

Planning and Social Life

Friendship and Neighbor Relations in Suburban Communities

Students of suburban communities have found that social relationships are influenced by the site and the architectural plans—re-enforcing the proposition that planners can influence social life. But, while physical propinquity does affect some visiting patterns, positive relationships with neighbors and the more intensive forms of social interaction, such as friendship, require homogeneity of background, or of interests, or of values. The planning implications of these findings are developed on the basis of value judgments that positive relationships between neighbors are desirable and that opportunities for the free choice of friends ought to be maximized.

These values can be affected by site planning techniques to a limited extent, but they can be implemented only by a moderate—though yet undetermined—degree of homogeneity among the residents. This requirement conflicts, however, with other planning values, for which planners have advocated the balanced community, made up of heterogeneous residents. This problem will be discussed in a second article, to appear in the August 1961 issue of the JOURNAL.

STUDIES OF WARTIME HOUSING PROJECTS and postwar suburban subdivisions have shown that the residents of these developments do a considerable amount of visiting with the nearest neighbors, and may select their friends from among them. Social relationships appear to be influenced and explained by *propinquity*.¹ As a result, they are affected by the site plan and the architectural design, which determine how near people will live to each other. In fact, the authors of one study of social life have suggested that: "The architect who builds a house or designs a site plan, who decides where the roads will and will not go, and who decides which directions the houses will face and how close together they will be, also is, to a large extent, deciding the pat-

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tern of social life among the people who will live in those houses."²

Conversely, other studies of social life have shown that people tend to choose friends on the basis of similarities in backgrounds, such as age and socio-economic level; values, such as those with respect to privacy or child rearing; and interests, such as leisure activity pref-

¹The principal postwar studies are: R. Merton, "The Social Psychology of Housing," in Wayne Dennis (ed.), *Current Trends in Social Psychology* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1947), pp. 163-217; T. Caplow and R. Foreman, "Neighborhood Interaction in a Homogeneous Community," *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 15 (1950), pp. 357-366; L. Festinger, S. Schachter, and K. Back, *Social Pressures in Informal Groups* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1950); L. Festinger, "Architecture and Group Membership," *Journal of Social Issues*, Vol. 7 (1951), pp. 152-163; L. Kuper, "Blueprint for Living Together," in L. Kuper (ed.), *Living in Towns* (London: Cresset Press, 1953), pp. 1-202; W. H. Whyte, Jr., "How the New Suburbia Socializes," *Fortune*, August 1953, pp. 120-122, 186-190, and *ibid.*, *The Organization Man* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1957), Chapter 25. See also the earlier researches and some negative findings cited by I. Rosow, "The Social Effects of the Physical Environment," *Journal of the American Institute of Planners*, Vol. 27 (1961), pp. 127-133. The discussion that follows draws on these studies and on my own research and observations in two suburban communities, Park Forest, Illinois and Levittown, New Jersey.

²Festinger, Schachter, and Back, *op. cit.*, p. 160. See also Merton, *op. cit.* p. 208.

erences.³ These findings suggest that social relationships are influenced and explained by people's *homogeneity* with respect to a variety of *characteristics*, although it is not yet known exactly what combination of characteristics must be shared for different social relationships. This explanation would imply that the planner affects social life not through the site plan but through decisions about lot size or facility standards that help to determine, directly or indirectly, whether the population of an area will be homogeneous or heterogeneous with respect to the characteristics that determine social relationships.⁴

The two explanations raise a number of issues for planning:

1. Whether or not the planner has the power to influence patterns of social life.
2. Whether or not he should exert this power.
3. Whether some patterns of social life are more desirable than others, and should, therefore, be sought as planning goals. For example, should people be encouraged to find their friends among neighbors, or throughout, or outside their residential area? Should they be politely distant or friendly with neighbors?

If propinquity is most important in determining friendship formation and neighbor relations, the ideal patterns—if such exist—would have to be implemented through the site plan. If homogeneity of characteristics is most important, the planner must decide whether to advocate homogeneous residential areas, if he wishes to encourage friendliness and friendship among neighbors; and heterogeneous ones, if he wishes to encourage more distant neighbor relations and spatially dispersed friendship.

Although the available research does not yet permit a final explanation of the patterns of social life, a preliminary conclusion can be suggested. This permits us to discuss the implications for planning theory and practice.

Propinquity, Homogeneity, and Friendship

The existing studies suggest that the two explanations are related, but that homogeneity of characteristics is more important than propinquity.⁵ Although propinquity initiates many social relationships and maintains less intensive ones, such as "being neighborly," it is not sufficient by itself to create intensive relationships. Friendship requires homogeneity.

Propinquity leads to visual contact between neighbors and is likely to produce face-to-face social contact.

This is true only if the distance between neighbors is small enough to encourage one or the other to transform the visual contact into a social one.⁶ Thus, physical distance between neighbors is important. So is the relationship of the dwellings—especially their front and rear doors—and the circulation system.⁷ For example, if doors of adjacent houses face each other or if residents must share driveways, visual contact is inevitable.

The opportunity for visual and social contact is greater at high densities than at low ones, but only if neighbors are adjacent horizontally. In apartment buildings, residents who share a common hallway will meet, but those who live on different floors are less likely to do so, because there is little occasion for visual contact.⁸ Consequently, propinquity operates most efficiently in single-family and row-house areas, especially if these are laid out as courts, narrow loops, or cul-de-sacs.

Initial social contacts can develop into relationships of varying intensity, from polite chats about the weather to close friendship. (Negative relationships, varying from avoidance to open enmity are also possible.) Propinquity not only initiates relationships, but it also plays an important role in maintaining the less intensive ones, for the mere fact of living together en-

³ See, e.g., P. Lazarsfeld and R. Merton, "Friendship as a Social Process: A Substantive and Methodological Analysis" (Part I: Substantive Analysis, by R. Merton), in M. Berger, T. Abel, and C. Page (eds.), *Freedom and Control in Modern Society* (New York: Van Nostrand, 1954), pp. 21–37.

⁴ Hereafter, when I describe a population as homogeneous or heterogeneous, I always mean with respect to the characteristics that are relevant to the particular aspect of social life under discussion, although for stylistic reasons, the qualifying phrase is usually left out.

⁵ The relationship between propinquity and homogeneity is considered in most of the studies cited in footnote 1. See, e.g., the discussion by Kuper, *op. cit.*, pp. 154–164, and by Rosow, *op. cit.*, p. 131.

⁶ If the physical distance is negligible, as between next door neighbors, social contact is likely to take place quickly. When neighbors are not immediately adjacent, however, one or the other must take the initiative, and this requires either some visible sign of a shared background characteristic, or interest, or the willingness to be socially aggressive. This is not as prevalent as sometimes imagined. Although the new suburbs are often thought to exhibit an inordinate amount of intrablock visiting, I found that on the block on which I lived in Levittown, New Jersey, some of the men who lived three to five houses away from each other did not meet for over a year after initial occupancy. The wives met more quickly, of course.

⁷ Festinger, Schachter, and Back call this "functional distance." *Op. cit.*, pp. 34–35.

⁸ Festinger, *op. cit.*, p. 157. See also A. Wallace, *Housing and Social Structure* (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Housing Authority, 1952). In urban tenement areas, where neighbors are often related or from the same ethnic background, there may be considerable visiting between floors. A high degree of homogeneity can thus overcome physical obstacles.

courages neighbors to make sure that the relationship between them remains positive. Propinquity cannot determine the intensity of the relationship, however; this is a function of the characteristics of the people involved. If neighbors are homogeneous and feel themselves to be compatible, there is some likelihood that the relationship will be more intensive than an exchange of greetings. If neighbors are heterogeneous, the relationship is not likely to be intensive, regardless of the degree of propinquity. *Propinquity may thus be the initial cause of an intensive positive relationship, but it cannot be the final or sufficient cause.*

This is best illustrated in a newly settled subdivision. When people first move in, they do not know each other, or anything about each other, except that they have all chosen to live in this community—and can probably afford to do so.⁹ As a result, they will begin to make social contacts based purely on propinquity, and because they share the characteristics of being strangers and pioneers, they will do so with almost every neighbor within physical and functional distance. As these social contacts continue, participants begin to discover each other's backgrounds, values, and interests, so that similarities and differences become apparent. Homogeneous neighbors may become friends, whereas heterogeneous ones soon reduce the amount of visiting, and eventually limit themselves to being neighborly. (This process is usually completed after about three months of social contact, especially if people have occupied their homes in spring or summer, when climate and garden chores lead to early visual contact.) The resulting pattern of social relationships cannot be explained by propinquity alone. An analysis of the characteristics of the people will show that homogeneity and heterogeneity explain the existence and the absence of social relationships more adequately than does the site plan or the architectural design. Needless to say, the initial social pattern is not immutable; it is changed by population turnover and by a gradual tendency to find other friends outside the immediate area.¹⁰

If neighbors are compatible, however, they may not look elsewhere for companionship, so that propinquity—as well as the migration patterns and housing market conditions which bring homogeneous people together—plays an important role. Most of the communities studied so far have been settled by homogeneous populations. For example, Festinger, Schachter, and Back studied two student housing projects whose residents were of similar age, marital status, and economic level. Moreover, they were all sharing a common educational experience and had little time for entertaining. Under

these conditions, the importance of propinquity in explaining visiting patterns and friendship is not surprising. The fact that they were impermanent residents is also relevant, although if a considerable degree of homogeneity exists among more permanent residents, similar patterns develop.

Propinquity, Homogeneity, and Neighbor Relations

Although propinquity brings neighbors into social contact, a certain degree of homogeneity is required to maintain this contact on a positive basis. If neighbors are too diverse, differences of behavior or attitude may develop which can lead to coolness or even conflict. For example, when children who are being reared by different methods come into conflict, disciplinary measures by their parents will reveal differences in ways of rewarding and punishing. If one child is punished for a digression and his playmate is not, misunderstandings and arguments can develop between the parents. Differences about house and yard maintenance, or about political issues can have similar consequences.

The need for homogeneity is probably greatest among neighbors with children of equal age and among immediately adjacent neighbors. Children, especially young ones, choose playmates on a purely propinquitous basis. Thus, positive relations among neighbors with children of similar age are best maintained if the neighbors are comparatively homogeneous with respect to child-rearing methods. Immediately adjacent neighbors are likely to have frequent visual contact, and if there is to be social contact, they must be relatively compatible. Some people minimize social contact with immediately adjacent neighbors on principle, in order to prevent possible differences from creating disagreement. Since such neighbors live in involuntary propinquity, conflict might result in permanently impaired relationships which might force one or the other to move out.

Generally speaking, conflicts between neighbors seem to be rare. In the new suburbs, current building and marketing practices combine to bring together people of relatively similar age and income, thus creating sufficient homogeneity to enable strangers to live together peaceably. In the communities which I have

⁹ Home buyers do not, however, move into a new area without some assurance that neighbors are likely to be compatible. They derive this assurance from the house price (which bears some correlation to purchasers' income level), from the kinds of people whom they see inspecting the model homes, and from the previous class and ethnic image of the area within which the subdivision is located.

¹⁰ See W. Form, "Stratification in Low and Middle Income Housing Areas," *Journal of Social Issues*, Vol. 7 (1951), pp. 116-117.

studied, many people say that they have never had such friendly neighbors. Where chance assembles a group of heterogeneous neighbors, unwritten and often unrecognized pacts are developed which bring standards of house and yard maintenance into alignment and which eliminate from the conversation topics that might result in conflict.

The Meaning of Homogeneity

I have been stressing the importance of resident characteristics without defining the terms homogeneity and heterogeneity. This omission has been intentional, for little is known about what characteristics must be shared before people feel themselves to be compatible with others. We do not know for certain if they must have common backgrounds, or similar interests, or shared values—or combinations of these. Nor do we know precisely which background characteristics, behavior patterns, and interests are most and least important, or about what issues values must be shared. Also, we do not know what similarities are needed for relationships of different intensities or, for any given characteristics, how large a difference can exist before incompatibility sets in. For example, it is known that income differences can create incompatibility between neighbors, but it is not known how large these differences must become before incompatibility is felt.

Demographers may conclude that one community is more homogeneous than another with respect to such characteristics as age or income, but this information is too general and superficial to predict the pattern of social life. Social relationships are not based on census data, but on subjectively experienced definitions of homogeneity and heterogeneity which terminate in judgments of compatibility or incompatibility. These definitions and judgments have received little study.

Sociologists generally agree that behavior patterns, values, and interests—what people think and do—are more important criteria for homogeneity than background factors.¹¹ My observations suggest that in the new suburbs, values with respect to child rearing, leisure-time interests, taste level, general cultural preferences, and temperament seem to be most important in judging compatibility or incompatibility.

Such interests and values *do* reflect differences in background characteristics, since a person's beliefs and actions are shaped in part by his age, income, occupation, and the like. These characteristics can, therefore, be used as clues to understanding the pattern of social relationships. *Life-cycle stage* (which summarizes such characteristics as age of adults, marital status, and age of children) and *class* (especially income and education)

are probably the two most significant characteristics. Education is especially important, because it affects occupational choice, child-rearing patterns, leisure-time preferences, and taste level. *Race* is also an important criterion, primarily because it is a highly visible—although not necessarily accurate—symbol of class position.¹²

Background characteristics provide crude measures that explain only in part the actual evaluations and choices made by neighbors on a block. Until these evaluations themselves are studied—and then related to background data—it is impossible to define homogeneity or heterogeneity operationally. Since considerable criticism has been leveled at the new suburbs for being overly homogeneous—at least by demographic criteria—such research is of considerable importance for the planner's evaluation of these communities and for the planning of future residential areas.

Variations in Homogeneity

The degree of population homogeneity varies from suburb to suburb. Moreover, since residents usually become neighbors by a fairly random process—for example, by signing deeds at the same time—many combinations of homogeneity and heterogeneity can be found among the blocks of a single subdivision.¹³ In some blocks, neighbors are so compatible that they spend a significant amount of their free time with each other and even set up informal clubs to cement the pattern. In other blocks, circumstances bring together very diverse people, and relationships between them may be only polite, or even cool.

Whyte's studies in Park Forest led him to attribute these variations to site planning features. He found that the small "courts" were friendly and happy; the larger ones, less friendly and sometimes unhappy. He also found that the residents of the smaller courts were so busy exchanging visits that, unlike those of the larger ones, they did not become active in the wider com-

¹¹ For one study which deals with this problem, see Lazarsfeld and Merton, *op. cit.* They concluded that the sharing of values is more important than the sharing of backgrounds.

¹² Studies such as M. Deutsch and M. Collins, *Interracial Housing* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1951) and E. and G. Greer, *Privately Developed Interracial Housing* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1960), suggest that where people are relatively homogeneous in class and age, race differences are no obstacle to social relationships, and race is no longer a criterion of heterogeneity. This is especially true in middle-class residential areas occupied by professional people.

¹³ This is true of the larger subdivisions. Smaller ones are sometimes not settled randomly, but are occupied by groups, for example related households or members of an ethnic group moving *en masse* from another area.

munity.¹⁴ My observations in Park Forest and in Levittown, New Jersey, suggest, however, that homogeneity and heterogeneity explain these phenomena more effectively.¹⁵ When neighbors are especially homogeneous, blocks can become friendly, regardless of their size, although the larger blocks usually divide themselves into several social groupings. Block size is significant only insofar as a small block may *feel* itself to be more cohesive because all sociability takes place within one group. In the larger blocks, the fact that there are several groups prevents such a feeling, even though each of the groups may be as friendly as the one in the smaller block.

Community participation patterns can be explained in a similar fashion. If the block population is heterogeneous, and residents must look elsewhere for friends, they inevitably turn to community-wide clubs, church organizations, and even civic groups in order to meet compatible people. If participation in these organizations is based solely on the need to find friends, however, it is likely to be minimal, and may even cease, once friendships are established. This type of membership differs considerably from civic or organizational participation proper. The distinction between the two types is important. Whyte recommends that site planners encourage participation by making blocks large enough to discourage excessive on-the-block social life. While this might increase the first type of participation, it cannot affect the second type. People who are inclined to be really active in community-wide organizations are a self-selected minority who will desert the social life of the block, regardless of the block's layout or of the neighbors' compatibility. They are usually attracted to community participation by pressing community problems and by interest, ambition, or the hope of personal gain. Site planning techniques cannot bring about their participation.

The Role of Propinquity

Given the importance of homogeneity in social relationships, what role remains for propinquity? Since propinquity results in visual contact, whether voluntary, or involuntary, it produces social contact among neighbors, although homogeneity will determine how intensive the relationships will be and whether they will be positive or not. Propinquity also supports relationships based on homogeneity by making frequent contact convenient. Finally, among people who are comparatively homogeneous and move into an area as strangers, propinquity may determine friendship formation among neighbors.

In addition, some types of people gravitate to propinquitous relationships more than others. Age is an

important factor. As already noted, children choose their playmates strictly on a propinquitous basis, though decreasingly so as they get older. This is why parents who want their young children to associate with playmates of similar status and cultural background must move to areas where such playmates are close at hand.

Among adults, the importance of propinquity seems to vary with sex and class. Women generally find their female friends nearby, especially if they are mothers and are restricted in their movements. In fact, young mothers must usually be able to find compatible people—and therefore, homogeneous neighbors—within a relatively small radius. Should they fail to do so, they may become the unhappy isolated suburban housewives about whom so much has been written. My observations suggest that most women are able to find the female companionship they seek, however. In addition, the increase in two-car families and women's greater willingness to drive are gradually reducing the traditional immobility of the housewife.

The relationship between propinquity and class has received little study. Generally speaking, the "higher" the class, the greater the physical mobility for visiting and entertaining. Thus, working-class people seem to be least mobile and most likely to pick their friends on a propinquitous basis. However, since they visit primarily with relatives, they may travel considerable distances if relatives are not available nearby.¹⁶ Upper-middle-class people seem to go farther afield for their social life than do lower-middle-class ones, in part because they may have specialized interests which are hard to satisfy on the block.

Propinquity is also more important for some types of social activities than others. In America, and probably everywhere in the Western world, adolescents and adults socialize either in peer groups—people of similar age and sex—or in sets of couples. Peer groups are more likely to form on the basis of propinquity. For example, the members of that well-known suburban peer group, the women's "coffee klatsch," are usually recruited in the immediate vicinity. Since the participants indulge primarily in shop talk—children, husbands, and home

¹⁴ Whyte, *The Organization Man*, pp. 333-334.

¹⁵ These comments are based on observations, however, rather than on systematic studies. Macris studied visiting patterns in Park Forest in 1957 and found considerably less intrablock visiting than did Whyte. He also found that there was almost no visiting at all between tenants and homeowners, even though they were living in physical propinquity in the area he studied. This suggests the importance of neighbor homogeneity. D. Macris, "Social Relationships Among Residents of Various House Types in a Planned Community," unpublished master's thesis, University of Illinois, 1958.

¹⁶ M. Young and P. Willmott, *Family and Kinship in East London* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1957).

—the fact that they are all wives and mothers provides sufficient homogeneity to allow propinquity to function.¹⁷ For couples, homogeneity is a more urgent requirement than propinquity, since the two people in a couple must accept both members of all other couples. The amount of compatibility that is required probably cannot be satisfied so easily among the supply of neighbors within propinquitous distance.

The role of propinquity also varies with the size of the group, and with the activities pursued. The larger the group, the less intensive are the relationships between participants, and the less homogeneity is required. If the group meets for a specific activity, such as to celebrate a major holiday or to play cards, the behavior that takes place is sufficiently specialized and habitual that the participants' other characteristics are less relevant. If the group meets for conversation, more homogeneity of values and interests is required.¹⁸

Limitations of These Observations

The foregoing comments are based largely on observations and studies in new suburban communities. Little is known about the role of propinquity and homogeneity in established communities, although there is no reason to expect any major differences.¹⁹ Whatever differences exist are probably due to the reduction of much of the initial homogeneity in established communities through population turnover. The same process is likely to take place in new communities. Moveouts create a gap in established social groupings. Newcomers may be able to fill this gap—provided they are not too different from those they have replaced. Even so, it is hard for a newcomer to break into an established coffee klatsch or card party, and only people with a little extra social aggressiveness are likely to do so. In addition, there is the previously noted tendency of the original residents to find new friends outside the immediate area and to spend less time with neighbors. As a result of these processes, patterns of social life in new communities will eventually resemble those in established areas.

Most of my observations are at present only hypotheses that need to be tested by more systematic research. Two types of studies are especially important. The first should investigate the influence of resident characteristics by analyzing the existence of propinquitous relationships among a variety of blocks, all similar in site plan and architectural design but differing in the degree of homogeneity among neighbors. The second study should analyze the impact of site plans and housing design on propinquity, by studying subdivisions which differ in physical layout but are occupied by similar kinds of residents.

Conclusions

At the beginning of this paper, I raised three questions: whether the planner had the power to influence patterns of social life; whether he ought to use this power; and if so, whether ideal patterns existed which should be advocated as planning goals. These questions can now be answered in a preliminary fashion.

The planner has only limited influence over social relationships. Although the site planner can create propinquity, he can only determine which houses are to be adjacent. He can thus affect visual contact and initial social contacts among their occupants, but he cannot determine the intensity or quality of the relationships. This depends on the characteristics of the people involved.

The characteristics of the residents can be affected to some small degree by subdivision regulations, lot-size provisions, facility standards, or by any other planning tools which determine the uniformity of the housing to be built and the facilities to be provided—and can therefore affect the degree of homogeneity or heterogeneity among the eventual occupants. The planner has considerably less influence, however, than the private and public agencies which combine to finance, build, and market houses. These in turn respond to housing demand—and to the fact that most buyers are willing to accept similarity in house type and want a fair degree of homogeneity in their neighbors.

Consequently, within the context of present planning powers and practices, the planner's influence on social relationships is not very great. Whether or not it should be greater can only be decided on the basis of value judgments about patterns of social life.

Needless to say, a wide variety of value judgments can be formulated. My own judgment is that no one ideal pattern of social life can be—or should be—prescribed, but that opportunity for choice should be available both with respect to neighbor relations and friendship formation.

Neighbor relations should be positive; no benefits, but many social and emotional costs, result from life in an atmosphere of mutual dislike or coolness. Beyond this point, however, the intensity of relationships should not be a subject for planning values. Whether neighbors become friends, whether they remain

¹⁷ There must, however, be general agreement about methods of housekeeping, getting along with husbands, and child rearing. Since these methods vary with education and socio-economic level, some homogeneity of class is necessary even for the coffee klatsch.

¹⁸ The kinds of gatherings which Whyte studied so ingeniously in Park Forest were mainly those of peer groups indulging in single-purpose activities. This may explain why he found propinquity to be so important.

¹⁹ See Rosow, *op. cit.*, p. 131.

friendly, or whether they are only polite to each other should be left up to the people who come to live together. Each type of relationship has its pros and cons, but none is so much more desirable than another that it should be advocated by the planner.

Friendship formation is a highly personal process, and it would be wrong for anyone to presume to plan another person's friendships. Moreover, one pattern of friendship does not seem to me to be preferable to any other. Finding one's friends on the block is convenient, although propinquity may encourage so much social contact that no time is left for friends who live farther away. Also, propinquity may make life on the block difficult if the relationship should cease to be friendly. Dispersal of friendship over a larger residential area may help people to know their community a little better, but unless they are already interested in gathering and using such knowledge, this is not likely to make much difference to them, or to the community.

Prescribing the opportunity for choice requires also that no one should be forced into any social relationship not of his own choosing. For example, no site plan should so isolate blocks from one another that residents must find it too difficult to maintain social contacts outside the block. Likewise, no residential area should be so heterogeneous in its population make-up that it prevents anyone from finding friends within the area; nor should it be so homogeneous that residents socialize only on their own block.

Implications for Planning Practice

Detailed implications cannot be spelled out until considerably more data are available on the relative roles of propinquity and homogeneity. Some guides can be suggested, however.

The site planner should not deliberately try to create a specific social pattern, but he should aim to provide maximum choice. If possible, the site plan should contain a variety of house-to-house relationships, so that residents who desire a large number of visual and social contacts and those who prefer relative isolation can both be satisfied. If density requirements permit, however, the site planner should not locate dwelling units within such close physical and functional distance to each other that the occupants are constantly thrown together and forced into social contact. In areas of single-family houses, the planner should avoid narrow courts. In row-house developments, soundproof party walls are necessary. In addition, some type of separation between houses should be provided to shield front and rear doors from those of adjacent houses. Since Americans seem to dislike complete and permanent separation from neighbors, however, something less irrevocable than a solid wall is desirable.

Blocks and courts should be so laid out that they do not become prisons. At the same time, however, they should not be spread out in such a fashion that all visual and social contact between neighbors is prevented. This is a problem in areas of very low density, where lots are so large that neighbors have difficulty in meeting each other.²⁰

If and when sufficient research has been done to establish the relationship between site planning and social life on a sounder empirical basis, the concept of voluntary resident placement should be explored. Thus, if the studies indicate that some locations in a site plan will inevitably result in greater social contact than others, potential occupants should be informed, so that they can take this fact into account in choosing their houses.²¹

Since homogeneity is an important determinant of social relationships, some degree of homogeneity on the block would seem to be desirable. This would encourage positive relationships among neighbors and would allow those who want to find friends in the immediate vicinity to do so without impairing the ability of others to seek friends on the outside. If blocks are too homogeneous, however, those people who differ from the majority are likely to be considered deviants, and may be exposed to social pressure to conform or sentenced to virtual isolation. Conversely, heterogeneous blocks would produce cool and possibly negative relations among neighbors and would eliminate the chance to make friends on the block.

The proper solution is a moderate degree of homogeneity, although at this point no one knows how to define this degree operationally or how to develop planning guides for it. Moreover, the planner lacks the power to implement such guides. *My observations suggest that, by and large, the present crop of suburban communities provides the degree of homogeneity described here. Consequently, the planner need not worry about his inability to intervene.*

My proposals in behalf of residential homogeneity are based on the value judgments defended here and apply only to one phase of residential life. Planners have long debated whether residential areas should be homogeneous or heterogeneous. Some planners, who give higher priority to other planning values, and are more concerned with other phases of residential life, have advocated balanced communities, with heterogeneous populations.

²⁰ Erich Lindemann (in a personal conversation) has reported that this resulted in an upper-income community which he and his associates have studied. The large lots which satisfy the status needs of their owners also create loneliness for women who have no social contacts in the larger community.

²¹ See the discussion of this proposal by Whyte, *The Organization Man*, p. 346.