to the source, on the other street, and asked that they cut out the burning and all they got was some really wild words. You see we don't think of that as being our neighborhood.... Anyways, so not having been in the neighborhood very long, he called me and said: "I've got a problem, what should I do?" And I said: "Oh, my! That's where that's been coming from and *we all have this problem.*" Well, between us, we finally decided the thing to do was the next time it happened to call the fire department and we haven't had a problem since. [Wife of speaker:] And it kept the immediate words from becoming a personal thing between the two families. [Original speaker:] And that's how the neighborhood depends on each other.

The quote illustrates several points. First, the respondent felt it important to emphasize that the problem lay with someone who lived outside the neighborhood, that people in their neighborhood understood how to act. Second, solutions ideally avoided direct confrontation between neighbors since the need to maintain some on-going order was paramount. Finally, it was the role of the long-term residents to help newcomers with their problems.

When problems arose within the neighborhood, residents felt the best strategy was to handle them through the neighborhood organization so as to minimize direct unpleasantness between individuals who would have to continue to live next to each other. When one individual decided to take a petition door-to-door to protest a neighbor who ran a business from his home (again the importance of keeping the public world separate from the private) she was immediately informed that such problems should be dealt with by the neighborhood organization.

In this neighborhood, people defined the neighbor role in terms of the interdependence born out of their residential proximity. All who lived in the area were therefore included. They did not have much to do with each other on a daily basis. In fact, one component of the local neighborhood culture was the maintenance of standards of non-interference. Newcomers sometimes had to be told that in this neighborhood, residents did not drop over uninvited or request too many casual favors.³ Yet, they maintained a sense of distanced care with all who lived in the area. Some might establish friendships with selected individuals, but all were clear that the basis for their relationships with the neighborhood as a whole was the need to watch out for each other, and to maintain the neighborhood as a desirable place to live, not the need for companionship. The public aspects of the relationship were the most important.

Tensions Between the Public and Private Aspects of the Neighborhood

The objective basis of the neighbor relationship is not simply public or private, it is both at the same time and this, coupled with expectations governing private life and the home, create a tension. I have shown how residents attach differing importance to the objective conditions which define their relationship to neighbors and then use either public or private models in constructing their actual relationships. Yet, no matter which objective factor they stressed, most agreed in the importance attached to the equation of the home with private life. This was the basis they used for seeing themselves as having anything at all in common with neighbors. Those who for whatever reason themselves felt a weaker attachment to the home or who saw neighbors as being less attached to their homes were less likely to recognize and/or act on connections to neighbors.⁴ Those who were unable to maintain the privacy of the home because of the intrusions of neighbors were also less likely to feel connected.

A number of objective factors encouraged and discouraged recognition of connection: homeownership, housing density, transience of the neighborhood population and population heterogeneity. This was most clearly seen in the neighborhood of San Francisco apartments. In the past, the population was entirely white middle-class residents. While at no time did most residents have much to do with one another, still in the early years there were feelings of connection to neighbors -- a connection founded upon the public style of neighboring. Today, the population is much more heterogeneous and contact between immediate neighbors is minimal. Some residents do not even know who lives next door. One woman thought her next door neighbors to be middle-eastern even though the adjoining door (about two feet from hers) sported a large "Viva Venezuela" sign. Some might wave at neighbors if they passed. For most, even casual conversations outside were unusual.

When questioned about their neighbors, most of these respondents mentioned that they were annoyed by some aspect of their behavior, an annoyance grounded in the lack of separation between dwellings and accompanying problems of passive infringement.

Like downstairs, I don't mean to -- them but sometimes they turn their stereo so loud. If you speak loud or you turn the stereo loud, upstairs, downstairs can hear. That's what, especially at night.

Sometimes the people next door have a fight and I can hear them. I would rather not.

The problem was compounded by the diversity of residents. Different standards of behavior created ill-will. One woman, for example, lived next door to an Iranian household.

I'm a very funny person. It's [a patio shared with the adjoining unit] mine. The patio out there is mine. It's not mine; it's one big patio. Half is mine and half is theirs. I wake up one morning and they have got all their pots, their flower pots, on my side. And they have been there for about six months. Stupid, do I go over there and say move your pots? No, but the whole time it has been eating me up inside [her neighbors were totally unaware there was a problem].

Residents first felt a lesser connection to neighbors because of the absence of shared ownership. This was exacerbated by their high expectations concerning the privacy of the home and their inability to maintain a desired spatial and, by extension, social separation from each other. If they were friendly, there would be the strain of maintaining an ongoing relationship with a person whose behavior annoyed them and who was too closely connected to permit the desired privacy in the association. Their neighboring patterns evolved in response to this. Several solutions were evident. In the past, the more homogeneous population maintained the public style of involvement. They saw themselves as having something in common based upon their shared residence, recognized that boundary problems were a result of their shared circumstances, and did what they could to minimize the intrusions. While friendly, they maintained a careful distance from those around them to maximize their privacy. In this manner they managed their relations, decreased the chance of strains developing from the inadvertent sharing of each other's space. Now neighbors are perceived as too diverse to admit such a solution. They see no bases of connection to neighbors and their avoidance of them masks the underlying strains. Not only are the absolute levels of intrusion higher, disruptions are not perceived as a function of circumstance but rather of personality. Neighbors are no longer considered trustworthy. They are seen as "other": foreign, black or transient.

I really don't have that much contact with neighbors here. The reason I don't is that the people who are my neighbors are people that I wouldn't want to (pause) they are nice. (Pause) I don't know if they are nice. Really, they may be real SOB's. I don't have the desire to create any kind of relationship.

One street in the neighborhood of San Francisco homes also witnessed a breakdown in the public order. So long as the numbers of non-native born Caucasians was limited and class variation

muted, newcomers could be absorbed into the neighborhood culture without threatening it. The internal public order regulated direct involvement. It permitted residents to mobilize against outsiders and maintain the quality of the neighborhood while also safeguarding the privacy of their homes. When, as at one edge of the area, the absolute numbers of newcomers were higher and class differences more prominent, the recognition of a common identity was dissolved. People no longer felt themselves to live in a neighborhood of like-minded others who could be trusted not to intrude on their homes and did not watch out for each other or work together on neighborhood issues.

In sum, the priority attached to the private life of the home infuses both the public and private styles of neighboring: it serves as the basis of the perception of commonality. The public style of neighboring serves to protect private life by maintaining a distance between neighbors. But, it is a fragile form of order. When the need to take action is greatest because of higher densities and diverse populations, neighbor involvement breaks down. When residents perceive that their control over the space of the home has been too severely violated by neighbors, and when neighbors are perceived as too diverse, residents perceive themselves as having nothing in common and, indeed, interests in conflict.

Public Ties as the Foundation of Neighbor Involvement

Average tendencies are neither prescriptive nor fully descriptive. They mask real diversities found even within this largely middle-class sample. (The working class individuals I interviewed did not differ from the described tendencies.) Only one of the five blacks interviewed had anything beyond minimal contact with neighbors. (It should be remembered that this is an atypical black population; they lived in primarily white areas and were largely middle to upper-middle class. Furthermore, the lack of involvement in most cases was probably due to the racism of their neighbors.) All five were actively aware of neighbors' interdependence and the accompanying need to work together. Their recognition of common identity was not grounded in control over the private space of the home.

If I believe in something I work for it. So I wouldn't want it to harm the neighborhood, whether I am going to live here or not because other people would come in and need it [the neighborhood] for the same reasons I needed it.

Members of the other deviant group were even more strongly distinguished in understandings and behavior. Six of the respondents blended the public and private aspects of neighboring and saw themselves as involved with neighbors simply because they were neighbors, not because of control over private property. They recognized that neighbors depended on each other and desired to

construct a special relationship based on that fact.

[A nurse] It's important to us that we have good relationships with people that we live close to.... We talked about being roommates, one of the things we talked about was how it was important that we have good relationships with our neighbors -- that our neighbors would be close and that we really want to love them in some real practical ways.

[A construction worker] [Best neighbor?] Other than just plain friendly? I would say a neighbor that would take a genuine interest in your well-being, that would help you or call on you for help if they needed it.... Take for instance [upstairs neighbor, an elderly Caucasian woman] now whenever she [goes to see her children], now she knows I work at night. She won't disturb me. But she will always stick a little note in through [the door]. So I will know she is not going to be home. You see I can hear her walking around.... She will leave me a little note like that so that I will... not be upset if I don't hear her. This whole place right here [front walk] we sweep it off together. I take care of her plants. Take the papers up with [next door neighbor]. To me that is an ideal neighbor.

They welcomed hearing their neighbors and sharing what others would consider private space and information because it strengthened the relationship.

[The construction worker] [Bother that can hear neighbors?] No, it doesn't bother or annoy me. To me, it's like I'm not alone. *I'm in a family.*

[His neighbor, a housewife] I like to walk in and look out those windows and see all the roses blooming out there and see all the chairs and tables out there and see neighbors come over, because neighbors use our patio because it is secluded and private and it is cheery to me.

[A doctor] One nice thing about the way this house is constructed and all these, they are all, our front door looks right into the kitchen of the next house and when [neighbor] is there, she can look right into our front porch, so that's a good feature. [The speaker kept his front door open so that the neighbors actually saw into the household.]

These people recognized that problems of internal order could easily arise out of shared boundaries but saw them as inevitable and soluble. Unlike the others whose typical response was to magnify and personalize differences with neighbors, these people took action when problems arose.

[The housewife] We have a young student up there [upstairs] now and no carpeting. And we had to call him on it; he was a doll -- he understood. He got one small carpet. But we told him that the lady who lived there before didn't have too much carpet, but she took her shoes off. So, the minute he comes into the house, he takes his shoes off. So, he's a doll.

[The nurse] The other neighbors who lived there, we knew them and we had their phone number and we would call them and say: "Bill would you turn down the stereo?" and he would say: "Now tell me when it's quiet enough." so we would sit on the stairs and say: "Keep turning."

Nothing obvious distinguished these people from the others: one was black, the other five white; their ages ranged from the mid-twenties to the seventies; they were found in all the neighborhoods except the suburban houses. Several had been trained into this style of involvement by neighbors, but this did not explain how the style came to exist in the first place. The explanation of them must await a larger sample.

In sum, these ten individuals differed from the others in that they drew upon the public aspects of the relationship, shared residence, as the reason for seeing themselves as connected to neighbors. The blacks as a group most clearly emphasized the need to work together against outside threats; the whites and one black constructed private relationships that also easily managed internal problems of order.

Public and Private Life and Neighborhood Mobilization

Whether residents used the public or private model affected their ability to act collectively against internal and external threats. The urbanites used the public model of involvement, and were able to take collective action at some point in time. As already developed, the neighborhood of single-family homes had an active neighborhood organization and managed problems among residents. In the past, residents of the apartment neighborhood also effectively mobilized to defeat the expansion plans of a nearby medical center. The neighborhood organization persists although its main function today is to advise the long-term residents how to handle the perceived disruptive behavior of the newcomers. In the suburban neighborhoods, to the extent that neighbors were involved at all, they used the private style of involvement. They further seemed unable to work collectively even though many issues would best be dealt with by group action. In the houses, for example, when someone drove a van into the area, removed his clothing and attempted to lure neighborhood children inside, a woman who worked in the local school was unable to generate any interest in setting up a neighborhood watch program. This was in spite of the fact that a rapist had been active in area the preceding year. Residents on another block lived in fear of a deranged woman but did not organize to do something about her actions. Similarly, in the apartments neither the high property crime rate nor the conversion of a large apartment complex to condominiums spurred neighbors to organize.

As noted, previous research has shown that friendship is not necessary for neighborhood mobilization, but has not provided an explanation for why this is the case. This research suggests an explanation. The private style of involvement is founded in individual shared interests oriented around lifestyle concerns. It does not recognize interdependence based upon shared residence as a source of identity. Those I interviewed were unable to translate their relationships with discrete individuals into any form of group action. Group identity and interdependence were at the heart of the public style of neighboring. What was not necessary to it was actual friendship.

Protection of the private domain, not friendship, lay at the core of these neighbors' public involvement. Much of their public activity was directed towards the maintenance of the privacy of the home and the enhancement of its value. For most, the sense of common identity necessary to public action only was present when they individually felt a strong attachment to the home and when neighbors did not infringe upon its domain.⁵ Control over private property and absence of problems in maintaining public order may be strong factors in encouraging people to recognize their connections to neighbors. But, as evidenced by the deviant cases, they are not the only possibilities. By its design, this research can only look at what has occurred in these neighborhoods. It therefore leaves open the question of the conditions under which the public aspects of the neighbor relationship might become more salient than private property rights.

Conclusion

Community and grassroots mobilization are value laden concepts which invoke a number of different theoretical and political stances. Unsurprisingly, much of the relevant literature emphasizes one aspect of local community over another. Clearly, a single work cannot address all issues, but the limited focus of existing theoretical models results in a qualitative loss of descriptive ability. The public and private aspects of neighbor involvement do not simply co-exist, each is formed in terms of the other. The political and social implications of local community involvement will depend on the manner in which the mixture is constructed.

FOOTNOTES

¹Public ties, in general, can incorporate private elements. A garage mechanic may become a friend. Although I find that the public-private distinction is more useful in discussing neighboring, an analysis similar to that presented in this paper can be applied to the *gemeinschaft-gesellschaft* typology. [See Bendix and Berger (1959) for a similar point.] Social relationships often are not simply more *gemeinschaft* or *gesellschaft*-like. **They are both at the same time and this can introduce tensions into the association. A garage mechanic who is a friend can make a serious mistake in repairs.**

²The reasons why people and neighborhoods differ in their emphasis on the public versus the private aspects of the neighbor tie fall beyond the scope of this paper and, to some extent, of the research. Briefly, I found that to the extent they were involved at all, those in the urban neighborhoods used the public style of involvement and those in the suburban, the private. The reason for these differences lies in the different ecologies and demographics of the urban and suburban environments with its accompanying effect on the politics and social environment of the neighborhood. See Silverman (1983; 1986) for a detailed explanation of the reasons for these differences.

³The pattern resembles but is not identical to Keller's (1968) discussion of the reserved neighbor, the one who prefers to keep a formalized distance from neighbors. Her discussion deals more with the private aspects of the relationship. The public style of neighboring incorporates the notion of the reserved neighbor but adds the public dimension to the concept.

⁴I also explored this matter using quantitative data (Silverman, 1986). Among the strongest predictors of whether respondents saw themselves as being connected to neighbors were housing density (single family detached or not) and ownership.

⁵Barton(1985) found that even liberal neighborhood organizers saw the protection of the private domain of the home as a goal of neighborhood organization.

REFERENCES

Barton, Stephen

- 1985 "Property Rights and Democracy: The Beliefs of San Francisco Neighborhood Leaders and the American Liberal Tradition." Ph.D. dissertation, University of California.

Bellah, R., W. Sullivan, A. Swidler and S. Tipton

- 1985 *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Bendix, Reinhard, and Bennett Berger

- 1959 "Images of Society and Problems of Concept Formation in Sociology." Pp. 92-118 in Llewellyn Gross (ed.), *Symposium on Sociological Theory*. Evanston: Row Peterson.

Boyte, Harry

- 1984 *Community is Possible: Repairing America's Roots*. New York: Harper.

Connerly, C.E.

- 1985 "The Community Question: An Extension of Wellman and Leighton." *Urban Affairs Quarterly* 20:537-566.

Crenson, M.

- 1983 *Neighborhood Politics*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Cunningham, James, and Milton Kotler

- 1983 *Building Neighborhood Organizations*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press.

Fisher, Robert

- 1984 *Let the People Decide: Neighborhood Organizing in America*. Boston: Twayne.

Guest, Avery, and Barrett Lee

- 1983 "The Social Organization of Local Areas." *Urban Affairs Quarterly* 19:217-239.

Hayden, Dolores

- 1984 *Redesigning the American Dream*. New York: Norton and Company.

Henig, Jeffrey

- 1982 *Neighborhood Mobilization: Redevelopment and Response*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.

Heskin, David A.

- 1983 *Tenants and the American Dream*. New York: Prager.

Hunter, Albert

- 1974 *Symbolic Communities: The Persistence and Change of Chicago's Local Communities*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Janowitz, Maurice

- 1952 *The Community Press in an Urban Setting*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Jeffres, Leo, and Jean Dobos

- 1984 "Communication and Neighborhood Mobilization." *Urban Affairs Quarterly* 20:97-112.

Kasarda, J., and M. Janowitz

- 1974 "Community Attachment in Mass Society." *American Sociological Review* 39:328-333

Keller, Suzanne

- 1968 *The Urban Neighborhood*. New York: Random House.

Key, William

- 1965 "Urbanism and Neighboring." *Sociological Quarterly* 6:379-385.

Lasch, Christopher

- 1977 *Haven in a Heartless World*. New York: Basic Books.

McGahan, Peter

- 1972 "The Neighborhood Role and Neighboring in a Highly Urban Area." *Sociological Quarterly* 13:397-408.

O'Brien, David

- 1975 *Neighborhood Organization and Interest Group Processes*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Schoenberg, Sandra

- 1979 "Criteria for Neighborhood Vitality in Working Class and Lower Class Neighborhoods in Core Cities." *Sociological Problems* 27: 69-78.

Schoenberg, Sandra, and Patricia Rosenbaum

- 1980 *Neighborhoods That Work*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.

Seeley, J., R. Sims, and E. Loosley

- 1956 *Crestwood Heights*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Shuvan, Judith

- 1956 "Class and Ethnic Correlates of Casual Neighboring." *American Sociological Review* 21:353-406.

Silverman, Carol

- 1983 "Neighbors and Nighbors" Ph.D. dissertation, University of California.

-
- 1986 "Neighboring and Urbanism: Commonality Versus Friendship." *Urban Affairs Quarterly* 22:312-328.

Toennies, F.

- 1887 *Community and Society*. Translated by C.P. Loomes. Reprint Edition (1957) New York: Harper and Row.

Tsai, Y., and L. Sigelman

- 1982 "The Community Question: A Perspective from National Survey Data -- The Case of the U.S.A." *British Journal of Sociology* 33: 578-588.

Warren, D. I.

- 1977 "The Functional Diversity of Urban Neighborhoods." *Urban Affairs Quarterly* 13:151-179.

Wellman, Barry

- 1979 "The Community Question: The Intimate Networks of East Yorkers." *American Journal of Sociology* 84: 1201-1231.

Wright, Gwendolyn

- 1981 *Building the American Dream: A Social History of Housing*. New York: Pantheon Books.

Zito, J.

- 1974 "Anonymity and Neighboring in an Urban High Rise Complex." *Urban Life and Culture* 3: 243-263.

FOOTNOTES

¹Public ties, in general, can incorporate private elements. A garage mechanic may become a friend. Although I find that the public-private distinction is more useful in discussing neighboring, an analysis similar to that presented in this paper can be applied to the *gemeinschaft-gesellschaft* typology. [See Bendix and Berger (1959) for a similar point.] Social relationships often are not simply more *gemeinschaft* or *gesellschaft*-like. They are both at the same time and this can introduce tensions into the association. A garage mechanic who is a friend can make a serious mistake in repairs.

²The reasons why people and neighborhoods differ in their emphasis on the public versus the private aspects of the neighbor tie fall beyond the scope of this paper and, to some extent, of the research. Briefly, I found that to the extent they were involved at all, those in the urban neighborhoods used the public style of involvement and those in the suburban, the private. The reason for these differences lies in the different ecologies and demographics of the urban and suburban environments with its accompanying effect on the politics and social environment of the neighborhood. See Silverman (1983; 1986) for a detailed explanation of the reasons for these differences.

³The pattern resembles but is not identical to Keller's (1968) discussion of the reserved neighbor, the one who prefers to keep a formalized distance from neighbors. Her discussion deals more with the private aspects of the relationship. The public style of neighboring incorporates the notion of the reserved neighbor but adds the public dimension to the concept.

⁴I also explored this matter using quantitative data (Silverman, 1986). Among the strongest predictors of whether respondents saw themselves as being connected to neighbors were housing density (single family detached or not) and ownership.

⁵Barton(1985) found that even liberal neighborhood organizers saw the protection of the private domain of the home as a goal of neighborhood organization.

REFERENCES

Barton, Stephen

- 1985 "Property Rights and Democracy: The Beliefs of San Francisco Neighborhood Leaders and the American Liberal Tradition." Ph.D. dissertation, University of California.

Bellah, R., W. Sullivan, A. Swidler and S. Tipton

- 1985 *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Bendix, Reinhard, and Bennett Berger

- 1959 "Images of Society and Problems of Concept Formation in Sociology." Pp. 92-118 in Llewellyn Gross (ed.), *Symposium on Sociological Theory*. Evanston: Row Peterson.

Boyte, Harry

- 1984 *Community is Possible: Repairing America's Roots*. New York: Harper.

Connerly, C.E.

- 1985 "The Community Question: An Extension of Wellman and Leighton." *Urban Affairs Quarterly* 20:537-566.

Crenson, M.

- 1983 *Neighborhood Politics*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Cunningham, James, and Milton Kotler

- 1983 *Building Neighborhood Organizations*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press.

Fisher, Robert

- 1984 *Let the People Decide: Neighborhood Organizing in America*. Boston: Twayne.

Guest, Avery, and Barrett Lee

- 1983 "The Social Organization of Local Areas." *Urban Affairs Quarterly* 19:217-239.

Hayden, Dolores

- 1984 *Redesigning the American Dream*. New York: Norton and Company.

Henig, Jeffrey

- 1982 *Neighborhood Mobilization: Redevelopment and Response*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.

Heskin, David A.

- 1983 *Tenants and the American Dream*. New York: Prager.

Hunter, Albert

- 1974 *Symbolic Communities: The Persistence and Change of Chicago's Local Communities*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Janowitz, Maurice

- 1952 *The Community Press in an Urban Setting*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Jeffres, Leo, and Jean Dobos

- 1984 "Communication and Neighborhood Mobilization." *Urban Affairs Quarterly* 20:97-112.

Kasarda, J., and M. Janowitz

- 1974 "Community Attachment in Mass Society." *American Sociological Review* 39:328-333

Keller, Suzanne

- 1968 *The Urban Neighborhood*. New York: Random House.

Key, William

- 1965 "Urbanism and Neighboring." *Sociological Quarterly* 6:379-385.

Lasch, Christopher

- 1977 *Haven in a Heartless World*. New York: Basic Books.

McGahan, Peter

- 1972 "The Neighborhood Role and Neighboring in a Highly Urban Area." *Sociological Quarterly* 13:397-408.

O'Brien, David

- 1975 *Neighborhood Organization and Interest Group Processes*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Schoenberg, Sandra

- 1979 "Criteria for Neighborhood Vitality in Working Class and Lower Class Neighborhoods in Core Cities." *Sociological Problems* 27: 69-78.

Schoenberg, Sandra, and Patricia Rosenbaum

- 1980 *Neighborhoods That Work*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.

Seeley, J., R. Sims, and E. Loosley

- 1956 *Crestwood Heights*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Shuvan, Judith

- 1956 "Class and Ethnic Correlates of Casual Neighboring." *American Sociological Review* 21:353-406.

Silverman, Carol

- 1983 "Neighbors and Nighbors" Ph.D. dissertation, University of California.

-
- 1986 "Neighboring and Urbanism: Commonality Versus Friendship." *Urban Affairs Quarterly* 22:312-328.
- Toennies, F.
- 1887 *Community and Society*. Translated by C.P. Loomes. Reprint Edition (1957) New York: Harper and Row.
- Tsai, Y., and L. Sigelman
- 1982 "The Community Question: A Perspective from National Survey Data -- The Case of the U.S.A." *British Journal of Sociology* 33: 578-588.
- Warren, D. I.
- 1977 "The Functional Diversity of Urban Neighborhoods." *Urban Affairs Quarterly* 13:151-179.
- Wellman, Barry
- 1979 "The Community Question: The Intimate Networks of East Yorkers." *American Journal of Sociology* 84: 1201-1231.
- Wright, Gwendolyn
- 1981 *Building the American Dream: A Social History of Housing*. New York: Pantheon Books.
- Zito, J.
- 1974 "Anonymity and Neighboring in an Urban High Rise Complex." *Urban Life and Culture* 3: 243-263.

