

**From Little Boxes to Loosely-Bounded Networks:  
The Privatization and Domestication of Community**

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## **FROM LITTLE BOXES TO LOOSELY BOUNDED NETWORKS: THE PRIVATIZATION AND DOMESTICATION OF COMMUNITY**

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### **Life is a Network**

It became clear to me growing up in New York City in the 1950s that gangs as corporate entities did not exist. It was impossible to draw up a membership list. It was as futile to try to learn the borders of each gang's turf as it is to draw a map showing precise ethnic boundaries in eastern Europe (Magocsi 1993). My New York consisted of unbounded networks of friends, and friends of friends. When a fight was coming up, groups of friends would call each other and come together to be a gang for that night. On another night, when other friends would call, many of some of the same teens would become members of another gang. Much of organized crime operates in the same way, be it a Colombian or Chinese drug cartel, the Cosa Nostra, or the Moscow mafia (1993). So do communities and, in practice, many organizations (Burt 1992).

My New York childhood prepared me for my life's work: showing how communities, organizations, cities and societies are organized as networks. When I arrived at graduate school, sociology was full of concern about the supposed loss of community in newly-developing suburbs and "decaying" inner cities. Indeed, the same politicians and pundits continue to assert this, although now cyberspace has replaced suburbia as a community-destroyer.

Fortunately, social network analysis was also in the air at Harvard in the 1960s. The essence of social network analysis is that it does not assume that the world is always composed of normatively-guided individuals aggregated into bounded groups. Rather, it starts with a set of *nodes* (which could be persons, organizations, states, etc.) and a set of *ties* that connect some or all of these nodes. Social network analysis conceives of social structure as the patterned organization of these network members and their relationships. Social network analysts work at describing underlying patterns of social structure, explaining the impact of such patterns on behavior and attitudes (Wellman 1988). Hence the network approach allows analysts to go looking for social relationships that transcend groups. Indeed, a group is really a special form of a social network that is *densely-knit* (most nodes are directly connected) and *tightly-bounded* (most relations stay within the same subset of nodes).

The social network approach provides ways for analysts to think about social relationships that are neither groups nor isolated duets. Instead of an either/or distinction between group membership and social isolation, researchers can bring to bear in their analysis a set of structural variables, such as the density and clustering of a network, how tightly it is bounded, and whether it is diversified or constricted in its size and heterogeneity, how narrowly specialized or broadly multiplex are its relationships, and how indirect connections and positions in social networks affect behavior. For example, the fact that Person A and Person B interact may have to be interpreted in the light of the relationship of Person B to Person C. Thus thinking about relationships in social networks rather than in groups can allow analysts to take into account the contexts within which relationships operate.

Although all studies have to start somewhere with some populations, many social network analyses do not treat formal group boundaries as truly social boundaries, be they departments in organizations or officially-designated neighborhoods in cities. Instead they trace the social relationships of those they are studying, wherever these relationships go and whomever they are with. Only then do network analysts look to see if such relationships actually cross formal group boundaries. In this way, formal boundaries become important analytic variables rather than *a priori* analytic constraints. Just as a local area network is only one kind of a computer network, a group is only one kind of a social network. More precisely, a group is a social network whose ties are tightly-bounded within a delimited set and are densely-knit so that almost all network members are directly linked with each other. To be sure, there are densely-knit and tightly-bounded work groups and community groups. Yet there are other kinds of work and community networks whose relationships are sparsely-knit with only a minority of members of the

workplace or community directly connected with each other. These relationships tend to ramify out in many directions like an expanding spider's web rather than curling back on themselves into a densely-knit tangle.

For example, a bunch of people who hang out together — at work, in a café or on an internet discussion group — can be studied as either a group or a social network. Those who study them as groups assume that they know the membership and boundaries of the groups. They might ask how important each group is to its members, how the groups are governed and make decisions, and how the groups control members. Yet in all but laboratory situations researchers will be faced with the real-world problem that members are entering and leaving a group over time. By contrast, those who study such entities as social networks can treat their membership and boundaries as open questions. For example, frequent participation in a friendship circle might be treated as the basis for membership but so might be the indirect connections (and resource flows) that friends provide to others outside the circle. The pattern of relationships becomes a research question rather than a given (see Wellman 1988, 1997 for further discussion).

Once you adopt this perspective, then it is clear that communities, organizations and world-systems are social networks, and that many communities, organizations and political systems are the not dense, bounded groups that politicians and organizational executives insist they are (see the chapter by Bourque and Duchastel; see also Taub, et al. 1977). Analysts have shown whoever cared to look that life is full of networks, and tools such as *UCINet* (Borgatti, Everett and Freeman, 1994) have made it almost as easy to play with networks as it is for *SPSS* users to play with surveys of individuals. Although network analysts have often done *sheer* documentation — demonstrating the existence of networks — much of their research has been more than *mere* documentation. It has shown social scientists ways to shift away from thinking of social structure as nested in little boxes and away from seeing relationships as the product of internalized norms.

The social network approach does not preclude finding that communities are urban villages where everyone knows each other and provides abundant, broadly-based support, what Tönnies (1887) called *gemeinschaft*. Nor does it preclude discovering that organizations really function as Weberian hierarchical bureaucracies. But the social network approach allows the discovery of other forms of community — perhaps sparsely-knit and spatially-dispersed — and other forms of organization — perhaps loosely-coupled or virtual (Weick 1976). Indeed, it was through using the social network approach that analysts discovered that community had not disappeared. Rather it had moved out of its traditional neighborhood base as the constraints of space weakened. Contemporary Western communities rarely are tightly-bounded, densely-knit groups of broadly-based ties. They usually are loosely-bounded, sparsely-knit, ramifying networks of specialized ties (Wellman 1993). Hence analysts should find community wherever it exists: in neighborhoods, in family solidarities, or in networks that reach farther out and include many friends and acquaintances (Wellman 1979; Wellman and Leighton 1979; Fischer 1982).

In this chapter, I discuss the nature of contemporary communities and the implications of their nature for the privatization, specialization and loose coupling of community and organizations. I do this in the form of seven propositions about the network nature of contemporary community. Where examples are called for, I draw upon our research group's thirty years of experience in studying community and organizational networks in Toronto.

## **1. Community Ties are Narrow, Specialized Relationships, not Broadly Supportive.**

Both scholars and the public have traditionally thought of communities as composed of broadly-based relationships in which each community member felt securely able to obtain a wide variety of help. In Toronto we have studied *personal communities*, social networks defined from the standpoints of the Egos at their centers. We have found that most ties are specialized, with active personal community members usually supplying only a few dimensions of social support. For example, those network members who provide small services or emotional aid rarely provide large services, companionship or financial aid (Wellman, Carrington and Hall 1988; Wellman and Wortley 1989, 1990). Parents and adult children provide the widest range of support although they rarely supply sociable companionship. Accessible ties — people living or working near-by, or otherwise in frequent in-person or telecommunications contact — provide important goods and services (Wellman and Wortley 1990). The strength of ties is important, with socially-close voluntary and multiple-role ties providing high levels of support. Yet Granovetter (1973, 1982) has cogently argued the importance of weak ties for linking sparsely-knit communities and providing people with a wider range of information.

This means that people must maintain differentiated portfolios of ties to obtain a wide variety of resources. They can no longer assume that any or all of their relationships will help them, no matter what is the problem. In market terms, they must shop at specialized boutiques for needed resources instead of casually dropping in at a general store. They search for support in relationships which they work hard to maintain. We need to know what are the consequences for people of having such insecure sources of supply.

## **2. People are Not Wrapped Up in Traditional Densely-knit, Tightly-bounded Communities But are Floating in Sparsely-Knit, Loosely-Bounded, Frequently-Changing Networks.**

Scholars and the public have traditionally seen communities as densely-knit solidarities. Such communities tend to have tight boundaries so that relationships largely stay within the communities. Dense knit and tight boundaries make it easy for communities to control their members and coordinate their behavior, whether this be supplying aid to those in distress or punishing those who transgress.

In reality, personal communities are usually sparsely knit and loosely bounded. For example, the 0.33 density that we found in two Toronto studies means that only one-third of a person's active community members have active ties with each other. Moreover, these networks become even more sparsely-knit as people age and their networks get more complex: mean network density declined from 0.33 to 0.13 over a decade (Wellman, et al. 1997). Variation in the composition and structure of these community networks is more complex than the traditional Tönniesian dichotomy of communal versus contractual organization (Wellman and Potter 1999).

The complex and specialized nature of personal communities means that these are fragmented networks. People must actively maintain each supportive relationship rather than relying on solitary communities to do their maintenance work. Thus the kinship system does not supply much social support — extended kin rarely are supportive — but a more restricted set of ties with parents, children and siblings. The fragmentation, specialization and low density suggest that tie characteristics may be more important than network characteristics in the provision of social support. Yet the characteristics of community networks do have some effect, with the size, heterogeneity and density of networks related to the kinds of resources that flow through them (Frank and Wellman 1998; Wellman and Gulia 1999b). Emergent properties are alive and well and living in Toronto.

The population of community networks is not stable. Only 28% of Torontonians' intimate ties were still intimate a decade later. Thirty-six percent of the once-intimate ties became less active over a decade,

while the rest became very weak or disappeared. Although kinship is more stable, only 34% of intimate kinship ties remained intimate a decade later while another 28% continued as active, but not intimate, relationships (Wellman, et al. 1997).

It is not that people's communities are disintegrating, but that they are in flux. Rather than being locked into one social circle, each person has about 1,000 ties that ramify across changing, fragmented communities to connect them to the diverse resources of multiple social arenas (Kochen 1989). Indeed Stanley Milgram's (1967) and Harrison White's (1970) observations that the entire world is linked by paths of five or fewer indirect ties is the basis for a recent play (and subsequent movie) *Six Degrees of Separation* (Guare 1993). With sparsely-knit, fragmentary, loosely-bounded communities, it is possible to reach many people through even shorter paths. One consequence is that people must actively search their ramifying ties in unbounded networks to deal with their affairs instead of having to depend on the goodwill of a single, bounded community.

### **3. Communities have Moved Out of Neighborhoods to be Dispersed Networks that Continue to be Supportive and Sociable.**

As well as contemporary communities being fragmentary, sparsely-knit and loosely-bounded, they are no longer local groupings of neighbors and kin. The residents of developed societies usually know few neighbors, and most members of their personal communities live outside of their neighborhoods (Wellman 1990, 1992b). People easily maintain far-flung relationships by telecommunications (with telephones recently being joined by faxes, electronic mail and the Web) and transportation (based on cars, expressways and airplanes). In Toronto, being within an hour's drive or the local telephone zone is more important than being within a neighborhood's walking distance as the boundary for where face-to-face contact and social support start decreasing. A large minority of relationships extend even farther than the metropolitan area. This lack of local ties and the presence of community members living elsewhere weakens local commitment and encourages people to leave when conditions are bad rather than staying to improve things.

This is not to say that communities have totally cut their domestic roots. Even the most spatially liberated person cannot avoid neighbors. Local relationships are necessary for domestic safety, controlling actual land-use, and quickly getting goods and services, as Jane Jacobs (1961) has pointed out for contemporary North America, Vicente Espinoza for impoverished Chileans (1992, 1999) and Charles Tilly for preindustrial Europe (1973). But most neighborly relations have become voluntary relations, similar to friendship ties with the added bonus of quick access. It is only the less-mobile minority who neighbor because they must: children, women who stay home to raise children, the elderly, and the infirm. Indeed, when we interviewed Torontonians about their ties, only those women who were full-time homemakers and childrearers had many involuntary ties with members of their personal communities. Their neighbors (and fellow full-time childrearers) were like coworkers: people they did not necessarily like but depended on to share the tasks of raising children (Wellman 1985).

In saying that communities are not as local as they used to be, we need to avoid committing the pastoralist fallacy of thinking our cities and suburbs are inferior to the villages or pestilent cities of yore, with their pestilence, crime and insecurity. Moreover, preindustrial communities may never have been as locally-bounded as tradition has maintained. As Levine's chapter points out, the initial frame of reference may seriously affect the subsequent analysis. Whenever scholars have looked for non-local ties, they have found far-ranging networks. For example, radioactive analyses of obsidian have found Neolithic spear points and choppers more than one thousand miles from their origin (Dixon, Cann and Renfrew 1968). In historic times, Emmanuel LeRoy Ladurie (1975) has used Inquisition data to describe the far-flung relationships of Pyrenean villagers. The male shepherds were always moving about, following the flocks or going off to war. So were the soldiers in the *Return of Martin Guerre* (Davis 1983), returning to

their villages from distant medieval wars. The wanderings continue: Ladurie's *The Beggar and the Professor* (1997) shows in his biographies of the 16<sup>th</sup>-century Swiss family Platter, that the men made long journeys around Europe (Eastern as well as Western), with fluid networks and much social and spatial mobility. The Platter women moved less frequently: when they got married and when their households changed cities.

Consider the unlikely comparison of the communities of 18<sup>th</sup>-century Latvia and 20<sup>th</sup>-century Toronto (Wetherell, Plakans and Wellman 1994). By contrast to the mythical kinship-ridden past, the rural Latvian community did not have enough kin to construct the kinds of social networks that exist today. As these farmers do not appear to have had many friends living beyond the local area, it seems that half the myth was true: Although their networks were much more local than late-20<sup>th</sup>-century Torontonians, they only had small clusters of kin at their core. Nor does non-localism seem to be a phenomenon of our post-industrial age. Kenneth Scherzer's (1992) study of mid-19th century New York City reveals that many wedding guests came from outside of the neighborhood, often from other counties or states.

#### **4. Private Intimacy has Replaced Public Sociability.**

Rather than operating out of public neighborhood spaces, contemporary communities usually operate out of private homes. Yet until well into this century, men customarily gathered in communal, quasi-public milieus, such as pubs, cafes, parks and village greens. More accessible than private homes, such places drew their clientele from fluid networks of regular habitues (Roche 1981). Men could drop into such places to talk and to escape domestic boredom. The high density of the city meant that they were likely to find others to talk with. This density, combined with the permeability of the public spaces, provided men with many chance encounters with friends of their friends, and gave them opportunities to form new bonds. Although the men generally went out to enjoy themselves, they also used these public communities to organize politically, to accomplish collective tasks, and to deal with larger organizations. In colonial New England, "neighbors assumed not only the right but the duty to supervise one another's lives" (Wall 1990).

This public community was largely a man's game. For example, women who went alone to a Parisian wine shop risked being mistaken for a prostitute (Garrioch 1986). Although some women always operated in public, and some respectable public spaces often existed for many women (church groups, clubs, etc.), in general, community for men was much more public than community for women (Tristan 1840, Ryan 1990; Cohn 1996; Hansen 1997). And the male public communities operated largely independently of the female private communities.

Community for men as well as for women has moved inside now, into private homes. The separation of work from residential localities means that co-workers are more apt to commute from different neighborhoods and no longer come home from work in solidary sociable groups. While men now spend more time at home, the feminization of paid work means that women spend less time. Husbands and wives are in no mood to go out together after their weary trip home from work. In any event, zoning regulations in North America ensure that commercial areas are far from home. Domestic pursuits dominate, with husbands and wives spending evenings and weekends together instead of the men going off to pubs and street corners (for more details, see Wellman, 1992a). Workaholics bring their computer disks home; couch potatoes rent videos.

Rather than being accessible to others in public places, people now overcome their isolation by getting together in each other's homes or by the private media of the telephone and electronic mail. Most members of Torontonians' personal communities do not live near-by but a median distance of 9 miles apart (Wellman, Carrington and Hall 1988). Yet easy accessibility makes local ties continue to be significant. Although neighbors (living within one mile) comprise only 22% of the Torontonians' active

ties, these neighbors engage in fully 42% of all interactions with active network members (Wellman 1996).

Thus the neo-conservative privatization of Western societies, the withering of collective public services for general well-being, is reflected in the movement indoors of community life. Even in Toronto, the safest North American metropolis, 36% of the residents feel somewhat unsafe walking alone in their neighborhoods at nights. Yet the usual flight to safety — driving one's car or staying home and using the telephone or e-mail — offers little opportunity for enriching, diversifying contact en route. Cars leave garages as sealed units, opened only on reaching the other's home; telephones and modems stay indoors, sustaining only closed duets.

Where North Americans a generation ago often spent Saturday night going out for a movie and pizza, they now invite a few friends over to their homes to watch videos and order a pizza to be delivered. People watch videos at home an average of thirty times per year but go out for entertainment only three or four times a year (Film Canada 1990; Strike 1990). As Toronto pundit Marshall McLuhan observed (1973), North Americans go out to be private — in streets where no one greets each another — but they stay in to be public — to meet their friends and relatives.

Public spaces have become residual places to pass through or to shop in. Rather than participating in clubs or organizations, when they do go out, North Americans tend to go out alone, in couples or in small, informal groups (Putnam 1995). North American church attendance is declining, and Canadian movie attendance declined from eighteen times per year in 1952 to three times per year in 1993. The public community of the pub in the recent television show *Cheers* was appealing because it is so rare. In reality, the 1989 Canadian National Alcohol Survey showed that only 10% of adult Canadians go to a pub as often as once a week, men somewhat more frequently than women. Suburban shopping malls have become residual agoras — for consumption purposes only but not for discussion. Their cafés mock the name, deliberately using tiny tables and uncomfortable chairs to discourage lingering sociability. There is little possibility for casual contact or for the expansion of networks.

As community has become private, people continue to feel responsible for their relatively strong relationships but not for the many acquaintances and strangers with whom they rub shoulders but are not connected. Private contact with familiar friends and relatives has replaced public gregariousness so that people pass each other unsmiling on streets and highways. This privatization may be responsible for the lack of informal help for strangers who are in trouble in public spaces (Latané and Darley 1976). One consequence of this privatization of community in a world of strangers is that people feel that they lack friends even when their personal communities are abundantly supportive (Lofland 1973).

## **5. Communities have become Domesticated**

Home is now the base for relationships that are more voluntary and selective than the public communities of the past. Personal communities now contain high proportions of people who enjoy each other and low proportions of people who are forced to interact with each other because they are juxtaposed in the same neighborhood, kinship group, organization or workplace (Feld 1981). Friends and relatives get together as small sets of singles or couples, but rarely as communal groups (Wellman 1992a). This voluntary selectivity means that personal communities have become homogeneous networks of people with similar attitudes and lifestyles.

Where public communities were essentially men's worlds, home-based personal communities bring husbands and wives together. Men's communities are now tucked away in homes just as women's communities usually have been. As community has moved into the home, homes have become less private. Previous generations had confined visitors to ground-floor parlors and dining rooms, but visiting

community members now roam all floors. They watch movies in elaborate home theaters; they soak in multiperson hot tubs.

In their domestic headquarters, Toronto couples operate their networks jointly (Wellman and Wellman 1992), a much different situation from the segregated networks that Elizabeth Bott (1957) described in the 1950s for England. To a great extent it is the household that exchanges support rather than the person: for example, our research shows in-laws to be as supportive as blood relatives (Wellman and Wortley 1989). By contrast to the specialized support that community members exchange, spouses supply each other with almost all types of social support (Wellman and Wellman 1992). Hence unmarried adults obtain much less social support domestically and do not have access to the networks (and their resources) that accompany spouses to marriage.

In the current situation, married women dominate the practice of community in their households. Women have historically been the "kinkeepers" of western society: mothers and sisters keeping relatives connected for themselves, their husbands and their children. They continue to be the preeminent suppliers of emotional support in community networks as well as the major suppliers of domestic services to households (Wellman 1992a; Wright 1989). With the privatization and domestication of community, community-keeping has become an extension of kinkeeping, with both linked to domestic management. No longer do husbands and wives have many separate friendships. As men now usually stay at home during their leisure time, the informal ties of their wives form the basis for relations between married couples. Women define the nature of friendship and help maintain many of their husbands' friendships. Women bear more than the "double-load" of domestic work and paid work; their "triple load" includes net work.

Thus the privatization and domestication of relationships have transformed the nature of community. As Dorothy Smith's chapter emphasizes, women's everyday practices have become the personal community's norm. Because communities interact in private homes, they are more likely to focus on household concerns and they provide less opportunity for casual encounters with friends of friends. Women's ties, which dominate personal communities, provide important support for dealing with domestic work. Community members help with daily hassles and crises; neighbors mind each other's children; sisters and friends provide emotional support for child, husband and elder care. Because women are the community-keepers and are pressed for time caring for homes and doing paid work, men have become even more cut off from male friendship groups (Wellman 1992a). North American men rarely use their community ties to accomplish collective projects of work, politics or leisure. Their relationships have largely become sociable ties, either as part of the relationship between two married couples or as disconnected relations with a few male "buddies."

This domestication helps explain the contemporary intellectual shift to seeing community and friendship as something that women do better than men. Just as husbands and wives are more involved with each other at home, the focus of couples and male friends is on private, domestic relations. Men's community ties have come to be defined as women's have been: relations of emotional support, companionship, and domestic aid (Canary and Emmers-Sommer 1997). The nature and success of community are now being defined in domestic, women's terms. Concurrently, the growing dominance of the service sector in the economy means that the manipulation of people and ideas has acquired more cultural importance than the industrial and resource-extraction sectors' manipulation of material goods.

With developed economies having more managers and professionals than blue-collar workers, many workplaces share the emphasis on social relationships that women have traditionally practiced at home. Some workplaces contain intense emotional relationships (Kornblum 1974; Coupland 1995; Hochschild 1997). For example, coworker ties at one Toronto software firm are supported by a sports gym, a masseuse, and private rooms for quick romantic encounters. Most of the workers' lives revolve around

the firm. This is a minority situation. The Torontonians we studied are usually eager to go home after work, leaving their work stresses and coworkers behind (see also Halle 1984).

The material comfort of most North Americans means that they no longer need to rely on maintaining good relations with community members to get the necessities for material survival. The goods and services that community members exchange are usually matters of convenience, rarely of necessity, and hardly ever of life and death. Community ties have become ends in themselves, to be enjoyed in their own right and used for emotional adjustment in a society that puts a premium on feeling good about oneself and others. This resonates with the contemporary feminist celebration of women as more qualified in the socioemotional skills that are the basis of contemporary communities — and the downgrading of the allegedly masculine qualities of instrumentalism and materialism. Community is no longer about men fixing a car together; it is about couples chatting about domestic problems.

Contemporary discussions of community often reverse the traditional sexist discourse that has seen women as inadequate men. Men are now seen as unable to sustain meaningful community relationships, especially when such relationships are defined only in terms of socioemotional support. This socioemotional definition has almost totally replaced the traditional definition of community as also including instrumental aid. Patriarchal arguments for male superiority in getting things done are being replaced by celebrations of female superiority in knitting together emotionally supportive networks (Bly 1990). As "feminist author" Maggie Scarf (1987) said on the Oprah Winfrey television show, "Men just don't have friends the way women have friends. Men just don't like to make themselves vulnerable to other men."

## **6. Political, Economic and Social Milieus Affect the Nature of Communities**

Although the assertion that women have greater capacity for community has raised much consciousness, it is an idea that is time bound, culture bound, and empirically unsound. It ignores the thousands of years during which men's bonds largely defined community in public discourse. By reducing the definition of community to socioemotional support, it assumes that the world is as materially comfortable as North American intellectuals.

In less comfortable parts of the world, community members do more for each other than being privately sociable and emotionally supportive. Consider how Eastern Europeans use friends for economic, political and social survival: Greek men argue and plan projects in cafes, poor Chileans help barrio neighbors to survive and find jobs for kin (Espinoza 1992, 1999), and Hungarians help each other build new homes (Sik 1988; Sik and Wellman 1999). Even in more affluent Britain, people value getting services and information from community members as much as they value getting esteem and affection (Argyle 1990). To put matters more broadly, communities do not function in isolation but within the context of political, economic and social milieus that affect their composition, structure and operations. The nature of different societies strongly affects the opportunities and insecurities with which individuals and households must deal, the supportive resources they seek, and the ways in which markets, institutions and networks structure access to these resources.

Communities are not just ways in which people spend some of their leisure time but key mechanisms by which people and households get resources. Yet most North American research has ignored the broader implications of community ties and looked only at "social support," the effects of community ties on maintaining physical and mental health. A broader view would see community as an essential component of society. For example, as French Revolutionaries proclaimed, "fraternity" (i.e., community) is one of five principal ways by which people gain access to resources:

- ! **Market Exchanges** (as purchases, barter or informal exchanges). Seeing this as the only means of access to resources is in line with the neo-conservative belief in the loss of community. [*Liberty*]
- ! **Institutional Distributions** (by the state or other bureaucracies as citizenship rights, organizational benefits or charitable aid). Such access to resources is in line with those who have traditionally seen society as a moral community writ large, as in the current American debate as to whether health care is a community obligation or a market decision. However, the use of the term "community" to describe such institutional distributions can be a subterfuge for bureaucratic privilege, as was the case in socialist eastern Europe [*Equality*]
- ! **Community Exchanges**. If informal, interpersonal access to resources occurs within neighborhood or kinship solidarities, then it fits those who believe in traditional community. If the exchanges are less-bounded (and hence less normatively-enforceable), then it fits the ramified community networks that have been described here. [*Fraternity*]
- ! **Coercive Appropriations** Direct predatory behavior by interpersonal (robbery) or institutional bullies (expropriation). Current involuntary appropriations usually occur under the legitimating guise of imbalanced market exchanges or state extractions for unequal institutional distributions (as in governments forcing farmers to sell produce to urbanites at low prices [Tilly 1975]). More extreme instances of the loss of community are common in societies where institutional and communal mechanisms of social control have broken down, such as in Bosnia or Rwanda. [*Robbery*]
- ! **Self-Provisioning** Making and growing things in one's household. Self-provisioning is used even in market societies (see Pahl's [1984] discussion of growing food in England) and in socialist-institutional ones (see Sik's [1988] discussion of Hungarian home building). Such self-provisioning rests on an infrastructure of market and community exchanges that provide advice, skills and materials. [*Yeomanry*]

Although all types of resource access can be found in all societies, market exchanges are especially characteristic of western societies, institutional distributions are characteristic of centrally-planned statist societies, and community exchanges are characteristic of third-world societies with weak states and few formal organizations (see also the chapters by Janet Abu-Lughod, Randall Collins and Gideon Sjoberg; Wolf 1966). While personal communities are important in western, statist and third-world societies, communities are differently composed, structured and used in each type of society. For example, the insecurities of members of western societies largely come from physical and emotional stresses in their personal lives and social relations. Hence people seek support from community members for emotional problems, homemaking chores and domestic crises, and they look to markets and institutions to deal with their economic and political problems.

The comparatively low importance of economic and political concerns in western societies distinguishes the communities in them from those in societies which are less economically or politically secure. Most westerners rely on market exchanges for almost all of their production and much of their consumption. Institutional benefits such as schooling and medical care are abundantly available as citizenship rights. Westerners do not pay as much attention as do the inhabitants of statist societies (such as the former East European socialist states) to having community members who can make and fix things (such as home building) or who have connections to strategic institutional circles (Sik and Wellman 1999). To make another contrast, because westerners rarely have urgent cares about daily survival, they can manage domestic resources with less apprehension than third-worlders living on the margins.

## 7. Cyberspace Supports “Glocalized” Communities

It is a direct progression to go from talking about personal communities — linked by phones, planes and cars — to talking about virtual communities, linked by computer-mediated communication media such as electronic mail and videoconferencing. After all, a computer network is a social network when it connects people and organizations. Although hopes and fears are exaggerated, computer-mediated communication will affect work and community. As in community, there is a move away from densely-knit, tightly-bounded workgroups (in offices and factories) to more loosely-coupled organizations, with shifting roles, collaborations and reporting structures. The experiences of workers in tightly-bounded, densely-knit, open-office fishbowls are similar to those in traditional village communities. Yet many workers and recreational e-mail users move among a variety of situations and social networks. They function in loosely-bounded, sparsely-knit, multiple, fragmented networks, switching among a diversified set of relationships to accomplish their tasks (For more details, see Garton and Wellman 1995; Wellman, et al. 1996; Wellman 1997; Wellman and Gulia 1999a).

Although scholars once feared that computer-mediated communication could not sustain subtle, ambiguous or intimate conversations, field research has shown that almost everything that can be done offline is being done online. Computer networks seem especially suitable for supporting weak (as well as strong) ties, for expanding the size of people’s active networks, for forming direct ties with friends of friends, and for fostering ties based on shared interests rather than on similar demographic characteristics (Parks and Roberts 1998). This is part of the continuing sociological shift from social organization based on “ascription” -- what you’re born into -- to “achievement” -- what you have become. As a *New Yorker* cartoon put it in 1993, “On the Internet, nobody knows you’re a dog.”

Some scholars have been fascinated with virtual communities that function almost entirely online (e.g., Rheingold 1993). Such communities can be as densely-knit and all-consuming as traditional urban villages. Yet, although virtual communities are imageable, in fact most people make only partial commitments to online relationships. They may interact online in specialized communities, such as the one devoted to BMW cars. Or their online interactions may be interwoven with in-person and telephone interactions with the same persons. Two persons living or working near-by might use the Internet to arrange a meeting (Haythornthwaite and Wellman 1998; Salaff, et al. 1996), or two persons living apart may sustain a relationship online until their rare in-person meeting. It is still an unresolved question if such online relationships add new ties to one’s existing personal network, maintain and expand the frequency and purview of existing ties, or substitute weaker online ties for more robust face-to-face ties (Kraut, et al., 1998).

### The Loosely-Coupled World

With the Internet able to leap large oceans at a single bound, there is the possibility that community and work will become “glocalized.” On the one hand, the cost of maintaining a computer-mediated relationship will be almost as low across the ocean as it is across the state. Moreover, the ability of media such as the Web or the Internet to store and forward communication will lessen the constraints of community or organizational members functioning on the same schedule. On the other hand, these same media can keep virtual communers and teleworkers bound to their home desktops for work and play, an extreme form of localization. In such situations, loosely-coupled global networks will intersect with tightly-bounded, densely-network domestic networks. Family members will see even more of each other around the home. Although men have done few domestic chores until now, such involvement in cyberspace may lead to new domestic divisions of labor. Doing the laundry may become a rest stop on the information highway.

Malvina Reynolds (1960) sang a generation ago in a sarcastic description of American suburbia and society:

“Little boxes made of ticky-tacky;  
Little boxes, little boxes, little boxes;  
All the same.”

Yet such little boxes were the way sociologists thought of the world then and probably the way much of the world was: bounded work and residential units hierarchically linked in cities and regions, workplaces and organizations. I suspect that the world is now more loosely-coupled, whether it be personal community networks, management by matrix, or virtual organizations. Time and space matter less; people work and commune with multiple others, switching frequently between roles and tasks, opportunities and constraints. To some extent, advances in communication and transportation have facilitated this transformation from hierarchical boxes to loosely-coupled networks. It has accompanied changes from the micro to the macro levels, from the proliferation of paid work for women to the almost seamless functioning of the world financial and production systems. The result is that people no longer no to which few units they belong, be it their community or their job. They need to cope with multidimensional networking in a loosely-coupled world.

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