

Web of Fear

Sites like Nextdoor put a digital spin on neighborhood watches, but you can't believe everything you read online

By *Jeremy Lybarger*

On June 30, the day after Pride, a cryptic message surfaced on Reddit: "I think I saw a corpse rolling around in a wheelchair at pride and I am so curious to know if anyone else saw this," an alarmed Redditor wrote. The thread disappeared hours later, and although it could have been a troll's macabre joke, it raises questions about community watchdogging in the digital age.

San Francisco-based Nextdoor.com is the antidote to Reddit's toxic anonymity. It bills itself as a private, hyper-local community forum where members must verify their home addresses before creating an account (addresses aren't made public). Among its listings for used Ikea bookshelves or rooms for rent are sporadic crime bulletins, posted by Nextdoor members and police.

One such bulletin caught the attention of Richmond District police Captain Simon Silverman last month. A Nextdoor member wrote that 15 women had been assaulted in the neighborhood; police knew of only two such incidents. At a community meeting, Silverman cautioned people not to believe everything they read online.

According to Nextdoor spokesperson Jeremie Beebe, 20 percent of the site's conversations are about crime. In September

2014, the site launched a partnership program with law enforcement whereby police can push crime notifications to Nextdoor and read members' responses (police cannot read any other messages on the site). Today, more than 700 police departments in as many cities partner with Nextdoor.

In San Francisco, the Richmond, Central, and Bayview police stations all use the site. Officer Ed Carew of Central

Station says he uses it as a public information tool to notify people of potential safety concerns. "On nights when I'm not working, I can check Nextdoor to see what's going on in the neighborhood," he says.

When Central Station joined the site in February, Carew wrote, "Please be aware that Nextdoor is not the appropriate way to request emergency services,

police services, report criminal or suspicious activity, file a report, etc." Yet, a cursory scroll dredges up horror stories of muggings and home invasions, car break-ins, and vicious dogs. San Francisco seems to be one felony away from becoming Gotham City.

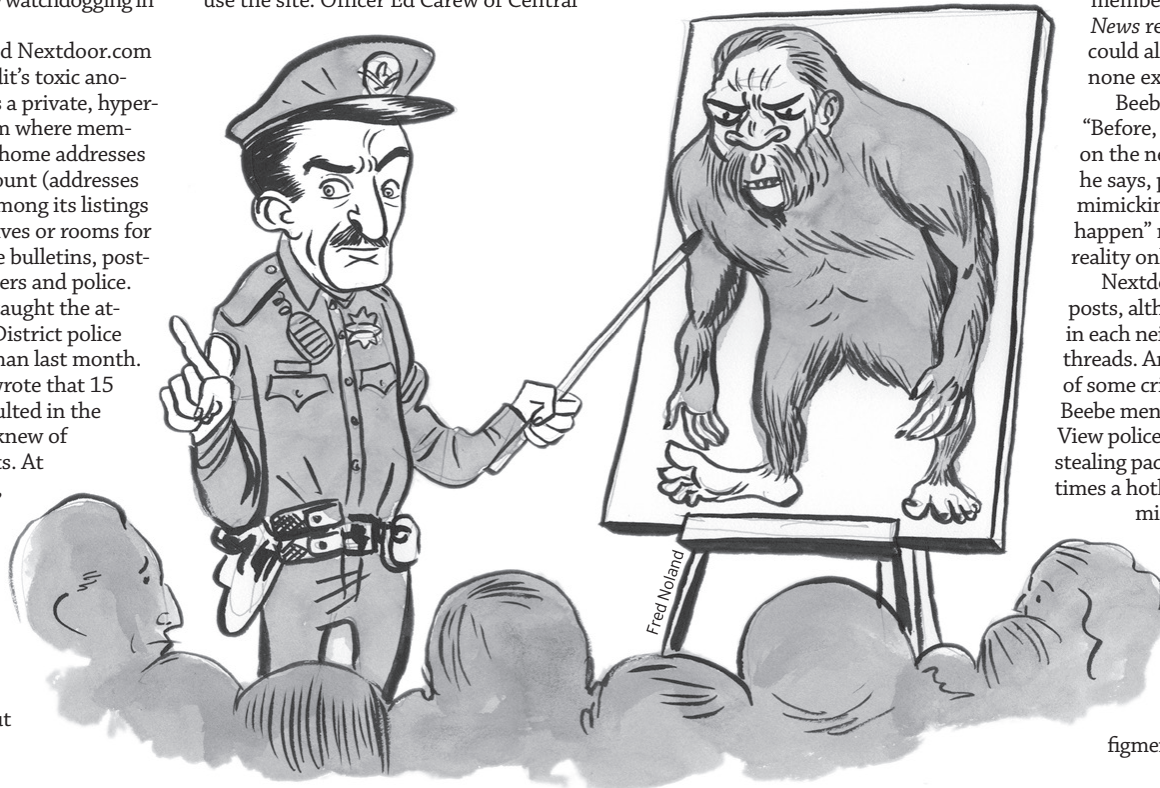
"Because of the information on Nextdoor, we could ... see a pattern that the police do not see," a Nextdoor member told *The Dallas Morning News* recently, but members could also create patterns where none exists.

Beebe is aware of such a risk. "Before, unless people saw it on the news, it didn't happen," he says, perhaps unconsciously mimicking the "pics or it didn't happen" meme that adjudicates reality online.

Nextdoor doesn't monitor the posts, although quasi-moderators in each neighborhood manage the threads. And while the site boasts of some crime-solving successes — Beebe mentions a sting Mountain View police conducted to catch a man stealing packages — it's also sometimes a hothouse for rumors and misinformation.

"As with any social media, anybody can post their opinion or exaggerate," Carew says.

It's wise to remember that some crime reports, like Bigfoot, are figments of one's imagination.



Independence Day

By *Benjamin Wachs*

How did San Franciscans celebrate the Fourth of July??

- Thanked a stripper for his service.
- Put an American flag on their startup's home page.
- Emailed random Texans their wedding pictures.
- Threw really ironic backyard barbecues.
- Celebrated a private, invite-only, much-hipper Independence Day they don't want anybody else to know about.
- Got a Ruth Bader Ginsburg tattoo.
- Showed their solidarity with the people of Greece instead of watching fireworks.
- Gathered the family to go watch the Bay Bridge continue disintegrating before their very eyes.
- Instagrammed the fuck out of a national monument.
- Netflix.

Cholo Pride

A homeboy explains his problem with the Mission LGBT mural

In June 2014, Galeria de la

Raza at 24th and Bryant streets mounted a digital mural that portrayed three transgender Latina women waving the pink, blue, and white transgender flag. In June 2013, the Pride month mural at the Galeria featured portraits of six undocumented youths, along with the message, "I Am UndocuQueer!"

Both murals celebrated queer people within Latino communities, yet neither elicited the backlash that greeted this year's Pride mural, which depicts two couples — one gay, one lesbian — and a trans man. Titled

"Por Vida," the mural has been defaced with graffiti three times, and on the night of June 29, it was set on fire.

The vandalism has distressed queer Latinos and their allies, several hundred of whom gathered last Thursday in front of the charred mural to express love for LGBT people and support for the Galeria.

"There's a lot of homophobia and transphobia in the Latino culture," Susana Cáceres, the executive director of El/La Para TransLatinas (a Mission-based transgender Latino support organization), says. "This is just surfacing something that's always been there."

But according to Barrio2Barrio, one of the most outspoken critics of the mural, the negative response is not about depicting gay people,

but depicting gay people as cholos — a slang term for Mexican gang members.

"It's not saying that there are no gay people that are gang members. That's like saying there's no gay mechanics," Barrio2Barrio said last week by phone. "What's being depicted here is an appropriation."

Barrio2Barrio is the social media handle of a 35-year-old East Bay documentarian and promoter of the cholo lifestyle. Between his Instagram feed (10,500 followers), Tumblr, and his DVDs, Barrio2Barrio chronicles the lowrider aesthetic of cholos and homeboys in barrios across California. For him, being a cholo means being part of a gang and enduring police harassment, violence, poverty, and prison. He says the mural glamorizes a lifestyle that isn't glamorous and

shows homosexuality in a way that's not realistic.

"The majority of homegirls that I got — they look like dudes," Barrio2Barrio says. "They're butch lesbians. It's a machismo culture." What you won't see in that culture is two gay cholos publicly embracing each other. That's unrealistic, Barrio2Barrio says, and a sign that outsiders — such as the Los Angeles-based artists who created the mural — feel "entitled" to cholo lifestyle "just because they're brown."

Barrio2Barrio says there's been a resurgence of interest in the cholo aesthetic and that it profits off the good while ignoring the bad. "Look at Mike Giant," he says, referring to the popular tattoo and graffiti artist. "He does nothing but cholo, and he makes bank on it. Everybody from

Gwen Stefani to Fergie to Justin Bieber's girlfriend is trying to be cholo now."

The anger Barrio2Barrio expresses unites him with anti-gentrification activists such as Roberto Hernandez of Our Mission No Eviction. After all, the Mission District is ground zero for the fight against outsiders who want to consume the products of Latino culture while displacing Latino people.

But while Hernandez rallied in support of the mural on Thursday, Barrio2Barrio is standing his ground. "They say it's just art," says Barrio2Barrio, "but I'm saying, if there was a mural in your neighborhood that was a black Nazi, or a Confederate flag, what would you do? The Confederate flag? They took that down."

Julia Carrie Wong