

prevent crime by strengthening community and reducing opportunities for criminal behavior. First, watch meetings are expected to strengthen community by giving residents additional opportunities for social interaction, which in turn should increase information exchange, familiarity, and social cohesion among neighbors. These social processes are considered important prerequisites for creating a socially organized community whose citizens exercise informal social control over one another through surveillance, reprimands, warnings, and behavioral interventions. In addition to increasing social contact, watch groups are expected to influence participants' knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors regarding the role of ordinary citizens in maintaining public safety. Second, if watch groups are able to produce more vigilance regarding suspicious or criminal activity, then opportunities to commit crime should be reduced. Specifically, whether through active citizen patrols or heightened natural surveillance, additional "eyes and ears" on the street (followed by quick responses from citizens and police in cases of criminal activity) are presumed to increase the chances that offenders will be detected and apprehended. These same mechanisms—social organization and reduced opportunity for criminal behavior—are expected to reduce fear of crime. Watch programs are hypothesized to reduce residents' fear of crime either by reducing levels of crime and disorder or by increasing familiarity, trust, support, and feelings of collective efficacy among neighbors, or both.

Research on the success of Neighborhood Watch has shown mixed results. Some studies have reported that watch programs are associated with reductions in property crimes (burglary and larceny), but outcomes such as reductions in fear or strengthening of community bonds have not been shown in controlled studies. Other research suggests that communities exhibiting strong feelings of "collective efficacy" have lower crime rates, but whether such feelings can be implanted in neighborhoods where those feelings are naturally weak remains unclear. More research is needed to clarify the conditions under which watch programs strengthen community and the factors that contribute to their success.

A fundamental challenge for watch programs is finding ways to reach the high-crime neighborhoods that could benefit most by participating in crime prevention programs. The assumption that residents have the desire or ability to identify "suspicious persons" and report them to the police is unreasonable in neighborhoods characterized by anonymity and distrust, high levels of violence and fear, and deep-seated hostility

toward the police. Implanting middle-class norms about "neighboring" and reporting suspicious acts has been a very difficult task, as reflected in low participation rates in such activities. However, some watch groups have been able to adapt to local conditions and move beyond surveillance activities to address a wide range of neighborhood problems. Sustainable watch groups are those that serve as a platform for organizing community residents around diverse issues and leveraging resources from other agencies and organizations as needed.

—Dennis P. Rosenbaum

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■ ■ NEIGHBORHOODS

A neighborhood is a subsection of a larger community—a collection of people and institutions occupying a spatially defined area influenced by ecological, cultural, and sometimes political forces. A local community is best thought of not as a single entity, but rather as a hierarchy of progressively more inclusive residential groupings. In this sense, neighborhoods are ecological units nested in successively larger communities. In practice, most social scientists rely on "statistical" neighborhoods that depend on geographic boundaries defined by the U.S. Census Bureau (census tracts, block groups) or other administrative agencies (school districts, police districts). Although administratively defined units such as census tracts and block groups are



American and British Ideas of Being Neighborly

The following extract of text is from British writer Francis Trollope's *Domestic Manners of the Americans*, a report of her life in the United States from 1827 to 1831. Putting aside her condescending tone, one can easily see the different attitudes the British and Americans had about being friendly neighbors.

The extraordinary familiarity of our poor neighbors startled us at first, and we hardly knew how to receive their uncouth advances, or what was expected of us in return; however, it sometimes produced very laughable scenes. Upon one occasion two of my children set off upon an exploring walk up the hills; they were absent rather longer than we expected, and the rest of our party determined upon going out to meet them; we knew the direction they had taken, but thought it would be as well to enquire at a little public-house at the bottom of the hill, if such a pair had been seen to pass. A woman, whose appearance more resembled a Covent Garden market-woman than any thing else I can remember, came out and answered my question with the most jovial good humour in the affirmative, and prepared to join us in our search. Her look, her voice, her manner, were so exceedingly coarse and vehement, that she almost frightened me; she passed her arm within mine, and to the inexpressible amusement of my young people, she dragged me on, talking and questioning me without ceasing. She lived a short distance from us, and I am sure intended to be a very good neighbor; but her violent intimacy made me dread to pass her door; my children, including my sons, she always addressed by their Christian names, excepting when she substituted the word "honey;" this familiarity of address, however, I afterwards found was universal throughout all ranks in the United States.

Source: Trollope, Fanny. (1984). *Domestic Manners of the Americans*. London: Alan Sutton Publishing, pp. 70-71. (Originally published in 1832)

reasonably consistent with the notion of overlapping and nested ecological structures, they offer imperfect definitions of neighborhoods for research and policy.

VARIATIONS IN NEIGHBORHOODS

Despite these problems in operational definition, research has consistently shown that social characteristics vary widely and systematically across neighborhoods along dimensions of socioeconomic status (poverty, wealth, occupational attainment), family structure and life cycle (female-headed households, child density), residential stability (homeownership and tenure), and racial or ethnic composition (racial segregation). Stratification by place is deep and pervasive.

The motivation to understand the consequences of neighborhood stratification has generated a multidisciplinary research agenda with a strong focus on child and adolescent development. Spurred in large part by William Julius Wilson's seminal book *The Truly Disadvantaged*

(1987), modern neighborhood research has attended primarily to socioeconomic dimensions of neighborhood disadvantage, especially the geographic isolation of poor, African American, and single-parent families with children. The range of child and adolescent outcomes associated with concentrated disadvantage is wide and includes infant mortality, low birth weight, teenage child bearing, dropping out of high school, child maltreatment, and adolescent delinquency. There is also independent evidence that a number of health-related indicators cluster spatially, including homicide, infant mortality, low birth weight, accidental injury, and suicide. The weight of evidence thus suggests that there are geographic "hot spots" for crime and problem-related behaviors, and that such hot spots are characterized by the concentration of multiple forms of disadvantage.

To a lesser extent, the social-ecological literature has considered aspects of neighborhood differentia-

tion other than concentrated disadvantage, including life-cycle status, residential stability, homeownership, density, and ethnic heterogeneity. The evidence for these factors is more mixed, especially for population density and ethnic heterogeneity. Perhaps the most extensive area of inquiry after disadvantage concerns residential stability and homeownership. Although the evidence here is also mixed, residential instability and low rates of homeownership are durable correlates of many problem behaviors. A more recent but understudied object of inquiry is concentrated affluence. Some have argued that it is the positive influence of concentrated socioeconomic resources, rather than the presence of low-income neighbors, that matters most for adolescent behaviors and in predicting the well-being of neighborhoods.

FACTS ABOUT NEIGHBORHOODS

In short, empirical research has established a reasonably consistent set of neighborhood facts. First, there is

considerable social inequality between neighborhoods in terms of socioeconomic and racial segregation. There is strong evidence of the connection of concentrated disadvantage with the geographic isolation of African Americans. Second, a number of social problems tend to come bundled together at the neighborhood level, including, but not limited to, crime, adolescent delinquency, social and physical disorder, low birth weight, infant mortality, school dropout, and child maltreatment.

Third, these two sets of clusters are themselves related—neighborhood predictors common to many child and adolescent outcomes include the concentration of poverty, racial isolation, single-parent families, and rates of homeownership and length of tenure. Fourth, empirical results have not varied much with the operational unit of analysis. The place stratification of local communities in American society by factors such as social class, race, and family status is a robust phenomenon that emerges at multiple levels of geography, whether these are local community areas, census tracts, or other administratively defined “neighborhood” units. Fifth, the ecological concentration of poverty appears to have increased significantly during recent decades, as has the concentration of affluence at the upper end of the income scale. Neighborhoods and residential differentiation thus remain persistent in American society. The cumulative facts on neighborhood differentiation yield a potentially important clue in thinking about the mechanisms by which neighborhoods matter most: If numerous and seemingly disparate outcomes are linked together empirically across neighborhoods and are predicted by similar structural characteristics, there may be common underlying processes at work.

BEYOND POVERTY: SOCIAL PROCESSES AND MECHANISMS

During the 1990s, a number of scholars moved beyond the traditional focus on concentrated poverty and began to theorize explicitly and measure directly how neighborhood social processes bear on the well-being of children, adolescents, and adults alike. Unlike the more static features of sociodemographic composition in the form of race or class position, social processes and mechanisms provide accounts of *how* neighborhoods bring about a change in a given phenomenon of interest. Although concern with neighborhood mechanisms goes back at least to the early founding of the discipline of sociology, only recently has there been a concerted

attempt to measure the social-interactive and institutional dimensions that might explain how neighborhood effects are transmitted. This body of research has identified and examined at least four classes of mechanisms.

Social Ties and Interaction

One of the driving forces behind much of the research on neighborhood mechanisms has been the concept of social capital, which is generally understood as a resource that is realized through social relationships. Examples include the presence of local friendship and kinship ties, the density of acquaintanceship among neighbors, and the frequency of local social interaction.

Norms and Collective Efficacy

Although the density of social ties is important, the willingness of residents to intervene on behalf of the community may depend, in larger part, on conditions of mutual trust and shared expectations among residents. People are unlikely to intervene in a neighborhood context where the rules are unclear and people mistrust or fear one another. It is the linkage of mutual trust and the shared willingness to intervene for the public good that captures the neighborhood context of what has been called “collective efficacy.” Components of collective efficacy include shared expectations for social control, a willingness to help neighbors, and the collective monitoring of children.

Institutional Resources

Institutional resources are the quality, quantity, and diversity of institutions in the community, especially those that address the needs of children and teenagers. Examples include libraries, schools and other learning centers, child care, organized social and recreational activities, medical facilities, family support centers, and employment opportunities. In practice, empirical measures have been limited to the presence of neighborhood institutions based on survey reports and archival records.

Routine Activities

A concern for institutions suggests a fourth, often overlooked factor in discussions of neighborhood effects—how land-use patterns and the ecological distributions of daily routine activities bear on children’s well-being. The location of schools, the mix of residential with

commercial land use (strip malls, bars), public transportation nodes, and large flows of nighttime visitors, for example, are relevant to organizing how and when children come into contact with other peers, adults, and nonresident activity. Like studies of institutions, however, direct measures of social activity patterns are mostly absent. Studies of routine activities typically measure types of land use in the neighborhood, such as the presence of schools, stores and shopping malls, motels and hotels, vacant lots, bars, restaurants, gas stations, industrial units, and multifamily residential units.

SOCIAL MECHANISMS AND OUTCOMES

To date, most research on neighborhood interactional and institutional processes has focused on crime outcomes, especially police records of homicide, robbery, and stranger assault, and survey reports of violence and property victimization. Crime rates tend to be higher in areas characterized by low collective efficacy, depleted institutional resources, and routine activity patterns linked to mixed land use and proximity to commercial districts. These patterns explain in part the connection of concentrated disadvantage with high crime.

There is also evidence suggesting that strong social ties may not be as critical for child well-being and general safety as the shared expectation that neighbors will intervene on behalf of the neighborhood. Strong ties may impede efforts to establish social control, as when dense local ties foster the growth of gang-related networks. Moreover, "weak ties"—less intimate connections between people based on more infrequent social interaction—may be essential for establishing social resources, such as job referrals, because they integrate the community by bringing together otherwise disconnected subgroups.

Two general research findings support this line of thinking. First, some studies have shown that the association of ties with crime is largely mediated by informal social control and social cohesion. Second, other studies have qualified the relationship between ties and crime by suggesting that crime is related only to certain patterns of neighborhood ties and social interaction, such as social ties among women or moderate frequency of social interaction among neighbors. These findings suggest that the activation of social ties to achieve shared expectations for action, or the construct of collective efficacy, may be the more critical ingredient for understanding neighborhood crime and general aspects of community well-being.

A growing number of studies have expanded the scope of neighborhood inquiry to consider mental-health outcomes such as depression and psychological distress. Overall, it appears that concentrated poverty, disorder, and low neighborhood cohesion are linked to greater mental distress, risk taking, deviant peer affiliation among adolescents, and indicators of high-risk sex. Some studies show that peer-group factors (deviant attitudes) mediate the effect of neighborhood disadvantage on teenage behaviors.

Although a number of studies show that social and institutional processes mediate the association of neighborhood structural factors with crime and other aspects of well-being, in many cases neighborhood processes do not explain all or even most of the traditional correlations. Factors such as concentrated disadvantage, affluence, and stability remain direct predictors of many outcomes. Moreover, neighborhood mechanisms are not produced in a vacuum: some social processes, particularly those related to the idea of collective efficacy, appear to emerge mainly in environments with a sufficient endowment of socioeconomic resources and residential stability.

Another stream of research has focused on social and physical disorder, also known as neighborhood incivilities. Much of the interest in disorder was stimulated by the theory of "broken windows," which suggests that physical signs of disorder—such as broken windows, public drinking, and graffiti—signal the unwillingness of residents to confront strangers, intervene in a crime, or call the police. The evidence suggests that the direct link between disorder and crime is not as strong as the broken-windows theory holds, and that disorder is predicted by the same characteristics as crime itself, inducing a spurious relationship. This does not necessarily mean that disorder is irrelevant. Because signs of disorder are stark visual reminders of neighborhood deterioration, they may trigger institutional disinvestment, out-migration, and a general malaise among residents.

SPATIAL DYNAMICS OF NEIGHBORHOODS

Another trend in neighborhood research is the expansion of community context to include nearby areas outside the formal boundaries of a given neighborhood, however defined. The general idea is that social behavior is influenced not only by what happens in people's immediate neighborhoods, but also by what happens in surrounding areas. For example, the bene-

fits of collective efficacy may accrue not just to the residents of a particular neighborhood, but potentially to residents in adjacent areas as well. Parents who send their child to play with friends in a nearby neighborhood, where residents tend to engage in collective supervision and monitoring, derive a spatial advantage much in the same way that they would benefit from living next to a park or a good school. By contrast, neighborhoods with minimal expectations for social control and sparse interfamily exchange produce spatial disadvantages for parents and children who live in adjoining areas. In this sense, neighborhoods are subject to diffusion or contagious-like processes that traverse internally defined boundaries.

The spatial framework has important implications for understanding residential stratification by race in American society. If African American neighborhoods are embedded in more disadvantaged city environments than are similarly endowed white neighborhoods, then the consequences of racial segregation may be greater and more systemic than previously thought. In other words, even if white and black neighborhoods are comparable internally on some measure of resources (for example, income), the evidence on spatial inequality has shown that white neighborhoods are nonetheless proximate to greater resources than similarly endowed black neighborhoods.

METHODOLOGICAL CHALLENGES

Despite the progress that has been made, there remain a daunting number of complex challenges to assessing neighborhood effects. Methodological issues such as the differential selection of individuals into communities, indirect pathways of neighborhood effects, measurement error in assessing social processes, and simultaneity bias (what is causing what?) represent serious obstacles to drawing definitive conclusions about the explanatory role of neighborhood social context. Determining the exact causal effect of neighborhoods is thus problematic from a methodological standpoint.

For this reason, a recent trend in neighborhood effects research has been to examine experimental studies where families have been randomly allocated to different environments through government-sponsored housing programs. Research of this type has found that the adolescents and their primary caretakers who relocated to higher-income neighborhoods, based on the random allocation of housing vouchers, did much better in terms of violent crime and various indicators of

physical and mental health. This finding supports the notion that neighborhoods have a causal effect on individuals.

IMPLICATIONS

There is little doubt that numerous problems hinder the study of neighborhood effects. Nonetheless, the evidence is extensive and consistent on the ecological differentiation of American cities along socioeconomic and racial lines, which in turn corresponds to the spatial differentiation of neighborhoods by multiple child, adolescent, and adult behaviors. These conditions are interrelated and appear to vary in systematic and theoretically meaningful ways with hypothesized social mechanisms such as collective efficacy, social ties, institutional resources, routine activity and land-use patterns, and perceived disorder. These and other neighborhood-level mechanisms can be measured reliably with survey, observational, and archival approaches. Another stable finding is that extralocal neighborhood mechanisms appear with considerable strength, suggesting that spatial externalities operate above and beyond the internal neighborhood characteristics of traditional concern. Despite the increasing influence of globalization and the Internet society, neighborhoods and spatial processes thus remain important for understanding the stratification of life chances in the United States.

—Robert J. Sampson

See also CITIES, INNER

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■ NEIGHBORING

The impact of new information and communication technologies (ICTs), such as the Internet, on place-based social relations is a contentious debate in the study of community. For the most part, this debate has centered on two opposing viewpoints. On the one hand, some argue that the Internet and related technologies contribute to an incomplete lifestyle, which they see as a consequence of turning away from in-person contacts. From this perspective, it is argued that new ICTs advance the home as a center for services and social interaction, which encourages home-centeredness and increased privatization, isolating people in their homes and reducing the opportunity and the need for public participation. Others argue that Internet use has led to the creation of a whole new type of community, the “virtual community.” Virtual communities are thought to connect people in diverse, supportive social relations that are free from the constraints of geography. If virtual communities proliferate and people access all of their supportive “neighborly” interactions online, then place-based social ties may no longer be important. The common thread in this utopian-dystopian debate is the argument for a decline in neighboring. Local place-based interactions are lost through isolation in the home or are replaced by social ties that are more easily maintained online. Recently, a third perspective has emerged that blends the utopian and dystopian arguments. This perspective argues that new ICTs may actually encourage neighborhood involvement.

THE LOSS OF PLACE-BASED COMMUNITY RELATIONS

In a situation where work, leisure, and social ties can all be maintained online, there is a fear that neighboring and other forms of in-person contact will decline. Does the rise of the information age lead to a decline of community? In this context, “community” refers to “neighborhood,” but for most people the neighborhood setting does not represent the major source of their supportive social ties. Most social support and much of the information and resources that people require to function in their day-to-day lives come from relationships outside the local setting. Long before the creation of the Internet, technological achievements such as the automobile and the telephone facilitated the formation and maintenance of social ties at a distance. It has been a long time since people belonged to homogeneous, place-based communities. New technologies that reduce the friction of space by making communication more affordable and more efficient can be viewed as a progression in this established trend toward the decentralization of social ties.

Technological change and the decentralization of community have long been a source of concern for those fearing a loss of community and neighborhood relations. In the late 1800s, French sociologist Émile Durkheim (1858–1917) wrote about an increasingly complex division of labor, the resulting industrialism and urbanization, and the potential for a loss of community in terms of its values and support structure. Durkheim argued that society was moving away from community based on common values and shared understanding toward one based on impersonal bureaucratic control. Around the same time, the French sociologist Ferdinand Tönnies (1855–1936) stated that the transformation away from a folk-type society and toward a capitalist society would result in social relations that were formal, impersonal, and individualistic in nature.

In twentieth-century America, these same concerns were echoed in response to the growth of large cities. American sociologist Louis Wirth (1897–1952) believed that urbanites were characterized by a blasé attitude, and their interpersonal relations were impersonal, superficial, and transitory. In the urban setting, “bonds of kinship, neighborliness, and sentiments arising out of living together for generations under a common folk tradition” were said to be “absent or, at best, relatively weak in an aggregate” (Wirth 1938, p. 11). Following World War II, sociologists expressed similar concerns about a new form of urban setting, the suburb.