Communal Intimacy: Formalization, Egalitarianism, and Exchangeability in Collective Housing

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This article uses collective housing, a voluntary form of shared living positioned in between the conventional intimacy sphere and public life, to explore the relation between the organized and the intimate. Combining multisited observations and interviews, the study reveals collective housing to represent fairly depersonalized homes characterized by residential transition and formalization. Rather than addressing the dwellings in terms of detachment, however, the article demonstrates that they are exchange(st)able structures with existential bearing. It is through, not despite, the partially organized framework of daily chores and routines that closeness emerges. Grounded in these findings, the article calls for a reframing of intimacy outside of its traditional contexts and proposes the term "communal intimacy" to conceptualize a sociality of closeness that is bound not to exclusive dyads but to an inclusive relational infrastructure characterized by the strength of many weak ties.

Introduction

Collective housing[1] is a growing trend in many western societies explained by demographic changes and escalating housing prices, as well as by a rising eco-political awareness (Chitewere and Taylor 2010; Falkenstjerne Beck 2019; Heath et al. 2017). This way of living, characterized by joint domestic areas and shared daily chores, attract not only young people in urban regions but also broader social segments. Today, shared living represents a spectrum of different types of housing, from arty entrepreneurial cohousing units to climate-friendly eco-villages and casual private lodging arrangements. In different fields of research, collective housing has been explored as a reflection of a societal challenges such as climate change, urban segregation, and detachment and loneliness in late-modern societies (Eräranta, Moisdander, and Pesonen 2009; Krokfors 2012; Lang, Carriou, and Czischke 2018). This article adds to a stream of research

that addresses relational aspects (see Eggebeen 2005; Heath 2004; Heath et al. 2017; Lietaert 2010; Ruiu 2016; Sandstedt and Westin 2015; Törnqvist 2019), while it inserts a closer dialogue both with the scholarly field of intimacy studies and with organizational sociology.[2] Foregrounding organizational features and exploring how these affect the sociality of the households, the aim is to develop a framework that allows for conceptualizing closeness in a setting characterized by formalized rules of conduct, decentered relationships, and a transition of members.

Collective housing adds to a long-lasting sociological debate on the relation between the organized and the intimate, the public and the private, as well as the relation between strong and weak ties. While the domestic context places the dwellings at a distance from workplaces and formal organizations, the friendly notice above a kitchen sink—"Your mom doesn't live here"—marks a divergence also from conventional family homes. Upon closer examination, the dwellings in fact unfold as rather formalized homes, at times regularized in ways that are more recurrent in public relations than in private ones. The fact that collective homes are bound to manage a delicate combination of high functional demands while retaining personal integrity within a social context made up of people who often did not know each other beforehand calls for outspoken decisions and equally distributed responsibilities over a variety of daily matters. This formalization of behavior recalls what Göran Ahrne and Nils Brunsson (2011, 2019) label "partial organizations" or "organization outside organizations."[3] Although life in collective housing does not always meet the criteria of a "formal organization" (membership, rules, monitoring, sanctions, and hierarchy)—even if some do— and while these elements are not as strictly adhered to as in firms where, for instance, the monitoring of rules is sometimes embedded in juridical systems,[4] shared living represents a fairly high level of organization, a social order shaped by decisions with firm and sometimes mandatory rules around casual activities like preparing dinner.[5] In fact, the organizational core is vital in defining and distinguishing collective homes from co-living arrangements, like families, in which the social order often is not formally decided beforehand but "emerges out of processes of mutual adaption" (ibid: 5). Like organizations, collective housing is not created out of and do not depend on interpersonal relations; instead, they are constructions that bind people together and uphold relations through organizational elements.

Not only formalization but also exchangeability is characteristic for how collective housing is organized. While individual members are dear to the households, these are transitory spaces in which residents move in and out. Flux makes collective housing rely, not on emotional liability, but on the solidity of a practically informed infrastructure.[6] Because there are rules and monitoring regarding, for example, when and with whom cooking will be carried out, individual members can easily be shifted out. This, in turn, relates to ideals of egalitarianism. The shifting of residential constellations requests an inclusive environment that ensures that new members are equally integrated and that there is an equal distribution of rights and obligations. In some dwellings, egalitarian ideals even come in the shape of rules against conventional intimacy,

as a way of preventing housing cliques and social exclusion. Throughout the article, it will be argued that these three aspects—formalization, exchangeability, and egalitarianism—[7] are central for understanding not only the organization of membership and household labor but also for how residential relations are lived. Grounded in interviews and observational data, the article explores how these elements become means to generate a sociality of closeness in a context characterized by what can be described in the words of James Coleman (1990: 427) as "a structure of positions (. . .) that exists independently of the occupants of these positions".

Functions and Feelings: Conceptualizing Intimacy in a Formalized Setting

Throughout the history of sociology, the fusion of functions and feelings has been critically evaluated. Siegfried Kracauer ([1917]1990), for instance, contrasts functionally derived comrade communities from intimate friendships with the argument that comradeship is not an end in itself but the outcome of a "goal connection" with "objectives external to the relationship" (Blatterer 2014: 39). "Comrades are equals before the goal, but nothing besides it" ([1917]1990: 14, translation by Blatterer). Conceptualizing collective housing along such a binary outlook positions these function-centered households at a distance from intimate relationships. The central role of formalized goal connection noticeable in, for instance mandatory cooking, makes collective housing, first, diverge from a definition of intimacy as emotion-centered and lived in spontaneous fashion. Second, the egalitarian ideal according to which all communal members have equal status deviates from a definition of intimacy as bound to emotional hierarchies that shape closeness with specific others based on exclusivity. And, third, exchangeability, contrasts the idea of unique bonds.

Instead of reinforcing such cleavage, however, this study is intrigued by how functions and feelings co-exist and pushes the argument that formalization, egalitarianism, and exchangeability are not necessarily in conflict with but rather engender intimacy. The discussion is enthused by Erving Goffman who makes an interesting twist to the binary framework of Kracauer and others by offering a fusion of functions and feelings in the trope of the sports team. Instead of addressing "goal connection" as an opposition to "intimacy," Goffman frames the group dynamic of a team as "a kind of intimacy without warmth" (Goffman 1956: 51). The team is a social form that "need not be something of an organic kind, slowly developing with the passage of time spent together, but rather a formal relationship that is automatically extended and received as soon as the individual takes a place on the team" (ibid: 51). According to this view, soccer players, just like communal residents, are part of a function-centered decided order, a structure imbued by formalized rules of conduct and a transition of members while they, concurrently, are also emotionally embedded. The lack of "warmth," as Goffman suggests, does thus not equal coldness in an economic sense, along the terminology of Eva Illouz in her work on "cold intimacy"

(Illouz 2007). Instead, intimate coolness, rather than cold intimacy, refers to the decentering, or displacement, not of individuality but of individual relations in favor of communal belonging. What we find in soccer teams and collective housing is not an extinction of intimacy, but a shift in its character.

In order to conceptualize this shift, intimacy is here addressed as a sociality of closeness that emerges differently in different relational contexts (Simmel 1909; see also Mjöberg 2009; Roseneil and Ketokivi 2016; Törnqvist 2018). This approach reflects the transformations of intimacy in recent decades, the declining marriage rates and new kinship formations such as "queer families" as well as the increasing importance of friendship bonds (see work by Bauman 2003; Giddens 1992; Jamieson 1998, 1999; Plummer 2003; Roseneil and Budgeon 2004; Ryan-Flood 2009; Smart 2007; Smart et al. 2012). Intimacy is a concept that aims at theorizing this relational complexity and people's experiences of closeness also outside the nuclear family and the heterosexual relation. In line with the argument that "no relationship is ever only intimate, and no intimate situation is by itself a relationship" (Henriksson 2014: 100), this study and others display how intimacy is expressed and lived in disparate contexts, ranging from feelings of being boundary-less as discussed in research on BDSM-societies (Newmahr 2011) and symbiotic kinship ties (Mjöberg 2011) to the results of this study, displaying experiences of closeness within the function-centered context of collective housing. Investigating a case outside what we, with Laurent Berlant (2000: 6), may call "hegemonic intimacy," contributes to illuminating the variety of intimate experience and imagination (Butler 2000: 23).

The concept of intimacy expands not only to various types of families, which is often the focus within the "personal life" research field, but also to a more diversified set of relations such as to how attachments, as friendships, form around "new" routines while serving needs traditionally bound up with the family (Roseneil 2010). As Katherine Davies and Brian Heaphy (2011) argue, deploying the term "critical associations" to explore a vast range of nonfamilial personal relationships, different types of relations are increasingly vital in people's lives. While the social architecture of collective homes diverges from conventional kinship bonds, they partly serve somewhat similar emotional and social needs. In that respect, these households recall other forms of attachments that bridge functions and feelings. In his study on survival strategies and network dynamics in a low-income US neighborhood, Matthew Desmond (2012), for instance, refers to the term "disposable ties" to demonstrate that people who were evicted from their homes neither relied on deeply embedded kinship bonds nor were isolated in solitude. For short periods, fleeting and unstable acquaintances instead became increasingly important and met pressing need for child care and shelter. Somewhat similarly, Stacy Torres (2019) discusses what she calls "elastic ties" among older adults in an NY neighborhood and shows how this type of tie challenges the distinction between weak and strong ties by offering "a third way to insert distance but retain intimacy" (ibid: 254).

Addressing such experiences, the concept of "intimacy" engenders an emphasis toward existential matters, i.e., attachments and situations that "*impact* on people, and on which they depend for living" (Berlant 2000: 4, emphasis in

the original). The term "existential bearing" is here used to theorize intimacy along Berlant's definition (above), thus encapsulating the deep meaning, the vulnerability and livability of those connections that keep us alive, regardless of whether these involve long-term kinship bonds or transitory residential relations.[8] In line with family sociologists, this study focuses on the "caring and sharing" aspects of "personal life," what Carol Smart "designates an area of life which impacts closely on people and means much to them" (Smart 2007: 28 and 29). Framing intimacy as constituted by relational dimensions such as deep knowing, trust, and practical caring and sharing in addition to "some form of love" (Jamieson 1998: 13, 7–10), the present study asks how a practical caring and sharing with existential bearing and "some form of love" can be grounded in the formalized logic of a partially organized space. What does it mean to deeply trust in one's cohabiters? And how is affection lived and expressed in a domestic setting characterized by rules to manage and delimit interpersonal bonds? Can there be intimacy when relationships are decentered?

Study Design

The empirical study is located to urban Stockholm, a socio-geographic region renowned both for its large proportion of one-person-household, 60 percent (Klinenberg 2012), and for having promoted large-scale communal living as part of early welfare housing policy (Jarvis 2011: 565; Vestbro and Horelli 2012). This way of living has, however, always made up a small percentage of the overall household share (Sandstedt and Westin 2015). A Stockholm survey estimates that three percent of the total population lives collectively (Ekstam and Sandstedt 2010: 44), whereas cohousing units comprise 0.05 percent (Chiodelli and Baglione 2014: 21).[9] Nonetheless, demographic trends together with an increasing interest both among dwellers and policy makers imply that this way of living plausibly will become more recurrent (Klinenberg 2012).

This study is designed to include the diversity of collective housing in the region and combines multisited participant observations and interviews in two types of residences: cohousing units and small-scale communes. Cohousing units, on the one hand, are large-scale communes in which members have their own private residences with kitchen and bathroom and where formalization plausibly is more apparent than in small-scale communes. One cohousing unit comprises between 10 and 60 apartments and promotes shared spaces and joint activities, often divided between mandatory (e.g., cleaning and cooking) and voluntary (e.g., gardening and decoration). Communal matters are often decided by a housing board in which all residents have equal status and in which the selection of new members take place, based on formal criteria and interviews (Ruiu 2016; Sandstedt and Westin 2015). Some of these units seek to create more diverse groupings and favor minority age-groups and ethnicities, whereas others prioritize similarity based on political conviction and gender. Small-scale communes, on the other hand, are private lodging arrangements typically comprising two to ten cohabitants living together in an apartment or villa. In contrast to cohousing units, small-scale communes provide a lower

degree of formality regarding housing duties, administration, and communal ethics. Regarding new residents, they often recruit through friends or Facebook-groups and the process of becoming a household member is rather flexible. The residents are often younger and normally stay for shorter periods, which creates a larger degree of flux than in cohousing units.

The selected sample contains two age-integrated cohousing units involving families with children (26 and 35 apartments, respectively), one senior-segregated cohousing unit for people in their second half of life living without children (43 apartments), and eight small-scale communes with between two and twelve cohabiters. Although different, all sample households display domestic multifunctionality (coexistence of private and communal spaces), residential participation in some level of shared household work, and the existence of commune guidelines (Chiodelli and Baglione 2014: 22–23). Some of them, both cohousing units and small-scale communes, are ideologically grounded (feminist, vegan), promoting decision-making through collective boards and often with outspoken egalitarian ideals. Others seek to minimize obligations but push for equally distributed work-load as a way of avoiding conflict and creating an inclusive home environment.

Combining observations and interviews aims at targeting collective housing both at the level of practice and discourse. In regard to observations, two methodological strategies have been used. First, I have been a member of a cooking-team in one of the cohousing units. During a year, once every 6 weeks, I spent half-a-day together with two to five residents preparing dinner and, in the evening, dining in the house. This part of the study could best be described as a "micro-ethnography" (Walcott 1990), focusing on a particular aspect of collective housing as a way of grasping more general patterns. Taking part and myself embodying an important dimension of everyday communal life allowed me to, at proximity, not only observe but also feel what it is like to cooperate in making lasagna for fifty persons, what it takes, in terms of routines and emotional management, and moreover what people do, besides cooking, when they cook, the chitchatting when chopping tomatoes, and how moments both of disagreement, stress, and triumph are shared before the meal finally is out in the dining room. Second, I have spent a day or evening in most of the sample homes. The residents have walked me around, telling me how communal spaces such as living rooms and bathrooms "work," how public and private areas are divided, and the routines for keeping up with rotating household chores. The visits, approximately three to six hours, involved dinner or coffee in which some or all residents participated. On two occasions, I took part in communal festivities and got the opportunity to talk extensively also with residents who were not interviewed.

Whereas observations allow the study to explore the intimate imprints through everyday practices and interaction, interviews enable access to the residents' reflections and narrated representations of collective housing. The interviews, all of them recorded, targeted the broad topic of cohabitation and encircled not only the dwellers' current residential situation but also experiences from living with parents and partners and, more generally, their view on relations

and intimacy (Spencer and Ray 2006). The interviews, with a total of 28 cohabiters, lasted approximately one to three hours. Out of 25 interviews, 21 involved one informant, three group interviews were conducted with two residents each, and one group interview with six cohabiters was carried out with the formal aim of discussing a theatre play that evolved from the study. Two informants were interviewed on several occasions.

Similar to other national contexts, the sample reflects voluntary collective housing to attract, predominantly, an academically educated and conscious (environmentalist, feminist, vegan) white middle-class (Chitewere and Taylor 2010; Heath 2004; Williams 2005).[10] Most of the 28 informants have an undergraduate education or above, while some are still undertaking their studies. Among those who work or recently left the labor market, almost all are in professional-level and managerial occupations. Age-wise, the sample covers residents between 23 and 86 years old, with a younger cluster primarily in small-scale communes and an older one in the cohousing units. Three dwellings were all female; the rest were mixed. Only 7 of the 28 informants were male, which reflects a gender bias in the collective housing population at large (Choi and Paulsson 2011: 138). Three informants were no longer living in a collective housing and were selected to reflect upon matters of exit and life beyond the commune. The informants were equally divided between the two forms of housing: 13 lived in cohousing units and 15 in small-scale communes. All dwellings were accessed through Facebook groups and through snowballing through informants, friends, and colleagues.

Communal Intimacy in Collective Housing

Feelings in Formalized Living

In a two-floor villa with a spotless lawn covered with strawberry plants and apple trees, 37-year-old Tomas, a business controller, is running a commune with twelve separate bedrooms. He used to live here alone but a couple of years ago he rebuilt the house for communal purposes and invited others to share it with him. In order not for "chaos to take over," Tomas has formalized a list of housing rules including alcohol policies and strict advices for how to behave in the kitchen, all easily accessible on the communion homepage. New residents are requested to accept the rules to become members and are asked to sign a formal contract before moving in. Breaking the rules means that dwellers no longer have the right to live in the house.

This is an example of how formalized directions are used in collective housing. Tomas' dwelling imposes a decided order on the residents, involving aspects related to membership, monitoring and sanction, whereby rules and regulation are foregrounded with functional arguments. In contrast to how the informants perceive of romantic or kinship-based cohabiting, described as grounded in "feelings," collective housing is frequently motivated by its practical benefits and is said to request a firm organization that facilitates effectuation.[11] Twenty-eight-year-old Peter, for instance, a university administrator who has

been living in a cohousing unit for 4 years, describes the easily accessible dinners to be the main advantage. Echoing Kracauer, Peter says: "The functions are center stage, if something else comes out of it, it's nice, but it's more like a side effect." To him collective housing is a social arena that provides practical utilities, such as cooperation and help with household duties. While social at heart, it is not necessarily a space for evolving strong affinities like friendship.

Different from romantic couples who move together to consolidate their relation, collective housing often brings people together, not primarily to advance existing bonds but to meet external needs, such as household support or a wish to form a collective lifestyle. Different from relations which often evolve over time and make it difficult to decide exactly when and how it started, communal residents become cohabiters and form relationship when they move in together, or with Goffman, when they "take place on the team" (1956: 51). Moreover, communal cohabiters, such as football players, do not need to know everything about each other in order to play—or live—well together. Although "personal chemistry" is brought up as beneficial during interviews, living well together relies heavily on the communal organization. However, this does not equal a lack of emotional spontaneity. On the contrary, in soccer, as well as in collective housing, rules create a foreseeability that allows the residents to act instinctively, out of feeling, in ways that create prerequisites for spontaneity to emerge.

One example of a situation that is both formalized and spontaneous is the communal dinner preparation. This task requests both timely workload (approximately a couple of hours up to a full workday twice a month) and a well-organized commune. As in Peter's house, many cohousing units request that new residents become members of a rotating cooking-team. Like Goffman's team, these units are formed, not primarily on the basis of personal relations, but out of communal needs and the matching of competences. Although the cooking units are not freely selected, and although this is a mandatory and time-consuming chore, as well as a target for critique and problems of free riding, most informants account for a high level of commitment. Seventy-six-year-old Bodil, who lives in a senior cohousing unit, for instance, heralds this shared responsibility for being "a wonderful obligation." To her, cooking together responds to a fundamental human need that shapes a collective solidarity with existential bearing. "Everyone eats" she says, "it's a necessity that creates rhythm, it's the heart-beat of the house."

Although the functional purpose is center stage, dinner preparation is often also described as intimate moments characterized by a mix of mundane chitchatting and confidential disclosure. Returning to Bodil, she refers to this as occasions in which residents "talk about life, if you have a child that is sick, you relieve pressure. [In that respect] my own team is really a safe haven, it's almost cute." Somewhat similarly, 47-year-old Cecilia, who lives with her husband and two children in an age-integrated cohousing unit, refers to the dinner preparation as situations where the residents get a chance to relate more closely to each other:

> When you cook together and try to figure out how to solve various tasks in the best way and so, well people are different but often there is time to express …

and to talk about ... everything between heaven and earth, and both, well yes the good things and the things you struggle with in your life. Pretty often those discussions take place downstairs.

The fact that communal kitchens are, in one way, non-intimate labor zones in which children, family, or friends normally are not present, appears to help creating a sheltered atmosphere. The spatial and temporal seclusion together with a focus on a practical chore makes it easy to be confident without loading personal conversations with relational expectations. It is not like meeting a friend in a café with the formal aim of "being social," informants state. The social and affective aspects that comes out of joint cooking are described as the happy, but rather unintended, consequence of an obligation that serves, not primarily emotional, but functional purposes.

Not only are the kitchens constructed to suit practical needs with their large working spaces and over-dimensioned household machines; the collected cooking experiences, often stretching over years, containing both present and former members' efforts, turn these spaces into memory banks. This is striking in one of the oldest cohousing units in the sample. With 25 years of experience, this unit displays an impressive amount of well-managed routines regarding all forms of communal matters. In particular, though, matters related to the communal dinner. The kitchen shelves are covered with hard-pack binders assembling recipes and manuals explaining how to use the machines. These guidelines not only facilitate large-size-cooking but also help the residents to handle emotionally demanding situations. Housing recipes are interrogated, not only for measuring ingredients but work also as devices to avoid argumentation regarding how to, for instance, go about the making of a king-size pasta bolognaise. Also other formalized guidelines, such as chore-lists and housing contracts, assist the residents in communicating delicate matters and help them handle practically and emotionally loaded situations. One resident, 70-year-old Maj, a former administrative manager in the cultural sector, describes these advices as means to help them "avoid ending up in conflict":

> I believe there is a need for formalization like what we have in the helpmeet [*hjälpredan*, a binder with guidelines and information regarding communal housing matters]. Otherwise there would be chaos. It would not be possible to do things collectively. And I think that through the helpmeet, by structuring different areas, we do not end up in conflict. It's as easy as that.

Instead of only restraining feelings, however, regulation also allows residents to be spontaneous and playful within a given framework. Just like the rules that help the players in a soccer team to be creative, formalized housing routines permit dwellers not only to avoid conflict but also to engage emotionally within a given framework.[12] The mandatory chores enforce all residents, also those who wish to keep an emotional distance, to get together and cooperate in maintaining "the heart-beat of the house." The kitchen constitutes a communal microcosm in which the residents are requested to develop a joint orientation toward a

shared task. Thereby, cooking-teams not only produce dinners but also privileged knowledge and a sense of trust and belonging.

Relational Egalitarianism

In the stairwell of a 43-apartment-large cohousing unit, the visitor immediately gets a sense of being in someone's home. Different from regular residential blocks where visitors use a code to enter, being let in requests a personal inviter, a tenant who opens the door. At the time of one of my visits, the residents had been engaged in a joint project, sharing memories and photos from their childhood. One entrance wall was covered with black-and-white images of small girls in pretty dresses and boys in jackets. Instead of confiding childhood memories in an exclusive fashion, face-to-face with one or a few close associates, the unit turned this act of intimate sharing into a communal endeavor, a form of "deep knowing," with Jamieson (1998), while retaining an egalitarian and inclusive address. On equal terms the residents' inner children hang on the wall, side by side, no one taking up more space than the other. The neat arrangement made the exhibition resemble a school assignment: formalized, yet personal.

This example is emblematic for collective housing. Regardless of the social composition, most sample dwellings promote all residents' equal status as household members. Often cohabiters have an equal say in decision-making and share equal responsibilities in regard to household labor. More importantly for our purposes, the egalitarian standard has relational implications and is promoted also as a means to hinder coteries and exclusionary practices from damaging the house fellowship. Like the behavioral rules in Cistercian monasteries, aiming to secure functional and egalitarian relations through interpersonal distance, as discussed by Mikaela Sundberg (2019), some of the communes actively restrict dyadic or small-group intimacy. Whereas monasteries propose relational asceticism in the name of a Christian love ethic, the egalitarian ideal in collective housing aims at securing an inclusive communal orientation.

Twenty-three-year-old student Clara, for instance, actively pushes for collective bonding rituals as a way of engendering intimacy. She speaks warmly about when all housemates in her peer-shared feminist villa read out loud from their dairies as a way of enhancing the level of closeness. However, these days, she is troubled. She recently got involved in a romantic relation with Ivan, a co-resident, and is afraid that their exclusiveness will tear the larger "we" into pieces by creating an enclave with another form of closeness. At the same time, she accounts, rather frustrated, for how daily life in the commune restricts romantic intimacy by firmly structuring the days. "First there is dinner," Clara tells, "after dinner we normally do something together all of us so although I may feel I want to be alone with this person it's not realistic, it's like dreaming about a unicorn."

Malin, a 30-year-old teacher assistant who has experience from several small-scale communes with varying degrees of communal ethics, tells that inclusion always is a delicate matter in shared living. In her present commune, with two women she did not know beforehand, Malin senses the risk of becoming too

close with one of them, thus creating a tension. She brings up the example of going for a walk with Shirin and how cautious she is at those occasions not to talk about Alice who is not present. Once they get home, there is a need to regulate the "communal we." "It's like, we have experienced something together, then you need to neutralize this in respect to the third part, like: 'Would you also like to eat? Do you want lunch?' [Living this way] means you have to see each other," she states.

Balancing the level of intimacy is a concern also in the cohousing units. During a dinner preparation, 59-year-old Anna, a preschool teacher, tells that she was rather surprised when she and her husband moved in and invited other residents to their apartment. Kindly but firmly, their invitations were rejected with reference to a housing rule serving to hinder "cliques" from emerging and harming the "house-solidarity." "We were told that we were welcome to invite family and friends to our personal apartment, but that residents primarily meet in the common areas … I had never thought of that, but it is so clever. This helps us having good relations with everyone in the house," Anna tells.

By restricting the level of intimacy, the egalitarian ideal simultaneously broadens its scope. Centering the communal fellowship before individual relationships potentially makes larger numbers of housemates significant. The relational management aims at creating a climate in which all residents, regardless of interests and personality, can meet and carry out a daily life together. This is accounted for when Cecilia positively refers to how her cohousing relations transmit a sense of closeness without imposing emotional responsibility. Living in a cohousing unit has extended the number of "important persons" in her life, she tells, while not necessarily augmenting the level of emotional investment normally required in close relations. When she meets a fellow resident in the grocery store or at the library, she tells that she immediately experiences a sense of closeness, while she, at the same time, realizes that she hardly knows the person. "This is an important person in my life, I feel, and then it strikes me that I have never been to this person's apartment, but she is still important in my life."

Returning to Bodil, she, just like Cecilia, tells that her cohousing unit has expanded the number of significant others in her life, and that inclusivity is necessary in order to create a large familial fellowship:

> I should be able to sit at any table in the dining room, having a friendly chat with all residents although they are not my best friends. You must be an inclusive person to live here. That is what makes it work … Working together creates a we, you get a we, an enormous we, a very strong we … When people ask me I tell them that I have a big family, fifty others are members in my family.

Rather than thinking of egalitarianism as in conflict with intimacy, we may thus address the centering of a communal fellowship in favor of individual relations as creating another type of closeness. Although many cohabiters remain fairly distantly related, the egalitarian ethic generates closeness in the shape of an everyday sociality that promotes emotional we-ness in a Goffmanian sense, a familiarity based not on exclusive bloodlines but on inclusive housing rules.

Exchange(st)ability with Existential Bearing

According to some residents, the problem with many "failing" collective house-holds is that they are "too personal." Peter, for instance, who for the moment lives in a small-scale commune claims that dwellings that depend on a few individuals become fragile, whereas it is "comforting to move into a household with firm routines … and checklists that have evolved over time." Manuals such as the "helpmeet" secure that knowledge on how to fix a troubling washing machine does not vanish when the person who once solved the problem moves out. In other words, well-embedded routines ensure that households do not depend on individual dwellers. Particularly the larger units are shaped to not go down with residential changes.

Compared with nuclear families, in which a divorce often threatens the entire household and all of its relations, communal life is created to handle shifts in the residential composition. Instructions and routinized practices encompass a circular rhythm, connecting former and present generations in ways that create collective memory and that facilitate for new members to enter into an already existing social order. Some dwellers not only watch people coming and going but also themselves shift household without big manners. Ida, a 32-year-old communicator in the cultural sector, tells that she is faithful to a lifestyle rather than to individual relations. If one household "doesn't work well," she tries another. Over the past 12 years, she has been living in 14 different communes. Also Malin speaks warmly of residential change and perceives exchangeability as a guaranty for a "less suffocating" home environment. Rather than addressing the rotation of household members as an expression of shallowness, she believes that the depersonalized infrastructure helps creating a firmer relational ground. Along the results of a British study on "difficult friendship and ontological insecurity" (Smart et al. 2012), Malin cherishes detached relations for stability reasons. This, she claims, is more, both, resilient and existentially supportive than love dyads or nuclear families in which all members are interdependent and thus vulnerable to change:

> It is firm in a way, it feels stable because it is a wider community. I am not depending on these people, it's not like you look at a person and feel "ah, if she disappears my life falls apart". It's quite easy to create a good atmosphere in [collective] homes. The concept is like exchangeable in a way … In regard to stability this is more reliable. Even though people move in and out there are always people around. There are no definite things that can cut it completely and that, to me, is a comfort. So in that way, stable but impersonal I would say.

In a similar fashion, also other informants foreground the existential bearing of these somewhat depersonalized homes. 68-year-old Helen, a former preschool teacher, likens her cohousing unit with an "existential cradle." Although she does not "love everyone in the house," it makes for a significant "foundation" in her life. On a similar note, 65-year-old Dagny, a civil servant, refers to her communal home as "an everyday togetherness without strong emotional investments," yet with deep bearing. The cohousing unit where she lives has become even more

important after her partner's death. The silent nods when she walks through the entrance and fetches her mail, their friendly phone calls when she does not show up for a housing meeting, and the chores that call her down to the kitchen every now and then help her "clinging on to life," she tells. The silent presence of others provides her with an identity and meaning-making routines without obliging her to engage emotionally with "each and everyone in the house." Rather poetically, she speaks of collective housing as a "corset for the soul." An invisible, yet intimate, support offered by the small remarks and everyday recognition of distant others.

In the sample households, shared responsibilities and a friendly control is the foundation of a communal affinity with existential bearing. As an example, Dagny's cohousing unit was deliberately designed to enable the residents to see and monitor each other. The entrance forms a bright plaza with large inner-windows to all connecting rooms which makes also dwellers who are less willing to participate in social activities visible, and thus present, within the community. In small-scale communes, there is often no such conscious design. However, the importance of a daily recognition in the shape of small talk or just a gaze from another co-resident is brought up as important social bricks also in these arrangements. Malin, for instance, tells that she and her two housemates rarely do things together, instead they communicate by "sending small affirmations" across the apartment in the shape of an "I'm so hungry" from the hall, and a responding "Ah … okay" from one of the bedrooms. She uses the metaphor of a mirror, a passive object, not interfering but quietly reflecting—and thus confirming—what is in front of it, and speaks of how this rather detached form of closeness puts her "back in line with the worlds." Like Dagny, she refers to the household as a positively framed control and tells that the presence of others hinders her from falling into solitude and troubled thoughts. "Someone has noticed you and … this makes you come down to earth and feel good. As an everyday comfort I think this is the best, those small comments," she says and adds later on that her cohabitants are a "great love" for her. Referring to moments when they have ended up at the same night club, she states that they "take each other for granted … we don't need to talk because it is like, we will meet later, it's a very special feeling and at the same time an enormous love … this person is the cornerstone in my life." This sense of "love," so familial it is taken for granted, does not emerge from emotion-intensive relationships but from shared daily life made up by household chores and low-key affirmations.

Discussion

Conceptualizing Communal Intimacy

Although this article mostly reflects on "positive" experiences, the residents also account for when formalization fails and when relations become intimate in ways that cross personal boundaries—or, on the contrary—when residents end up in overly formal and distant relations. In this regard, there are differences between the two types of households. Some residents complain that small-scale communes

easily become "too personal," while others lament that the larger cohousing units bring too many rules to the plate while detaching the residents from each other. Although varied, and variedly experienced, all sample households display a vivid interplay of functions and feelings. Performing mandatory chores "for the household," visualizing and carrying out common tasks, pushes residents, for better or worse, to be sociable and to handle relations within a domestic framework. Intimacy does not necessarily come in the shape of deep friendship bonds, or even in forms that are positively valued, yet residents are connected through their cooperative interaction and their everyday attention to one another. In both cohousing units and small-scale communes, formalization, egalitarianism, and exchangeability generate a communal belonging characterized by practical caring and sharing, trust, deep knowledge, and at times some form of love.

Collective housing thus exemplifies a counter-case to what Berlant (2000) labels "hegemonic intimacy." Communal intimacy emerges not primarily in exclusive dyads, such as love relations or parent–child bonds, but in larger inclusive groupings. It refers to a sociality of closeness that is not liminal but that grows in the slow repetitive rhythm of everyday life, thus constituting a cool form of togetherness with existential bearing. Different from Kracauer's "comradeship," communal intimacy involves autonomy and integrity and is not informed by total loyalty to the collective. Rather, it implies an orientation that evaluates personal gains, mundane, as well as existential, in relation to a collective enterprise. While imbued with an individualist ethic and often transitory, it is not, however, depersonalized to the level of anonymity. On the contrary, this form of intimacy is deeply entwined with the social context and is marked by regularity and routines to the point that the structure itself becomes the intimate other. This is borne out by informants who "love" their housing unit, their "corset for the soul," more than their cohabiters. It also shows in the fact that most housing relations "die" when residents move out. The affinities need the context, the physical place with its shared practices and routines, to survive.

This implies that intimacy in collective housing is conjured up by almost invisible, yet vital, signs of attention that, without the aim of shaping "best friends" or "family" bind people together and establish an intimate sense of belonging and trust. It rarely comes with large emotional gestures but rather displays through mundane affirmations, as when two residents hug and check in on each other in the cohousing entrance after a day at work, or when a group of cohabitants in a small-scale commune silently watch a movie together, shoulder to shoulder. However, what I label communal intimacy is not primarily about group membership. Although there are overlaps with Randall Collins' (2004) work on interaction ritual chains, communal intimacy is not principally about group vivacity, emotional energy, and firm group barriers to the outside, but rather conceptualizes a mundane sociality that foregrounds the inclusive joint orientation.[13] In accordance with Alfred Schutz's (1964) view on intimacy— a shared direction emerging in situations in which people's worlds coincide— this rather cool form of closeness is ultimately about embodying the same space and time, about co-presence and daily attention. Communal intimacy is

grounded in those moments when everyday worlds overlap and when, ideally, "what one regards as relevant also becomes relevant for the other" (Ahrne and Brunsson 2019: 1; Luhmann 1986: 158), not as a consequence of "interpersonal interpenetration" (ibid) but as a result of a joint mobilized coordination within a daily framework.

Instead of drawing more attention to the home as a continuous site for traditional family life, collective housing exposes a form of habitation that destabilizes the notion of domestic spaces as stable infrastructures and displays how transition and depersonalized relations live side by side with accounts of residential love and existential security. As argued throughout the article, this is not, necessarily, contradictory evidence but rather two sides of the same coin. Challenging a conventional distinction between the public and the private, the organized and the intimate, the results of this study show similarities with research on connectedness in workplaces. In her book on the democratic and integrative potential of diversified social life at work, Cynthia Estlund, for instance, displays that constraints do not necessarily delimit or harm but rather is what enables close intergroup relations, not the least between people with different social background. Along the results of this study, she states that "relations among co-workers form under the imperative of getting work done" (Estlund 2003: 24). At work, like in shared living, people normally do not choose their relations, while it may be the "very involuntariness of interactions" that "turns out to play a curiously constructive role in making possible the extraordinary convergence of close and regular interaction" (ibid: 4).

Somewhat similar to how soccer players or singers in a choir orient themselves, not necessarily toward individual players or choir members but to the flow of the game or a joint harmony, communal dwellers are, ideally, kept together by an imposed orientation toward the common. Thus, communal intimacy captures not primarily "a directedness between the persons in a relationship, but rather a joint directedness from all those involved in a situation – toward the situation" (Mjöberg 2011: 178, my translation). The intimate potentiality lays in the situational, in Schutz's meaning, in the joint conditions whereby people direct themselves simultaneously toward a shared physical place and a set of joint activities. Intimate flows, in kitchens as well as on soccer fields, bring about the importance, not necessarily of people's reflexive understanding, a theme which has dominated much of recent sociological debate on intimacy, but of the constructions that bind them together.

Similar to Mario Luis Small (2009), who stresses the importance not of peoples' active networking, but of the institutional conditions bound to the organizations in which people meet and connect; also this research emphasizes the context. The way support systems are built into collective dwellings appear as the inverse of Desmond's (2012) "disposable ties" and Torres' (2019) "elastic ties" by centering the communal infrastructure rather than individual relationships. In collective housing, the "strength of many weak ties" (Granovetter 1973) links to a formalized communal order, which involves quite an opposite ethic to that of reciprocity and mutual confiding. Residents do not necessarily exchange services

but engage in a relational infrastructure characterized by fairly depersonalized bonds, by which all members ideally have equal, not unique, status.

Translating this into a general conceptualization, communal intimacy is highly situational. In terms of a social form, a sociality, this form of closeness inhabits a joint orientation that directs people toward a set of functions, practices, and materialities imbued with a communal incentive for sharing. It is through the everyday structure, the sharing of household chores and daily routines that residents relate intimately to each other–through, not despite, the formalized framework. The results from this study thus indicate that there can be intimacy when individual relationships are downplayed. To unfold the intimate imprints of a homely space marked by formalization, egalitarianism, and exchangeability, intimacy must, however, be approached, not as restricted to a number of already given relationships but conceptualized as a sociality encompassing various forms of relations and relational situations.

Conclusion

Collective housing reflects a contemporary movement toward alternatives to individualism and loneliness and reveals the intimate imprints of "commoning practices" (Singh 2017). The case unfolds the intriguing rewards and trials of an everyday sociality grounded in an outspoken orientation toward a common aim of giving private life a collective meaning. Although this way of living often is used as a trope to epitomize the radical seventies (not the least in movies such as "Together" and "The Commune"), collective housing is far from a reminiscence. Offering an emotionally low-cost and yet connected way of living together with others, it reflects societal trends of multisited and serial intimacy in which relations are lived in various spheres and with different degrees of closeness. The intimate coolness found in the sample households may, in fact, potentially become more prevalent as societies are further marked by individualization and transition while people continuously search for community and some form of love. The findings of this study may thus be important, not only to the field of collective housing and the growing stream of communitarianism research but also to broader sociological fields, exploring present and future social forms of closeness that blur the boundaries between the private and the public, strong and weak ties, and that display the relation between the organized and the intimate.

About the Author

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Notes

1. Throughout the article, collective housing, also labeled communal housing or shared living, will be used as an umbrella term to capture two types of arrangements: cohousing units and small-scale communes (see study design).

2. See for instance the book *Shared Housing, Shared Lives* (Heath et al. 2017) which focuses on how the organization of daily routines and finances relates to different types of relationships.

3. There are sample households that fit the term "formal organization," particularly among the larger cohousing units. Besides the size of the household, suggesting that larger cohousing units more often than small-scale communes tend to be "formal organizations," time is likely a factor that interrelates with different types of organizations. In order to survive for a long period, collective housing requires a firm organization with rules and routines to assure stability. For the purpose of this article, it is sufficient to notice that the sample households range between "formal" and "partial organizations," possibly shifting in-between during a lifetime.

4. Normally, there is no formal surveillance in collective homes, instead the households are characterized by "unobtrusive control," similar to the discrete governing used by people who work closely together (Perrow 1986: 128–31).

5. Of the five organizational elements, rules are prior to the discussions in this article and imply "decisions about how people are expected to behave: when they shall meet, what they shall do, how they shall do things together, and the goals they are expected to achieve" (Brunsson and Ahrne 2019: 7). In the article, I use the terms "regulations" and "guidelines" as somewhat synonymous to "rules."

6. The term "infrastructure" points toward the functional aspects of an organized structure. Like societal infrastructures, collective households serve basic needs and offer routines and services to meet these needs. The term also alludes to the physical environment in which residents carry out their joint lives and labor.

7. These three concepts are the result of the empirical analysis. Similar aspects are, however, brought up by other researchers and are referred to throughout the article, such as Sundberg (2019) on egalitarianism in monasteries.

8. This relates to the concept "communal belonging" which is used to capture the residents' feelings of solidarity and affinity, both with the household, as such, and with groups of residents.

9. Although Sweden has a long history of idea- and ideology-based communes, Stockholm plausibly scores low in international comparison, particularly when including households formed on the basis of economic hardship and housing scarcity (cp Heath et al. 2017).

10. Different from cohousing research which include also residents who share housing due to scarcity or housing shortage (Heath et al. 2017), this study contains, for the most part, voluntary dwellers who live collectively out of a lifestyle choice.

11. Necessary to say, though, functions, practical and emotional, are important also for people to engage in romantic relations and kinship-based living. However, in collective housing, these are part of a legitimate discourse.
12. This recalls the results from a study on intimacy in tango dancing, showing that the many rules that restrict intimacy also help dancers to enhance the experience of connection and closeness. Dance-sets are clearly divided, and informal sanctions punish dancers who transgress bodily limitations, which creates a safer space for intimacy to be played out (Törnqvist 2018).
13. In their research on senior cohousing, Eva Sandstedt and Sara Westin refer to the concept of "the bund" to discuss how communal sociality is grounded in the "intentional act of joining together with strangers that is the basis of their common feeling and mutual solidarity" (Hetherington 1994: 13, in Sandstedt and Westin 2015: 17).

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