A Hierarchy of Urban Communities: Observations on the Nested Character of Place

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Revisiting Hunter's (1974, 1979) classic but rarely applied notion of a "hierarchy of communities," this article investigates the nested meanings and uses of place in the urban realm. Qualitative research conducted in two Los Angeles neighborhoods in the late 1990s revealed the existence of four layers of community, here called microsettings, street blocks, walking distance neighborhoods, and enclaves. While all these geographies have been examined previously by urban scholars in a variety of contexts, they have never been linked and discussed together as parts of a hierarchy of communities. The main section of the article explores the four layers by taking into account residents' sentiments and practical uses of their environment, neighborly interaction and relationships, and locals' participation in collective events and rituals. For each zone of community, I discuss two salient characteristics and briefly compare the two research neighborhoods. The conclusion reflects on the interchange of the identified layers and suggests further uses of the new conceptual model.

> [C]ommunities must also be considered as symbolic variables, which range in scale from small social blocks to larger neighborhoods and communities to larger regions of the city. These "hierarchies of community" imply that an individual may select a level of symbolic community that best satisfies the needs and interests with his particular social statuses, and that what is defined as the community may vary between individuals and for the same individual in different settings and at different times. (Hunter, 1974, p. 179)

INTRODUCTION

Over the last decades, Hunter's (1974) milestone observations that place-based communities may vary dramatically in size, and that they tend to be structured hierarchically, have not received the scholarly attention they deserve (for an exception see Slovak, 1986). To this day, many sociological studies rely on "neighborhood" as an unproblematic unit for the investigation of urban communities, even though we know that commonly used operationalizations of neighborhoods such as census tracts, zip codes, or elementary school districts rarely correspond with the naturally occurring kinds of communities that can be

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found in urban territories (Coulton et al., 2001). As a result, the characteristics of urban communities discovered by many studies are, at best, imprecise representations of how local residents view and use their environments, and how they interact with each other. Yet why should we let inauthentic categorizations compromise our understanding of such an important institution? In order to clearly capture the everyday realities of people living in cities, urban scholars are well advised to invest a good deal of footwork in their conceptualizations of community.

Inspired by Hunter's and other scholars' models of community hierarchies, this article develops a new series of concepts suited to grasp the complex and nested meanings of places in the urban realm: microsettings, street blocks, walking distance neighborhoods, and enclaves. The proposed model is based on qualitative research conducted in two Los Angeles neighborhoods in the late 1990s and is firmly grounded in the life-worlds of urban residents. At best, it can serve to advance current conceptualizations of community and thus provide an improved framework for future empirical research.

Despite the longstanding ambiguity of the concept of community, the authors of previous overviews (for instance, Altman and Wandersman, 1987; Driskell and Lyon, 2002; Hillery, 1955; Hunter, 1975; Karp, Stone, and Yoels, 1991; Keller, 1968; Lyon, 1987; Olsen, 1982) largely agree on three basic components that have dominated definitions of community in the past: the presence of a shared territory, significant social ties, and meaningful social interaction. Ample evidence exists for the importance of including all three elements when defining and studying urban communities. In a highly mobile and digitalized society such as ours, it would be naïve to give primacy to purely territorial variables. The concept of *place*—defined as chunks and features of the physical environment that are highly saturated with individual and collective meanings (Gans, 2002; Gieryn, 2000; Janz, 2005; Paulsen, 2004)—allows for the inclusion of additional aspects and has greatly enhanced urban and community research in recent years (for a contemporary example, see Hays and Kogl, 2007).

In emphasizing *place*, my analysis aligns neither with territorial conceptions of community—many of which have diagnosed and bemoaned its continuing "eclipse" or "loss" in the past (Nisbet, 1953; Putnam, 2000; Stein, 1960)—nor with the contrasting perspective that communities have been "transformed" and even "saved" by radical despatialization (Hampton and Wellman, 2003; Wellman, 1979, 1999; Wellman and Leighton, 1979). My analysis rather embraces an alternative position, largely shared by symbolic interactionist urban scholars such as Karp, Lofland, Lyon, Stone, and Yoels who welcome the considerable conceptual gains the social network approach has delivered and its overall focus on social relationships, yet are not ready to retire the significant role of place as an important spatial aspect in understanding communities.

Further, this perspective emphasizes the importance of the third element of community, namely meaningful social interaction. Lofland (2003) details how urban and community sociology, especially the area of "interaction spaces and urban relationships," can benefit, and has benefited, from studies within the symbolic interactionist tradition. By utilizing data that were collected face-to-face, and by building on residents' understandings of their actions, this article draws on the same principles.

Within this perspective, place-based communities bridge, at least, four distinct dimensions that characterize each of the four areas: (1) residents' individual routines and practical uses of the environment; (2) their sentiments, often called place or neighborhood

"attachment" (e.g., Hummon, 1992; Milligan, 1998; Woldoff, 2002); (3) their neighborly interactions and relationships; and (4) their collective rituals and representations. Due to space limitations, I cannot discuss all four dimensions in detail for each of the four layer of community. Instead, I examine two salient characteristics of each zone while briefly comparing my two research neighborhoods. The conclusion reflects on the interchange of the identified community types and suggests further uses of the newly developed model.

COMMUNITY HIERARCHIES IN THE LITERATURE

Definitions and typologies of various forms of communities are as old as our discipline. They can be found in classic works by Toennies, Weber, Durkheim, Simmel, Wirth, and many others, and they have been debated ever since. Conducting empirical research on the spatial ordering and clustering of a diversity of "natural areas" was a priority of members of the Chicago School of sociology. Olson (1982) justly pointed out that developing research-based typologies of communities can greatly alleviate the problem of defining community by adding complexity and variability to the observed forms.

> [T]ypologies recognize the variant forms and content of local communities; thus for example, the face block, integral neighborhood, defended neighborhood, or community of liability represent specific types of local communities and enhance the precision of neighborhood research. (Olson, 1982, p. 507)

One particular kind of typology, *hierarchical* models that identify nested layers of community, has been proposed in the past by a number of prominent scholars within our discipline, yet unfortunately has not received much application or conceptual development. This section briefly reviews the main features of existing models of community hierarchies in roughly chronological order.

In the 1950s and 1960s, urban scholars began to discuss the fact that people use, feel, and think about local environments in multiple ways. In 1952, while introducing the important concept of the "community of limited liability," Janowitz remarked that "(i)n varying degrees, the local community resident has a current psychological and social investment in his local community. In varying degrees, use of local facilities is accompanied by community orientations" (Janowitz, 1952, p. 211). This remark and his general descriptions anticipate the idea of a hierarchy of communities. Several years later, Jacobs (1961, p. 117) also hinted at a nested model of communities in her distinction of three types of urban territories: street neighborhoods, districts of larger size, and the city as a whole. In Jacobs' view, street neighborhoods are most successful if they are not geographically isolated yet function as part of continuous small-block networks.

Interestingly, Greer (1960) also differentiated three levels of social organization beyond the household in his study of suburbia: the neighborhood, the local residential area, and the municipality. Greer (1960, p. 520) characterized neighborhoods as a primary arena for the exchange of regulated interaction and mutual aid. Suttles (1972) was the first to suggest a more complex four-level model of urban community differentiation. His hierarchy begins with the face block, consisting of casual relationship networks that result from residential proximity and shared routines. This smallest unit

is followed by the defended neighborhood, defined as the "smallest area which possesses a corporate identity known to both its members and outsiders" (Suttles, 1972, p. 56), followed by Janowitz's community of limited liability and, finally, the expanded community of limited liability, which is a very loosely defined larger region of the city—"an almost hypothetical entity" (Suttles, 1972, p. 61). Suttles stresses that his model of the multiple levels of community does not universally describe contemporary American cities yet can offer valuable understandings of how urbanites develop solidarity under threat.

Hunter (1974, p. 112; also see 1979, p. 283f.) first introduced the concept "hierarchies of community." The identified zones in his model proceed from social blocks to neighborhoods, and from community areas to regions of the city. Hunter (1974) points out that each zone exhibits varying degrees of member interaction and spatial distinction, the latter measured through institutionalization. While the largest and the smallest geographic layer of his model specialize on producing only one of these two characteristics, the intermediate levels of neighborhoods and community areas maximize both interaction and spatial distinction, and are thus more commonly identified by their members. Most noteworthy is Hunter's (1974, p. 179) observation that communal affiliations may vary individually and situationally, and that they may change biographically as people move through various social statuses.

Drawing on Suttles' and Hunter's idea of the variable levels of community, Slovak (1986), surveying residents of a high-rise building in New Jersey, investigated urbanites' attachment to two levels of community, the building and the larger city, and found that they were clearly distinct. Guest and Lee (1983) systematically compared twenty local areas regarding their "urban village" and "community of limited liability" characteristics that roughly correspond with different modes of institutional and emotional engagement (expressive versus functional). Indirectly, their analysis also compares community social organization on two different geographic levels.

Hallman (1984, p. 57) agrees with previous scholars that "people perceive and use several types of subareas, arranged in a size hierarchy." Yet his identification of three distinct levels—the face block, the functional neighborhood, and the community district—lacks descriptive detail. In contrast, while anthropologist Bestor's (1989) study of a Tokyo neighborhood includes outstanding descriptions of the many formal and informal layers of community, and of how multiple affiliations compete in the everyday lives of residents, it offers no larger conceptual model. Lastly, in an interesting conference article, Lynn (2000) speaks of a first and a second neighborhood, which urban residents seem to distinguish through their practical routines: a smaller (first) neighborhood exclusively devoted to social functions, and a larger (second) neighborhood that accommodates commercial and public activities. However, in real life, it seems difficult to separate these different types of activities from each other as they can easily overlap at both neighborhood levels.

A research report by Sastry, Pebley, and Zonta (2002) does not offer a multilevel model yet still supports the idea of a hierarchy of communities. The authors asked respondents in Los Angeles to select one of four possible definitions of what neighborhood means to them. Choices included the immediate block or street, several blocks in each direction, the area within a 15-minute walking distance, and, lastly, a larger area outside this radius. Each category was selected by at least 13 percent of all participants. Interestingly, the largest group of respondents (36 percent) selected the smallest possible unit, the immediate block or street. Lee and Campbell (1997, p. 931) also noted that answers to the

question of neighborhood size ranged widely, between one block and several hundred, among the Nashville residents they surveyed.

This brief overview of previous research indicates the stability of the finding that communities can be identified at various spatial and social levels in the urban realm. These models substantially informed my own analysis. Yet, on a critical note, the theoretical discussions rarely offer clear operationalizations of the utilized concepts, and the empirical studies tend to rely on underdeveloped or monodimensional indicators of community (Guest and Lee's 1983 study is a welcome exception), thus warranting further investigation and development.

RESEARCH METHODS

From January 1997 to June 1998, I conducted ethnographic fieldwork in two middle-class neighborhoods in the Hollywood area of Los Angeles.[1] For several years before, during, and after the research period, I lived in short walking distance of both these neighborhoods. Additionally, for six months in 1997, I rented a single apartment in the less affluent of the two areas, thus becoming a full-time neighbor and participant.

A first data set consists of approximately 200 pages of observational fieldnotes detailing people and events in the two neighborhoods. Second, in both areas combined I conducted in-depth qualitative interviews with 26 men and 35 women representing 52 households. The age of my interviewees ranged from 18 to 91 with the majority being in their thirties and forties. My informants included five people of color (three Hispanics, one African American, and one Asian), and 14 foreign-borns from Europe, Central and South America, and the Middle East. Participants in each neighborhood were recruited through a variety of leads, including personal contacts, neighborhood association membership, police liaisons, referrals by other neighbors, and spontaneous encounters. Overall, I succeeded in recruiting a cross section of residents in each neighborhood in terms of (adult) age, race, ethnicity, culture, income, career, and family status.

Interviews were open-ended yet followed a guide that included questions about participants' personal biographies, their neighborhoods and neighbors, their daily practices, and their experiences with crime, disorder, and the police. Interviews were tape-recorded and lasted between 45 minutes and three hours, with an average length of one and a half hours. I transcribed verbatim large portions of each interview and paraphrased the less-relevant passages. The interviews were routinely framed by other activities—such as informal chats, introductions to family members or pets, a tour of the home and yard—all of which I recorded in detailed fieldnotes.

As a third method of data collection, I conducted 50 "go-alongs" with interviewees from both areas combined, either directly following the interviews or on separate occasions. I call go-alongs the time periods during which I accompanied informants on routine trips in and around the neighborhood while observing and querying them about their thoughts and feelings at the same time (Kusenbach, 2003). Go-alongs thus explore slices of ordinary lives as precisely as possible by combining interviewing with *in-situ* observations of environments, activities, and interaction. They are a productive research method when investigating patterns of community because they allow researchers to view physical and social environments through the eyes and understandings of local residents. I will draw from all three data sets in this article.

I analyzed these data according to the principles of grounded theory (Charmaz, 2001, 2006) and analytic induction (Becker, 1998; Katz, 1983). All notes and transcripts were submitted to two rounds of coding, commonly called open and focused coding (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw, 1995). Coding resulted in a preliminary typology of communal territories and their characteristics. Each layer of community was further developed through contrast and comparison, and through the inclusion of seemingly negative cases.

Upon reviewing the literature, I realized that the idea of a hierarchy of communities is rarely utilized in present-day research, and I began to wonder why the nested patterns of daily practices, place attachment, social interaction and relationships, and collective events and representations are often overlooked. Specifically, as described above, my analysis of the nested zones of community was influenced by Hunter's conceptions of community hierarchies (1974, 1979) and the parochial order (1985). More generally, my research on urban communities continues to be inspired by Lyn Lofland's (1973, 1998) analyses of social behavior in public places, as well as by other scholars and studies grounded within the symbolic interactionist tradition.

RESEARCH SETTINGS AND GENERALIZABILITY

One of the two research areas is called "Melrose" and covers approximately five street blocks in size. It is home to nearly 400 people who are unevenly distributed over about 200 households. Melrose consists of half a census block group, which is part of a much larger census tract inhabited by over 5,000 people in 2,600 households. The area can be described as a lower-middle- to middle-class neighborhood of a white yet culturally heterogeneous population. A typical block in renter-dominated Melrose houses a diversity of dwellings, ranging from small bachelor units in courtyard apartment complexes to spacious single-family homes with back yards. On two sides, Melrose is bordered by major business streets offering a wide range of stores, restaurants, services, and leisure opportunities (thus also workplaces) in convenient walking distance. On a third side, Melrose is bound by industrial buildings. Even though Melrose carries the deceptively suburban look that is typical of many Los Angeles neighborhoods—tree-lined streets, grassy parkways, and one- to two-story buildings—it is a mixed-use urban territory embedded within a busy, tourist-drawing section of Hollywood.

Melrose residents include a mix of singles in their twenties and thirties pursuing careers in the entertainment industry, large Hasidic (Jewish Orthodox) families with up to a dozen children, reformed Jewish homeowners and their families who have lived in the area for decades, several Latino families, and a small but growing number of recent Eastern European immigrants. The Melrose area's close proximity to West Hollywood further accounts for a fairly large number of gays and lesbians who tend to be either struggling artists or middle-class professionals. Overall, Melrose is a diverse neighborhood full of contrasts—some of which are readily apparent to outsiders while others remain hidden from public view.

The other area, "Spaulding Square," covers eight street blocks and is home to approximately 350 people in 160 households. It roughly coincides with an entire block group located within a tract of 2,700 individuals distributed across 1,500 households. In the late 1990s, Spaulding Square was an increasingly affluent yet still middle-class neighborhood. Owing to its homogeneous, early twentieth century architecture (California bungalow

and various revival styles) and the efforts of a group of residents, Spaulding Square became a Historic Preservation Overlay Zone (HPOZ) in 1993, as only the sixth of currently 21 such districts in the City of Los Angeles. Since the early 1990s, Spaulding Square has had an active neighborhood organization working toward historic preservation and beautification of the area on the one hand, and the eradication of crime and disorder problems (such as street prostitution) on the other. As a well-preserved 1920s neighborhood, Spaulding Square displays spatial features now promoted by New Urbanism such as short blocks, open views, and front porches. Even more so than Melrose, Spaulding Square has a suburban look and feel, and residents often refer to it as an "island" or a "garden" in the city.

Aside from a very small number of Asians and Hispanics, Spaulding Square residents are overwhelmingly white, and well over 80 percent are homeowners. Most renters are long-term residents and tend to be quite similar to the home owners. Overlooking the occasional guesthouse, there are no multiple unit buildings or lots within Spaulding Square. Over half of the residents work in, or have close ties to, the Hollywood entertainment industry, meaning that many neighbors are linked through professional networks and share acquaintances and friends. Spaulding Square is located directly across the street from West Hollywood and it is thus not surprising that the area's largest subgroup are gays and lesbians who make up 20 to 25 percent of all residents. Teenagers and people in their twenties are virtually absent.

Some comments on the generalizability of my study are needed at this point. The patterns investigated here are far from universal. As described, my analysis is based on fieldwork in contemporary, American, urban, largely middle-class, and predominantly white neighborhoods. Therefore, what I found is principally limited to areas exhibiting similar spatial, structural, and cultural features. Previous studies of comparable neighborhoods in the United States (for instance, Carr, 2005; Halperin, 1998; Kefalas, 2003) and in other countries (Bestor, 1989) also indicate the existence of various layers of community yet they do not systematically develop this idea. Preliminary comparisons with the poor, working class, and upper-class neighborhoods investigated by my collaborators, as well as by many other scholars (for instance, Blokland, 2003; Kornblum, 1974; Small, 2004) do not reveal fundamental differences concerning how residents of other economic and racial/ethnic backgrounds form and sustain communities. Suburban neighborhoods and rural communities (for instance, Falk, 2004; Keller, 2003; Low, 2003; Salamon, 2003) might exhibit some of the features discussed here yet, due to their different spatial, social, and cultural contexts, it is unlikely that they follow the exact same patterns.

It is not my goal here to account for the structural factors that cause the formation of urban communities, or even contrast these with other types of environments—this could not be done based on qualitative research in only two neighborhoods. Nevertheless, this research is useful for developing patterns and concepts that can serve as a matrix for future investigations of communities in other places and contexts.

A NEW HIERARCHY OF COMMUNITIES

Consistent with previous studies, I have found that communities occur as a set of nested zones that subdivide the environment around one's home into sections of distinct spatial, social, and emotional nearness. Table 1 provides an overview of the identified zones

TABLE 1. Zones and Dimensions of Local Community

Dimensions Zones	Practical Use	Sentiments	Neighborly Interaction and Relationships	Collective Events and Representations
Microsettings	Mutual visibility of private and semi-private routines	Trust, dependency	Passive contacts, sociability, proactive neighboring, friendships	Informal gatherings, nicknames, "reputation" of places
Street Blocks	Leaving and arriving, short outings, children's play	Tolerance, responsibility	Friendly greetings, sociability, reactive neighboring	Block-based social events, defense in emergencies, block captains
Walking Distance Neighborhoods	Recreation (walking), daily needs	Familiarity	Recognizing others, nodding relationships	Formal organizations, newsletters, neighborhood events, names or nicknames
Enclaves	Lifestyle necessities, shopping, errands, leisure	Comfort, belonging	Identification of peers, assumed connection and understanding	Holidays, festivals, landmarks, area names or nicknames

and dimensions of local community. I will discuss their most significant features in the following.

MICROSETTINGS: FAMILIAR ROUTINES AND PROACTIVE INTERVENTION

I use the term "microsetting" to describe small niches of community that sometimes flourish within subsections of urban street blocks. Microsettings typically consist of a number of adjacent households whose members share a sense of connection, engage in specific patterns of interaction, and occasionally participate in collective events. Even though some members of households within microsettings tend to be more closely linked than others, all are expected to treat each other with a certain degree of courtesy and care. Already linked by shared walls or adjacent properties, members of microsettings frequently develop more intimate associations via parallels in their respective biographies (such as being young and single, working at home, or having children of similar ages), or via shared interests and activities (such as crime protection, gardening, or pets). Occasionally, microsettings include members of diverse racial, religious, and cultural backgrounds, and of different ages and household types.

Past analysts of community hierarchies tended to overlook the existence of meaningful communal networks below the level of street blocks. My understanding of microsettings thus builds on the work of other scholars who have described and theorized clusters of neighboring households whose members share a sense of connection. Specifically, the terms face-to-face social groups (Festinger, Schachter, and Back, 1950), subblocks (Gans, 1967), pockets of neighboring (MacTavish and Salamon, 2001), and microneighborhoods (Campbell and Lee, 1990; Kirschenbaum, 2004; Lee and Campbell, 1999; Lee,

Campbell, and Miller, 1991; Shuval, 1962; Warren, 1978; and Woldoff, 2002), are of interest here.[2] Unlike some previous definitions, my conception of microsettings is explicitly based on the patterned practices and understandings of their members.

In my research, microsettings existed in both areas and among all residential subgroups. On single family blocks, microsettings typically developed around the lifestyle similarities and shared interests of a small number of residents living in adjacent homes or across the street from each other. Microsettings were also apparent within the Melrose area apartment complexes that averaged around 12 units in size. Virtually all residents of such buildings were culturally segregated, either by religion or by age and lifestyle. The following sections discuss two of the most noticeable characteristics of microsettings: residents' familiarity with each others' daily routines, and proactive helpfulness as a distinct pattern of neighborly social conduct.

Familiar Routines. Melrose apartment dwellers often came into contact with the other residents of their complex and could not help noticing that many of them had similar schedules and routines. Frequent chance encounters were encouraged by certain design features of the buildings, such as central access via a security gate, shared facilities (mailboxes, trashcans, laundry room), and the U-shaped layout of units around a central courtyard. In their 1940s study of community processes in a student housing complex, Festinger, Schachter, and Back (1950, p. 10ff.) verified the high dependence of "friendship formation on the mere physical arrangement of the houses." Position and design features regulate the "functional distance," meaning the opportunity for passive contacts to occur among residents (Festinger, Schachter, and Back, 1950, p. 35ff.), thus a key factor in the development of close social ties in addition to physical distance. Encouraged by the year-round balmy climate, many Melrose apartment dwellers used doorsteps and outdoor communal areas as extensions of their limited living space to relax, smoke, drink, eat, read, talk on the phone, socialize, paint or fix something, or practice for an audition, oftentimes within view and earshot of their neighbors. Together, these factors resulted in a high visibility of the private and semi-private lives of apartment dwellers.

Consequently, all 14 apartment dwellers I interviewed were well acquainted with the other people in their building and many had developed close or even "best" friendships with some of their peers in the complex, oftentimes next door neighbors. In contrast, residents had few social ties with peers in other buildings further up or down the block, or on adjacent streets, even though these people were strikingly similar in age, class, family status, work, interests, and ambitions. This characteristic, a high familiarity with others' routines grounded in frequent passive contacts, was most pronounced in the Melrose apartment complexes yet is a typical ingredient of microsettings in general, and an important building block of all neighborly relationships.

Proactive Intervention. In a previous article (Kusenbach, 2006), I describe and analyze several patterns of neighborly interaction, and I also review in detail the vast literature on neighboring (cf. Guest, Cover, Matsueda, and Kubrin, 2006, for another recent overview and study). In contrast to patterns of interaction among strangers in public (Lofland, 1998, p. 25ff.), good neighbors exhibit what I call friendly recognition as opposed to civil inattention (Goffman, 1963), they engage in extended as opposed to restrained helpfulness, and they embrace or resist local diversity instead of showing civility toward diversity. To put it differently, good neighbors are expected to greet each other in ways that exhibit

recognition and friendliness. Requests for favors such as providing a needed item (the proverbial "cup of sugar"), or watching over plants, pets, and home for a limited period of time, are commonly made and met. Additionally, it is typical for close neighbors to view some of their existing social differences as positive while simultaneously resisting other residents evaluated as deviant or threatening. Of all the patterns of neighborly interaction I noted (Kusenbach, 2006), the most defining one within microsettings is the exchange of proactive intervention, in contrast to audience role prominence or the unspoken mandate to "mind your own business," which is an integral element of the behavioral code in the public realm (Lofland, 1998, p. 31f.).

Consider two examples. The first case of proactive intervention or neighboring was reported by Linda, a single Melrose woman in her thirties who freelances in music management.

> If I were to see something odd at Gina's apartment, I would investigate. I would investigate for anyone here! And I think that they would probably do the same for me. (. . .) We all know about one another, we all care about one another. If I see Carolyn's cat three doors down, I pick up the cat and bring him over here. And she'll know that I've done that, you know? So, I do think there's a sense of community. At least in this little ten apartment unit, and it extends a little bit to Aaron and his family [complex next door].

The excerpt indicates that it is primarily the building and not individual relationships that motivate Linda to watch out for others without being prompted. She would "investigate," meaning inquire without being asked, for anyone in her building and believes that others would do the same for her, thereby highlighting the shared "sense of community" that unites the residents of her apartment complex. To a lesser degree, Linda's microsetting also includes a household directly adjacent to hers in the next building.

The second example comes from my interview with Fiona, a director and acting coach in her forties who lives with her family in a Spaulding Square home. She describes the relationship with her three closest neighbors in the following way.

> I know my neighbors here: Greg, Brent and Tim, and Jennifer. They're very nice. We protect each other. Do we socialize? No. But we're neighbors! And we'll help each other if we need to help each other.

Here, Fiona defines what being a good neighbor within the microsetting essentially means: to "protect" and "help" each other when needed. Interestingly, she does not consider "socializing" a necessary component. In addition to Fiona's terms "protecting" and "helping in need" and Linda's word "investigating," many of the people I interviewed described the same stance toward close neighbors using expressions such as "looking after," "watching out," or "taking care."

Observed and reported examples of proactive intervention, meaning unsolicited acts to protect or defend a neighbor, almost always involved members of microsettings. Whereas solicited help is available more broadly within neighborhoods, proactive neighboring is typically limited to the members of the closest communal circle. Moreover, even if unsuccessful or unwarranted, such help is nearly always appreciated. During 18 months of research, I heard of only one case in which a proactive deed (in which a young man

confronted a presumed burglar who turned out to be a friend of his neighbor) was not welcomed, and ended with termination of a formerly friendly tie. Proactive intervention is generous, but it is not free: similar to sympathy (Clark, 1997), it carries the normative expectation of reciprocity or, at least, gratitude, and it is part of a more complex exchange of favors within this communal zone.

In sum, residents' mutual familiarity grounded in passive contacts, and proactive instances of neighboring are among the most noticeable features of microsettings as the smallest place of community in the urban realm.

STREET BLOCKS: RESPONSIBILITY AND INFORMAL COLLECTIVE EVENTS

Census blocks consist of island-like segments of the built environment that are surrounded by streets on all sides, and census block groups and census tracts are clusters of such blocks. Census tracts tend to align with natural or built edges such as waterways or major streets and thus often overlap with how residents define the boundaries of their communal environments. However, in dense urban areas there are rarely enough natural or built edges to inform the boundaries of census tracts and other census geographies, thus these units tend to be somewhat disassociated from residents' practices and perceptions. At the smallest geographical level, island-like census blocks have generally little in common with how residents experience and utilize their environments. As often noted (for instance, Sampson, 2004, p. 164), one of the problems with census geographies is that they may artificially separate locals who are closely linked socially, for instance people living across the street from each other. Despite the limited real-life authenticity of census geographies (Coulton et al., 2001), many studies continue to represent neighborhoods and communities through census block groups or tracts because they are the best approximations for which large amounts of data are available. While this is completely understandable and justified within other contexts, utilizing external categorizations to determine neighborhoods and communities would not be satisfactory here.

Building on the frequently occurring references among residents to "my street" or "my block" I here use the term "street block" to describe those segments of streets that run between two intersections and all the dwellings that face them. Despite the tremendous social significance of street blocks—some also call them "face blocks"—in shaping neighborly communities, only a limited number of urban scholars have treated them as meaningful units of analysis in the past. In their classic studies, Appleyard (1981), Gans (1967), Jacobs (1961), and Suttles (1972) have discussed significant aspects of urban and suburban street blocks (also see Mayo, 1979). Hunter's (1974) previously cited notion of "social blocks" does not refer to networks that are actually based on block geographies. Most contemporary investigations of street blocks (for instance, Bursik and Grasmick, 1993; Sampson and Raudenbush, 1999; Taylor, 1997; Taylor, Godfredsen, and Brower, 1984) focus on issues of crime and social control.[3] Together, these studies provide powerful reasons to view street blocks as a primary analytic unit in urban and community research. My discussion concentrates on two significant characteristics of communities at the street block level: typical experiences and expressions of responsibility, and the organization of block-based collective events.

Responsibility. Two examples serve to highlight the subtle yet tangible difference Melrose residents tend to draw between the microsetting and the community of the street block.

Linda, the Melrose single introduced above, differentiates between two circles of neighbors. The following excerpt immediately trails the passage quoted above in which Linda explains that she would "investigate" for anybody, and that there is "a sense of community" in her building.

> M: "So, who else do you know? These neighbors, and these, okay. Anyone across the street, in that building?"
> L: "You know, it's funny. I mean a couple of people right across the street I know by sight, and we say 'good morning' and stuff. And again, I know their cars. If at any time anything were to . . . if there's something I saw going on on this block, I would respond to that. And I think that there is a sense of that here."

This account indicates that Linda feels responsibility beyond her building for the people who live on her block. She would "respond" (reactive) to things going on the block, whereas she would "investigate" (proactive) anything suspicious that happened in her building. Despite this difference in the degree of her neighborly involvement, Linda identifies a shared "sense" of community on both levels, the building (microsetting) and the street block.

In some cases, block-bound feelings of responsibility bridge social differences. Consider the following example from my interview with Jenny, a single aspiring actress in her thirties living in another Melrose apartment complex.

> J: "I feel a sense of responsibility, for this building, for the people who live here, and for the neighborhood as a whole. Even, you know, the families down the street. I feel a sense of responsibility for them. (. . .) There's a sense of community. (. . .)"
> M: "Do you have the feeling that there is something like a community in this area?"
> J. "Yeah. Yes, I think there's definitely a mutual respect. This street is a really diverse street. Just with the Jewish families and then the, what I consider, artists. (. . .) I think it's just a really interesting mix."
> M: "Now, the sense of community you have, does that extend to the block? Is it more like a block thing?"
> J: "Only this street. It's one block, this street, to back there." (Points.)
> M: "So you wouldn't know who lives on the next block?"
> J: "No! I've never even been down that street! (Laughs.) That's about it! I consider this stretch from Greenwood to Flower, that's it."

The excerpt begins with Jenny listing three distinct spheres of responsibility: the "building," the "people who live here", and the "neighborhood as a whole." While the building clearly refers to the microsetting, the spatial boundaries of the other two spheres are less obvious. Nonetheless, the block ("down the street") is the place Jenny discusses in the following. Jenny notes that her feelings of responsibility transcend the social boundaries that may separate residents on her block. She also clarifies that her felt sense of commitment is limited to only one street block, the one she lives on; and she claims that she has "never even been down" the adjacent street.

Similar differences in sentiment and interaction between the microsetting and the street block community surfaced in the accounts of many other informants, not only

Melrose apartment dwellers. For instance, Al, a single Spaulding Square resident in his forties, helps out several elderly widows on his block when asked, yet he regularly checks on the nonagenarian across the street, bringing her bread and changing her light bulbs, without needing any prompts. Additional examples could be cited to show that residents' feelings of responsibility for the street block frequently translate into action that is slightly different than neighboring within microsettings.

Informal Collective Events. None of the street blocks in either of the two neighborhoods was formally named or organized. Still, for many home dwellers, and especially home owners, the street block is a meaningful unit for the organization of collective events on selected occasions. In Spaulding Square, where there were no apartment buildings and few renters, the block was a common arena for the staging of all sorts of celebrations. In Melrose, the homeowners of one block came together during the so called Los Angeles Riots in 1992 to defend their homes against looters and arsonists whom they perceived to be on the attack, thus activating a version of Suttles' (1972) "defended neighborhood."

The following example of a couple's strong awareness of the street block is quite typical for Spaulding Square residents. Eddie (a record dealer) and Jill (a professional songwriter), both in their late forties, described to me how the street block was a meaningful entity in their daily lives. The childless couple made it a point to know and be on friendly terms with everyone in this particular zone. Several times during our interview, both Jill and Eddie used the expression "neighbor friends" to describe the type of relationship they have developed with almost all of the people living on their street. Further, Eddie and Jill told me that when they moved into their house, they had three housewarming parties: one for the neighbors on the block, one for their families, and one for Jill's friends in the music industry. Having a separate housewarming party for block residents indicates that these neighbors are indeed a distinct and important reference group in the couple's social life, next to family members and Jill's work contacts. On another Spaulding Square block, one resident, a widow in her late seventies, has invited all block neighbors to her house on every major holiday, offering food and gifts to everyone, for almost fifty years. And Al, a resident mentioned above, was getting ready to organize a block party for his across-the-street neighbor's upcoming 100th birthday.

Aside from housewarming, holiday, and birthday parties, Spaulding Square residents mentioned block-based potluck dinners, cocktail and football parties, and poker nights. Overall, my Spaulding Square informants were distributed over seven of the eight blocks that officially make up the neighborhood and I found signs of existing block communities and regular social events on every single one of them.

Similar examples of block-based social life did not surface in Melrose where each block included a variety of housing types and was occupied by more renters than owners. I never witnessed or heard of any block parties here. Still, the homeowners of one Melrose block did show solidarity with each other during the "defense" of their homes in 1993, an important collective event that instilled pride in many residents. Two Melrose blocks had semiofficial "block captains" who acted as occasional liaisons for local police officers. Another Melrose block featured a woman who was informally called "the mayor of the block" based on her ubiquitous presence and notoriety.

Generally speaking, at the individual level, residents of both neighborhoods expressed their identification with the street block through feelings and acts of responsibility. At the collective level, street blocks became relevant resources of informal community on festive and social occasions in Spaulding Square, whereas the same was limited to threatening situations in the less homogeneous and socially coherent Melrose area.

WALKING DISTANCE NEIGHBORHOODS: PEDESTRIAN MOBILITY AND SOCIAL ORGANIZATION

As Warren (1981, p. 63) put it: "[B]eyond the residential block begins the walking-distance neighborhood." While adopting his term, I do not follow Warren's own definition of this zone because he applied the administrative boundaries of elementary school districts, thereby downplaying the practical qualities of the concept. Here, walking distance neighborhood refers to sections of the urban environment that transcend individual street block yet are still meaningful geographies in the eyes of residents.

Generally speaking, I found walking distance neighborhoods to be considerably smaller and messier than official designations of a city's neighborhoods, for instance as defined by Visitors Bureaus. In my research, the identified places ranged in size from a handful of street blocks to rarely more than twenty. Neither did they mirror in size or shape any institutionalized areas, such as elementary school districts, census geographies, or zip codes. Coulton, Korbin, Chan, and Su (2001, p. 377) explained that the neighborhood maps drawn by their study participants typically "included a portion of at least two census tracts and at least three block groups." Lee and Campbell (1997) also pointed out that territorial and experience-based ("egocentric") conceptions of neighborhoods are much more common than structural and institutional definitions. The two authors noted that the number of blocks the surveyed Nashville residents identified as their neighborhood averaged around 15, thus an area of approximately four-by-four blocks.

In some cases, urban residents practically define areas that then become institutionalized as neighborhoods. This happened when "Spaulding Square" was conceived and created as an organized and historic neighborhood in the late 1980s and early 1990s. However, even in the absence of official names and organizations, walking distance zones may develop and persist through various patterns of residential mobility. Practical use and social organization are the two salient features of walking distance neighborhoods I now discuss in more detail.

Pedestrian Mobility. One of the interesting features of walking distance neighborhoods is that residents often map out this territory on foot, through patterns of walking (Demerath and Levinger, 2003). Spaulding Square and Melrose residents exhibited patterns of pedestrian mobility that were distinct and typical of each neighborhood. Over half of the Spaulding Square households I interviewed (12 of 21) owned dogs, compared with about one in eight households in Melrose (4 of 31). I found dogs to be the most common reason for why people walk recreationally, thus leading to a high intensity of dog-related foot traffic on Spaulding Square's streets. While accompanying a number of Spaulding Square residents on walks with their dogs I was told, and noticed first hand, how regular and predictable the ensuing social encounters were (cf. Robins, Sanders, and Cahill, 1991; Rogers, Hart, and Boltz, 1993).

Liz, a single television producer in her forties, explained: "I got the dog at Christmas last year, and walking him has made me more integrated into the rest of the streets. You meet the other dog owners." Liz usually walks her dog around the block in the same way and at the same time. She was able to quickly list the many people she has gotten to know through this activity. Jill, the Spaulding Square songwriter introduced above, walks her two small dogs at least twice a day. She brings the communal benefits of dog-walking to the point: "Probably, we met most of the people with walking the dogs. When you have dogs, you tend to meet your neighborhood. When you don't, you stay home." During their rounds, dog owners not only interact with fellow dog owners and walkers but they also encounter stationary neighbors spending time on their front porches or in their front yards. Besides walking the dog(s), walking in general and jogging were popular activities among Spaulding Square residents.

In contrast, less than a handful of my Melrose informants mentioned walking or jogging as a form of relaxation or exercise, and only two of the four dog owners took their pets on local walks. Here, the most conspicuous walking routines were those of large Hasidic families who, especially on weekends, could be seen walking to and from religious services and other local places and events. Generally speaking, many Melrose residents walked through the area during out-and-back kinds of trips to the edges of the neighborhood. Several residents walked to work at nearby businesses or to the local bus stops, and many more took take advantage of nearby stores to buy coffee, food, cigarettes, or flowers, to do laundry, rent videos, and so on. The business that was visited on foot by the highest number and greatest variety of Melrose residents was a cluttered one-of-a-kind grocery and international foods market located at the edge of the neighborhood.

Overall, in comparison with Spaulding Square, the walking patterns of Melrose residents were less often recreational and more frequently served work-related or errand-type purposes, which could be summarized as "functional" mobility. Whether recreational or functional, the pedestrian mobility of the two neighborhoods' residents was typically limited to a four- to five-block radius around the home, occurred in very regular patterns, and led to routine encounters and recurring social interactions with others who engaged in similar routines at similar times.

Social Organization. It is no surprise that the members of the neighborhood association in Spaulding Square identified more strongly with the larger area compared with the nonorganized neighbors of both neighborhoods who generally prioritized the block. The link between neighborhood association membership and a larger image of one's neighborhood was found to be significant by Lee and Campbell (1997). The activists perceived street blocks as embedded in a larger social and political context, which became the focus of their concerns and actions.

Margaret, a married schoolteacher and long-time president of the Spaulding Square neighborhood association, describes her connection with the larger area as follows.

> M: "We are only eight blocks and we really didn't want to make it any larger. (. . .) But even the eight blocks; what may affect one end doesn't necessarily affect the other end quite as much."

MK: "It's interesting that you identify with the entire neighborhood, you know, whereas other people that I talked to here more or less identify with the block as 'us.'"
M: "Maybe because I'm chairman of the whole neighborhood association. I think it's important, every issue. If it affects one block in my neighborhood, then it affects me! And that's the only way we can win major battles."

Margaret takes issues that negatively affect any of the area's eight blocks very personally; "it affects me." Being part of a larger organization is necessary to generate visibility and political impact, especially when it comes to "win[ning] major battles." Margaret here refers to her previous experiences of losing zoning-related fights as a very small and informally organized group of neighbors, compared with winning similar cases at a later point in time when she had the backing of her neighborhood association. At the time of my research, the biggest institutional success that can be traced back directly to members of the Spaulding Square neighborhood association was the passage of a law by the California legislature in 1996 that restricts street prostitution.

While it would be incorrect to say that Spaulding Square has become a walking-distance neighborhood simply because of its status as an organized and historic neighborhood, there is no doubt that a certain degree of identification, and certain patterns of interaction and relationships, emanate from Spaulding Square's history, architecture, and formal social organization. Neighborhood organization membership was formally marked through the regular distribution of a newsletter and the collection of a yearly fee from about 90 percent of all local households. Additionally, many residents supported the association's social and organizational activities through donations of money, goods, skills, connections, and time, thus types of capital that promise success (Kilburn and Maume, 2000; Logan and Molotch, 1987, p. 134 f.). Since all of the association's activities required and promoted a wealth of social contacts among residents, it is difficult to separate the institutional neighborhood from a more informal multiblock community.

In contrast, no comparable organization could be found in Melrose, an area that does not even have an agreed-upon name. The socially more diverse Melrose residents did not share an understanding of a clearly designated area as their local community, even though many had mapped out walking distance neighborhoods for their personal use. While I observed a certain degree of solidarity and appreciation of differences on the block level, the residents' larger communal orientations typically aligned with their memberships in cultural enclaves. The terms Melrose residents used to describe their home territory included "Jewish neighborhood," "working class neighborhood," "middle class area," "family neighborhood," "artistic neighborhood," and simply "mixed area." In almost all cases, the exact boundaries of the described area were left implicit or they changed from one situation to the next. In using these descriptions, locals emphasized whatever social characteristic they noticed and probably identified with the most (Hunter, 1974, p. 179). In sum, Melrose residents' personal use and views of their walking distance neighborhoods did not lead to sustained social organization.

ENCLAVES: MEMBERSHIP BENEFITS AND SYMBOLIC RITUALS

Studies of enclaves, especially ethnic enclaves, are an important domain within urban and community sociology (e.g., Chiswick and Miller, 2005; Light, 2004; Logan and Alba,

2002). Following Abrahamson's definition (2006, p. 2), I apply the term "enclave" broadly to any intentional cluster of residents who share a significant social status or identity, be it race, ethnicity, nationality, wealth, occupation, sexuality, religion, or lifestyle (e.g., Lloyd, 2004). Enclaves are geographically anchored peer communities that typically feature a concentration of businesses and services catering to members' special needs and wants.

Many previous studies emphasize that enclaves provide economically important resources for their constituency. In fact, some locally concentrated niche industries, ranging from mining to entertainment, can generate and sustain their own peer communities. Enclaves also tend to encompass collective representations, such as names, landmarks, and celebrations that symbolize their members' identities and cultures. Furthermore, enclaves provide considerable psychological and emotional benefits. As Abrahamson (2006, p. 12) notes, by normalizing their master status, enclaves enable members to cultivate and express their other roles and interests, thus allowing them to be recognized as unique individuals rather than stereotypical representatives of their groups. Enclaves thus support both collective and individual identities.

Like many metropolitan areas, the Hollywood section of Los Angeles is home to a good number and diversity of such enclaves. Many Hollywood enclaves have become a regional, national, or even international magnet for their following. At least six enclaves can be identified within a one mile radius of the two researched neighborhoods. "Fairfax" denotes a concentration of European Jewish immigrants who arrived pre and post World War II; "West Hollywood" or "Boy's Town" are common names for a large and well-known gay and lesbian enclave; "La Brea" or "Beverly" are used to refer to the quickly growing Hollywood niche for Orthodox Jews; "Little Moscow" is frequently heard in reference to the large number of recent Eastern European immigrants in the area; "Melrose" is often used by singles and aspiring artists to geographically and symbolically locate their position; and "entertainment industry" vaguely refers to the remaining studios and post-production businesses that have drawn successful artists and industry professionals to parts of Hollywood. Additionally, since the late 1990s, skyrocketing home prices have resulted in a sharp increase of wealthier and more status-oriented residents in Spaulding Square and other appealing pockets of Hollywood. Their presence begins to attract Beverly Hills-type businesses and services that cater to upper-class tastes and wallets. These enclaves are surrounded by several others, including some ethnic communities, at a slightly greater distance.

Melrose and Spaulding Square residents expressed their affiliation with a larger enclave through sentiments, spatial and social routines, and involvement in collective events. In the following, I briefly focus on two characteristics of enclaves that were especially noticeable in my research: personal benefits of membership and residents' participation in symbolic rituals.

Membership Benefits. On a practical level, members of all enclaves could be observed frequenting specialized businesses and services that met their needs and desires, such as places of worship, education, and entertainment as well as specialty food and clothing stores. Clearly, enclave members practically benefited from finding supplies for their lifestyles so close to home. Interestingly, residents also expressed enclave memberships and affiliations while pursuing more universal daily needs. Many informants of both

neighborhoods consciously chose which of the four nearby Ralph's supermarkets they frequented—nicknames included Rock'n'Roll Ralph's, Russian Ralph's, Jewish Ralph's, and Nice Ralph's—and they offered cultural rationalizations for their preferences. I often observed residents of both areas traveling an extra mile or two to use a particular gas station or dry cleaner, or even a particular Starbucks or Kinko's, that they felt best corresponded with their cultural niche.

Of all social groups interviewed, members of the gay/lesbian and the Jewish Orthodox communities (see, for instance, Rivlin, 1987) most consciously affiliated with their respective enclaves. For some gay and lesbian residents, the symbolic significance and emotional comfort of their peer community rivaled its practical functions. A relatively high level of practical detachment was typical for those gays and lesbians in Spaulding Square who had families and pursued stable careers. In comparison, the younger, less economically stable, and predominantly single gays and lesbians of the Melrose area tended to take greater advantage of the available goods, services, and social opportunities.

However, in spite of their varying practical participation, living in spatial proximity to their peers seemed meaningful for all interviewees who self-identified as gay or lesbian. Six of seven such informants stated that living in or near West Hollywood is essential to them. Consider, for instance, the answer I received from Jay, a Spaulding Square dancer and choreographer in his forties, to my question whether living in West Hollywood was important to him.

> Yes, it is, and it has always been that way! I know there is [sic] a lot of people who don't want to, it's like living in the gay ghetto! For me, it is so important that I live in it or right next to it. That's a definite! Knowing that there is quite a big gay community, lots of them, it's a great sense of security for me.

Living near a critical mass of peers instills in Jay a "sense of security" and emotional comfort, despite the dangers of becoming ghettoized. Jay's interview delivered the impression that the proximity of a supportive community of peers is even more critical than convenient access to specialized goods and services. This finding brings to mind Gardner's (1994) investigation of the "kinship claims" gay men employ when interacting with strangers in their enclaves while putting faith into the imagined acceptance, tolerance, and support of their peers. In short, for my gay and lesbian informants, as for many others whom I interviewed, their membership in a locally grounded community of peers provided significant practical and emotional benefits. These subcultural rewards render enclaves a meaningful unit in the hierarchy of urban communities.

Symbolic Rituals. Despite huge differences in content, there were many similarities in how members of various enclaves expressed their group affiliation and identity through collective events and symbolic rituals. While the Melrose Hasidim were the only group to always formally signal their membership through dress and accessories, associates of many other groups frequently used clothing items and symbols to publicly express their affiliation. All groups featured holidays, festivals, and ceremonies in which residents of both neighborhoods participated on a more or less regular basis.

For instance, during the seven-day holiday of Succoth, most Hasidic households in Melrose featured Succas, temporary wooden huts in which the men eat all their meals,

in yards or driveways. For gays and lesbians, events like the yearly gay pride parade or the festive homecoming ceremony of the California AIDS Ride, a large fundraising event, offered opportunities to publicly express and affirm one's identity. Other peer communities have their own local landmarks and rituals. A neighborhood park located between the two research areas is fully in the hands of Eastern European immigrants and their families who, on weekends, come here by the hundreds to socialize and play. A final example is the yearly Academy Awards Ceremony, which is of special importance to the many aspiring and established members of the entertainment industry and was locally marked by parties and a general sense of excitement.

In sum, each local enclave featured its own name, symbols, landmarks, and ritual events that publicly cemented its presence and structured the lives of members in varying degrees. All identified enclaves transcended the two small study areas yet they were clearly anchored in the spatial environment, thus constituting a fourth nested layer of urban community.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

I have described characteristics of four layers of community that can be differentiated in many urban contexts. Variations of two of them, walking distance neighborhoods and enclaves, are commonly identified and investigated by scholars in our field. One problem with walking distance neighborhoods is that, unless they are institutionalized, their boundaries are difficult to determine and may vary considerably among residents. The two smaller zones, microsettings and street blocks, rarely surface as independent units of analysis in current community research. The significance of street blocks has been noted and conceptualized more consistently in the past compared with the importance of microsettings. The scarcity of contemporary research on the two small zones of community is surprising because they are easily noticed when using qualitative research methods and a theoretical framework that takes members' meanings into consideration. Microsettings in particular shape the everyday lives of urban residents in significant ways, practically, emotionally, and socially. Previous models of community hierarchies have established the existence of multiple communal layers in the urban realm yet they have not linked the places and dimensions of community pinpointed in this article. Other findings of my research that were also discussed include the distinction between proactive and reactive forms of neighborly interaction, the significance of dogs for neighborhood-level interaction and integration, and the emotional benefits enclaves deliver to their members in addition to practical advantages.

DISCUSSION

Each nested layer of community exhibits distinct characteristics across several dimensions and was thus discussed separately. But what can be noted regarding the connections between them? The four zones do not operate in isolation yet reference and shape each other in systematic ways. It is crucial to note that not every participant in my study possessed four equally well-defined layers of community. My respondents greatly varied in their commitment to the various communities, and they exhibited differences regarding the perceived order of importance. Some interviewees were not closely attached to

the smaller communal zones yet strongly identified with their neighborhood and enclave, whereas others did not think of any area beyond their block as a meaningful place.

Interestingly, I was able to make out a certain balance, whether intentional or not, in many individual cases. When a resident was strongly invested in one of the zones, the other local communities tended to take on less significance and distinction. For instance, the importance of living in an enclave seemed amplified by the absence of strong connections in the microsetting, street block, or walking distance neighborhood. Conversely, the existence of close social ties in the two small communal zones appeared to coincide with little interest in cultivating relationships within the larger neighborhood or enclave. Generally speaking, smaller communities dominate larger ones: the presence of a strong block community seems to lessen a local's interest in the larger walking-distance neighborhood, and the presence of a close-knit microsetting can diminish one's need for inclusion in the street block or in the walking distance neighborhood.

This trend toward a concentration of energies at one or two place levels is consistent with Guest and Wierzbicki's (1999) finding that since approximately the 1970s, people are increasingly specializing in either neighborhood or nonneighborhood (long distance) social ties, and that local and nonlocal social ties are actively competing with each other. My research also anecdotally confirms Guest and Wierzbicki's (1999) findings that certain social groups orient more closely toward smaller units of community, for instance seniors and people who spend their daily lives at home, and, to a lesser extent, families with many children and the least educated.

Overall, these comments suggest that a person's investment in communal social relationships and events can be saturated, or that interest in local community is a depletable resource. Once locals have forged meaningful bonds with others in one or two zones of community, they are not as driven to seek further integration beyond the contacts and relationships they have already established. The various zones appear to be functionally equivalent in absorbing communal sentiments and interpersonal investments. A more thorough investigation of this balancing hypothesis is clearly warranted and promises to deliver new insights into the social psychological processes of community formation and development.

How might urban and community scholars benefit from a new conceptual model of community hierarchy that is grounded in the everyday experiences of practitioners? A phenomenologically sensitized understanding of the practices, feelings, and interactions that characterize urban places and communities can help fine-tune the framing and examination of a number of important topics, such as segregation and social distances, crime/disorder and fear of crime, gentrification and preservation, community and neighborhood effects, as well as community sustainability and resilience. The new model might also be suited to inform applied research and policy efforts in areas such as community assessment, urban planning, transportation, and disaster preparation. In sum, the suggested matrix of community layers and dimensions captures and preserves the complexities of everyday life in the urban realm. In proposing new links between environment, social structures, and interaction it has theoretical and methodological relevance, and it facilitates a deeper understanding of contemporary social life and society.

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Notes

[1] My research was part of a team investigation of five Hollywood neighborhoods that included a poor immigrant community, a mixed-race working class neighborhood, a culturally heterogeneous middle-class area, a gentrified historic neighborhood, and an affluent section of the Hollywood Hills. The research project entitled "Fear of Crime, Perception of Disorder, and Community Policing in Hollywood" was funded by the National Institute of Justice under grant number 95-IJ-CX-0078. Jack Katz was the Principal Investigator and Peter Ibarra was the third member of the research team. My coinvestigators and I did not rely on external or institutional definitions of these neighborhoods but drew on fieldwork and interviews to discover how local residents viewed their environments, and how they defined and formed communities. While we did not change the existing names and major cross streets of our research areas, the identities of all individuals as well as the names of smaller streets and businesses have been altered.

[2] Already in 1950, Festinger, Schachter, and Back described an equivalent of microsettings which they called "small face-to-face social groups." The authors' major findings are discussed in the article. In suburban Levittown, Gans (1967, p. 280ff.) found "subblocks," described as "the sector of adjacent houses facing each other on the street, where most neighbor visiting and mutual help takes place" to be a significant social unit yet difficult to define in physical terms. In their study of a rural mobile home park, MacTavish and Salomon (2001; p. 499) found that the park exhibited "a fragmented mosaic of small pockets of neighboring" rather than a functioning community. The authors provide examples of residents' connections with adjacent neighbors yet they do not consider such areas of localized interaction to be sufficiently resilient to speak of them as a community.

Shuval (1962) first used the concept of "microneighborhoods" in her study of the assimilation and segregation patterns of urban immigrants in Israel. She defined the simplest form of a microneighborhood as consisting of three households, the one of the respondent plus its two closest neighbors, yet she notes that the definition could easily be expanded to accommodate a larger number of adjacent households. While interesting, Shuval's definition of micro-neighborhoods does not take the residents' daily lives into account. Warren (1978, p. 310) also refers to microneighborhoods, or "the most immediate dwelling units accessible to an individual," yet his actual investigation of neighborhood types is based on elementary school districts.

Campbell, Lee, and Miller (Campbell and Lee, 1990; Lee and Campbell, 1999; Lee, Campbell, and Miller, 1991) concentrated their survey research on partial street blocks or "microneighborhoods," which were defined as groups of ten households, five adjacent units on each side of a street. Their conception of microneighborhoods is very relevant yet somewhat mechanical since it was determined in advance and independent of residents' views and actions. Woldoff's (2002) article on neighborhood attachment is based on the same Nashville dataset used by Campbell, Lee, and Miller. Kirschenbaum (2004, p. 107) uses the concept "micro-neighborhood networks" to describe one type of social network that can generate community during times of disasters. He speaks of "close physical proximity" and a high "probability of interaction" yet does not offer a clear definition of the concept.

Previous research on neighboring in apartment buildings tends to focus on large complexes; for instance, multiple building estates (Parker, 1983), or urban high-rise buildings with hundreds or even thousands of units (McGahan, 1972; Slovak, 1986; Zito, 1974). The authors of two studies found that building floors, and even smaller sections such as "the units on my side of the elevator" (Zito, 1974) can become meaningful social sites for residents, yet they do not offer concepts for these places.

[3] Building on Bursik and Grasmick's (1993) conception of the parochial sphere as an independent level of social control, Taylor (1997, p. 116ff.) asserts that the street block acts as an autonomous "behavior setting" that affects residents' feelings of safety and responsibility, and the amount of informal social control they exercise. Taylor, Gottfredsen, and Brower (1984) used street block level characteristics to successfully predict variations in crime and fear-of-crime levels. In their landmark study of the links of collective efficacy with crime and disorder, Sampson and Raudenbush (1999) treated the two sides of a street block as separate "face blocks."

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