

# CHAPTER 1

## Introduction

Shared housing arrangements provide an important complement to conventional housing options for all segments of the population. Defined broadly, shared housing combines common facilities for joint use and shared responsibility for governing this use. Housing providers sell single family dwellings and town homes in condominium and planned unit developments that use formalized sharing to enhance access to home ownership. Thus, for millions of middle-class households, shared housing masquerades as independent home ownership. In contrast, current policy and public opinion oppose efforts to justify and support shared housing for the poor or those people whose needs appear marginal and undeserving from the viewpoint of middle-income buyers anxious to protect their own vulnerability. But this prejudice against the poor, the disabled, the single parent family, and other vulnerable households remains hidden behind the selective use of development regulations supported by the myth that the single family house, designed exclusively for the nuclear family, offers the ideal home for everyone. These chapters expose the unfair practices and policies this myth supports, and so encourage efforts to treat fairly people living in all forms of shared housing, while providing arguments, evidence, and stories to document the value and legitimacy of informal sharing.

Residential structures can be designed to accommodate sharing for members of different social classes, whether transitional housing for the homeless or co-housing for the middle-class. Sharing itself does not impose the stigma of dependency or low status, at least not if undertaken free of moral and legal sanction from outside. Many households and community organizations currently modify the structure and use of the physical housing stock to meet a diverse assortment of social needs. Nationally, thousands of individual owners use informal and frequently illegal means to convert housing to shared use. Nonprofit organizations construct shared housing for special populations whose age, abilities or illness make conventional housing arrangements obsolete or even dangerous. These innovations in shared housing persist despite regulations that restrict or

banish shared residences for the poor and needy from single-family zoned neighborhoods including shared single-family type homes, elder cottages, and accessory apartments. We conclude that people and government should treat all forms of sharing equally instead of privileging sharing for those with economic advantages. Removing the stigma paves the way for reforming overly restrictive regulations and policies.

### **Sharing and the Single Family Dwelling**

Ownership of the single family dwelling has for the past fifty years signified social and economic success for all but the poorest households in the United States. First, government and the building industry worked hard to make ownership economically affordable, socially attractive, and politically desirable. Second, increasing real incomes for the vast majority of the population meant that more households could purchase the space and privacy of single-family dwellings, usually in the suburbs. The one-two combination of prosperity and subsidy paid off. After World War II single-family housing starts shot up from 114,000 in 1944 to 1,692,000 in 1950 (Jackson 1985: 233). The proportion of households who owned their home increased from a century low of 43.6 percent in 1940 to a peak of 64.4 percent in 1980 (Devaney 1994: 21). Accompanying and fueling this shift, the nuclear household, living in its own single-family home, was promoted and celebrated as the desirable social norm, a norm that increasingly rings hollow as economic middle-class prosperity fades and households change shape.

Industry and government have maintained support for home ownership even though the real income for most households has leveled off or declined over the past twenty years. Unable to enter the homeowner market, many newly forming moderate and middle income households have been forced to remain in a rental market that has little government support and usually receives general public contempt. As this demand for rental housing has increased, so have rents (Apgar 1990: 31–32).

Large developers anticipated this affordability problem during the 1960s by adopting the use of the common interest development (CID). Conventional subdivision procedures treat each lot and house as an independent product. The purchaser pays for shared facilities and utilities as part of the purchase price or through local taxes. But the rising costs for conventional subdivision in the 1960s and 1970s encouraged developers to find ways to increase development density and decrease the cost of residential infrastructure. In the common interest development (usually either a condominium or planned unit development), purchasers join a private nonprofit homeowners' association established by the developer

that regulates property use for the entire development. CIDs enable developers to cluster housing units on less space, reduce infrastructure expense, and offer formerly individual amenities (e.g., swimming pools) as shared amenities. This version of shared housing for the middle-class proved astonishingly popular. There were barely 200 common interest developments in the United States in 1960. But by 1993 the number of homeowners associations had skyrocketed to 150,000—housing some 32 million people in more than 12 million housing units. This is out of a national housing stock of 102 million units (Community Associations Institute 1993).

Contemporary residents rarely grasp the social and political implications of their shared membership in homeowner associations. Responsibilities that first appear as fine print in the deed do not register for buyers eager to purchase their own home, such as landscaping requirements, color codes, and other restrictive covenants. Residents usually discover much later that association rules prohibit the use of their property in unexpected ways. Submitting to the shared rules of private covenants protects the economic and social value of each house as it reduces the individual autonomy of each owner (McKenzie 1994).

Ironically to our point of view, CIDs perpetuate the myth of the single family dwelling and its autonomous inhabitants rather than promote community social life among the diverse households that live there. The shared covenants restrict the appearance and use of the property regardless of household composition and need. The homeowner associations buttress beliefs about the virtue of home ownership for the nuclear family, even as declining housing affordability, increasing household variety and changing social values challenge the relevance and workability of this housing option for everyone.<sup>1</sup>

### **Housing Needs that Challenge the American Dream**

The desire for a high degree of privacy and autonomy in the choice of a residence shapes the public conception of “good” housing for all segments of the population. Many public policies, like zoning laws, subsidize and promote the development of single-family homes while outlawing or at best ignoring shared housing accommodations. The private detached dwelling inhabited by a nuclear family, however, has only just recently become the predominant form of residential housing in the United States. The rapid growth of American cities in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century encouraged the construction of high density apartments and apartment hotels for families, and boarding, rooming and lodging house

accommodations for single adults, most of whom were recent urban migrants. Apartment hotels offered an attractive and fashionable option for prosperous middle-class families, while rooming houses sheltered mobile middle-class singles. For instance, Chicago possessed 2,424 rooming houses in 1915, a number that had increased almost fivefold during the previous 30 years. One near North Side neighborhood housed 23,007 roomers, while Chicago's skid row lodging houses sheltered somewhere between 40,000 and 60,000 single poor people (Hoch and Slayton 1989: 16, 92). The development and promotion of high density urban hotels and rooming houses waned from the 1920s onward as professional reformers, real estate developers, and federal officials promoted ownership of suburban single-family dwellings at the expense of the variety of dense city housing forms.

Paul Groth, in a recent historical review of attitudes toward hotel living, describes vividly how the promotion of the one family—one house ideal came at the expense of other forms of residential life. He quotes Lawrence Veiller, a leader in housing reform writing in 1905, “The bad effect on the community of a congregate form of living is by no means limited to poor people. Waldorf-Astorias at one end of town and ‘big flats’ at the other are equally bad in their destruction of civic spirit and the responsibilities of citizenship.” In 1903 the *Architectural Record* complained that communal dining was the “consummate flower of domestic irresponsibility,... the sacrifice of everything implied by the word ‘home’.” Even the University of Chicago sociologist, Ernest Burgess, writing in 1926 after extensive fieldwork, could still say that “the small family group in apartment houses and hotels” was “The most notorious illustration of effectual detachment from the claims of kinship” (Groth 1994: 201, 210).

### *Declining Prosperity and Changing Households*

As long as the availability and affordability of purchasing single-family suburban dwellings was high, the free standing single-family dwelling on a parcel of land allowing setbacks all around appeared compelling as a social objective for those who wanted to pursue this way of life. Since 1973, economic constraints have hampered household formation and successful home purchase by young moderate and middle-income individuals. In addition, the number and kind of households has increased in response to marital breakups, life cycle changes, and changing social mores. The proportion of unmarried couples living together has increased, as has the share of empty nest households. Most striking is the increase in female-headed households with children. It was mainly due to lack of means, but among scattered minorities the desire for other housing forms was growing (See Table 1).

**TABLE 1**  
**Households by Type, U.S. Total: 1940 to 1990**

<i>Characteristic</i>	<i>Number in Millions</i>		<i>Percent Change</i>
	<i>1940</i>	<i>1990</i>	<i>1940–90</i>
Total Households	34.9	91.9	163%
Family Householder	31.5	64.5	105
Married Couples	26.6	50.7	91
Male, No Wife	1.5	3.1	108
Female, No Husband	3.4	10.7	213
Nonfamily Householder	3.5	27.4	693
Male	1.6	12.1	659
Female	1.9	15.3	722

Source: (Devaney 1994: 16)

The future availability and access to the suburban single-family home relies on a convergence of economic, social, and political forces that no longer flow with the same strength or in parallel. Efforts are underway to revive and rechannel the diverging streams along the same route. In addition to the widespread use of CIDs, builders offer downsized versions of the single-family dwelling with more or fewer amenities. The Federal National Mortgage Association (FNMAE) offers subsidy schemes to reduce downpayment requirements for first time homebuyers hoping to increase demand for single-family mortgages. Local governments develop increasingly sophisticated land use restrictions to protect against the threat of eroding property values and to police illegal conversions in middle-class neighborhoods. These efforts intend to maintain existing development patterns that privilege single-family housing development.

### *The Growing Ranks of the Poor*

Providing housing for the poor has long been a central focus of government housing policy in most industrially-developed countries. The quality and scope of programs vary enormously from country to country, but significant institutional innovations have led to more and better housing for the poor than had been offered previously. In the United States, for instance, early housing reformers at the turn of the century deplored the wretched living conditions for the poor inhabitants of the slums, and many of their proposals to eliminate the slums and replace the tenements with higher standard accommodations have been implemented. The widespread destruction of the substandard housing stock, especially in the

urban slums, increased the quality of the housing stock nationwide. As long as the growth in the real income of the poor (whether by subsidy or wages) kept pace with such improvements, a growing portion of the poor enjoyed improved housing conditions. This achievement was announced by the analysts of the Housing Commission Report prepared for the Reagan administration in 1981. The United States had solved the housing quality problem, but not the housing affordability problem.

Despite numerous government efforts to increase the income of the poor, the 1990s finds the scope and intensity of shelter poverty increasing in the United States and other industrial countries. Changing patterns of economic growth and decline have shifted greater burdens of economic uncertainty onto the poor. Real income for the poor has declined precipitously over the past decade. As the poor get poorer, fewer can afford to remain in, or even enter, the bottom of the housing market. The supply of low rent housing has not kept pace with rising demand in some areas, and the supply has contracted in others. Homelessness emerges, less a temporary problem than a chronic condition.<sup>2</sup>

Members squeezed out of the shrinking middle-class and others joining the growing underclass, especially young adults, face affordability gaps that put owning a single-family dwelling out of reach. Economic necessity forces many to live with kin or friends much longer than they would like. Those unable or unwilling to buy into a CID face the combination of disappointed expectations and enforced doubling up that can make residential sharing a source of shame rather than an opportunity to economize and even build community.

The chapters in this book offer argument and evidence that challenge our exclusive attachment to the single (nuclear) family dwelling and our corresponding neglect of shared housing arrangements for the numerous households that do not fit the prototype of the nuclear family. When residents voluntarily collaborate in the design, management, and use of shared accommodations, they can overcome the indignity of necessity in modest yet meaningful ways. Shared housing arrangements provide an important complement to conventional housing options.

Households and community organizations do currently modify the structure and use of the physical housing stock to meet a diverse assortment of social needs. Middle-class families collaborate to produce cohousing arrangements that provide space for group meals and play, while ensuring private living quarters for each family. Nonprofit organizations construct housing designed to meet the social and physical needs of special populations whose age, disabilities, or illness make conventional housing arrangements obsolete or even dangerous. Households take in kin or friends suffering social and economic hardship.

Unlike the impersonal reciprocity in legal and monetary exchanges that define traditional housing arrangements (e.g., the lease and the mortgage) and the more recent CIDs, shared housing requires reciprocity and participation among residents as each learns what to expect and how to contribute to the domestic welfare of the entire household. Residents of shared housing do not only agree to a contract, but enter a domestic community in which they agree to participate.

We often imagine such communities using ideological concepts that polarize and exaggerate the difference between community and individuality. In ideological debates joining a community requires sacrificing individuality, while obtaining independence demands sundering all ties of community dependence. Housing policy and development practices have tended in this century to emphasize and foster images of household independence that ignore and occasionally deny the importance of social community in residential life. Shared housing appears quaint, weird, threatening, or otherwise exceptional because of the now widespread belief in the desirability and value of the single-family home. However, challenging the belief on ideological grounds is foolish, since the advantages of home ownership for individual households remain obvious, even if a diminishing possibility. The problem is not individual home ownership for nuclear families, but the system of ideological, legal, and cultural beliefs that enshrine this housing option as the only “good” housing to the detriment of alternative housing that better meets many people’s needs and wants.

### **Defining Shared Housing**

The definition of shared housing reflects different conceptions of what and how residents share, whether dwelling, social life, tenure or rent. Each of these kinds sharing may be used to classify one type of shared housing (e.g., roommates), but frequently the relationships are more complex. For instance, a boarding house resident is likely to rent a private room while using a bath, kitchen, or other space in common. Residents are most likely to rely on the landlord manager or caretaker for the maintenance of common spaces. In-kind rent arrangements for the care of common spaces (e.g., cleaning living room and hallways) are usually considered desirable, but are not frequent in practice. Yet in all these instances, sharing refers to an intentional and purposeful commitment by participating households. Prisons, military barracks and emergency shelters in which members involuntarily share common facilities, therefore, do not count as shared housing.

Figure 1 provides a scheme for classifying different types of shared housing that currently exist by combining what people share: physical

dwelling, social life, tenure, and rent. The types listed in the first column of the figure are clustered by sponsorship category: shared ownership, private ownership, and institutional ownership. Shared ownership applies to shared housing arrangements in which residents possess legal ownership rights to use and obligations to care for the common space. Common interest developments (condominiums, cooperatives, and planned unit developments) offer the most prominent example of these arrangements. Mingles refer to a kind of condominium arrangement where two unattached adults purchase a unit with two or more bedrooms but only one kitchen and bath. Private ownership includes shared housing units purchased through mortgage agreements and rented to tenants with lease agreements. Nonprofit ownership includes shared housing units purchased, financed, and managed by a nonprofit agency for the benefit of shared housing residents. Rows in Figure 1 include the most frequently mentioned types of shared housing. The responses in the cells of the figure denote what particular kinds of sharing are most likely to occur in each type of shared housing.

**FIGURE 1**

**Kinds of Shared Housing by Sponsorship and Type of Sharing**

	<i>Physical Sharing</i>			<i>Social Sharing</i>			<i>Tenure</i>		<i>Rent Sharing</i>		
	Room	Bath/Kitchen		Sociability	Reciprocity		Ownership	Rental	Rental	Mortgage	
		Common Space	Common Space		Caretaking	Caretaking				In-kind	Subsidy
<b>SHARED</b>											
Collective		Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes		Yes	Yes	
Coop			Yes	Yes	Yes		Yes		Yes	Some	
Mingles	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Some		Yes		Yes		
Condo			Yes	Some			Yes		Yes		
<b>PRIVATE</b>											
Boarding		Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes		Yes	Yes	Some	
Rooming		Yes	Some	Yes	Some			Yes	Yes	Some	
SRO		Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes			Yes	Yes		
Echo			Yes	Yes	Some	Some	Some	Yes	Yes	Some	
Accessory			Yes	Yes	Yes	Some	Some	Yes	Yes	Some	
<b>INSTITUTIONAL</b>											
Congregate			Yes	Some	Some	Some	Yes		Yes		Some
Transitional	Some	Yes	Yes	Yes	Some	Yes		Yes		Some	Yes
Women Shltr	Some	Yes	Yes	Yes	Some	Yes		Yes		Some	Yes
Group Homes	Some	Yes	Yes	Yes	Some	Yes		Yes		Some	Yes

Note: Yes means sharing very likely.  
 A blank space means sharing unlikely.  
 Some means occasional sharing.



### *Physical Sharing*

Physical sharing occurs when multiple households inhabit the same residential site or structure, and at least two households use the same bath, kitchen, and/or other space in common, in addition to the entrance. The structure may be small—a two-bedroom house in which the owner uses one bedroom and rents the other room to a tenant who shares the kitchen, bath, and other rooms. Shared housing accommodations may also be large—a 200 unit SRO hotel whose residents use bath facilities and other services in common or a large congregate housing project for the elderly.

All forms of shared housing allow for individual possession and control of some private space. At one extreme are institutional facilities for the poor, such as transitional shelters and SRO hotels. Although shelter providers usually offer private sleeping rooms for resident households, limited budgets and increased demand require that sleeping rooms be shared by several households. When a residential facility can no longer provide private space for individual households and these households must share all the spaces in which they live, sharing loses its voluntary character and becomes an imposition. At the other extreme are CIDs and cohousing arrangements, in which middle-class households each possess complete dwelling units, while sharing a common garden, laundry, dining room, workshop, or other facilities on a carefully landscaped site.

### *Social Sharing*

Social sharing occurs when at least two households living in the same structure take joint responsibility for their use of some space in common. Each household respects the use of common spaces by others so as to ensure their own access and use of such spaces. Adopting and following customary practices of propriety, cleanliness, and security establishes a minimal reciprocity that enables households to share the same facilities based on the relatively thin social bonds of neighborliness or sociability, without requiring residents to take on the deeper responsibilities of friendship or kin.

Responsibility for joint use may also rely on the more substantial social bonds of mutual obligation and/or shared dependency. People may voluntarily choose to form a residential collective in which they not only share common space, but common values and obligations with each other. In these collectives, the households define themselves as members of a residential community rather than individual private households who simply share common facilities (e.g., fraternities, convents, communes). The responsibility of shared use may not always rest exclusively with residents. CID residents who do not want the hassle of maintaining a pool or golf

course or residents whose reason for living together is based on conditions of shared vulnerability and dependency, for instance, dependent elderly, teen-aged single mothers, homeless families, and others, may not be willing or able to care adequately for the common spaces each uses. Responsibility for the use of common spaces is then managed by caretakers who may negotiate with residents a variety of agreements for the joint care of common spaces.

### *Tenure*

Shared tenure takes two forms: resident or absentee ownership. Resident owners share their dwelling with co-owners or tenants, while absentee owners rent their dwelling to tenants who share the use of common space. When the owner or co-owners share the same dwelling with tenants, the owners tend to care for and manage the housing as home rather than as just a business venture. Disinvestment or deferred maintenance is highly unlikely as it would come at the expense of the owners' standard of living. Usually, these arrangements are of a much smaller scale than shared housing accommodations managed by absentee owners.

Absentee ownership offers the opportunity to operate shared housing arrangements as a profit making business or a nonprofit housing resource for low income households. The combination of small residential quarters, high density, and shared common spaces can produce efficient, affordable housing without abandoning privacy for individual tenants.

### *Rent Sharing*

Virtually all shared housing arrangements require payment of rent. In many, especially those in which deep social ties are present, needy tenants may substitute in-kind services for cash rent. Some cohousing arrangements will adjust mortgage payments and condominium association fees based on household income. Shared housing arrangements sponsored by government agencies or nonprofit organizations will frequently subsidize the rents of poor tenants in shared housing arrangements (e.g., congregate housing for the elderly) or perhaps subsidize the financing and construction of the shared housing units in order to keep rents below market rates. An example of this is using McKinney Act funds to rehabilitate SRO hotels as housing for homeless individuals.

### **Benefits of Sharing**

The provision of shared housing options offers a promising alternative to meet the increasing demand for affordable, decent, and secure housing

and offers benefits both to the individuals and households who share and to the larger community.

Sharing common facilities among several residents reduces the rent burden of each. For instance, an elderly homeowner receives rent from the homesharing tenant to offset mortgage and property tax expenses, while the tenant may enjoy a rent significantly below market rates for studio and one bedroom apartments. Shared housing can also make amenities and services available to residents that they could not otherwise afford. For example, a homesharing resident may enjoy access to a living room, garden, or common space not available if renting a studio or apartment. Similarly, residents can receive valuable services from each other in the form of shared meal preparation, personal chores, building maintenance, and household repairs. Sharing also offers each resident the opportunity to rely on the availability of others to meet particular social and personal needs, while meeting the specific needs of others in return.

Homesharing increases the availability of affordable housing stock in a relatively inexpensive fashion. Providing for more, smaller, private units in shared housing arrangements not only makes for greater affordability (less private space, less rent), but also accommodates the increasing number of single-person households. Homesharing increases neighborhood and community stability by enabling both senior and younger residents with relatively less income than the more prosperous middle-age cohort to stay in their home neighborhoods. In older communities this helps ensure the social continuity and diversity of the neighborhood. As a result, public facilities remain in use which might otherwise have been abandoned well before becoming obsolete (e.g., schools, neighborhood parks). Homesharing puts the aging housing stock to a more efficient use. When two or more people, formerly living in separate dwellings, share one large dwelling it releases the dwellings they left for others to purchase or rent. Shared housing offers affordable housing without costly public subsidies, while providing an alternative to apartment complexes.

### **The Stigma of Shared Housing**

The conventional ideal of the single-family dwelling diminishes the social meaning and practical value of shared accommodations. So too does the belief about the moral influence of home ownership that links possession of a single-family home with ideals of self-reliance. The homeowner appears a better citizen than the renter. This belief not only binds individual virtue with exclusive possession of a home, but inspires institutional policies that favor individual home ownership over other

forms of housing tenancy. For several generations Americans have learned to accept shared tenancy if done out of necessity rather than voluntary choice: for example, the college student who shares an apartment with others to cut costs, the adult child living at home to save funds for purchase of her own home, or the poor immigrants doubling up to reduce rent and save income for other needs. In all these cases, sharing appears acceptable because it is an involuntary and temporary accommodation to necessity, rather than a long term residential living arrangement. Presumably, then, if involuntary necessity and disciplined group life characterize shared tenancy, then sharing must reduce individual freedom and privacy.

The stigma of residential sharing flows not only from this presumption of involuntary necessity, but also from association with other forms of group quarters such as dormitories, barracks, jails, prisons, halfway houses, group homes, shelters, and nursing homes in which institutional caretakers and rules organize residential sharing. Most homeowners look with suspicion on the placement of such facilities nearby as a threat to property values and a source of social contagion.

The models of the housing market and the practice of real estate sales reproduce this housing status hierarchy with the single-family dwelling at the top, and group quarters of all sorts at the bottom. Existing zoning regulations mirror and reinforce the hierarchy by enforcing geographically homogeneous clusters of housing, while decades of investment in massive numbers of single-family units carries with it a powerful incentive to continue.

We do not expect people to abandon the single-family house. Possession and use of single-family housing units offers a wide assortment of valuable benefits for most households. However, we believe that claims about the superior moral and social value of exclusive possession and use of a house ignore the diverse needs of changing households, while justifying unnecessary social, legal, and political barriers to the development of shared housing alternatives.

## **Overview of Book**

The chapters that follow answer the following questions: How do the benefits of reciprocity in shared housing compare in relationship to the loss of autonomy among the poor? How much of the housing stock has been physically converted to allow for shared living? What do buildings designed for shared living look like? How do they function? How do shared accommodations work for middle-class families as well as poor singles and

the retired elderly? How should we respond to the increasing numbers of women and men earning their livings in homes designed to exclude work related activity? What role does local government play in controlling shared housing? A brief summary of each chapter follows.

Hemmens and Hoch draw on ten years of research with low income white and minority households in particular Chicago neighborhoods to describe routine house-sharing arrangements. Many residents, especially homeowners, provide shelter for relatives and friends coping with economic and personal problems. Home sharing arrangements can include a variety of households, most of whose members help manage, maintain, and support the house. Home sharing is an important part of a larger pattern of informal help among these households. Unable to access and afford the autonomy of middle-class residential choice, households offer a variety of shared housing arrangements instead. It is not too surprising then that residents consider the willingness to share as an important sign of positive moral character.

The poor double-up during recessions, but this requires owners who will subdivide and convert units to meet demand. These conversions are mainly illegal additions, violating the strict zoning and building codes designed to maintain the residential hierarchy. Anna Hardman uses national statistics from the American Housing Survey to identify additions to the housing stock due to conversion activity. Reviewing case study research on owners who convert their buildings, Hardman finds that neighborhood response to conversion activity varied with the attributes of the stock and the characteristics of the landlord. Local research findings suggest that positive additions to the housing stock may be made by simultaneously reducing regulatory restrictions, encouraging informal additions to housing stock, strengthening tenant rights, and supporting small property owners.

In her essay on shared housing, Sherry Ahrentzen describes the relationship between physical design and social reciprocity in predominantly middle-class co-housing arrangements and transitional shelters for the homeless poor. Residential structures can be designed to accommodate sharing for members of different social classes, whether transitional housing for the homeless or co-housing for the middle-class. Sharing does not itself impose the stigma of dependency or low status, at least not if undertaken free of moral and legal sanction from outside. Ahrentzen offers numerous examples of designs for shared housing and the interaction of design and social structure in the United States and Europe to show how design can enhance housing options by providing a balance between private and public shared space.

Jean Butzen describes how one Chicago non-profit corporation has developed a brand of single-room occupancy housing that fosters

community as it strives for affordability. She describes how the organization combines the financing and acquisition of buildings, property management, provision of social service programs, and community interaction called “blended management”. Instead of separating the physical and the social, the staff together with residents share responsibility for property management and social service programs on a daily basis. Residents enjoy the privacy of their small rooms, while having direct access to a variety of social supports and common facilities.

Nursing homes offer an increasingly unacceptable solution to the shelter needs of an aging population. Yet despite near universal misgivings about the desirability of nursing home care, most Americans lack residential alternatives between independent living and total care. Richard Biddlecombe describes how Abbeyfield International offers a variety of shared housing arrangements to fill this gap. Abbeyfield’s 1100 independent houses are the product of the joint effort of local nonprofit developers, staff, and residents. Abbeyfield houses emphasize a cooperative spirit and a ‘family’ atmosphere. The design and management of different homes reflect differences in residents’ need for balance between independence and support, while providing them both privacy and companionship for residents.

Jacqueline Leavitt briefly explores how economic restructuring and changing social relations have affected the location and nature of women’s work, with particular impacts depending on race and ethnicity. The contemporary trend of home-based work (such as telecommuting) as a substitute for labor market participation outside the home, requires homeworking women to structure their residences and time to accommodate work. Architectural design can enable shared residences for various income levels to successfully combine home with work. At Nickerson Gardens, a public housing project in Los Angeles, unemployed residents use home space to participate in the informal economy, and activists encourage service-oriented home-based work as job creation and as community development. The opportunity for home-based work for otherwise unemployed residents in public housing projects has implications for the design and retro-fitting of low-income shared housing.

The social barriers to shared housing find legal support in local land use controls, according to housing analyst Patricia Pollak. Single-family zoning, created in part to perpetuate the single-family house, promotes a way of life that the majority of the population in the United States no longer lives. Pollak argues that zoning regulations greatly restrict or banish shared residences from single-family zoned neighborhoods, including shared single-family type homes, elder cottages, and accessory apartments. Although challenges to the legality of zoning classification have focused especially on the restrictive definition of family, Pollak concludes that

issues of land use and density will play a decisive role in determining which forms of shared housing eventually receive legal approval.

Sharing contrasts dramatically with the formal and impersonal relationships of legal contract and economic exchange. But even as we doubt the mythical and rhetorical link between the virtues of home ownership and community improvement, we must beware embracing the opposite belief in reciprocal sharing as the exclusive source of community renewal. Peter Marris offers some useful cautions, arguing that sharing, rather than being a spontaneous or easily managed relationship, requires trust and predictability in everyday behavior, mutual agreement, and effective sanctions against unreliability. Despite our attachment to individual autonomy, most of us live most of our lives sharing housing with others, usually family members. Marris observes that such sharing arrangements are actually “sharing out”—for example, taking turns cooking meals, or using private bedrooms. What cannot be so easily shared out (the use of bathrooms or the television) becomes a focus of conflict and negotiation. Sharing between people who are not part of the same family or household raises the same issues of how mutual obligations and privacy can be balanced and protected.

These chapters give reason to reconsider conventional assumptions about the undesirability and marginality of shared accommodations. Shared housing has drawbacks, but does offer an efficient, decent, and relatively unstudied form of housing for many kinds of households. We need to pay careful attention to how changing households are adapting the existing housing stock to meet their needs and what can be done to help them put this stock to better use. Since family, social, and cultural relationships play the central role in determining the value of this housing rather than the market, shared housing arrangements get lumped into a residual category.

Local, state, and federal efforts to protect, enhance, and promote individual home ownership have gone too far. The obsession with the American Dream house has not only failed to address the diversity of need and desire for other forms of residential accommodation, but outlawed them. There are large portions of the population for whom individual home ownership and occupancy is unaffordable, undesirable, or both. These include large portions of the poor, but also more prosperous households who want to work at home, nurture a residential community, or cope with the vulnerabilities of illness or aging by living with others. Our purpose is simple, if difficult. We hope these readings will persuade readers that sharing offers a legitimate and useful residential housing option for many of these households in the United States, regardless of social class, gender, or race.

**Notes**

1. The social costs of middle-class CIDs are only now starting to obtain widespread public recognition (Barton and Silverman 1994; McKenzie 1994).

2. The literature counting, describing, and analyzing the homeless has expanded exponentially over the past decade. See for instance: Baum and Burnes 1993; Burt 1992; Dear and Wolch 1993; Ringheim 1990; Rossi 1989; Wright 1989.