

Barry Wellman

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Barry Wellman, FRSC (b. 1942) directs NetLab as the S.D. Clark Professor of Sociology at the University of Toronto. His areas of research are community sociology, the Internet, human-computer interaction and social structure, as manifested in social networks in communities and organizations. His overarching interest is in the paradigm shift from group-centered relations to networked individualism.



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Contents

- 1 Early Life
- 2 Community Sociology
- 3 Social Network Theory
- 4 Social Network Methods
- 5 Internet, Technology and Society
 - 5.1 Work Networks and ICTs
 - 5.2 Community Networks and ICTs
- 6 Teaching and Mentoring
- 7 Offices
- 8 Awards
- 9 Publications
- 10 Notes
- 11 References

Early Life

Wellman was born, bar mitzvahed and raised in the Grand Concourse and Fordham Road area of the Bronx, New York City. He attended P.S. 33 and Creston J.H.S. 79, and was a member of the Fordham Flames. He gained his high school degree from the Bronx High School of Science in 1959. He received his A.B. (Bachelor's) degree magna cum laude from Lafayette College in 1963, majoring in social history and winning prizes in both history and religious studies. At Lafayette, he was a member of the McKelvy Honors House and captained the undefeated 1962 College Bowl team), whose final victory was over Berkeley. [1]

His graduate work was at Harvard University, where he trained with Chad Gordon, Charles Tilly and Harrison White, and also studied with Roger Brown, George Homans, Alex Inkeles, Florence Kluckhohn, Talcott Parsons and Phillip J. Stone. He received M.A. in Social Relations in 1965 and a Ph.D. in Sociology in 1969. His focus was on community, computer applications, social networks and self-conception, and his dissertation showed that the social identities of African-American and White American Pittsburgh junior high school students were related to the extent of segregation of their schools.

Barry Wellman has been married since 1965 with Beverly Wellman, a leading researcher in complementary and alternative medicine.

Community Sociology

Wellman has been a faculty member at the University of Toronto since 1967. Until 1990, he focused on community sociology and social network analysis. During his first three years in Toronto, he also held a joint appointment with the Clarke Institute of Psychiatry. His first project at the Clarke, working with D.B. Coates was co-directing the "Yorklea Study" in the Toronto borough of East York. This first East York study, with data collected in 1968, attempted (unsuccessfully) to do a field study of a large population, linking interpersonal relations with psychiatric symptoms. However, the study was notable for pioneering the study of "social support", documenting the prevalence of non-local friendship and kinship ties, demonstrating that community is no longer confined to neighborhood and studying non-local communities as social networks. Wellman's "Community Question" paper, reporting on this study, has been selected as one of the seven most important articles in English-Canadian sociology. [2]

A second East York study, conducted in 1978-1979 at the University of Toronto's Centre for Urban and Community Studies, used in-depth interviews with 33 East Yorkers (originally surveyed in the first study) to find out much more information about their social networks. It was probably the first study to provide evidence about which kinds of ties and networks provide which types of social support. It showed, for example, that sisters provide siblings with much emotional support, while parents provide financial aid.[3] The support seems to come more from the characteristics of the ties than from the networks in which they are embedded.[4] This research also demonstrated that wives maintain social networks for their husbands as well as for themselves. [5]

Although Wellman's work has shifted primarily to studies of the Internet (see section below), he has continued collaborative analyses of the first and second East York studies, showing that reciprocity (like social support) is much more of a tie phenomenon than a social network phenomenon[6] and that the frequency and supportiveness of interpersonal contact before the Internet was non-linearly affected by residential (and workplace) distance.[7] He has also edited Networks in the Global Village (1999), a book of original articles about personal networks around the world.

Social Network Theory

Concomitant with his empirical work, Wellman has contributed to the theory of social network analysis. The most comprehensive statement is in his introductory article to Social Structures, co-edited with the late S.D. Berkowitz. This work reviews the history of social network thought, and suggests a number of basic principles of social network analysis.[8]

More recent and more focused theoretical work has discussed the "glocalization" of contemporary communities (simultaneously "global" and "local")[9] and the rise of "networked individualism" -- the transformation from group-based networks to individualized networks.[10]

Social Network Methods

Wellman's methodological contributions have been for the analysis of ego-centered or "personal" networks -- defined from the standpoint of an individual (usually a person). As batches of personal networks are often studied, this calls for somewhat different techniques than the more common social network practice of analyzing a single large network.

A 2007 paper, co-authored by Wellman (with Bernie Hogan and Juan-Antonio Carrasco), has discussed alternatives in gathering personal network data.[11] A paper with Kenneth Frank

showed how to tackle the problem of simultaneously analyzing personal network data on the two distinct levels of ties and networks.[12] The most widely cited papers are the simplest: Co-authored guides to analyzing personal network data while using the statistical software packages SAS and SPSS.[13] Other work by Wellman with Howard D. White and associates has examined how to link social network analysis with the scientometric study of citation networks. This research has shown that scholarly friends do not necessarily cite each other, but that scholars cited in the same article are apt to seek each other out and become friends.[14]

Internet, Technology and Society



Barry Wellman at the International Conference on Communities and Technologies, Sept. 2003, Amsterdam

Barry Wellman has often worked in collaboration with computer scientists, communication scientists and information scientists. In 1990, he became involved in studying how ordinary people use the Internet and other communication technologies to communicate and exchange information at work, at home and in the community. Thus his work has expanded his interest in non-local communities and social networks to encompass the Internet, mobile phones and other information and communication technologies.

Work Networks and ICTs

Wellman's initial project ("Cavecat" which morphed into "Telepresence") was in collaboration with Ronald Baecker, Caroline Haythornthwaite, Marilyn Mantei, Gale Moore, and Janet Salaff. This was a pioneering effort in the early 1990s, before the advent of the Internet, to use networked PCs for videoconferencing and computer supported collaborative work (CSCW).[15] Caroline Haythornthwaite (for her dissertation, etc.) and Wellman analyzed why computer scientists connect with each other -- online and offline. They discovered that friendships as well as collaborative work were prime movers of connectivity at work. [16]

Wellman and Anabel Quan-Haase also wondered if such computer-supported work teams were supporting networked organizations, in which bureaucratic structure and physical proximity did not matter. Their research in one high-tech American organization -- heavily dependent on instant messaging and e-mail showed that the supposed ICT-driven transformation of work to networked organizations was only partially fulfilled in practice. The organizational constraints of departmental organization (including power) and physical proximity continued to play important roles. There were strong norms in the organization for when different communication media were used, with face-to-face contact intertwined with online contact. [17]

Community Networks and ICTs

As a community sociologist, Wellman began arguing that too much analysis of life online was happening in isolation from other aspects of everyday life. He published several papers (alone and with associates) arguing the need to contextualize Internet research, and proposing that online relations -- like off-line -- would be best studied as ramified social networks rather than as bounded groups.[18]. This argument culminated in a 2002 book, *The Internet in Everyday Life*

(co-edited with Caroline Haythornthwaite), providing exemplification from studies in a number of social milieus.

Prof. Wellman also led some of the empirical work in this area. He was part of a team (led by James Witte) that surveyed visitors to the National Geographic Society's website in 1998. Wellman's unit used these data to counter the dystopian argument that Internet involvement was associated with social isolation.[19] Some critics wondered if the non-random nature of the National Geographic web survey had distorted the results. However, the large U.S. national survey analyzed in the Pew Internet report, "The Strength of Weak Ties" (with Jeffrey Boase, John Horrigan and Lee Rainie) also showed a positive association between communication online and communication by telephone and face-to-face. The study showed that email is well-suited for maintaining regular contact with large networks, and especially with relationships that are only somewhat strong. The study also found that Internet users get more help than non-users from friends and relatives. [20]

Research into the "glocalization" concept also fed into this intellectual stream. Keith Hampton and Wellman studied the Toronto suburb of "Netville" a pseudonym. It showed the interplay between online and offline activity, and how the Internet -- aided by a list-serve -- is not just a means of long-distance communication but enhances neighboring and civic involvement. [21]

Wellman's current work continues to focus on the interplay between information and communication technologies, especially the Internet, social relations and social structure. For example, he is collaborating on Wenhong Chen's study of transnational immigrant entrepreneurs who link China and North America.[22]

Wellman's major current focus is as the head of the Connected Lives project studying the interplay between communication, community and domestic relationships in Toronto and in Chapleau in rural northern Ontario. Early findings of the interplay between online and offline life are summarized in "Connected Lives: The Project".[23] More focused research (with Jennifer Kayahara) has shown how the onetime two-step flow of communication has become more recursively multi-step as the result of the Internet's facilitation of information seeking and communication.[24]. Recent research (with Tracy Kennedy) has argued that many households, like communities, have changed from local groups to become spatially- dispersed networks connected by frequent ICT and mobile phone communication.[25] Other NetLab researchers, besides those noted in the text and the notes, include Prof. Dean Behrens , and doctoral students Paul Glavin and Jing Shen.

Teaching and Mentoring

Wellman is known for his interactive style of teaching and extensive mentoring of graduate and undergraduate students in courses about community, social network analysis, and technology and society. He has co-authored with more than 80 persons, almost all of whom were his students. He received the International Network for Personal Relationships' "Mentoring Award" in 1998.

Offices

Professor Wellman founded the International Network for Social Network Analysis in 1976-1977 and led it until 1988. Concomitantly, he founded, edited and published INSNA's informal journal, Connections.

In 1979, he founded the University of Toronto's "Structural Analysis Programme" in the Department of Sociology, focused on studying social structure and relationships from a social

network perspective, and he led the twelve-person virtual research centre until 1982. The Department of Sociology subsequently established the "Barry Wellman Award" for excellence in undergraduate research.

He has been a Council member and then President of two sections of the American Sociological Association:

- Community and Urban Sociology (1998-2000), where he led the team that found the journal, *City and Community*;
- Communications and Information Technologies (2005-2006), which increased in membership from 95 to 303.[26]

He was elected to the Council (2000) and then became President of the Sociological Research Association honor society (2004-2005).

He is currently the North American editor of the journal *Information, Communication and Society*.

He has also been the Associate Director of the Centre for Urban and Community Studies, University of Toronto, where he was based, 1970-2007.

Awards

Career achievement awards from:

- The Canadian Sociology and Anthropology Association (2001)
- The International Network for Social Network Analysis (1994)
- Community and Urban Sociology section of the American Sociological Association (2006)
- Communication and Information Technologies of the American Sociological Association(2004).

- Mentoring Award, International Network for Personal Relationships (1998).
- Elected to the Sociological Research Association honor society (1994).
- S.D. Clark endowed chair at the University of Toronto (2006). [27][28]
- Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada, FRSC (2007)

Residencies at the:

- Netherlands Institute for Advanced Studies, Wassenaar (1978-1979)
- Rockefeller Foundation Study and Conference Center, Lake Como Italy (1999);
- World Internet Project's headquarters at the University of Southern California (2006),
- University of Surrey (Guildford England, 1974-1975),
- University of California, Berkeley -- Institute for Urban and Regional Development (1985) and School of Information Management and Systems (1999)

He has an Erdős number of 3.

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Publications

Wellman is the editor of three books, and the author of more than 200 articles. His books are: *Social Structures: A Network Approach* (with the late S.D. Berkowitz; Cambridge University Press, 1988); *Networks in the Global Village* (Boulder, CO: Westview 1999); *The Internet in Everyday Life* (with

Caroline Haythornthwaite; Oxford: Blackwell 2002).

Wellman has an extensive website with many of his publications available for reading. He has also compiled, for fun, Updating Cybertimes (<http://chass.utoronto.ca/oldnew/cybertimes.php>): a site that translates songs, movies, popular culture and historical figures from pre-Internet days to current times.

Notes

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