Culture, Cohorts, and Social Organization Theory: Understanding Local Participation in a Latino Housing Project[1]

Mario Luis Small
Princeton University

Recent work on neighborhood effects has rekindled interest in social organization theory and its relationship to local social capital. This article addresses several gaps in our knowledge about the *mechanisms* linking structural conditions to social (dis)organization and the role of culture in this process. Relying on the case of a predominantly Puerto Rican housing project in Boston, it investigates changes in one aspect of social organization—participation in local community activities—suggesting the theory should incorporate the role of cohorts and cultural frames and rethink the relationship among structure, culture, and change.

INTRODUCTION

The urban poverty literature demonstrates a renewed interest in the relationship between neighborhood poverty and various aspects of social capital, such as social isolation, "collective efficacy," and community participation (Wilson 1996; Sampson 1999; Sampson, Morenoff, and Earls 1999; Rankin and Quane 2000; Wellman 1988, 1999). Much of the work

has stemmed from social disorganization theory, which posits that poor neighborhoods' structural conditions produce socially disorganized communities (Shaw and McKay 1969). Of the multiple aspects of social disorganization, this article focuses on one: the extent to which residents are willing to participate in voluntary community activities.

Social organization theorists agree that community participation is affected by structural conditions,[2] but surprisingly little is understood, with any clarity, about the *mechanisms* underlying this process (see Sampson 1988, 1991, 1999). Much of the mystery is the role of culture, which some scholars have recently revisited but few have studied empirically or with conceptual clarity (Sampson and Wilson 1995, p. 53; but see Hannerz 1969). Indeed, as Sampson and Wilson (1995, p. 47) have recently written, "it is . . . difficult to study the intervening mechanisms of social disorganization directly." This article aims to open this "black box" by examining in depth the role of structural conditions and culture in the decline in community participation over two decades in one housing project. It asks three questions: How did the neighborhood's structural characteristics affect the waning of community participation? Did cultural factors play a role *independent* of structural ones? And, if so, what was the relationship between structural and cultural factors?

The article shows that social organization theory's answers to these questions are inadequate. Thus, the article has three objectives: first, to incorporate a better conception of culture into the theory; second, to suggest that we rethink the relationship among culture, structure, and community participation; and third, to show why changes in cohorts, not changes in structural conditions, may be the driving force behind changes in community participation.

SOCIAL ORGANIZATION THEORY

Social organization theory was originally developed to explain differences in crime rates among neighborhoods. In the 1940s, Shaw and McKay (1942, 1969) noticed that crime rates in Chicago neighborhoods varied by level of social organization, which they defined as the strength and or-

[2] Much of the work has been criticized for perpetuating a view of the ghetto as inherently pathological and disorganized (Wacquant 1997; Abu Lughod 1997; Katz 1997; see also Suttles 1968, Whyte 1943; Gans 1962; Duneier 1992, 1999). Thus, recent researchers have left neighborhoods' levels of organization as an empirical question, and argued for the terms "differential social organization" (Sampson 1999; also Shaw and McKay 1969; Kornhauser 1978) or "social organization" (Wacquant 1997). In this article, I employ the latter term. The idea of "differential social organization" emphasizes between-neighborhood differences at the expense of within-neighborhood change, a tendency this study aims to critique.

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ganization of local institutions and the ability and willingness of residents to become involved on behalf of the common good and to exercise informal social control. Neighborhoods were high in crime because they were "socially disorganized." The authors also found that social disorganization was associated with (*a*) ethnic heterogeneity, (*b*) residential instability, and (*c*) high neighborhood poverty, which they then theorized as exogenous causes of disorganization.

Contemporary researchers have expanded on this work by collecting better evidence of these associations, searching for other exogenous causes, refining the concept of social organization, and asking whether social organization has positive effects beyond reducing crime, such as "the realization of common values in support of social goods," the "collective socialization of the young," and the enforcement of "norms of civility and mutual trust" (Sampson 1999, p. 247; see Lee et al. 1984; Sampson, Raudenbush, and Earls 1997; Sampson et al. 1999; Sampson 1988, 1991, 1999; Sampson and Groves 1989; Sampson and Wilson 1995; Pattillo-McCoy 1999). The theory, however, has remained fundamentally the same. The term "social organization" has denoted several distinct issues, such as a neighborhood's ability to supervise and control teens, the extent of mutual trust among neighbors, the density and range of local social networks, and the level of voluntary community participation (Sampson and Groves 1989; Sampson 1999; Rankin and Quane 2000). This study is specifically concerned with this last factor.[3]

Social organization theory has several limitations, two of which are relevant here. First, the basic theory posits that differences in structural conditions across neighborhoods will cause differences in local participation (see fig. 1*a*). Yet the widespread use of cross-sectional data prevents us from demonstrating this causal relationship. Most tests employ multilevel or hierarchical linear models (HLM; Bryk and Raudenbush 1992), which help adjudicate between neighborhood and individual characteristics (e.g., Sampson et al. 1997). But the use of HLM alone cannot account for the fact that individuals are not randomly distributed across neighborhoods—that is, for "selection effects" (see Duncan and Aber 1997; Jencks and Mayer 1990; Furstenberg and Hughes 1997; Small and Newman 2001; Tienda 1991). Individuals live in neighborhoods as a consequence of multiple measured and unmeasured factors that affect both

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[3] Recent research highlights the importance of studying each indicator separately. Patillo-McCoy (1999), e.g., shows that precisely because of the high density of and range of local social networks (one indicator), residents in a Chicago black middleclass neighborhood were unable to control drug-related crimes among its young people (another indicator). The residents, reluctant to see their children, nephews, and grandchildren incarcerated, failed to seek the police protection that could have helped reduce these crimes (see also Gregory 1998).

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A
Different structural
conditions across
neighborhoods

Different levels of
social organization
(and participation)
across neighborhoods

B
Changes in structural
conditions within
neighborhoods

Changes in level of
social organization
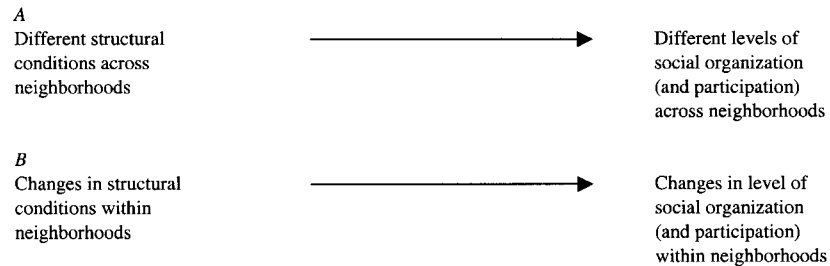(and participation)
within neighborhoods

Fig. 1.—Relationship between structure and organization in social organization theory

social organization levels and heterogeneity, neighborhood socioeconomic status (SES), and residential instability. If any of these factors is correlated with both social disorganization and any of its three hypothesized causes, failing to account for it would inflate the perceived effect of the hypothesized cause on social disorganization.[4] Though many studies may demonstrate strong associations, they cannot establish which variable caused which outcome, a particularly critical concern where so many variables at different levels of analysis are involved.

This problem can also be understood by noticing that although the existing evidence (conclusive or not) relates to figure 1a, the theoretical causal relationship is, in fact, the one illustrated in figure 1b. Thus to substantiate the theory, "longitudinal designs are needed where sequential order can be established" between the structural factors and social organization (Sampson 1999, p. 269). Along the same lines, I argue that the mechanisms linking structure and community participation can only be uncovered within the context of changes over time (see Schwirian 1983). However, I also suggest an additional step in the revision—that, at least with respect to *community participation*, even figure 1b is misleading, for structural changes may not necessarily produce changes in community participation.

Second, we must recognize the literature's general weakness in dealing with *cultural factors* as anything other than epiphenomena of structural conditions (see Sampson and Wilson 1995; also Emirbayer and Goodwin 1994; Lamont 1999). Early on, Shaw and McKay (1969) considered the role of culture in perpetuating social organization yet still privileged structural conditions. Kornhauser's later (1978) devastating critique of cultural

[4] For example, some people are raised in households that foster volunteer work. If these people, as adults, move into high-SES, homogenous neighborhoods, those neighborhoods will likely have high levels of social organization, and the causal factor will not be either neighborhood SES or homogeneity, but the familial culture and early socialization of their residents.

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deviance perspectives on crime further discredited culture. More recently, scholars within the tradition have taken culture more seriously, allowing it at least partial causal force, but not much more. By and large, culture is assumed, a priori, to be either epiphenomenal or (at best) endogenous (and explainable by a structural factor), assumptions rarely tested or examined empirically. As Sampson and Wilson (1995, p. 53) note, "Scholars have dismissed the relevance of culture based on the analysis of census data that provide no measures of culture whatsoever." In fact, the authors could simply have written of the "dismissal of culture based on no data whatsoever."

Part of this reluctance to deal with culture stems from the tendency to rely on the conceptions of culture as norms and values prevalent during the 1950s and 1960s (Lewis 1968; Banfield 1968; see also Valentine 1968; Hannerz 1969). For example, Shaw and McKay define culture as "social values" (1969, pp. 170–89). Korhnauser, hoping to add clarity to the notion, argued that "shared values are the core of culture" and that "motivational orientations are not incorporated into culture unless they are valued or linked to values" (1978, p. 210). This view of culture led Moynihan (1965) and others to be accused of "blaming the victim" (Ryan 1976; see Wilson 1987). And indeed, if social organization scholars both (*a*) granted culture an exogenous explanatory force and (*b*) defined it in terms of shared norms and values, then they would be led to the politically controversial (and empirically incorrect) conclusion that the values of the poor are the cause of their low social organization (discussed in more detail by Wacquant [1997]). Thus, researchers have refrained from examining culture seriously, rather than reconsidering whether "shared norms and values" is its most appropriate definition (see also Wilson 1996).[5]

The recent sociology of culture has produced dozens of more sophisticated conceptions of culture—Swidler's (1986) "tool kit" or "repertoires," Bourdieu's (1977) "habitus," and the use of "narrative" (Taylor 1989; Somers 1992; Hart 1992) and "frames" (Goffman 1974). Indeed, the notion that people's actions are directed primarily by their norms and values is

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[5] Hannerz's (1969) early critique of the values perspective is often cited as a more sophisticated approach to culture (e.g., Wilson 1987) but, somewhat surprisingly, rarely employed as a source for actual theory building. Hannerz's approach, centered on the notions of "mainstream" and "ghetto-specific" forms of behavior that operate in dual fashion among the poor, is too broad based to be of use here. As I discuss later, such generalized conceptions of culture are probably inappropriate for understanding community participation.

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rather dated and simplistic.[6] More generally, even recent researchers sympathetic to the idea have said relatively little about how to incorporate culture (see Small and Newman 2001). Pushing for more sophisticated approaches to culture in urban poverty, Sampson and Wilson (1995) have recently advocated the study of the "*cognitive landscapes* or ecologically structured norms (e.g., normative ecologies) regarding appropriate standards and expectations of conduct" (p. 50). But they do not elaborate either theoretically or empirically on how these cognitive landscapes are related to structural factors or how they should be studied.

To address these issues, I rely on the case of Villa Victoria, a predominantly Puerto Rican housing project in Boston that, after a period of high local participation between the mid-1970s and mid-1980s, experienced a prolonged decline lasting well into the 1990s. Can social organization theory explain why neighborhood participation declined in Villa Victoria? If not, why not? I find that the decline cannot be accounted for by the changes in the structural conditions hypothesized by the theory, which (*a*) insufficiently or inadequately articulates the relationship between structure and participation, (*b*) neglects of the role of cohort succession, and (*c*) does not account for the importance of cultural perceptions of the neighborhood in sustaining local participation. By addressing these issues, I show that a modified and expanded version of social organization theory—which includes a more thorough treatment of culture—provides a clearer and more robust (if necessarily incomplete) account of what happened in Villa Victoria. The revised approach comfortably incorporates culture while helping to clarify the sequential relationship between structural conditions and changes in community participation.

My analysis is based on participant observation between 1999 and 2001; census data for 1970, 1980, and 1990; testimonials from residents; and historical archives from the neighborhood's community organizations (see the appendix). I will use the case to push the limits of social organization theory. I do not propose an idiographic explanation of all factors that might have affected the neighborhood's decline in local participation; nor will I provide a neighborhood history of local participation, a task best suited for a historian, not a sociologist. Instead, I examine in detail the key variables proposed by social organization theory and show that the changes cannot be understood by relying on the theory as traditionally

[6] Although social organization theory has not incorporated the recent work on culture (but see Sampson and Wilson 1995, p. 50; Wilson 1996), recent studies on class reproduction (MacLeod 1995) and social movements (Snow and Benford 1992; Morris and Mueller 1992; Hart 1992) have, and both of them address questions relevant to social organization theory (see also Bourgois 1995).

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conceived—but that they *can* be understood after rethinking the relationship among structure, culture, and change.

Below I describe the neighborhood, its birth, its period of high participation, and the subsequent decline in community participation. I then assess whether the decline can be explained by changes in the neighborhood's structural conditions. Next, I identify the cohort (rather than the neighborhood's structural conditions) as the key unit behind the change. Then, I introduce the concept of neighborhood frames, that is, the cultural categories through which residents perceive and interpret their neighborhood. I show that different cohorts "framed" the neighborhood differently, which accounts for the difference in willingness to get involved. Subsequently, I examine why different cohorts framed the neighborhood as they did, and I show that these frames—which form part of a narrative residents have about the role of their neighborhood in their lives—are sustained by collective historical experiences and residents' perceptions of their life chances. Finally, I incorporate this notion into what I argue is an improved conception of the relationship among structure, culture, and local participation within social organization theory.

THE NEIGHBORHOOD

Villa Victoria, or "the Villa," is a 20-acre, low-income housing project of over 800 units and roughly 3,000 residents in Boston's South End neighborhood. Most residents are poor and either first- or second-generation Puerto Rican. The Villa resulted from a grassroots political movement during the 1960s (see Hardy-Fanta 1993; Uriarte-Gastón 1988; Bond 1982). At the time, the parcel of land where the Villa now sits, Parcel 19, was populated primarily by about 2,000 Puerto Rican migrants, who lived in deteriorating brownstones and brick townhouses built in the late 19th century. Most of them were of rural origin and uneducated: 77% were from either the countryside or a town in Puerto Rico with fewer than 25,000 residents, and only 11% of men or women had at least a tenth-grade education (Youngerman 1969). That section of the South End was, in addition, rampant with crime, unsanitary, and structurally unsound (Keyes 1969).

In the mid-1960s, Parcel 19 was designated a redevelopment zone by the Boston Redevelopment Authority (BRA 1965), which would displace the residents, as had happened to low-income and working poor African-Americans and immigrants throughout the South End. In response, around 1967, the Puerto Rican residents began to assemble with the support of activists, priests and seminarians, architects, and a few professionals, both Latino and white. Meetings were held at the local St.

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Stephens Episcopal Church, where funds raised by the ecumenical Co-operative Metropolitan Ministries and the Episcopal City Mission were funneled to the group. Charismatic leaders from the community emerged who convinced residents to join the resistance. In a historic meeting of roughly 500 residents in 1969, the group became ETC Developers Incorporated. ETC settled on the motto, "*No nos mudaremos de la Parcela 19! (We shall not be moved from Parcel 19)*" (IBA Archives; NU IBA Z02-20 [henceforth NU], Box 3; see the appendix).

Ernesto, a middle-aged Puerto Rican immigrant, emerged as one of the leaders.[7] With little formal education, he had never, in either Puerto Rico or the South End, participated in any activity of this kind. But he became motivated by the prospects of being displaced, the deteriorating state of the neighborhood, and the encouraging words of one of his Episcopal priests. As he recalls (in Spanish), "Father —— told us, 'Don't go anywhere!'" He and others joined the growing task forces that went door to door to register residents' complaints. For months, ETC picketed City Hall, organized alternative rehabilitation plans, and negotiated with the BRA to build low-income housing instead of luxury condominiums in the parcel.

In 1969, in a stunning victory, ETC won the right to develop the parcel and manage the resulting complex.[8] A new, attractive housing project was built, and residents who were relocated during construction were allowed to move back in upon completion. In the early 1970s ETC became *Inquilinos Boricuas en Acción* (IBA, or Puerto Rican Tenants in Action), a community service organization with permanent staff and volunteers. Simultaneously, a new organization, ETC, Inc., became the management company in charge of the property.[9] The residents called their new neighborhood "Villa Victoria" (IBA Archives; NU Box 3).

[7] All names, and minor identifying details, have been changed in the interests of confidentiality. When a quotation was taken from a public source, such as a newspaper, the person's real name is used. To differentiate between actual names and pseudonyms, only the former will include the first and last name.

[8] Though it was a rare occurrence, it was not as unlikely as one might expect. Fewer than 10 years earlier, the furor over the destruction of Boston's West End (Gans 1962) had forced the BRA to be especially sensitive to the needs of local residents during rehabilitation efforts. In at least one earlier case, in South End's Castle Square neighborhood, residents were walked through housing options, rather than being merely evicted (BRA 1964).

[9] IBA is now a complex service-provision organization with residential, finance, and arts and culture departments. The organizational relationship between IBA and ETC has changed several times over the years. There have been times when a single director managed both IBA and ETC, times when the two organizations were governed by two separate boards, and times when they were governed by one board. The size of the boards has also changed. Presently, IBA has a managing director and a board of

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For the student of local participation, Villa Victoria is ideal. Its boundaries are socially recognized and ecologically reinforced, rather than bureaucratically defined census-tract demarcations (Sampson 1999; Wilson 1991; Chaskin 1997); its Puerto Rican–inspired design and landscape contrasts with the surrounding South End of renovated Victorian brownstones and townhouses. Furthermore, as I show below, its history of local participation surpasses that of many poor neighborhoods, making it an ideal (not representative) site to uncover the working of inner mechanisms (see Ragin and Becker 1992). Finally, its changes in participation over time allow one to track the sequential relationship between structural transformations and community participation (Sampson 1999).

THE RISE AND DECLINE OF LOCAL PARTICIPATION

A High Period

This study begins with the period immediately following Villa Victoria's construction, the bulk of which ended in 1976. By then, the Villa was a stark contrast to the old Parcel 19—it boasted clean, safe streets, attractive parks and sidewalks, freshly painted buildings, and attractive dwellings with adequate heating and hot water. This radical transformation in quality of life taught the residents that community involvement pays off. Thus began a period exemplary of what urban scholars call community participation (Sampson 1999; Rankin and Quane 2000), a process that manifested itself both institutionally and noninstitutionally.

The most institutional response was the creation of IBA, whose main mission became "fostering the human, social, and economic well-being of Villa Victoria residents" (IBA 2000a). IBA became a full-functioning nonprofit organization with professional directors housed in office space in the neighborhood. IBA (as well as ETC) was governed by a board of directors selected exclusively by the residents of the neighborhood and composed mainly of residents but also of outsiders who had demonstrated their ability and willingness to serve. The neighborhood was divided into eight small "districts"; one board member represented each district, while an additional 12 or so members were selected at large (IBA Archives; NU Boxes 2, 3, 27).

Community participation also manifested itself noninstitutionally, in forms both elaborate and mundane. Consider a sample: beginning in the early 1970s, the first of several newsletters was published. *El Luchador* (in this context, "The Struggler") was initially a 10-page item photocopied

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directors (composed primarily of elected residents), while ETC is run as an independent company.

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at the IBA office. It often evoked optimism as it described new and continuing community associations: "A few weeks ago began the dance classes of the Areyto program for children. We are very happy with the reception of this workshop, given that the first day of classes numerous girls showed up with great interest in learning" (IBA Archives, 1976, in Spanish). In the mid-1970s, the residents initiated the yearly Betances Festival, a four-day celebration of Puerto Rican music, arts, and culture held in the neighborhood's main plaza. The festival attracted thousands of people every year, celebrating with a small parade and the traditional election of a "reina del festival." In the late 1970s, a small group of women calling themselves "la cooperativa de cocina" began meeting a few times a month to exchange and discuss Puerto Rican recipes, some of which were disseminated through the neighborhood newsletters (IBA Archives). Shortly before 1980, Fredo, an extroverted man who had migrated to the South End in the early fifties, started informal English courses for adults and for children. The long-running courses were held in one of IBA's rooms and were very popular, earning him the still-remembered nickname "El Profesor." In 1980 a group of young men and women built a small solar greenhouse, which a reporter described as a "plastic-covered geodesic dome [that] resembles a jungle gym topped with a bubble. . . . Inside, warm humid air bathes the vegetables and flowers tucked into the 21-foot circle of soil" (Pollard 1980). The residents built it for the long term: "We want kids to run this project, to have a garden growing all year round" (Pollard 1980). In the early 1980s, Villa Victoria's own closed-circuit television station, Channel 6, was launched (see Rivas 1981). Staffed by one full-time worker and up to 20 volunteers from the community, Channel 6 left an archive of thousands of hours of tapes (IBA Archives). In the mid-1980s a particularly popular IBA-sponsored cultural program, *Areyto*, got residents involved in the visual arts, including print-making and photography. Once, with the help of outside funders, the youngsters in the neighborhood assembled a colorful tile mural on a large wall facing *Plaza Betances* that depicted the history of the Puerto Ricans in the neighborhood and their struggle to create Villa Victoria (see Hoyt and Rivera, n.d.).

From 1976 to the mid-1980s, the neighborhood experienced heavy community participation, with activities such as big brother/big sister mentorships, math and literacy workshops, English-language courses, community gardening, cultural education on the music and rhythms of Puerto Rico (such as the *son* and the *trova*), workshops on dances of Puerto Rico and Latin America (esp. salsa and *bomba*), baton twirling for girls, after-school tutoring programs, summer field trips, and celebrations of every major holiday for both the U.S. mainland and Puerto Rico. Scores of boxes of IBA archives contain fliers, posters, photographs, announce-

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ments, meeting minutes, editions of neighborhood newsletters, draft certificates of appreciation for volunteers, local newspaper clippings, and auditors' reports bearing evidence to the hundreds of events, group meetings, and ad hoc associations that took place at the time in the neighborhood (see e.g., NU boxes 1, 2, 3, 22, 44, 49, 102, 132). The level of participation was striking.

This phenomenon, which I am calling *community participation*, differed radically from the earlier, *political mobilization* that had led to the creation of Villa Victoria. The mobilization of the late 1960s was precisely that—a movement aimed at the clear goals of resisting displacement and creating a housing complex. The participation of the late 1970s and early 1980s was not a movement; it had no particular goals or missions and was hardly of a political nature.[10] Though math and English language courses may possibly be thought of in that light, cooking groups, gardening associations, mural painting, and cultural festivals represent participation in the more general sense of voluntary involvement for its own sake (e.g., Rankin and Quane 2000; Sampson 1999). Unlike the political mobilization of the 1960s, community participation would not lead to policy changes; but it would, according to urban theorists, improve the quality of life, decrease crime, and lessen the hardships that accompany poverty by increasing social support systems (Wilson 1987, 1996; Sampson 1999). Indeed, Villa Victoria demonstrated that poor neighborhoods need not be disorganized, anomic, or alienating (see also Gans 1962; Whyte 1943). As Carla, a lifelong Villa resident in her sixties, recalls, "This community used to be a model for other communities" (in Spanish).

The Decline

These golden years did not last. By the time I began fieldwork in the neighborhood in the late 1990s, most of these associations and activities had vanished. There were no cooking groups, plays for the elderly, volunteer-run ESL or math courses, print-making activities, newsletters, or even shows on Channel 6. Attendance was low at community meetings, new ideas were supported in a haphazard fashion, and volunteers for cultural or music education were scarce. Few residents even ran for the board of IBA/ETC, which had dropped in size from 20 in 1977 to 12 in 1999. In fact, the "district" system had been disbanded, for it was too difficult to find at least one candidate for each of the eight districts.

[10] The Partido Socialista Puertorriqueño (Puerto Rican Socialist Party, or PSP) did have some members in Villa Victoria and attempted organizing during the late 1970s around employment issues, education, health, and housing. It distributed an occasional newsletter titled Voz de Lucha. The effort was short-lived.

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Some activities (such as the Betances Festival and an after-school program) survived, but Villa Victoria was a different neighborhood. As Tania, a resident in her fifites, lamented, "it's been about 10 years now since all of this has disappeared" (in Spanish). Although many of IBA's community *service* programs were still in operation, the number of volunteer-dependent activities had declined drastically. On several meetings set up for neighborhood residents to discuss how to improve their community—for example, by organizing a cleaning day—few people showed up other than the organizers and me. A newly instituted computer center had trouble attracting volunteers to teach courses and even people willing to learn. Since organizers had been unable to find volunteers, I offered to teach a free, fully bilingual, introductory computer course for adults, which was scheduled for the early evenings. After much canvassing with local organizers, announcements, and word-of-mouth advertising, fewer than 10 students attended the first day. Melissa, a young, lifelong resident of the neighborhood, set up a meeting to organize an after-school dance class and almost no one showed up. "I try to organize things and people don't come," she explained. "It's frustrating!" This sentiment was repeated over and over from the few organizers still invested in community participation. Gloria, another young woman poised to become a leader, simply quit the board of directors: "Feeling a lack of involvement from the community. Feeling that there was so much work and there wasn't enough help. . . . [So I said] I do not want to do this anymore. So I stopped. . . . I just was not involved."

How did it come to this? Both the archival record and the oral histories point to a gradual if precipitous decline beginning the second half of the 1980s and continuing through the late 1990s. An instructive, if imperfect, indicator of this trend is the number of residents volunteering in the board of directors of IBA. The board in 1970 had 21 active members; in 1977 it had 20; in 1982, it had 20; in 1987 it had 16; in 1994 it had 12. That year, only 14 people decided to run at all for election (IBA Archives).[11]

Around 1990, there was hope. As IBA's management changed over the years, its mission had shifted, sometimes emphasizing human services, at other times, financial independence and stability. But that year it was so clear the ethos of participation had changed for the worse that IBA decided to attempt suppressing the trend. It hired professional community organizers and directed them "to . . . increase resident participation . . . and create a community vision of Villa Victoria" (Meza and Buxbaum

[11] These figures, I emphasize, are imperfect proxies. Until 1993, there were two separate boards, one for ETC, one for IBA; that year, the two boards were consolidated into one. I have tried to include those years for which I was able to obtain figures on the number of actual persons sitting on the board(s).

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1995, p. 7). Their campaign, the Villa Victoria 2000 Initiative, was called a "'back to the future' grassroots effort to get Villa residents re-engaged" in the neighborhood through community forums and local mobilization (see *El Correo de la Villa*, NU Box 30). Yellowing scraps of drafts for handouts and newsletters reveal how hard the organizers worked to shift residents' attitudes about participation. A 1994 flier optimistically wrote about IBA's restructuring as a solution to this problem: "IBA/ETC is uniquely equipped to maintain and strengthen the community it helped create 26 years ago. . . . To hear the board and staff at IBA speak is to know why. Just listen to their words: *community participation*, *resident leadership*, *responsible representation*, *the importance of coordination*" (NU Box 132; emphasis in original).

But the same flier called for the "renewal of the community spirit which marked the early years of the [ETC] movement," emphasizing the campaign's recurring theme—a "renewal" of the former "spirit" of involvement. It attempted, for example, to revive Channel 6 with youth support, calling for residents to show "evidence for our teens . . . that the community has made a commitment and supports them."

In 1991, the campaign began a monthly newsletter, *El Correo de la Villa*, using its editorials to invoke residents to act. A 1993 editorial commented optimistically that "we have taken important steps towards achieving unity in Villa Victoria. There have been several community forums, all well attended by residents" (NU Box 31), suggesting the campaign might be successful.

By early 1995, the outlook was more pessimistic. The monthly newsletter had turned into a quarterly. In the fall issue, the editorial struck a grimmer note:

> Editorial: Fight Negativism . . . Too often our minds get stuck on the negativity and adversity that surrounds us, and we don't even notice the small victories that are the best evidence of our daily efforts. . . . As small as the victories of our neighbors, co-workers, members of our community, committee or Board of Directors may be, we need to recognize them. If we do not, we perpetuate a culture of negativism that can bury for years to come our dreams of progress in our communities. (NU Box 30)

Fifteen years earlier, *El Luchador* had celebrated ever-increasing opportunities for engagement; now, organizers discussed "renewal of spirit" strategies, and newsletters complained of "negativism" and apathy. In late 1995, the organizers were forced to admit a defeat that engendered feelings of "distress," "acrimony," and "distrust" (Meza and Buxbaum 1995). The campaign was indefinitely suspended. The "grassroots effort to get Villa residents re-engaged" had failed.

If one were to produce a line graph representing the change in com-

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munity participation from the mid-1980s through the late 1990s, it would not be a smooth, downward line. It would be a bumpy one with sharp highs and lows—momentary bursts of activity and brief collective disengagement—whose messy pattern would only reveal itself from a distance. Historical events over a few months affected the momentary direction of change, yet, over time, the direction of the trend was unmistakably downward.[12]

THE DECLINE AS A FUNCTION OF STRUCTURAL CHANGES

What happened? Can social organization theory account for the neighborhood's decline in local participation? Since social organization theory posits that the decline would result from a decline in the neighborhood's SES, ethnic homogeneity, and residential stability, I examine each of these factors.

Socioeconomic Status

Table 1 shows the median family income, %high school graduates, and %poor in Parcel 19 in 1970, 1980, and 1990.[13] The 1970 figures correspond roughly to the pre–Villa Victoria, antidislocation movement; the 1980 figures, to the period of high participation in Villa Victoria itself; and the 1990 figures to the early period of low participation. Social organization theory would argue that a decline in neighborhood participation between 1980 and 1990 would be caused by a decline in the table's top two figures and an increase in the bottom one over that period. On the contrary, the median family income increased slightly, while the education level in-

[12] It is important to be clear that a decline in local community participation, one form of social capital, does not mean that all forms of social capital declined (as, e.g., Putnam [2000] argues). On the contrary, later I show how a different type of social capital (the level of contact with people from other neighborhoods) might have increased.

[13] The figures must be read very cautiously, for several reasons. The most serious is probably the undercount problem. The 1990 census, e.g., counts only about 1,300 people as Puerto Ricans in tract 705, which encompasses the Villa entirely; yet we know there are over 3,000 residents, the overwhelming majority of whom are Puerto Rican or of Puerto Rican descent, in the Villa. The 1970 census counts about 650, even though the historical record points to at least 2,000. Undercounted populations tend to be the poorest and least steadily employed, so the figures can be thought of as conservative estimates of the seriousness of the poverty situation.

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TABLE 1

Socioeconomic Characteristics of Latinos in Villa Victoria

	1970	1980	1990
Median family income (1990 dollars)	15,991	13,635	14,231
%residents over 25 with high school diploma ...	17	29	41
%residents living below poverty level	31	34	44

Note.—Data are from the U.S. Bureau of the Census (1970, 1980, 1990). See the appendix.

creased *dramatically*, as it had been for the previous decade. Residents were wealthier and much better educated, yet they participated less.[14]

However, the poverty level increased, much as the theory would have predicted. This presents a discrepancy with the income figures. The proportion of poor persons increased by about 10 percentage points over the 1980s, suggesting greater poverty, but the median income also increased, by about $596 in 1990 dollars, suggesting *less* poverty. Thus, did material hardship increase or did it not? The available census data will not provide a fully satisfactory answer. But since it is adults who can reasonably be thought of as potential participants, an ideal (and unavailable) figure would be the percentage of poor *adults* and the median income for adults after controlling for the number of children. If families grew over this period, then hardship increased, contrary to the implication of the income figures; if they became smaller, hardship decreased, contrary to the implication of the poverty figures. The censuses do show the percentage of residents who are children, which can be used as a proxy for family size, only because we are interested in the relative hardship of the collective of adults in the entire neighborhood. In 1980, 61% of the Latino residents in Parcel 19 were 19 and under, suggesting that the median $13,635 per

[14] Does not include unemployment as an SES measure. However, it is important to address (Wilson 1996). The unemployment rate in Parcel 19 has been 24% in 1970, 17% in 1980, and 26% in 1990. Thus, although the participation trend was downward, the unemployment trend was u-shaped. As such, it is unclear which decade (the seventies or the eighties) reflects accurately the relationship between employment and participation. On one hand, people who are unemployed are likely to have more time to be involved, provided they have alternative sources of income (such as subsidized housing and AFDC/TANF checks, as in the case of Villa Victoria); on the other, employment has been associated with high self-efficacy (Wilson 1996), which would be conducive to greater participation. Both hypotheses are plausible, judging from the cases of the Villa, where highly involved residents have run the gamut from people permanently unemployed because of disability (Ernesto), to parents living off AFDC and TANF payments (Eugenia, described below), to temporary and unstable workers (Melissa), to full-time workers (Gloria). There may well be no automatic connection between unemployment and participation, though this would have to be resolved in further research. With respect to our question, the key is not that the unemployment hypothesis is wrong; it is simply unclear that it can contribute, as it presently exists, to our case.

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family was spread thin. In 1990, the population 19 years old and younger had dropped to 38%. Thus, the number of children per adult declined dramatically, which suggests that hardship may have decreased among adults over this period. If true, then participation should have increased, not decreased, according to social organization theory.[15]

With respect to ethnic homogeneity, the neighborhood remained relatively stable over that period. It is not possible to obtain precise racial data over time for the ethnic composition of the Villa (see the appendix). Furthermore, defining "ethnic homogeneity" is difficult among Puerto Ricans, who do not ordinarily conceive of themselves in racial terms. Yet through both self-identification and external measures, the evidence suggests the ethnic makeup of the neighborhood did not change radically over that period. An ETC-commissioned study in 1985 showed that 76% of the heads of household self-identified as "Latino," 10% as "black," and 8% as "white" (NU Box 24). In 2001, I obtained current figures from ETC wherein roughly 77% of heads of households self-identified as "Hispanic," which, in this survey, could be of any race (the overwhelming majority selected "white" as their race). This would indicate no change in ethnic heterogeneity.[16]

Nevertheless, the staff member who provided the data was skeptical of these figures, as was I. From both our experiences, the neighborhood was closer to 90% Latino, at least by sociological definitions of the term. She explained: "We have lots of underreporting, and people living [in units] who are not on the lease" (a problem they addressed aggressively in 2001). "I know [the 77% figure] is not true. I would say it's about 95% Latino. More conservatively, 90%." Each year, IBA runs a "membership drive" to get residents to become "corporate members," which means they will obtain an IBA ID card (for $1) that allows them to vote in the yearly elections for the board of directors. I volunteered with IBA one year on

[15] A reviewer has suggested the important issue that children are often a motivation to participate, so that a greater proportion of children might lead to higher rates of community participation. I do not know of tests that adjudicate between this and the alternative view presented in the paragraph above, but I suggest the question of children as motivators may be thought of as a qualifier for the approach. Later I show that the relationship between poverty and a neighborhood's participation level is not so straightforward (independent of the issue of children): local participation tends to be limited to a minority of the population (see n. 21 below; also Gans 1982, p. 144).

[16] A note on the figures. The 2001 figures are for the 395 households ETC managed at the time. ETC lost the right to manage most of the housing project in the late 1990s after several irregularities; it won the right to manage several of the properties in 2000. The figures are for four of the Villa Victoria developments, Viviendas Associates, Casas Borinquen, Victoria Associates, and South End Apartments. The 1985 figures are for these same four developments, plus a fifth named ETC and Associates, which housed 125 individuals at the time. Thus, the figures are very closely, though not 100%, comparable. All of these developments are within what is known as Villa Victoria.

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several door-to-door membership drives. For the drives, volunteers were given lists with the head of household (or whoever paid rent) for every house in every street in the neighborhood, and the streets were divided among the volunteers in pairs. In our list, for every 50 or so names, roughly three derived from a language other than Spanish, indicating a Latino population of about 94% of households (also note many Latinos have first and last names that derive from the English language). Thus, in addition to underreporting, many individuals with Spanish surnames were probably identifying themselves as either black or white, bringing the self-reported figure down to 77%.[17] In either case, the neighborhood did not increase and may have decreased in heterogeneity, contrary to the expectations of the theory.

It is still possible, however, that ethnic heterogeneity *within* the Latino population increased over the period, driving down the level of neighborhood participation. According to the 1980 census, of the Latinos living in Parcel 19 at the time, 11% were not Puerto Rican (the 1970 figure was the same). In 1990, however, the figure was 2%, again suggesting a more homogeneous population.

Finally, I address residential stability through examining the retention rate (100 minus the turnover rate). Table 2 shows the percentage of heads of households who reported living at the same address for five years prior to the census. In 1980, the figure was 34%. According to the theory that figure should be lower in 1990. Yet the 1990 figure was 57%, representing a dramatic increase.[18]

As it stands, therefore, traditional social organization theory is not well suited to account for the decline in participation over the years. Most measures have not changed as the theory would predict they should, and some have changed in the opposite direction. Thus, we must go beyond

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[17] All these figures exclude the Unity Tower, a tall building in Villa Victoria that does not have a random sample of residents. The Tower, with roughly 200 wheelchair accessible units, has been, since its construction in the 1970s, reserved for the elderly and the disabled. Throughout its history, residents have been low-income people of all ethnic backgrounds, and it has always had a much higher proportion of non-Latinos than the rest of the Villa. Including it would probably bring the current total of Latinos to anywhere between 75% and 95%, including in 1980, but exact figures are unavailable.

[18] These are conservative estimates of the neighborhood retention rate in each of the years, since they only ask residents whether they lived in the same house. A common practice in the Villa is for residents to move from one unit in the neighborhood to another, perhaps larger for its growing family, or closer to the park, or with elevator service, or with a vacancy downstairs where in-laws can live. Indeed, the bulk of the changes in families occupying apartments does not come from new residents (the waiting list is currently closed), but, according to a staff member at ETC, from "transfers. Lots of transfers."

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TABLE 2
RETENTION RATE AMONG LATINOS IN
VILA VICTORIA

Year	%
1970	47
1980	34
1990	57

SOURCE.—U.S. Census Bureau (1970, 1980, 1990; see the appendix).
NOTE.—"%" column shows proportion of residents living in the same dwelling they had occupied five years earlier.

the confines of the traditional theory, something several researchers within the tradition have begun to do (Sampson and Wilson 1995).

Social Organization Theory and the Political Economy

To the extent that social organization theory is rooted in the free urban market paradigm of the Chicago school (Park 1952; Park, Burgess, and McKenzie 1925), it has been criticized for its neglect of the effect of the political economy of cities on urban neighborhoods (Sampson and Morenoff 1997; Sampson and Wilson 1995). Throughout the seventies, eighties, and nineties, Boston experienced important politicoeconomic transformations, such as the shift from an industrial to a technology-based economy, the widespread departure (during the sixties, seventies, and eighties) and subsequent return (during the nineties) of white middle-class professionals, an influx of immigrants to the greater metropolitan area, and a relatively robust economy that kept unemployment low, even among low-skilled workers (Bluestone and Stevenson 2000). These factors matter. Yet the difficulty with assessing the specific influence of politicoeconomic factors is they can include anything and everything—from the drug economy to the political makeup of City Hall to rent control to the national attitude toward welfare. This study cannot account for all of them. How may we apply them systematically to our question? To this end, I make a heuristic distinction between environmental effects and institutional effects. The former refer to the effects of political or economic changes on the general neighborhood environment under which residents would be inclined to participate; the latter, to effects on the local institutions that sustain participation. Politicoeconomic effects on environmental conditions are addressed later, where I show their relation to residents' perception of their neighborhood. With respect to institution-related factors, I address how they affected the IBA—the most important institution with respect to

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local participation—and whether changes in that organization contributed to the decline.

Because IBA relies on government funding and both loans and donations from private organizations, such as United Way (state, local, and federal sources currently account for roughly a third of its budget; see IBA 2000*b*; e.g., Teltsch 1982; Rivas 1982), political factors unavoidably affect the economic viability of the organization. For example, in the summer of 2000 the state's Republican governor threatened to cut nearly 4 million dollars in funding for summer youth employment programs, despite pleas by the city's Democratic mayor to keep the funds intact and retain 1,950 jobs for teenagers (Jonas 2000; Marantz 2000), including the 30 or so adolescents working at IBA. The situation became particularly precarious on the Thursday before the decision would be made, when one community organizer worried that the youngsters might be out of work by Monday. The governor did cut the funding, but the mayor found emergency funds for the program, amid much political fanfare. A minor shift in the state's attitude toward its urban poor, fueled by a political feud, threatened the ability of IBA to fulfill its functions.

But how does IBA affect voluntary community participation? Although IBA is, above all, a human service provision organization, it can also help sustain participation, whether by providing rooms for brainstorming (e.g., clean up day) or running programs (e.g., computer courses), helping publicize events in newsletters (e.g., *El Correo de la Villa*), or providing the institutional backing to formalize a budding activity (e.g., community garden). Thus, if an external factor affects the stability of IBA, it will affect its sustaining power. And, indeed, during 1996–97 IBA suffered the single biggest institutional crisis in its history, as internal and external politics led to conflicts between the board and the head of IBA, the resignation of the head, the firing of board members by the community, and the election of an entirely new board (see Chacon 1997; also With 1996*a*, 1996*b*). This crisis, however, ensued long after participation had declined. In addition, it is easy to overestimate what a service-provision organization can do. By definition, voluntary community participation requires volunteers. Recall that IBA's early 1990s reengagement campaign failed. Indeed, despite IBAs sustained fiscal and institutional stability over two and a half decades, participation declined, suggesting the decline lay in a deeper transformation occurring within the residents themselves.[19] I

[19] The very institutionalization of IBA may have played some role in its decline. Two hypotheses are possible. One states that when voluntary-based organizations become institutionalized, roles formerly occupied by volunteers are subsumed by paid staff in the interests of accountability and regulation (Smith and Lipsky 1993, p. 111ff). The other is that when community-based organizations become more institutionalized, they become an infrastructure that facilitates local participation, which can be thought of

suggest that once we understand this deeper transformation, we shall be better poised to identify what IBA could and could not do.

CHANGE, STRUCTURE, AND CULTURE

The relationship between changes in a neighborhood's structural conditions and changes in community participation, I suggest, is not a one-to-one, cause-and-effect relationship. The reason, to state it somewhat simplistically, different cohorts will respond differently to the same structural conditions if they conceive of the neighborhood through different cultural "frames." This suggestion has three nonobvious implications that, taken together, provide for a different and stronger theory:

1. The best approach to the decline in local participation is by examining cohort differences.
2. Residents' perceptions of their neighborhood (i.e., their narrative frames) affect centrally whether and how they become involved in it.
3. Structural conditions affect participation over time not by producing changes but by setting constraints on a neighborhood's highest potential level of participation.

In what follows, I unpack each element of this argument.

Cohorts

One of my most surprising discoveries in the Villa came as I investigated who, among the current residents, was involved in the remaining neighborhood activities. The current participation level is not zero; it is simply much lower than in previous years. There is still a board of directors (though it holds elections at irregular intervals, not yearly), still a summer beautification campaign (though it is sporadic and receives meager resident support), and still a Betances Festival (though it sometimes has trouble attracting local volunteers). Yet many of the people who volunteer their time now have been doing so since the early 1980s. An imperfect but useful indicator of the makeup of current participants is the composition of the IBA board of directors: members from the mid-1990s show

as the benefit of resource accrual (e.g., McCarthy and Wolfson 1996; McCarthy and Zald 1977). The two hypotheses are not incompatible, for the former refers to volunteers working for the organization, while the other refers to participants who may or may not wish a formal relationship to the organization. Charting he bureaucratization of IBA lies beyond the scope of this article. Nevertheless, later I suggest that such an analysis could be conducted in reconsidering the relationship between structural and cultural factors affecting IBA's decline.

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an overlap with many names from the 1980s. In 1999, only two board members were in their thirties. In the late 1990s, most members were in their late forties and older, except for a handful of residents in their thirties and one under 30, even though age (other than being an adult) is not an eligiblilty requirement. When I participated in the membership drives described earlier, part of our mandate was to encourage residents to run for the board by informing them what types of activities IBA undertook. In all of my rounds, only three persons considered it: an African-American lifelong resident in her fifties, a Latina lifelong resident of roughly the same age, and another Latina in her early sixties who had been active for 30 years in the neighborhood.

Meetings for community service activities are generally attended by middle-aged and older residents, rarely by young adults. For example, at a recent, symbolically important public ceremony in the plaza to designate Villa Victoria a "historic place," there were fewer than a dozen young adults. At our meetings for volunteers for membership drives, most attendants were over 40, except for a couple of young men and women who attended over and over. As part of a cultural festival one summer, an organizer, Melissa, asked for volunteers for a simple activity in which young children would be provided paints to decorate a set of cement tree and plant holders in an area of the neighborhood. On the date of the event I was one of only two adult volunteers under 35 to attend. In recent years, several residents under 40 have been approached by the elders to run for the board, but few have accepted. Overwhelmingly, voluntary participation in the Villa is the practice of an older generation; those of the second cohort of residents are generally uninvolved (see Putnam 2000), much to the chagrin of community leaders. In the words of Gloria, a nearly lifelong resident in her thirties, "We need new people. I mean, I hate to say it like that but we have an older generation in there."

By and large, it was not the case that individuals who were once involved gradually lost their interest in involvement. Instead, the participation levels of the first cohort of adults were not replaced by the second as the former grew older and died. In the Villa's past, young adults were involved locally; now, young adults are doing other things.[20] The key change came at the cohort level.

Why do the two cohorts participate locally at different rates? (Differences in *local* participation does not imply that *external* participation in voluntary activities outside the neighborhood also differed among the cohorts, much less that it is lower among the later cohort.) I suggest the cohort differences in participation can be attributed to the "frames"

[20] Of course, lest we romanticize the 1970s and early 1980s, many young adults of that time did nothing in the community as well. The issue here is one of proportion.

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through which members of each cohort perceived the neighborhood and its history. I describe these differences below.[21]

LOCAL PARTICIPATION AND NEIGHBORHOOD FRAMING PROCESSES

Framing the Neighborhood

Relying on recent work in social movements and culture (Snow and Benford 1992; Morris and Mueller 1992; Johnston and Klandermans 1995) and in narrative theory (Hart 1992; Somers and Gibson 1994; Somers 1992; Taylor 1989), I suggest the cohort differences reflect, above all, a difference in the narrative-related frames by which the cohorts perceived and made sense of their neighborhood. Neighborhood narrative frames (NNFs) are the continuously shifting but nonetheless concrete sets of categories through which the neighborhood's houses, streets, parks, population, location, families, murals, history, heritage, and institutions are made sense of and understood. Contrary to what some neighborhood effects researchers seem to assume (e.g., Cutler and Glaeser 1997), residents do not merely see and experience the characteristics of their neighborhood "as it is"; their perceptions are filtered through a set of cultural categories that highlight certain aspects of the neighborhood and ignore others. These perceptions become part of an often explicit narrative about the neighborhood's role and significance in residents' lives. Residents' framing of the neighborhood will, in turn, affect how they act in or toward it.

The concept of NNFs borrows from the work on "collective action frames" in the social movements literature. Much of that literature, expanding on the resource mobilization perspective, has focused on how

[21] The question of cohort participation highlights an interesting but little-discussed fact about the peculiar macro-micro nature of neighborhood participation (see Huber 1991; Sampson 1991). The level of participation is presumably a macrolevel (i.e., neighborhood-level) problem; yet the mechanisms I suggest operate at both the macro and micro level. Furthermore, much of the evidence discussed below about collective narratives is, by definition, microlevel evidence. Microdata can help understand macrolevel changes in participation because neighborhoods' participation levels are so small that even small changes—of, say 30 persons—can mean large differences in a neighborhood's participation rate. The Villa contains roughly 3,000 persons and 800 households. A change in the participation rate to 1% of the population would constitute an increase from none to 30 engaged individuals. The change is minor in percentage points, but one that would make a large difference in the number of visible activities in the neighborhood. The reality, of course, is that as individuals come in and out of being involved, the apparent number of involved persons changes. But understanding something about those 30 persons would reveal much about the conceptual macrolevel question of neighborhood change.

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"frames" affect mobilization (see Morris and Mueller 1992; Goffman 1974; Snow and Benford 1992; Steinberg 1999). Snow and Benford (1992, p. 137) define a frame as "an interpretive [schema] that simplifies and condenses the 'world out there' by selectively punctuating and encoding objects, situations, events, experiences, and sequences of actions within one's present or past environment" (see also Goffman 1974). The framing perspective's critique of resource mobilization theory is that cultural or symbolic elements are critical for the possibility of action; regardless of resources, activists will be unable to mobilize potential participants without transforming their perception of their situation (see Thomas 1936) by "framing" the issues in such a way that mobilization appears necessary (Morris and Mueller 1992; Snow and Benford 1992; Gamson 1992). Though few would argue that framing processes are at work alone, most would suggest that frames are a necessary, even if not sufficient, condition for action. This approach to framing process is highly applicable to the Villa.[22]

Any discussion of framing theory should be sensitive to three criticisms: that the term "frames" implies cultural perceptions are static; that the theory may assume people are passively subject to reframing but hardly involved in the framing process itself; and that framing theory may be tautological (see Benford 1997; Benford and Snow 2000; Steinberg 1998, 1999). Recent work on narrative theory can help both conceptualize neighborhood framing as a *process* and interpret how residents can have a role in the development of their neighborhood frames while being affected by them. The term "narrative" has been attached to a diverse and uneven literature, some of it dealing with topics more appropriate to literary criticism, and some dealing with political change, historical sociology, and the critique of rational choice theory (see esp. Somers 1992; Somers and Gibson 1994; Hart 1992; Taylor 1989). The theory suggests that individuals understand their lives as narratives with ongoing and complex plots and that they tend to act not when acts are rational but when the actions accord with such narratives. I suggest the same is true with respect to behavior in neighborhoods. Residents act and become involved in their neighborhoods when such actions conform to their narrative of the neigh-

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[22] It is important to be clear about how the social movements literature is and is not applicable to my question. The creation of the Villa, as a result of the collective activities of the Puerto Rican residents of the neighborhood during the late 1960s, is certainly a social movement question. Yet if the issue of framing is relevant to this discussion, it is not because the community participation of the 1970s and 1980s is a type of mobilization (it is not), but because both problems (community participation and social mobilization) concern how making meaning—in the case of movements, of social injustices (Benford 1997, p. 415), in this case, of neighborhoods—can be said to result in action.

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borhood's role in their lives. These narratives, in turn, are shaped by the frames through which the neighborhood is perceived. Frames are assumed to be dynamic entities partly dependent on the experiences of individuals. Specific aspects of the tautology problem are addressed in a subsequent section. Below, I examine the cohorts' differences in their cultural framing of the Villa.

A "Beautiful" Place to Live

Residents of the Villa's first cohort frame it as a wonderful place to live. Ernesto, for example, has lived in Parcel 19 since the 1950s. He now relies on a wheelchair, but as a young man was one of the first members of the IBA board, and in the sixties was part of the ETC campaign, picketing the BRA "sometimes until 12 o'clock at night" (in Spanish).

> They used to call this around here "the trap" [or "the catch-all"].
> Look—behind [my apartment] here there used to be a huge ditch. The little
> houses used to lean over into the water. When it rained hard, a spurt of
> water ran along [behind here] and the houses—and their balconies—were
> almost falling over. And people lived in these places! Holy Mary! The houses
> were falling apart. And I find myself dumbfounded [*me quedo bobo*] at how
> beautiful this got afterward! It was torn down and refilled with machines,
> until the houses were all built anew. (In Spanish)

Ernesto believes he is fortunate to live in Villa Victoria. That the neighborhood deteriorated markedly over the years (until 2001, when a massive renovation was begun) has had little effect on his belief in its fundamental beauty.

Ernesto's perception is part of a vision of the neighborhood as a place of historical significance. This cohort considers the neighborhood a sort of treasure, the legacy of a group of activists who fought for its creation. These activists are known as "the pioneers," a title considered a badge of honor. The pioneers' struggles and accomplishments imply, in this cohort's minds, the responsibility of the existing residents to sustain the community.

Doña Cotto, like Ernesto a "pioneer," is an elderly woman who has lived in the South End most of her life. She recalls that, in the 1960s, "the living conditions were very bad. The apartments were really rats' nests." With her husband, Leonso Cotto, and often with her daughter, she attended many of the meetings with housing officials before the neighborhood was built. She lacked professional skills, but she believed her presence helped bear evidence of the residents' determination to put up a fight against dislocation. She saw the construction of Villa Victoria as something much larger than herself: "I thought that this would be strong

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and up-to-date construction that would last for many years, for future generations." Thus, she complains that,

> Some tenants have moved in without orientation about how this community was forged. And many of the younger generation don't care about [the buildings], and have damaged and vandalized the apartments, as if the housing had just fallen as a gift from heaven. Many people sacrificed [themselves] to build this housing. . . . I believe that the residents must get together and preserve this housing that so many of us fought for. (*El Correo de la Villa*, 1995 4 [3] NU Box 30)

Just about all of the highly involved residents of this cohort appealed to this narrative when explaining their motivations: there was a difficult struggle that produced a beautiful community which should be preserved.

Consider the case of Tania, a confrontational, yet positive woman in her late fifties who has been a passionate member of the board of directors and has organized after-school arts projects for years: "This was a struggle. . . . These people [the pioneers] went to war. They had to go to City Hall, at dawn, and picket, fight. That's why I want to join the board. . . . I want to see more programs that provide services for the community. This was a fight of the Puerto Ricans who lived here, and I want to see that [our lives] are even better" (in Spanish).

Another woman with four teenage sons recently told a reporter: "Puerto Ricans and other Latinos struggled to get this. That's why I moved here. That's why I have stayed and that's why I will fight to keep it" (Manly 1992).

Eugenia, a 60-year-old who migrated to the South End in the 1950s, has the energy of someone 15 years younger. She has been on and off the board over the past 10 years and has volunteered for everything from the Betances Festival to an ad hoc coalition to improve the landscape of the houses' tiny backyards. She is known as a bottomless well of ideas for neighborhood improvement. During a recent conversation she said, referring to younger residents, "They don't know what we have here . . . something *beautiful*." To explain why she is involved, she expressed herself nearly exactly in Tania's words, adding her characteristic tinge of indignation: "This was a fight! And hard work! . . . And for us to be letting it go to waste. We haven't valued everything they [the pioneers] have done" (in Spanish).These residents perceive the Villa as a success, something "beautiful" to cherish and preserve.

"The Projects"

The second cohort frames the neighborhood as an entirely different place. I use the term "cohort" rather than "generation" quite purposely, as I am

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referring to the second wave of residents, who are not necessarily the children of the first. In addition to containing the children and grandchildren of the pioneers, the second wave also includes new residents, often recent migrants from Puerto Rico, who moved into the neighborhood in the 1990s. Both second-wave groups share certain conceptions of the Villa.

During a meeting in 1999, younger residents discussed Villa Victoria, brainstorming what they believed the neighborhood needed. The list included trash cans to get rid of the public litter; speed bumps to prevent accidents; the elimination of the iron fences surrounding parks and public areas; roofs over the basketball court; the removal of "the bums" found in the plaza ("they should get [i.e., be offered] jobs"); a bank closer to the neighborhood; more programs for 17–22-year-olds; more programs aimed at drugs to reduce heroin and cocaine use; a summer program for enhancing work skills, rather than for recreation; more training in parenting skills; more police officers (some disagreed); a cleanup of local parks; a better security squad (again, disagreement); a new laundromat; a bigger day care center; a youth center with table games, late hours, and air conditioning; more street lamps; a program for parents with children doing drugs; and more probation officers, since right now, one probation officer has "lots of kids." In addition, they complained the apartments needed repair: "the closets come off the racks," "the walls are thin," "rugs are cheap," a closet fell over in one apartment, the refrigerators often have no handles and too few shelves, windows often lack screens. This meeting was organized to discuss what they thought about the Villa, so one should not conclude from this that the young are always complaining about their neighborhood. What is noteworthy is the category of things they chose to talk about—structural decay and the general manifestations of urban poverty, drug use, police involvement in their lives, and material deterioration. Indeed, for them, their neighborhood is little more than a ghetto.

Equally noteworthy was what they did *not* talk about. The notion of preserving a treasure was absent; the word "beauty" never came up. And, contrary to similar meetings attended by the middle-aged and elderly residents, nobody complained that too few people were involved in the community.

This cohort's running narrative of the Villa was not of an attractive neighborhood, much less "something beautiful." The Villa for them is either passable or undesirable. In fact, while the first cohort repeatedly used the words "community" or simply "Villa Victoria," many of the young residents refer to the neighborhood as "the projects." Papi is a young man nearing 30 with an extended family in the Villa. Once, while boasting his young nephew's athletic abilities in basketball, he proudly stated, "This kid's gonna get us out of the projects," a phrase that betrays his perception

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of the neighborhood. Melissa, a young resident who has been ambivalent about both her involvement in and feelings about the neighborhood, reminisces on her walks home from school when she was in high school; she explains the clear contrast she felt between the affluent Back Bay/South End and the Villa: "I'd walk in from Back Bay, and I'd get here and right away I'd now—yep, there's the graffiti, and the men going *Oye, mami*'—and I'd *hate* it." If she had a child, Melissa repeatedly states, that child would not be raised in Villa Victoria. Laura, a woman in her midtwenties who has lived her whole life in the neighborhood, frequently laments that many of the younger and newer residents of the Villa do not understand its history: "They basically see this as the projects with a little flavor, the projects with a [Puerto Rican] twist."

What History?

As Laura points out, an important element of the second-wave cohort's perception is its lack of understanding of the neighborhood's political history. Among those raised in the neighborhood, most know that, during the sixties, a political struggle took place around the construction of the Villa. Yet most of them have little understanding of the role that mobilizing, canvassing, picketing, and political negotiation by the earlier generation had in the creation of the neighborhood. This is all the more notable given the several murals throughout the neighborhood that depict, in different ways, the history of the Villa and of the Puerto Ricans who came to live there.

Members of this cohort, furthermore, do not provide a particularly coherent set of reasons for not being involved. For the most part, they do not see the point of it. Don, a man in his late twenties who has a wife and two young children, brushed aside any notion of his being involved saying, "I got a family to take care of." Tommy, a responsible, witty man in his early thirties, is more blunt about why he is not involved: "What for?!" He complains about IBA's organizational troubles circa 1996, but he is unsure what he would expect IBA to do to foster participation. In any case, he says, "I do my own thing," serving as mentor of sorts to one of his younger peers. One resident, Daniela, now regularly volunteers at the yearly Festival Betances. But for much of her life she was indifferent, when, as she reports, "I never wanted to get involved. I was a very private person. . . . I didn't see the point in getting involved. . . . I didn't see the reason for it. And in truth I didn't know much about the history [of the neighborhood]" (in Spanish).

Indeed, ordinary people are often eloquent in describing social processes larger than themselves. Tania describes the new cohort of residents:

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> Many people have moved in, and they don't know the history, they don't know what happened here. Nobody has told them. They have come in as if they owned the place [*como Juan por su casa*]. I understand that this is an important factor. I want to make it so that any time a new person moves into the neighborhood, they should be taught this history and about IBA and about why it is possible for you to live here today. (In Spanish)

This is a common complaint of earlier residents about newer residents: "They don't know the history."

If neighborhood frames are a set of categories that filter perceptions of the neighborhood, and if *narrative*-related frames are those categories that bear a relationship to an ongoing story of the neighborhood, then the two cohorts' narrative frames can be articulated both through what their categories highlight and through the generalized story about the Villa to which these categories belong. For the first-wave cohort's narrative, the neighborhood has a politically important history; it constitutes a marked improvement in the quality of life of a generation of Puerto Ricans; it is a symbol of their capacity to resist their displacement by forces more powerful than themselves; it would not have existed without the "struggles" of the "pioneers" of ETC in the late 1960s; it is a desirable, even "beautiful," place to live; its park and plaza are special places where community can be built. For the second cohort, the narrative is starkly different, in many ways more consonant with those of an outside, first-time observer: the neighborhood is physically dirty and deteriorating; it constitutes the poorest section of the South End; it is, above all, a ghetto, "the projects"; in it, drug use is rampant; the central plaza is full of "bums" and alcoholics; the Villa is no more beautiful or historically important than any other poor person's place.

Neither narrative represents a more accurate description of the neighborhood; each one simply accentuates different aspects of the complex agglomeration of people, historical events, landscape, and institutions that represent Villa Victoria. Neither cohort has delusions about the neighborhood's current problems; both can see the grime, the rodents, the drug traffic. But how they react to the situation depends on how they frame the neighborhood as a whole, which is why positing automatic reactions to changes in structural conditions (such as low SES $\Rightarrow$ anomie) is a mischaracterization of how people respond to concentrated poverty. In addition, it is not merely that the first cohort "knows" the history while the second does not; the first cohort's perception of history is itself biased and incomplete. The critical role of Anglo priests and seminarians and of outside professionals and architects is not denied but generally neglected. History matters but in a fragmented and selective fashion. Participating in neighborhood activities does not occur outside of a personal

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justification found in a collection of meaning symbols of some type. Here, such a collection of symbols is historically constituted.

ELABORATION ON THE IMPORTANCE OF CULTURAL PERCEPTIONS

Distinguishing NNFs from Other Cultural Concepts

To incorporate culture into social organization theory, we must move beyond stating that "culture matters," and show how it does and does not operate. To this end, I contrast neighborhood frames to other cultural concepts employed recently in related work (Wacquant 1997; Anderson 1994, 1999; McLeod 1995; also Valentine 1968; Hannerz 1969). The three most relevant ones are "master frames" in the social movements literature, generalized belief of value systems in the urban poverty literature, and the "habitus" or cultural dispositions in the sociology of culture and inequality.

The cultural frames through which residents perceive Villa Victoria are not "master frames" in Snow and Benford's (1992) use of the term, for they do not categorize "the world out there" or their lives in general, just their conception of *the neighborhood*. For example, they are not frames about what it means to be Puerto Rican or poor, nor are they particularly nationalist frames, even though a nationalist "collective identity" (Melucci 1989) may have been part of 1960s political mobilization (Uriarte-Gastón 1988). That is, the statements quoted above do not reflect the conception that participation is critical to Puerto Ricans everywhere or to the poor in general. The older, highly involved residents evince, at best, a weak Puerto Rican nationalism; indeed, most of them have no intention of ever moving back to Puerto Rico. In any case, they do not invoke their origins as Puerto Rican when explaining their motivation to participate; instead, they invoke the specific history of activism in their own neighborhood.

Neither can one equate neighborhood narratives with generalized value systems. That is, the former are independent of the generalized culture-as-values concepts employed by Kornhauser (1978), Shaw and McKay (1969), and, recently, in somewhat different fashion, by Anderson (1994, 1999) in the "street" versus "decent" distinction. Many of the Villa's residents would be characterized in that typology as "decent"—for valuing work, family, and responsibility—who not only do *not* participate in voluntary activities but also feel no moral dissonance from not doing so. Tommy, the young man who responded "What for?!" when asked why he is not involved in neighborhood activities, quickly pointed out that he is still involved, if not in the neighborhood, by mentoring his younger friend. Don, cited above, also expressed no interest in participating, but

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his justification was, indeed, the sense of responsibility for his family. These individuals are lacking not "the right values," but a neighborhood-specific framing process that highlights specific aspects of the neighborhood that render it symbolically important. Additionally, most of the older, highly involved residents in the Villa are not and were not "general" participants. Ernesto, never attended school PTAs, joined external residents' associations in the wider South End, or volunteered his time to civic engagement activities unrelated to the Villa. Outside of her church activities, Eugenia has maintained a similarly narrow focus. That is, their community participation is not rooted in the perception that participation is good for humanity at large (though they may well believe this); it is rooted in the perception that it is good for Villa Victoria.

Part of the utility of the notion neighborhood frames is its connotation of cognitive, as opposed to strictly normative, perceptions of and attitudes toward the neighborhood. Thus, Bourdieu's notion of habitus (1977; Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992) is potentially relevant, for it denotes a cognitive perception that predisposes individuals to act in a particular fashion. Such dispositions are, indeed, site specific (or, in Bourdieu's framework, "field specific") and, in addition, independent of values. Yet Bourdieu's habitus works precisely because it is unconscious; it operates at a level that individuals do not typically articulate and may even be unable to. The cultural narratives in Villa Victoria, on the contrary, are conscious perceptions of an entity—the neighborhood—that individuals not only articulate (in rich detail, as described above) but also consciously act upon.

Exceptions that "Test the Rule"

That the cohorts differ in both their rates of participation and their NNFs does not guarantee that participation cannot be understood without understanding NNFs, for the cohorts differ in a host of other traits. A more compelling case can be made by examining a group of residents who are members of one cohort but who act like the other. A small group of second-wave cohort residents participate at the rates of the first; they run for the board of directors, volunteer at fundraising campaigns, and do door-to-door canvassing. These "exceptions" corroborate the significance of narrative framing processes.

Most young adults are either resentful or indifferent about living in the Villa; they are unaware and uninterested in its history. But others, such as Laura, a young woman who has volunteered formally and informally for just about every teen-centered activity available over the past five or six years (such as fundraising for ski trips and crisis counseling) can explain in rich detail the birth of the neighborhood, the political tendencies of the city administration of the sixties, the politics of urban renewal, the sig-

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nificance and source of the architectural design of the Villa, the names and family relations of the activists of the time, and the symbolic significance of the three murals painted in the neighborhood. This is not because of formal education; Laura, like many second-generation Latinas, did not graduate from high school. Laura repeatedly explains that the "struggles" earlier generations went through to create Villa Victoria drive her to remain involved in her "community."

Oscar, a young man who has served as a big brother to many of the neighborhood's children, also frames the neighborhood as a historically constituted "community" playing an important role in his life: "I know what people had to go through to get my community to where it is today. And that means a lot to me. The history of my community means a lot to me. People struggling, and the fight . . . to get affordable housing, to get a piece of land in the city . . . that represents my culture."

Gloria, a young woman who volunteered on the board of directors, similarly expresses issues of struggle, history, and the maintenance of community, if perhaps in less articulate fashion: "[In the past,] people were so involved in this neighborhood. Because they knew what it entailed. They knew it was not an easy fight against the city to be able to control this. It was not simple. It was a clash of the minds. . . And they got together. They started figuring out ways to battle [the city], and they did. They did it. And they were able to be part of the . . . urban renewal project. . . . They took control of this area." She adds "[I hope] people will start realizing the importance of working for this and trying to nurture it and keeping it afloat."

These exceptions among the second-wave cohort share with the first cohort (*a*) a narrative of the neighborhood as something good and sometimes even a privilege and (*b*) a historically constituted conception of the neighborhood. The symbolic element, that is, transcends the cohort and is found across both groups in those residents who are involved in the neighborhood.[23]

Note on the Etiology of Framing Processes

The framing perspective has been rightly criticized for its failure to deal adequately with the etiology of framing processes (Benford 1997; Steinberg 1998, 1999). The critique questions the direction of the causal arrow: How do we know that residents' framing of the neighborhood was not a post

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[23] As we will see below, these "exceptions'" narratives of the neighborhood are similar, but not identical, to those of the first cohort. Though very much aligned on the historical significance of the neighborhood, their perception of the landscape is tempered by their own, different, experiences.

facto justification for their acts of participation that would have happened anyway for other reasons? To be clear, this critique does not disallow the operation of a loop-back effect (Stinchcombe 1968). Once residents became involved, their existing perception may have become increasingly historicized and this may have led them to highlight the neighborhood's perceived political importance. What is critical is that the *initial impetus* run from framing to action, or, stated differently, that the initial action might not have occurred without the "right" framing of the situation.

Among most residents I observed in the neighborhood, participation had been a part of their lives ever since they had come to develop a concrete idea of where they lived, making it difficult for me to identify the initial impetus for their actions. But one case strongly suggests that the arrow does, indeed, run from perception to participation, even if participation later reinforces perception. Daniela, one of the most active young residents of the neighborhood, was born and raised in Aguadilla, Puerto Rico, where she lived with her family until graduating from high school. An independent, if shy young woman, she did not consider herself a political person, nor was she active in neighborhood or town organizations of any kind. Since economic prospects in her small town were grim in the mid 1980s, she migrated in her late teens to Boston, where one of her uncles had opened a bodega in the South End. Daniela worked for her uncle and lived in his apartment directly above the store. She soon married, bore two children, and applied for a unit in Villa Victoria. In the early 1990s, she moved in with her family.

I met Daniela in the late 1990s, while we were both volunteers for the Betances Festival, and eventually I grew very close to her and her family. During a taped interview (see the appendix) I asked if she started getting involved shortly after moving to the Villa:

> No, no. I never wanted to get involved. I was a very private person. . . . I didn't see the point in getting involved. . . . I didn't see the reason for it. And in truth I didn't know much about the history [of the neighborhood]. I didn't know how this neighborhood was created. . . I didn't even know—and pardon my ignorance, I didn't have a lot of schooling—what a board of directors was, what its function was, what they did here. . . . Because if I had known [*voice trails off*]. Maybe ignorance. Above all, I would say ignorance. I got involved about three years after being here. If I had known from the beginning how this community worked maybe I would have gotten involved. . . . I was too young, too ignorant. I didn't know what Villa Victoria was about, the community, IBA. (In Spanish)

Indeed, she had never been involved in neighborhood activities of any type. When she first moved in, she saw Villa Victoria in the ahistorical fashion in which most people view their neighborhoods—as nothing more

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important than a place to live. For her, it was "ignorance"; for the sociologist, it is a way of framing the neighborhood.

Daniela came to know the history of the neighborhood and IBA very gradually. She recalls, for example, getting "fliers about workshops to learn [about] computers." As she asked about taking the workshops she came to know about IBA, and, in turn, the neighborhood, its "pioneers," and what had been transpiring during the late sixties in the South End and Parcel 19. In particular, getting to know the pioneers was critical for her. One of them—an elderly ETC activist who, being a father or grandfather to residents in over a dozen households in the neighborhood, was known to nearly everyone in the community—lived directly across the street. Daniela had heard both fact and gossip about his past, and eventually came to know him well, for he enjoyed retelling the history of the Villa's creation. Thus, she slowly began to develop a different conception of the neighborhood, coming to understand it as a symbolically meaningful place, a place that, in addition, and not insignificantly, could be lost to another wave of urban renewal. Indeed, she began to conceive of living in the Villa as a "privilege." She recalls a conversation she had recently with this pioneer:

> I was telling Mr. —— that he is a person I admire a lot . . . because he is a leader who has been working in the community for so many years. . . . I told him: "You are a person who must sit back and feel proud of what you did because it's thanks to you that I and my children are here, enjoying the privileges of having a low income apartment, paying a [low] rent, because we cannot pay for more." And I was telling him. . . . "I thank you so much. Because all of this we have. . . . We owe this to all of you, people like you, because you worked for so many years." People like him motivate me to do something more for my community. (In Spanish)

To be sure, the changes in how she saw the Villa were much more gradual than her words imply. Yet Daniela has become one of the most active residents of the neighborhood, having done everything from sitting on the board of IBA, to contributing to several clean-up campaigns, to helping me recruit students for the computer courses I taught. She attributes her earlier lack of participation to her "ignorance" or what she calls later her "lack of education" about her neighborhood's history. Her distinction between "ignorance" and knowledge is our distinction between an ahistorical and a historicized way of framing the neighborhood. It is clear that the activism did not precede her narrative framing of the neighborhood. Yet it is not the case that no other factors contributed to her participation (in her case, the fears wrought by the mid 1990s crises in ETC and IBA probably had an impact); nor is it true that her participation did not later reinforce her perceptions about Villa Victoria (it may or may

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not have). The issue is that coming to conceive of living in the Villa as a privilege—or, more generally, reframing her conception of the neighborhood—was a necessary condition, and a principal motivator, for her involvement. Before, there was "no point" in getting involved. Furthermore, her shift did not make her more likely to participate in general—only to participate in the Villa. Daniela's testament to the motivating effect of her newfound knowledge (her new set of framing categories) bears evidence to an initial impetus from framing to participation.

I happen to trust Daniela because we know each other well. Yet, generally, it is important to note that although residents may pretend to an interviewer that they care about a neighborhood, they cannot pretend to know a history they do not know. Furthermore, when residents are asked simply to describe their neighborhood, their answers will betray their framing of the neighborhood, because they will either discuss its history or they will not, allude to its political significance or they will not, depict it as beautiful or they will not. In this sense, it is possible to obtain relatively bias-free descriptions of residents' conception of the neighborhood, addressing an important issue in the study of culture (see also Weiss 1994, pp. 147–50).

Factors Affecting How Residents Frame Their Neighborhood

In order to address what affects the residents' framing of the Villa, I discuss two separate questions: Why did the two cohorts frame the neighborhood differently? And, more generally, under what conditions will a group of individuals develop conceptions of the neighborhood conducive to community participation? The cohorts framed the neighborhood differently, without a doubt, because of the historical experiences through which they came to live in Villa Victoria. These experiences are affected by the polticoeconomic environmental conditions each cohort faced as it developed its view of the neighborhood.

The first cohort's framing of the neighborhood arises from their collective history: born in the small rural towns such as Aguadilla in Puerto Rico, they had lived poor and (by their account) uneventful lives. The men worked in construction, agriculture, or other temporary and low-skilled jobs. Attracted by opportunities in manufacturing and agriculture in New England, they migrated to Boston and settled in the cheap if overcrowded South End. Many of the women never held stable employment. Their new houses were a century old, cold, dirty, and falling apart (see, e.g., Green 1975, pp. 16–17). Roberta, an elderly Puerto Rican migrant, recalls the ubiquitous problem with rodents:

> I'll tell you something. The South End, those were old buildings. And there

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> were so many mice it was scary. One night, my son-in-law and I set up a
> mouse trap. And we trapped nine mice . . . the big ones. . . . One "shopping
> bag" full of rats. . . . Those buildings belonged to ——, one of those rich
> Bostonians. But he was one of those who would never renovate anything.
> (In Spanish)

As adults in their twenties, thirties, and forties, they had experienced the fear of displacement, and so they picketed, rallied, and negotiated and succeeded in producing a new complex. The many of them who had done nothing or very little—perhaps signed a petition or two and attended the meeting of 500 in 1969—enjoyed the success as much as the community leaders, for they had experienced the same deprivation. Moving to the new, attractive Villa Victoria represented the single most significant improvement in standard of living since their migration. For most of them, the event would never be surpassed, and so they began to construe the Villa as a beautiful and important neighborhood, which it was, given their experience. For many, this process took place at a critical age in their lives—the period of early adulthood—where significant events have lasting impacts on our memories and perceptions of history (Schuman and Scott 1989; also Mannheim 1952).

The second cohort's perception of the Villa is constructed around its different historical experience. Some of them, now adults in their twenties and early thirties, were born and raised in the Villa. They never saw the former Parcel 19. Though they might or might not remember the attractiveness of the Villa in the late 1970s, they certainly witnessed the opening of cracks along the cobblestoned path of the plaza, the resurgence of rats along the sidewalks, and the rise in drug traffic. But this cohort has also acquired its basic socialization, and associated networks, not in Puerto Rico but in Boston's public schools, where they interact with students from other neighborhoods and are taught by U.S. born teachers. English is their dominant language, and although most of them understand Spanish, the majority speak "broken Spanish." Gloria, for example, spoke only Spanish during her first few years. But after starting school, her mind "switched," as she explains, and she now prefers English. These residents are invested in urban hip hop culture. Unlike their parents, but in common with their peers in school, this cohort's favorite music is R&B, hip hop, reggae, and Spanish reggae. Their story, in many ways, is a classic tale of modern second-generation assimilation (see Portes and Rumbaut 2001; Rumbaut and Portes 2001).

Moreover, this cohort, both the second generation and the new residents, developed a radically different comparison point when assessing their neighborhood. Their only conception of the South End is of the new surrounding upper-middle-class area with its accompanying signifiers of

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affluence in Victorian urban New England-brick sidewalks and cobble-stone roads, elaborate street lamps, meticulously restored brick town-houses, and expensive automobiles parked along the streets. Thus, the Villa Victoria they witness, when compared to its surroundings, is physically unattractive, poorly maintained, and clearly of lower SES. Recall Melissa's comments about walking from work through the South End and "hating" the "graffiti" and the "*Oye, mami*" catcalls when she entered the Villa. Both cohorts tend to be rather sedentary, spending much of their time in the Villa; yet the first compares it to the former Parcel 19 and sees an impressive success, while the second compares it to the surrounding South End and sees a ghetto.

The Exceptions: The Importance of the Family

The issue is more perplexing when we consider those members of the second-wave cohort who, having no direct experience with the political struggles of the sixties, still framed the neighborhood in terms similar to the first. Here we turn from between-cohort differences to the broader question of what factors result in perceptions conducive to participation. One factor links nearly all these "exceptions," a point made succinctly by one of the residents themselves: "All of them had parents who were involved" (in Spanish). Indeed, with one exception, all of the second-wave cohort participants I met had a mother, a father, or a close relative who was either a "pioneer" or a community leader during the 1970s and 1980s.

Although many of the current second-wave cohort residents had parents in Villa Victoria—parents who, therefore, tended to frame the neighborhood as described above—not all of these parents were equally involved in their own time. In the 1970s and early 1980s, many residents were willing to get involved in activities started by others; but, as in most neighborhoods, the proportion of persons consistently willing to initiate activities was much smaller. Most of the second-wave cohort participants I met had a near relative in this latter category. Laura described how her aunt, a neighborhood activist during her own youth, not only educated Laura about the history of the neighborhood but also encouraged her to work for a local service agency. Oscar remembers that, when he was "a child, my mother was a board member. My mother would *drag* me to the meetings" Gloria, who once served on the board, relates that her "mother had been on the board . . . and [both my father and my mother] were very involved in the community. My father used to teach" English courses in the neighborhood. Melissa is a young woman who, despite her uncertainties about becoming involved in her neighborhood, had tried to start an afterschool dance group. She repeatedly explains that one of the few reasons she perseveres is her mother, who, as one of the pioneers, em-

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phasized the importance of helping others in the neighborhood. Consider, finally, the words of Tania, older than most residents of the second-wave cohort: "I know about the history [of the neighborhood] because my mother was one of the people who got together and worked [to fight their displacement]. They held activities to raise funds. My mother would bring her musicians, and they would put together shows [to raise money]" (in Spanish).

Among this group, family socialization directly affected conceptions of the neighborhood. By relating and repeating the story of the birth of the Villa, these relatives acted in effect, as mobilizers of their own children by shaping the categories through which the children viewed the now-deteriorated neighborhood. Yet what the parents witnessed the children had to imagine and construct. This finding is consistent with much of the literature, which finds that family effects are at least as strong and often stronger than neighborhood effects (Furstenberg et al. 1998).

Mechanisms to Sustain and Mechanisms to Incite

One cannot predict the historical circumstances that will drive a particular group of residents to perceive their neighborhood through symbolic channels that make participation seem important. Yet one can use the Villa's case to examine what types of conditions are necessary for this to happen. I use the Villa case to suggest two different types of conditions: sustaining mechanisms and inciting mechanisms. Cultural frames, I have suggested, are dynamic, not static or unchanging entities (Benford 1997; Steinberg 1998, 1999). As such, for any set of categories to be sustained requires reinforcement mechanisms, for the contents of the set are bound to change as individuals' and collectivities' lives change. In the case of residents of poor neighborhoods, I suggest, such mechanisms are bound to be tied to the relationship between their neighborhood and their life chances, insofar as poverty is a state one—in theory—wishes to escape. The Villa suggests that the sustenance of the types of neighborhood narratives conducive to participation is more likely among individuals (or cohorts) for whom their perceived best opportunities are tied to the neighborhood. For Ernesto, Eugenia, Roberta, and others of that first generation, moving to the Villa was an instance of upward mobility, and they did not expect more upward movement in their lifetime. Indeed, this generation spends much of its time within the bounds of the neighborhood itself. Here, their existing perception of the Villa as symbolically important is likely to sustain itself.

But for Tommy, Don, and others of the second-wave cohort, the Villa is a ghetto to transcend. Even if they heard—as everyone in the Villa eventually does—the tales of the political struggles of the 1960s, they are unlikely to sustain a perception of the Villa as beautiful or important in

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light of the possibility of mobility they see and want for themselves, a possibility that can only come to fruition if they leave. When a resident's aspirations involve or require leaving the neighborhood, a narrative of the type of the first generation is difficult to sustain. Thus, one can formulate as a necessary mechanism for the sustenance of such narratives the belief that one's life chances would not realistically be much improved by living elsewhere. This belief does not imply despair. Rather it implies that residents have not concluded they can do better by going elsewhere; if they have, it becomes extremely difficult to sustain such narratives.

At this juncture, the members of the second-wave cohort who are nonetheless highly involved are particularly instructive. All of them share much of their older relatives' conception of the neighborhood, but their perception, tempered by their experience of a more deteriorated landscape, is secondhand, more impressionistic, and, as we saw earlier, often articulated less clearly. Having interacted with most of them for at least two years, I do not believe it is insincere. Yet, unlike their first-generation counterparts, these young leaders struggle between the responsibility to contribute somehow to community life in the Villa and their ambition for upward mobility. In this respect, our understanding of the importance of the potential participant's poverty level gains nuance. Indeed, like the rest of their cohort, they long for upward mobility, and they have reservations about whether that can occur within the Villa. They perceive the neighborhood as historically important, yet have ambiguities about what the elders called its "beauty." Almost all of them—Oscar, Gloria, Melissa—have ceased their participation at some point in frustration only to reengage later. Melissa, as noted above, feels enough responsibility to try organizing activities for children, yet other times she rejects the idea she would raise her own children in the Villa. Oscar explained, "I'll always, always remember where I come from, and I'll always give back to [Villa Victoria]" but insisted that "I [don't] want to sell myself short. I [don't] want to just keep myself in an environment." Their perception of the neighborhood—while similar to that of the first cohort—is more ambiguous, for it relies on a more precarious sustaining mechanism. Indeed, one suspects this mechanism will not last as long for them as it did for the first-wave cohort.

Equally important are those mechanisms that help incite, rather than sustain, a perception of the neighborhood conducive to participation. Here, I generate some hypotheses extrapolated from the Villa. What will drive a group of residents who were previously not involved locally to develop a perception of their neighborhood that is conducive to community participation? Few poor neighborhoods have experienced the spectacular and volatile birth Villa Victoria did. But the basic mechanism is easily replicable in smaller scale: A sudden, exogenous threat (in Parcel

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19, of displacement) produces a momentary spurt of engagement (in this case, to resist displacement), whose outcome contributes to a reconfiguration of the running narrative of the neighborhood. Momentary crises, large or small, incite short-term reactions that distort the established social order and have the potential of transforming cultural perceptions as communities attempt to reestablish normalcy. This pattern is parallel to Swidler's (1986) argument that "unsettled times" bring symbolic categories to the fore, creating the possibility for their contestation, reimagination, and transformation. Sewell (1996, p. 867) found something similar on a much larger scale, when he argued that political dislocations of the social structure (in his case, France in spring 1789) produce a transformation of the symbolic channels through which society is interpreted. But events may be much smaller in scale—such as a particularly atrocious crime perpetrated in the neighborhood or the imminent threat of a new runway in a nearby airport—and lead to short-term action that creates "unsettlement," which allows for the reconfiguration of cultural perceptions of the neighborhood and the possibility of the conception of community participation as important. It is in such times that cultural perceptions are likely to change radically, as crises heighten cultural activity.[24] Thus, the inciting mechanisms and the sustaining mechanisms described above have the potential to transform an unengaged community into one in which participation for its own sake is supported. To be clear, this process relates to local community participation as the term is employed here, not necessarily to sustained political mobilization around specific issues (e.g., voter registration), though the latter may well be affected by similar dual mechanisms.

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[24] Here, it is important to distinguish a shock from mere neighborhood change. To be sure, "settled" and "unsettled" are relative terms, and neighborhoods, especially urban neighborhoods, are constantly in flux (see Schwirian 1983; Taub, Taylor, and Dunham 1984). However, not all changes should be considered crises; i.e., although urban neighborhoods may be constantly in flux, they are not constantly experiencing shocks. The distinguishing characteristics of the latter probably lie at the juncture of intensity and swiftness. In the case of Parcel 19, the crisis was high in magnitude; in neighborhoods where the crisis is lower in magnitude, it probably must be higher in intensity (e.g., with a higher number of interested and contentious parties) or in suddenness or unexpectedness (e.g., as in the case of a horrid crime) to generate an "unsettled time" likely to produce cultural reassessment. Furthermore, larger crises are probably more likely to lead to cultural reassessment and revaluations. One possibility for generating formal predictions in this respect lies in adapting the models of neighborhood change in Taub, Taylor, and Dunham (1984), which take into account ecology, corporate decisions, and individual decisions.

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DISCUSSION: STRUCTURE, CULTURE, AND LOCAL PARTICIPATION
IN SOCIAL ORGANIZATION THEORY

I have argued that the decline in local participation in the Villa was driven by changes in cohorts, not changes in structural conditions, and that the most important of these changes was the transformation in the cultural categories through which the cohorts framed their neighborhood. At this point, I expand on the wider significance of the Villa's case. This article noted two limitations in social organization theory: its difficulty in demonstrating that low neighborhood SES, residential instability, and ethnic heterogeneity cause low community participation, and its failure to deal with culture in much depth. We are now poised to reconsider each of these critiques.

With respect to causality and "selection effects," the specific problem here would be that residents who were highly involved for prior reasons might have moved into Parcel 19. Yet the case of the Villa shows that neighborhood-related factors affect participation *independent* of the traits of residents who moved in. As mentioned earlier, the residents had shown no evidence of participation—political or otherwise—before the threat of displacement of the late 1960s. Ernesto confesses that neither in Boston nor in Puerto Rico before he migrated had he ever been involved in any such activities; Eugenia, who migrated to the parcel as a young child, had aspirations to being "a teacher and a social worker" but had never become involved in community activities of any type other than faith-related outings conducted by her church. Indeed, neither the testimonies nor the few existing studies of the residents at the time (Youngerman 1969) suggest there was any participation *before* the threat of displacement. Thus, the exogenous threat of displacement by urban renewal provided an elegant natural experiment. Collectively shared experiences by residents of a particular neighborhood will have an independent effect on their future actions. People who had not been involved previously, it is clear, may begin to do so after neighborhood-specific (not just individual) changes take place.[25] Along these lines, we must assess what is implied by

[25] Notice that, for those residents of the second-wave cohort who were active, the influence was less at the neighborhood level than at the family level. The general point is obviously not that active people never cluster into specific neighborhoods, but that this selection bias does not account for participation in the Villa. Along these lines, the case of the Villa highlights the potential dangers of taking the selection bias critique too far. With respect to the literature on neighborhoods, the critique, employed by econometricians and other social scientists, is that one must be able to show that neighborhood factors, independent of the traits of the particular residents who moved (or selected themselves) into the neighborhood, produce a given outcome (see, e.g., Jencks and Mayer 1990). It is an important critique. Yet the social scientist should be interested in not just "controlling" away this possibility but also accounting for the social processes through which individuals become participants. It would not be sur-

the apparent inability of changes in structural conditions to explain the decline. I turned to the question of changes over time because it is only in this sense that we can determine whether the structural conditions mentioned earlier cause disorganization (Sampson 1999). That is, figure 1*b* articulates what the causal relationship would be. I suggest that, contrary to the figure, changes in a neighborhood's structural conditions by themselves may not cause participation to fall (or rise) in a neighborhood. This, however, by no means suggests structural factors are irrelevant. Figures 2 and 3 present a revised approach to the mechanisms by which neighborhood participation changes in a neighborhood. The replacement of an existing cohort by a new one will bring about a new set of residents with their own histories. Whether these residents volunteer their time to their neighborhood will depend on the narrative categories through which they frame that neighborhood. These narrative frames will, themselves, be affected by the collective history of the cohort, in this case manifested in differences in socialization and migration, experiences with urban deterioration before living in the Villa, and integration into urban American society.

But this relationship occurs within the constraints imposed by structural factors. Assume in neighborhood A the conditions are high SES, high homogeneity, and high stability (solid line), while in neighborhood B, they are low on all three factors (dotted line). As shown on figures 2 and 3, any changes in participation would take place regardless of whether the line is dotted or solid (i.e., whether the constraints are weak or strong), yet only within the boundaries (i.e., structural constraints) imposed by the line. Thus, at any given time participation will be expected to be lower in neighborhood B than in neighborhood A, as the cross-sectional research has shown. And whatever changes are brought about in each neighborhood will be constrained by such conditions, so that B's highest *potential* level of participation will never be as high as A's.[26] But whether structural

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prising if many of the second-wave participants eventually moved to neighborhoods where other residents are highly engaged, which would certainly be an instance of self-selection. But the circumstance for both cohorts are consistent with the notion of participation as not a mere given but a socioculturally learned process—through personal experience in one case and family socialization in the other.

[26] Moreover, consider the following: If one could artificially control, e.g., SES and the stability rate and cause a neighborhood to increase only in homogeneity, what would happen to participation? Fig. 1*b* suggests that it would rise. I suggest that a third of the time it would rise, a third of the time it would fall, and a third of the time it would remain the same. However, over time, as participation rose and fell, its highest possible level of participation would be higher than it was before since there is now greater homogeneity. A related, but different, point about the qualitative difference between how structural factors operate across space and over time was made recently by Quillian (1999).

Structural conditions in neighborhood A
_____

Cohort replacement   ⟶   Change in cultural frames of neighborhood   ⟶   Changes in level
of participation

↑

Causal factors

_____

Structrual conditions in neighborhood B
- -

Cohort replacement   ⟶   Change in cultural frames of neighborhood   ⟶   Changes in level
of participation

↑

Causal factors

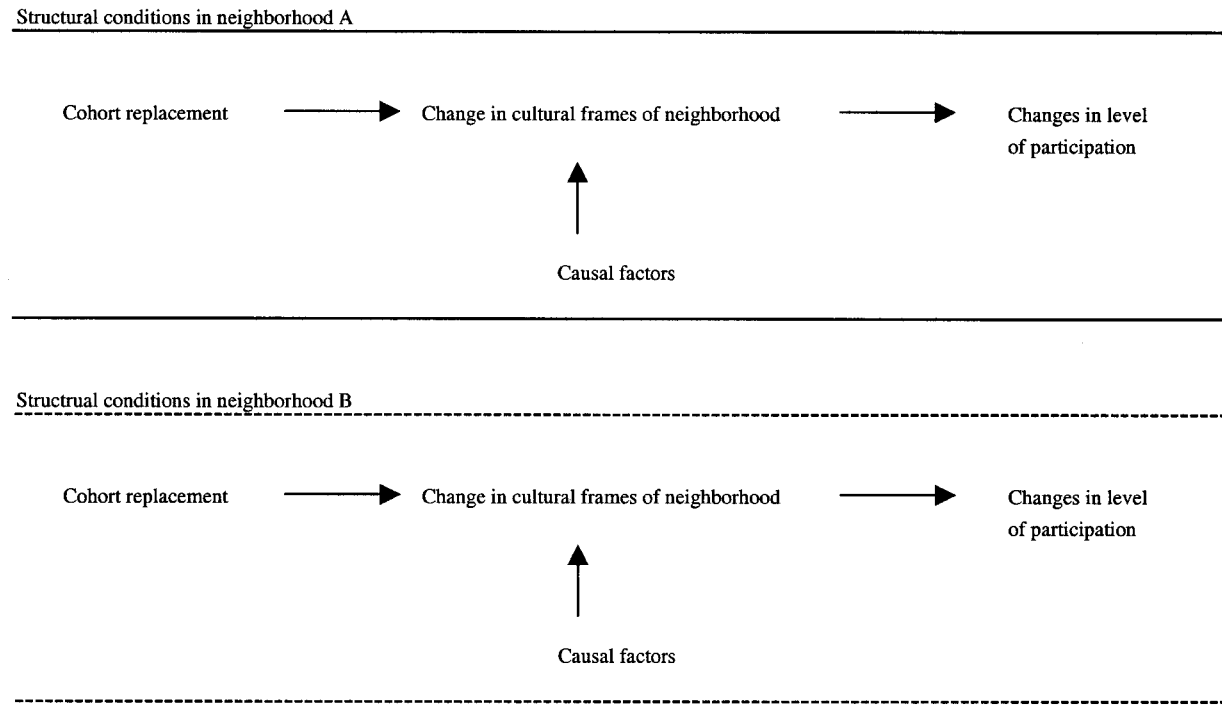- -

FIG. 2.—Relationship among structural conditions, cohort replacement, and participation; note that structural conditions set the constraints under which participation changes, but they do not necessarily predict change; furthermore, for the sake of clarity, the diagrams do not show the effects of other causal factors affecting participation itself (see fig. 3).
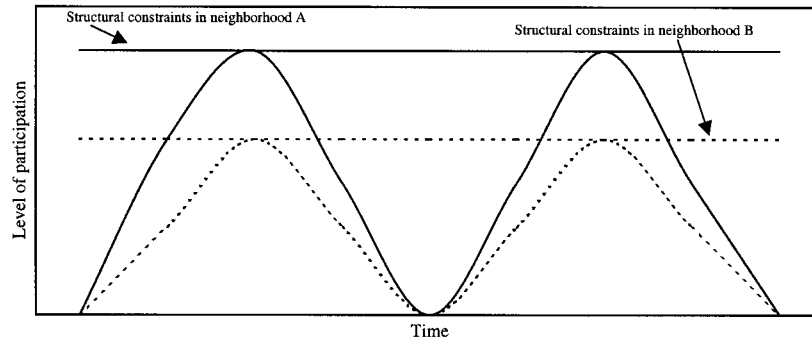
F_IG. 3.— The relationship between structural constraints and fluctuations in participation; the fluctuations in neighborhood A are denoted by a solid line; those in neighborhood B, by a dotted line. As shown in the diagram, participation will change regardless of structural conditions but only within the limits imposed by them. That is, participation is unlikely to rise above the constrains imposed by its set of conditions.

conditions change or remain the same may not affect whether partici-
pation changes or remains the same.

Therefore, although structural changes would not produce changes in participation, structural conditions set constraints on how high partici-pation is likely to be. In Villa Victoria, the most important of these struc-tural constraints were its relative homogeneity and its residential stability. The collective narrative of the neighborhood as a historically important place has only lasted over time at all because the neighborhood is resi-dentially stable—because many residents who lived there in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, are still around, and they have maintained the oral history. Its ethnic homogeneity serves as a sustaining factor in similar fashion. Since the story of the neighborhood's birth—selective and in-complete as it is—centers on the role of Puerto Rican activists, a more heterogeneous neighborhood would have been less receptive to its mes-sage, making it harder for that particular narrative to last. It is in this sense that structural factors may operate: as constraining or enabling conditions that do not precipitate changes but make them easier or more difficult. The high associations between the independent variables and social organization uncovered over decades of empirical evidence point to a relationship of constraint-and-possibility, not cause-and-effect. The failure to articulate this distinction has been a significant drawback in the literature's attempt to open the black box linking structural conditions and participation. At the neighborhood level, the causal process may lie not in transformations of structural traits but in transformations of cohorts and their associated collective perceptions of the neighborhood.

I have also critiqued how culture is employed in the study of community

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participation. Social organization theory has seen culture as a set of general values, and has argued it is the natural result of structural urban poverty, a collective cultural response shared more or less equally by all residents. On the contrary, the concept of neighborhood frames emphasizes the *neighborhood*-specificity of this process, rather than overgeneralized conceptions of culture which, in purporting to account for nearly everything (community participation, crime, joblessness, teenage pregnancy, etc.), ultimately explain very little. Second, cultural frames can be shown to work independently of, even if within the constraints imposed by, structure—a more useful application than the positing of automatic relationships between certain structural conditions and, say, an "anomic" local culture. Third, the concept of neighborhood frames does not imply much about value orientations; in fact, the article shows that this conception, employed by early social organization theorists, contributes little insight about community participation.

This article locates the crux of change in the collectives of cohorts whose agency in community participation depends on motivational factors associated with their perception of the neighborhood. Where does this leave the role of other political or economic factors that might have contributed to the decline in the Villa, such as the increased incarceration of the young, the rise of the cocaine trade in the early 1990s, or the transformation of Boston's economy from a manufacturing to a technology base? Most of these factors would produce what I earlier called environmental effects, in one of two ways: at the micro level, by affecting the cohorts' perception of the neighborhood, or, at the marco level, by placing additional constraints on the possibility that the first cohort's narrative would be sustained. For example, the neighborhood witnessed a drug-related crime spree between about 1991 and 1996, as several young men were killed in stabbings or drive-by shootings. These circumstances certainly contributed to the perceptions of the neighborhood expressed by the second cohort in the community meeting described above, where they called for drug-related programs. As an example at the structural level, politicoeconomic factors are often related to the residential stability of the poor. If city or federal politics forced ETC to set time limits on length-of-stay in the complex, on the number of persons per unit, or on the minimum (or maximum) income a resident may earn, residential instability would increase, making less likely the sustenance of the first cohort's historically constituted narrative, dependent as it is on collective memory.

As with structural conditions, politicoeconomic factors producing what I earlier called institutional effects probably do not hold a one-to-one relationship to participation. Changes in these factors may not produce changes in participation but instead undermine or buttress IBA's capacity to help sustain participation. In this sense, they present possibilities for

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change in participation. Though this article cannot address every additional politicoeconomic factor, their role can be incorporated relatively parsimoniously into this framework, the crux of which is to incorporate culture into social organization theory and change our perspective about how structure, culture, and local participation interact.

In conjunction with the analysis of culture, I have highlighted the importance of cohorts. More focused attention on cohorts may lead to informative comparisons with other neighborhoods and housing projects. In the Villa, the second cohort differed from the first in more than one sense: it was the second generation of residents of the neighborhood, it was constituted mainly of persons born and raised in Boston, and it was raised during a different economic period—notably, at a time when HUD experienced budget cuts affecting housing projects throughout the country. Throughout the article I have suggested several ways of considering these questions, but I would now like to offer a few comparative observations about how cohorts may operate in different settings.

An instructive comparison case is Venkatesh's (2000) study of the Robert Taylor Homes (RTH) in Chicago. There, the earlier cohort had radically different motivations for participation. Venkatesh (2000, chap. 1) discusses at length how infrastructural problems, such as vertical construction, overcrowding, and the generally poor design of public space led, early on, to significant problems that the residents felt compelled to mobilize in order to address. In Villa Victoria, the earlier cohort got involved not because they had problems with the infrastructure (on the contrary, it was widely considered to be a blessing), but because they had witnessed, firsthand, the fruits of participation and wished to sustain a community. It was also, as we saw, a very different sort of local participation. Another comparison relates to the issue of gang involvement in the second cohorts and between-cohort conflict in the two cases. The second cohort of the RTH was slightly older than those of the Villa, but both experienced an economic downturn and budget cuts during their prime in the neighborhood. The wider spanning and much more complex gang structure of the RTH helped crystalize persistent conflicts between the older and younger cohorts, as the elders struggled to contain the newer cohort's overwhelming control of the housing complex. In the Villa, smaller and comparatively much weaker gangs contributed to the fact that very few of the internal political conflicts crystalized around cohorts.[27]

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[27] One must place the development and complexity of gangs within their proper context. The Robert Taylor Homes, spanning two miles and housing 27,000 tenants in 4,500 units (Venkatesh 2000, pp. 21–22, 32) was ripe for the creation of multiple gangs competing for turf and clients, and, thus, in perpetual conflict that led to an especially violent place. The Villa, all of 20 acres housing 3,000 tenants in 800 units, was not.

In this respect, the Villa resembled Pattillo-McCoy's "Groveland" (1999), a black middle-class neighborhood in Chicago with dense intergenerational ties that temper cross-cohort conflict (even in cases, such as crime control, where the tempering of conflict, according to Pattillo-McCoy, is counterproductive). I suggest there is much to be gained from systematically comparing cohort-level phenomena across cases.

More generally, the case of the Villa leads to a host of unanswered questions. The Villa's uniqueness has been pointed out throughout—indeed, it has made this analysis possible—and I have suggested how similar relationships may manifest themselves in radically different settings.[28] Still, all case studies should eventually be complemented by large-sample studies, in this case, of the longitudinal type. Second, the study has been focused, throughout, on *local* participation, for it is this—the engagement in voluntary activity with one's neighbors—which has been hypothesized to increase local quality of life. But an additional concern of urban poverty research (e.g., Wilson 1996) is participation in voluntary activities in the mainstream, outside the neighborhood. More generally, researchers would benefit from questioning more closely the idea championing local community participation as the main answer to the problems of the urban poor. Evidence has shown it increases local social capital (Gans 1982) and decreases crime under certain circumstances (Sampson et al. 1997), but much remains to be unpacked about the limits, in the long term, of local participation. (On this issue, see, e.g., Sampson 1999; Pattillo-McCoy 1999.)

It housed essentially one drug gang, and the overwhelming majority of drug-related violent confrontations have been against gangs in other neighborhoods.

[28] An interesting and related literature is that on local participation in new or planned communities of the 1960s and 1970s (see Gans 1982; also Loomis 1939; Loomis and Davidson 1939). These were mostly suburban and middle class, but, like Villa Victoria, were constructed and planned anew, with some vision of what a good community should look like. The literature on these communities has found similar yet also quite different patterns with respect to local participation. Fifteen years after publishing his study of Levittown, N.J., Gans (1982) returned to find what seemed to be less local voluntary participation. He suggests that "once needed organizations are in place, and services function at an expected or tolerated level of efficiency, people devote themselves to family, self, and social life, creating a community only when new needs develop or threats must be dealt with" (1982, p. xvi). Nevertheless, almost all the organizations, many of them much more formal (e.g., Boy Scouts and Kiwanis [1982, p. 44ff]), were still in existence and enjoying healthy memberships, though not growth (1982, p. xv). In addition to the class difference, the level of participation and types of organizations may be related to the very different settlement patterns in the two communities. In Levittown, the new community was inhabited by strangers who were moving to a new county, and, often, a new state; in the Villa, it was inhabited by old friends who had lived in the same place for years. In addition, their political origins were different: Levittown was created from the top down by a private enterprise, the Villa was created from the bottom up and in conjunction with city agencies.

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In any case, community participation is but one of a host of indicators of social organization. The presence or absence of formal organizations, for example, are probably related to structural conditions in a very different fashion. In addition, the discrete boundaries around the Villa made for a relatively parsimonious analysis of these relationships. But neighborhoods are often fluid entities whose character is reflected in social relationships, where categorizations such as local versus external participation may be less substantively meaningful. Finally, the cohort analysis was possible in part because in the Villa cohorts (again, not necessarily generations) are relatively discreet. In many urban neighborhoods, this will be the case; in others they will not, producing potentially different possibilities for the sustenance of collective perceptions of the neighborhoods. All these questions should be addressed in future work.

APPENDIX

Methods

This article relied on multiple sources. The most important were participant observation between 1999 and 2001 and archival records. Below I describe briefly the key elements of data collection.

Participant Observation

In an early phase of the research I investigated the Villa with an emphasis on the institutions and organizations of the Villa and the South End that dealt with issues relevant to poor women with children. I interviewed service providers and spent a great deal of time observing social interactions in the neighborhood, around the plaza, the parks, and streets and sidewalks. I am a native Spanish speaker of Latino origin, so getting to know neighborhood residents was unhampered by linguistic or cultural barriers. Within a short time, I came to know a large number of people in the community, and most new residents I met were in some way related to others I had met previously. About a dozen large, extended families account for a sizable portion of the residents of the Villa. Over time, I made some very close friends in the neighborhood and developed several key informants who were the most important source for correcting, elaborating on, and validating what I was observing.

My research was not limited to detached observation. Over the two years I studied the neighborhood, I volunteered in the yearly membership drives for IBA corporate members, in the Betances Festival, and in beautification efforts; served on a career panels and "career shadowing" days with neighborhood youth; taught bilingual courses in computing for

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adults; and attended countless meetings, public events, and celebrations. I routinely ate at the local restaurants, visited with friends, old and young, at their homes, attended the dances at the Jorge Hernández Cultural Center, hung around the offices of IBA, and, generally, spent a great deal of leisure time in the central plaza, the local park, and public spaces throughout the neighborhood. These experiences, recorded in fieldnotes, gave me a solid sense of life in the Villa and in the South End.

In addition to my observations, the comments of key informants and oral histories of several elders helped me both understand the present conditions of the Villa and reconstruct its past. In the vast majority of these conversations, I took notes by hand, either during or after they took place. This method, however, makes it difficult to produce extended quotes with any accuracy. Thus, to supplement these conversations, I taped several interviews; all extended quotes in the article were taken from these taped interviews. It was not always practical, or advisable, to carry a tape recorder around, so most of the data are derived from notes. In addition to the statements of key informants and my oral histories, I relied on the testimony documented in Green (1975), Lukas (1985), Hardy-Fanta (1993), and Toro (1998). These sources help produce firsthand accounts by residents of both the Villa and the South End at different points in its history.

Archival Records

The research was also supplemented with records and written documentation. There were two sources of these: the census and archival records. Census data were used to obtain information on poverty, unemployment, and income rates, educational status, and residential stability in the Villa. The census does not provide tract data for the Villa itself. However, it is possible to obtain Villa data because of a fortunate peculiarity of census tract 0705 in Boston.

The tract is a rectangular plane running neatly along two streets directly on opposite borders of the Villa, and two streets a few blocks away from the neighborhood's side borders. Within that rectangular plane, the only place in which there are Latinos is, with a tiny number of exceptions, Villa Victoria. Furthermore, Villa Victoria is almost completely Latino. Thus, I used the statistics for Latinos in tract 0705 as a proxy for the statistics of Villa residents. This is by no means a perfect measure, not just because it includes the very few Latinos in that tract who do not live in the Villa, but also because there is a severe undercount problem of Latinos. Nevertheless, it is by far the best measure available. Instead of census data, for example, I might have used the narrower block group data. However, there are two problems with these data. Three of the four

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block groups that comprise tract 0705 cover parts of the Villa, and they cover more than just the Villa, so they only do slightly better in terms of geographic accuracy than the census tract. Yet more statistics are available at the tract than at the block group level. Furthermore, in 1970 the block groups in tract 0705 were drawn differently, and there were only two, not four of them, so comparisons over time are impossible with block group data. Another potential source of these data for Villa Victoria would have been ETC, the management company. ETC at one time collected statistics on some of these measures, but, as the administration of ETC has changed hands over the years, hundreds of records have been destroyed. ETC now manages part, not all, of the local properties in Villa Victoria. Thus, ETC has no historical data and only incomplete current data.

In addition to census data, I relied on newspaper articles in the *Boston Globe*, *La Semana*, the *South End News*, and to a lesser extent, the *New York Times*. Finally, I made use of fliers, pamphlets, meeting minutes, newspaper clippings, and other archival data in storage rooms that were generously made available to me by the staff of IBA. The archives, originally accumulated not for an academic to read through but as remnants of past mobilization and institutionalization efforts by ETC and IBA, were imperfect and incomplete, but nonetheless extremely useful, dating as early as the 1960s. These files are cited as "IBA Archives," for there is no other consistent organization. Since the time of my study, many of these papers, in about 135 boxes, have been donated to a collection at the Northeastern University Special Collections Department. I have accessed those archives and matched where possible my earlier records to the files at Northeastern. These files are cited as "NU IBA Z02–20," and identified by box number. The full citation is Northeastern University, Archives and Special Collections Department, Inquilinos Boricuas en Acción (Z02–20). The current boxes were simply numbered as they arrived from IBA, so that documents on a single topic are scattered throughout them. The staff at NU is applying for grants to reorganize the files in a more intuitive fashion; if and when this reorganization takes place, a correspondence index (between the old and new box numbers) should be available.

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