

The Density of Acquaintanceship: An Overlooked Variable in Community Research?¹

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One of the most basic characteristics of a community's social structure is the proportion of its residents who are acquainted with one another—in the terminology of this paper, the community's "density of acquaintanceship." Although versions of this variable have been discussed for at least three-quarters of a century, quantitative studies have found little evidence that it has any significant consequences for psychosocial adjustment. Using a different focus, however, may lead to different conclusions. Drawing from a study of rapid community growth, this paper reports that a marked decline in the density of acquaintanceship did in fact lead to significant consequences—but that the effects were strongest in areas other than psychological functioning. Changes were particularly evident in control of deviance, socialization of the young, and care for the community's weaker members. Psychosocial impacts, by contrast, were lessened by the continuing vitality of intimate social supports. The paper concludes that the density of acquaintanceship variable warrants systematic but refocused investigation in the future.

At least since the time of Weber and Simmel, sociologists have noticed a basic fact about urban social structure: city residents tend to know a smaller proportion of their neighbors than do persons in smaller com-

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munities. For almost as long, quantitative studies have failed to find evidence that this fact produces any significant consequences. Today, it appears that most of those familiar with the empirical literature would agree with Claude S. Fischer's recent assessment: "Perhaps living among people who are unknown . . . has little effect" (1976, pp. 84–85).

In this paper, I will argue that such a conclusion would be premature—and that the apparent lack of findings to date may actually reflect a tendency to look for effects in the wrong places. There is good reason to expect that the effects of knowing only a small proportion of one's fellow residents in a community—of living in a community with a low "density of acquaintanceship," to use this paper's terminology—will be strongest *not* in the area of psychological adjustment but in other areas of social functioning. As with any other variable, moreover, if we wish to see the effects of the density of acquaintanceship, we need to be sure that we are considering a genuine range of variation. Significant variations are not likely to occur in an analysis confined to communities of the 50,000–5,000,000 population range—where even the smallest community is so large that the average resident is unlikely to know more than a small percentage of the other people in town. Important research opportunities emerge, by contrast, when relatively stable rural communities experience rapid population growth.

The first section of this article introduces the density of acquaintanceship concept, reviews related/previous usage, notes the need for a more precise definition, and outlines a priori theoretical reasoning. The second section presents relevant data from a community study in western Colorado. The third examines the most important competing hypothesis for the study's findings, and the final section discusses implications for future research.

THE DENSITY OF ACQUAINTANCESHIP

Previous Literature

As a number of classic theorists have noted, cities contain a relatively high proportion of people who do not know one another. Weber describes the city as being "a locality . . . so extensive that personal reciprocal acquaintanceship of the inhabitants is lacking" ([1921] 1958, p. 65). Tönnies, in his *Gesellschaft*, sees a social world where "everybody is by himself and isolated" ([1887] 1963, p. 74). Wirth sees the human relations of the urban dweller becoming "largely anonymous" (1938, p. 1). Bossard (1945) notes that similar observations have been made as far back as the time of Aristotle (see also Simmel 1902; [1903] 1950, p. 416; Park 1925, p. 24).

The presumed isolation of city dwellers, in turn, has been identified as a possible cause of alienation or psychological disruption in urban settings (see esp. Simmel [1903] 1950; Wirth 1938). Urbanites are seen as responding to the high stimulus level of cities by adopting “reserved” behavior toward others, cutting down on sensory overload by withdrawing from social contacts. This withdrawal, in turn, leads to a “segmentalization of human relationships” and to a situation that is “characterized by secondary rather than primary contacts” (Wirth 1938, p. 12). The situation has also been seen as affecting personalities and as weakening even intimate social bonds of urban dwellers, leading in turn to psychological distress and to “essentially the state of *anomie* or the social void to which Durkheim alludes” (Wirth 1938, p. 13; see also Fischer 1976, pp. 29–33).

In the 20th century, however, empirical research has repeatedly failed to find evidence of “atomization”—interpersonal isolation—or of psychological pathologies in urban residents. Studies made over the past three decades, in particular, have consistently indicated that the typical social milieu of the city may be one of thriving primary relationships, not greatly different in their quality or quantity from those found in smaller communities (see, e.g., Adams 1967; Axelrod 1956; Bell and Boat 1957; Fischer 1982; Gans 1962; Greer 1962; Laumann 1973; Litwak and Szelenyi 1969; Reiss 1959; Wellman 1979; see also the review and analysis by Kasarda and Janowitz 1974). Similarly, empirical research on the effect of city size on mental illness has failed to demonstrate any clear pattern (Dohrenwend and Dohrenwend 1972; see also Campbell, Converse, and Rodgers 1976; Dohrenwend et al. 1980; Fischer 1976, 1982; Inkeles and Smith 1970; Webb and Collette 1979). Given the general lack of findings, one obvious reaction would be to discontinue further efforts to document “findings” that have been stubbornly elusive to date.

Present Reasoning

This paper takes a different approach—one that begins with an attempt to disentangle a low density of acquaintanceship (at the community level) from assumptions of “isolation and estrangement” at the individual level.

In fact, there is no logically compelling reason to assume that persons who know *fewer* of their fellow community residents will therefore not know *anyone*. The individual-level experience of isolation is conceptually distinct from aggregate-level variations in the proportion of people in a given community who know one another, so long as some social contacts exist. To avoid confusion with individual-level phenomena, this paper uses the term “density of acquaintanceship,” which is explicitly intended to refer to a community-level social structural characteristic.

The density of acquaintanceship may be thought of as the average

proportion of the people in a community known by the community's inhabitants. It will be operationalized below with an index of the kinds of persons *not* known by survey respondents. An alternative approach would make use of a conceptually simple but operationally challenging ratio: if it is at least theoretically possible for an individual to know (or to "have ties with") each other person in the community, then a community-wide density of acquaintanceship could also be defined conceptually by the community's ratio of actual ties to potential ties.² Other operationalizations could also prove useful, so long as they provide meaningful measures of the proportion of people in a community who are acquainted with one another.

Numerous variations of this concept have been used by sociological and anthropological analysts of social networks, although none of the earlier terminologies are entirely appropriate in a community-level context. This paper draws from Barnes's (1968, p. 117) usage of the term "density" for analyzing a "zone" of a social network. The use of "acquaintanceship" is meant to indicate the inclusion of what Granovetter (1973) called "weak ties"—relationships with people who are "just acquaintances"—in addition to more intimate friendships.

Antecedent variables.—On an a priori basis, several variables can be expected to affect a community's density of acquaintanceship. The first and most obvious is the variable already noted by classic theorists—a community's *population*. In a small town, it can be physically possible for someone to know everyone else in the community, but the average New York city resident cannot possibly know all eight million of his or her neighbors. Community population size, however, is only the first of several relevant variables.

The second is an individual's *length of residence* in a community (cf. Albrecht 1984; Kasarda and Janowitz 1974). All other factors being equal, the longer a given individual has lived in a community, the greater will have been his or her opportunity to become acquainted with other community residents. A third and closely related variable is *anticipated*

² This ratio is probably the most straightforward approach to conceptualizing the density of acquaintanceship, although the operationalization of the ratio could be somewhat complex. Simple expedients are available, however—e.g., asking survey respondents for their own estimates of the proportion of the people in their community with whom they are acquainted. It also appears that it would be possible to compute the actual ratio. As Bossard (1945, p. 293) has noted, ties between individuals are $N(N - 1)/2$ in number for communities of size N . Measurement of "existing ties" can be considerably more complex, but Granovetter (1976) has been able to suggest a methodology for measuring the "average acquaintanceship volume" of individuals in a community. His technique would require considerable effort, but would, as he notes, permit the relatively straightforward computation of a community's total number of ties.

length of residence: a person who expects to remain in a given community for many years will have much greater incentive to make friends locally than will someone who expects to be moving in a relatively short time.

Diversity, the fourth variable, is also likely to affect residents' motivation to become acquainted. As has perhaps been pointed out most effectively by Fischer (1981, 1982), if one feels little in common with the other residents of a community—or regards them with genuine disdain—one is likely to feel less motivation to become acquainted with them. A fifth and occasionally related variable is *segregation*: if different types of people have relatively little contact with one another—whether because they live in different sections of a community, work in completely different milieus, feel antipathy for one another, or for some other reason—they are also less likely to become acquainted.

Expected consequences.—People who know one another often work out interpersonal “agreements” for achieving desired goals. The agreements are usually not formalized; often they are unspoken, and sometimes they may not even be consciously acknowledged. They are a result of “personal accommodation,” in Park’s words, “rather than the formulation of a rational and abstract principle” (1925, p. 24). They are made possible by the fact that the people involved are personally acquainted—that they know each other well enough to be willing or able to predict and depend on one another’s behavior. Persons who remain strangers will be systematically less likely to be willing or able to participate in such mutual agreements.

These “informal mechanisms,” as I will call them here, can range from the small-group level (as when friends alternate baby-sitting duties, e.g., instead of hiring “professional” baby-sitters, or when a neighbor shovels the sidewalk of an elderly couple living next door) to the community-wide. Certain types of informal mechanisms, however—because they are based on interpersonal acquaintanceship—cannot function effectively if a community comes to contain a high proportion of persons who remain strangers to one another (see also Milgram 1970, p. 1464).

If an informal mechanism loses effectiveness because of a drop in a community’s density of acquaintanceship, essentially two possibilities exist. If the function can still be performed equally well by some alternative “mechanism”—whether formal or informal—there may be no reason for any “urban pathologies” to result. If the function cannot be performed equally well by an alternative mechanism, however, the change may cause impaired community functioning in that area.

Given accumulated findings on the importance of primary and quasi-primary social support for mental health (e.g., Gore 1978; House 1981; Lin et al. 1979; Thoits 1982, 1984), we should *not* expect a decline in a community’s density of acquaintanceship, per se, to have negative conse-

quences for community mental health, unless that community simultaneously experiences an increase in the proportion of its residents who are truly isolated or "atomized." Instead, we should expect increased problems in three other areas of community functioning that can be identified on an a priori basis: control of deviance, socialization of the young, and caring for those in need of help.

Control of deviance.—Neighborly watchfulness can evidently lead to effective informal deviance control even in the most densely populated of urban areas, provided that it is exercised in neighborhoods with relatively stable populations. In a smaller community, a high density of acquaintanceship can allow the watchfulness to extend to the entire community: if a resident sees a person entering a house even in another section of town, there is a relatively high likelihood that the resident will know whether the person entering the house has any right to do so, and if not, that the resident will take appropriate action. Such watchfulness can lead to highly effective control of deviance, in part because the high likelihood of apprehension acts as a deterrent to the committing of deviant acts in the first place.

Informal deviance control mechanisms do have a potential inadequacy, however: they can be expected to be quite vulnerable to a drop in a community's density of acquaintanceship. When more of the faces in town are strange, the residents may or may not suffer from feelings of isolation, but a lawbreaker probably will find it easier to escape detection and capture. He becomes a "white male, about 5 feet, 10 inches tall, between the ages of 16 and 19," instead of "Ruth Johnson's nephew, Frank."

Socialization of the young.—In a stable small community with a high density of acquaintanceship, socialization can often be as much a community effort as a familial one, and hence it can also be vulnerable to disruption in the face of community change. Child rearing in many small communities tends to be punitive, with parents frequently making threats such as, "Don't you ever let me catch you doing that, or I'll really let you have it." Such threats are fairly effective if they are supported by the cooperative surveillance that is permitted by a high density of acquaintanceship. Even if parents do not see their children misbehaving, others often do. In such cases, the misbehaviors are often corrected on the spot as a favor to the family, or else the parents find out through a network of neighbors just as effectively as if they had witnessed the deviant acts in person.

A sudden decline in a community's density of acquaintanceship can be highly disruptive to such socialization mechanisms. Even if an adult sees a child misbehaving, there is a substantially lower likelihood that the adult will recognize the youngster. In cases where the youngster is recog-

nized, moreover, the witness may not know the parent or may not realize that the transgressor is related to the family on the next block. Even if the witness knows both the child and the parents, and knows they are related, he may still not feel it appropriate to “get involved.” Under such circumstances, children can become their parents’ primary source of information on the very behaviors the parents hope to control. If the children decide it would not be wise to let their parents “catch them” engaging in deviant activities, we can expect that their parents will receive less than full disclosure of all deviant acts.

Caring for those in need of help.—Informal “caring” functions can be provided both by small groups and by the community at large. To the extent to which people’s support comes from relatively small groups, we can expect the caring functions to be little affected by a change in a community’s density of acquaintanceship. We would expect to find impaired functioning, however, in what might be called community-wide caring functions. Examples would include the so-called town drunk or other such persons with physical, mental, or situational handicaps, who are supported to some extent by the community at large or for whom other community residents “make allowances” on the basis of personal acquaintanceship. Erikson notes the similar example of an Appalachian mountaineer whose idiosyncrasies were tolerated by neighbors “on the grounds that they know the motives involved (‘we don’t worry none about that, it’s just the way old Billy is’)” (1976, p. 207). Given that these kinds of toleration and support depend on interpersonal acquaintanceship, they can be expected to be impaired if a community’s density of acquaintanceship declines.

The reasoning described in this section is summarized graphically in figure 1. (The figure is merely illustrative and is not intended to imply the use of path-analytic quantitative techniques. The hypothesized relationships can be “tested” only qualitatively on the basis of the exploratory study summarized below; I am making my reasoning explicit in the interest of clarity and to facilitate quantitative testing in future research.) Figure 1 indicates that we can expect the variables of population size, diversity, and segregation to be associated negatively with a community’s density of acquaintanceship, while both present and anticipated (future) length of residence should be associated positively. A decline in the density of acquaintanceship can be expected to lead to impaired effectiveness in the control of deviance and socialization of the young and, to an extent, in the community’s ability to provide informal care for its weaker members. On the other hand, we should not expect a lowered density of acquaintanceship per se to lead to a lower level of community mental health. The maintenance of mental health (and to some extent the provision of caring functions) should be expected to be related instead

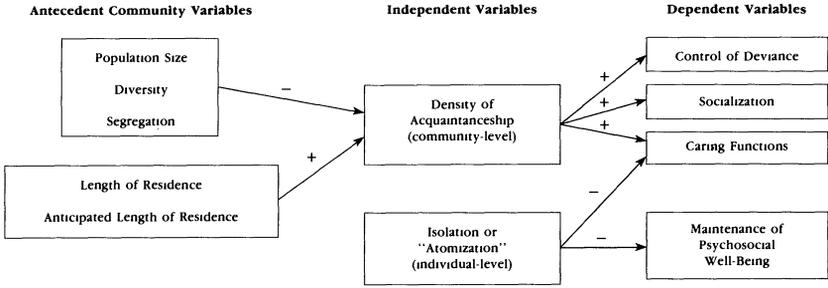


FIG. 1.—Hypothesized relationships

to the proportion of community residents who lack significant social supports. There is no a priori basis, finally, for expecting the individual-level experience of isolation to be related to the community-wide density of acquaintanceship.

THE STUDY

Setting

Rapid population growth in the relatively isolated communities of the Rocky Mountain region provides a particularly important research opportunity. These communities are small enough that they can be expected to have a relatively high density of acquaintanceship before growth begins; after the growth takes place, by contrast, significant changes can be expected. The communities' *populations* increase substantially. The rates of growth are relatively rapid, moreover, meaning that the *average length of residence* drops significantly, as does the *anticipated length of residence*, since many of the "newcomers" expect to remain in a given community only for a relatively short time. Although some sources have suggested the possibility of "value differences" between long-time residents and newcomers (e.g., Tremblay, Schwartz, and Dillman 1981), the objective differences appear to be smaller than is commonly assumed (Baring-Gould and Bennett 1976; Christenson 1979; Freudenburg 1982*b*; Massey and Lewis 1979; Uhlmann 1978). Even so, *diversity* increases, and in some cases a certain amount of antipathy exists. Residential and occupational *segregation* also limit opportunities for contact because many newcomers hold specialized construction jobs and live in mobile home developments on the fringes of preestablished communities. Thus, of the five variables identified on an a priori basis as likely to affect a community's density of acquaintanceship, all five are present at least to a degree in the so-called energy boomtowns. In addition, the boomtowns

have the pragmatic advantages of being isolated geographically and of a size that permits in-depth analysis.

While the reasoning in this paper is intended to have relevance across a broad range of community sizes, the boomtown data should not be assumed to be “representative” of urban areas. A boomtown of 10,000 persons may be significantly larger than the community that stood on the same site several years earlier, but it is still not highly “urban” by contemporary standards. What a boomtown does provide is an important context for examining the potential usefulness of the density of acquaintanceship concept; its usefulness in other communities will need to be demonstrated empirically.

Methods

This paper’s primary evidence will be drawn from a study of four communities in western Colorado. All four had pregrowth populations of between 1,000 and 5,000, and all were identified by Garrett and Webb (1977) as being “energy-impacted communities.” In three of the communities, however, little growth took place before or during the study. The fourth roughly doubled in population—growing approximately from 5,000 to 10,000 persons—largely during the period of data collection. Most of the growth was due to the construction of a single facility—a coal-fired electricity-generating plant with a peak construction work force of slightly over 1,900 persons.

The data are largely ethnographic; the ethnographic observations, however, are supported by quantitative evidence that is available from survey research and existing secondary sources. The ethnography included 16 months of firsthand fieldwork during the primary research phase of the study. This fieldwork was preceded by at least two visits to each of the study communities, and it has been followed by ongoing contact, including newspaper subscriptions, telephone and personal conversations with key informants, and numerous return visits to each of the communities. In all, the written documentation from the four study communities covers a 10-year period, filling roughly 15 file drawers at last count. Approximately half of that information focuses on the boomtown. The survey sample included the random selection of adults from within a probability sample of households in each of the four communities. In all communities, interviewers gathered a small amount of background information while dropping off a questionnaire at households that were selected for survey inclusion; an adult within the household was then chosen by means of a random number table to complete a longer questionnaire, which the interviewer returned later to retrieve. The total

sample size included 597 usable questionnaires, reflecting a response rate of approximately 81%.

This combination of ethnography surveys, and secondary analyses overcame many of the shortcomings that would have been associated with any single technique. The contributions of the survey to the ethnographic work were of particular importance. Because the study director personally conducted most of the household interviews, the surveys helped to avert what may be the two most important sources of bias in ethnographic work—"selective" sampling, in which the researcher mistakenly assumes a given group to be representative of the community as a whole, and the special case of elite bias, in which the leaders and "community spokespersons" to whom the researcher is referred are mistakenly thought to provide a representative sampling. In addition, the quantitative data often provide a truly independent means of double-checking the accuracy of ethnographic observations and conclusions, and they will be used in that way below. Finally, roughly a third of the survey respondents volunteered additional observations or clarifications, suggested additional contact and lines of inquiry, and/or invited the researcher to return on an informal basis at a later date "so my friends and I can tell you what we *really* think," as one of them put it. These offers, which were almost always accepted, provided opportunities for important insights and for a more systematic sampling of ethnographic informants than could have been obtained through standard or "snowball" ethnographic sampling. Further details on the study communities and methodology are available in Freudenburg (1979, 1981, 1984).

FINDINGS

Ethnographic Data

At a relatively early stage of the ethnographic fieldwork in the boomtown, a clear pattern emerged, although its deeper significance was not immediately obvious. When people were asked to describe the changes caused by rapid growth, the most common response was some variation on the following: "This used to be the kind of town where everybody knew everybody else. Now, whenever I go downtown or something, it seems as though I hardly know anybody." Although precise figures were not kept, the number of persons offering such comments was well in to the hundreds. Similar statements were made by perhaps a third of the persons who commented on the topic; by contrast, none of the persons interviewed made statements that implied an *increase* in the boomtown's density of acquaintanceship. Other reports from industrializing rural communities—in Colorado (Gates 1981; Spayd 1981), Wyoming (Bald-

win 1982), Washington (Wisniewski and Freudenburg 1981), Alaska (Baring-Gould and Bennett 1976), Canada (Gartrell, Krahn, and Sunahara 1980), and even Scotland (Suzman, Voorhees-Rosen, and Rosen 1980)—also indicate declines in the proportions of the growing communities' residents who know one another (see also Cortese and Jones 1977).

At first, comments about “hardly knowing anybody” evoked echoes of Wirth’s statement that urban relationships are “largely anonymous, superficial, and transitory,” conveying the impression that the boomtown residents were somehow lamenting a “loss of community.” Indeed, many visitors to the boomtown interpreted this kind of comment as a quasi-psychological lament. As will be seen below, however, such interpretations should be avoided. The greater importance of such a comment is in its status as a simple statement of fact and in some of the other consequences that follow from it.

Ethnographic fieldwork soon showed that the statement was a reasonably accurate one, although it was neither meant nor interpreted literally. Interviews and direct observations both showed that, although there were often few cultural differences between the newcomers and the long-time residents, the newcomers generally knew few of the long-time residents, and the long-time residents knew relatively few of the newcomers. In addition, any given newcomer was likely to know a relatively small proportion of the other newcomers, although very few of them (and very few of the long-time residents) were actually isolated or friendless. And finally, even the long-time residents’ relationships with one another showed some tendency to become more limited and focused, as the growth and its related disruptions increased the difficulty of remaining in contact with fellow community residents.

Quantitative Data

Quantitative support for these ethnographic findings can be drawn both from other studies and from the present study’s cross-sectional survey data. These data, like the ethnographic observations, strongly indicate a decline in the community-wide density of acquaintanceship but a relative absence of genuine isolation.

In the present study, a series of 20 items (adapted from Jobs and Parsons 1975) asked respondents whether they knew “the following *kinds* of persons in this area”—whether the respondents knew their names and spoke to them “on a conversational basis.” The results are recorded in table 1. Two facts from this table deserve emphasis here. One is that not a single “kind” of person was known by 100% of the respondents, even in the comparison communities—further evidence that it was not literally

TABLE 1
DATA ON THE DENSITY OF ACQUAINTANCESHIP

TYPE OF PERSON	In Compari- son Commu- nities (%)	PERCENTAGE ANSWERING YES			Level of Signifi- cance†
		In Boom- town (%)	Differ- ence (%)*	χ^2	
Grocer	91.8	63.1	28.7	67.9	.0000
Carpenter	72.0	59.7	12.3	7.2	.0072
Plumber	63.8	49.7	14.1	8.7	.0032
Electrician	61.7	59.7	2.0	N.S.	N.S.
Banker	76.1	65.1	11.0	6.3	.0120
Lawyer	56.9	54.4	2.5	N.S.	N.S.
Dentist	51.3	56.4	-5.1	N.S.	N.S.
Coal miner	72.2	54.4	17.8	15.4	.0001
Doctor (physician)	77.0	67.1	9.9	5.2	.0225
Farmer or rancher	90.9	77.2	13.7	17.8	.0000
Mayor or city councilman	67.7	48.3	19.4	17.0	.0000
Law enforcement officer	69.9	56.4	13.5	8.6	.0034
Coal company official	40.3	26.8	13.5	8.1	.0044
Minister or priest	71.1	55.0	16.1	12.2	.0005
School teacher or principal	75.9	63.1	12.8	8.5	.0036
School board member	62.9	43.6	19.3	16.1	.0001
State or county official	50.6	47.7	2.9	N.S.	N.S.
Local "hippie" (longhair)	53.1	51.0	2.1	N.S.	N.S.
Newspaper reporter, editor, or publisher	64.0	45.6	18.4	14.8	.0001
Motel or hotel operator	58.8	40.3	18.5	14.6	.0001

NOTE.—The table contains responses to the following item: "Do you know any of the following *kinds* of persons in this area? That is, do you know their names and speak to them on a conversational basis? (For this question, circle *as many* types of persons as apply.)"

* Positive differences indicate a greater proportion of respondents answering yes in the comparison communities; the negative difference indicates a greater proportion of yes answers among boomtown respondents.

† Levels are from SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) "corrected chi square" statistics, computed with 1 *df*.

true that "everybody knew everybody else" in any of the study communities. The second is that the persons in the boomtown were significantly less likely than the persons in the comparison communities to know 15 of the 20 kinds of people. They were also less likely to know four of the remaining five at nonsignificant levels. There was only one category (dentists) in which the percentage was lower in the boomtown than in the comparison communities. The apparent reason for this nonsignificant exception is that one of the comparison communities did not have a resident dentist at the time of the survey; the difference disappears when that community is removed from the analysis. The three comparison

communities were otherwise quite similar to each other, and thus they have been combined in tables for simplicity.

The significant differences between the boomtown and the comparison communities are not merely a function of differential lengths of residence. Among “newcomers”—persons who had lived in their respective communities for less than three years, which in the boomtown meant that they had arrived in the community after the rapid growth began—those in the boomtown knew lower proportions of 17 of the 20 types of persons listed in table 1. Fourteen of the 17 differences are 10% or more in magnitude, although only seven of them are significant given the reduced sample size. But even among the long-term residents, or “old-timers”—those who had lived in their communities for three years or more—15 of the 20 types of persons were known by lower proportions of respondents in the boomtown than in the comparison communities. The differences are considerably smaller among the long-term residents: only four are statistically significant, and just two of them show a 10% or greater difference in magnitude. In the present context, however, the newcomer/old-timer differences are less important than the overall pattern—first, because the focus here is on the overall (community-level) density of acquaintanceship, and second, because if a given newcomer does not know an old-timer, then it is unlikely that the old-timer would report knowing that same newcomer.

While the survey data indicate a lower density of acquaintanceship, however, these data show virtually no evidence of the individual-level atomization of Tönnies’s *Gesellschaft*, for example, where “everybody is by himself and isolated” ([1887] 1963, p. 74). As table 2 indicates, the boomtown residents do report a slightly smaller average number of “truly close friends” than do those in the comparison communities, but while the chi-square statistic shows the difference to be significant at the .05 level, both the *F*-ratio and the superior tau_c statistic show the difference to be significant only at somewhat weaker levels of probability. Even this difference, moreover, is largely due to the younger average age of boomtown residents, as is shown in the lower section of table 2. In all study communities, younger persons report fewer friends than do older ones, and the boomtown respondents tend to be younger than those in the comparison communities; after age is controlled, the boomtown/control difference in number of friends drops to nonsignificant levels. Other analyses not included in this table show that even among newcomers, only 6.1% report being without friends—a proportion not significantly higher than the proportion with no close friends among the other three communities’ newcomers ($\chi^2 = 2.00$, N.S.).

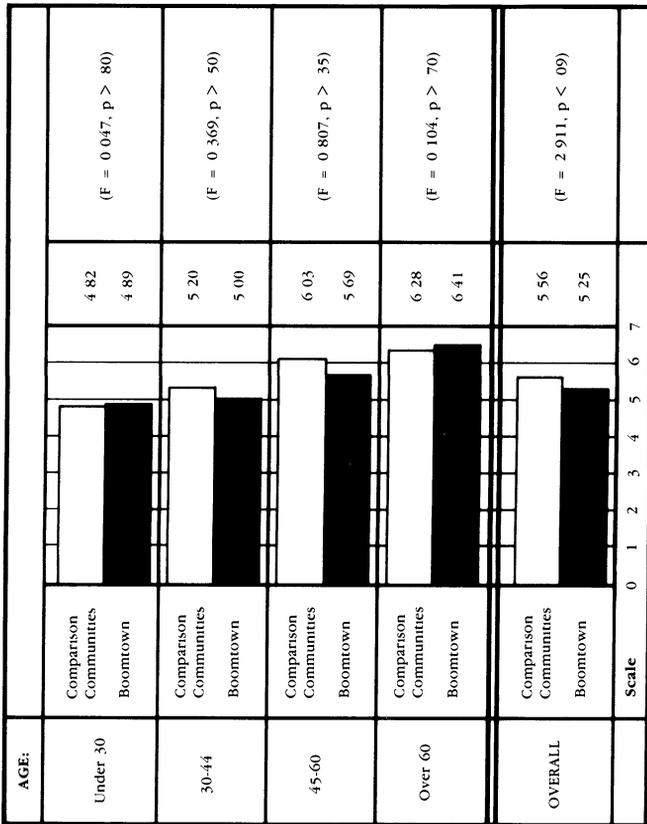
Studies of other rapidly growing communities have led to similar findings (Andrews and Bauder 1968; England and Albrecht 1984; Gil-

TABLE 2
NUMBER OF GOOD FRIENDS

	RESPONSES									
	0	1	2	3	4	5-6	7-10	11-15	16+	
Other three communities.....	0.7%	2.9%	2.9%	6.6%	7.8%	25.7%	23.1%	13.3%	17.0%	100%
	(3)	(12)	(12)	(27)	(32)	(106)	(95)	(55)	(70)	(412)
Boomtown	4.2%	0.7%	5.6%	4.2%	13.3%	25.9%	21.7%	7.7%	16.8%	100%
	(6)	(1)	(8)	(6)	(19)	(37)	(31)	(11)	(24)	(143)

NOTE.—The table contains responses to the following item: "All in all, how many truly close friends would you say that you have?"
 $\chi^2 = 19.7, 8 \text{ df}, P < .05$; $\text{tau}_c = -0.068, P < .07$; $F = 2.91, P < .09$. Numbers in parentheses are the numbers of persons.

(MEAN LEVELS, BY AGE.)



more and Duff 1975; Pattinson, Weisz, and Hickman 1979; Rank and Voss 1982; see also Greider and Krannich 1985). Perhaps the clearest evidence comes from a study in the oil-sands region of Alberta, Canada (Gartrell et al. 1980). In the "preboom" community of Cold Lake, 43% of the respondents reported knowing "all" or "almost all" of their neighbors. In the rapidly growing community of Fort McMurray, *no* respondent reported knowing all of his neighbors, and only 7% reported knowing "almost all" of them; in the regional metropolis of Edmonton, the comparable figures were 2% and 4%, respectively (Gartrell et al. 1980, p. 2.299). Length of residence, incidentally, explained 24.3% of the variance in knowledge of neighbors, although even those who had lived in Cold Lake for less than one year had scores almost identical to the overall average in Edmonton, despite the fact that 63% of the Edmonton sample had lived in the city 10 years or more (Gartrell et al. 1980, p. 2.300). Another study focused explicitly on the subset of newcomers who are most often assumed to be social isolates. It found that "only two of the 114 [mobile-home-dwelling] respondents knew neither their next door neighbors nor anyone else in the immediate neighborhood. More than 80 percent of all respondents knew other neighbors as well as one or both of their next door neighbors" (Massey and Lewis 1979, p. 85).

In sum, quantitative as well as ethnographic data, from both this study and others, provide strong indications of declines in boomtowns' densities of acquaintanceship but no major increases in isolation. Accordingly, the paper turns next to observed consequences, discussing them in terms of the areas of community functioning identified on an a priori basis above.

Observed Consequences

Control of deviance.—The ethnographic fieldwork indicated a substantial difference between the boomtown and the three comparison communities in the informal control of deviance, a difference related to the higher degree of "watchfulness" permitted by a high density of acquaintanceship in the comparison communities. While the ethnographic data would be difficult to quantify, the difference appears to have grown during the period of the study, as the continuing growth and population turnover in the boomtown led to further decreases in its density of acquaintanceship. The degree of watchfulness in the stable communities is illustrated by the following entry in study field notes:

[The next-door neighbor] related how once, back when —— owned the place, she'd seen a car drive up late at night and turn off its headlights just as it turned into the driveway. "I didn't know if he was somebody who knew —— or what—but I wanted to make sure he knew somebody was watching him. . . . I just went out the back door and stood there . . . *staring*

at him. [laughs] He was at the side door there, where you guys usually go in, and I couldn't tell if he was trying to pick the lock, or what—except that old ——— practically *never* locked that door—but it didn't take very long with me standing there [laughs again] before he turned around and waved at me, and said, "It's okay, Mrs. ———, it's only me, ———'s son in law."

By contrast, boomtown residents reported a degree of anonymity that greatly decreased the effectiveness of deviance control. Perhaps the clearest example is this field note entry:

[During our conversation, a stout young woman came in. She was extremely upset. Her house—"That pink one, down by the ———," had just been broken into.] "Somebody just kicked a hole right through the front door, right next to the doorknob, and of course once they did that they could just walk right in. . . . I used to live way out in the country, where we didn't even have *locks* on the doors, and we never had this kind of thing ever happen out there. Then you move to ———, and look what happens!" [After commiserating with her a bit, I commented that I'd heard it was actually safer to live in town, where you had neighbors to keep an eye on your house when you weren't around.] "Not around here, it ain't!" [But didn't she have any neighbors who might have spotted a person doing something as obviously suspicious as breaking in, especially by kicking a hole through the front door?] "It don't look much like that, does it? As far as I can see, people in that neighborhood stick pretty much to themselves."

Quantitative data also indicate a diminished effectiveness of deviance control. Lantz and McKeown (1979) report that crimes against property in this boomtown rose 222% (from 58 to 187) and crimes against persons increased 900% (from four to 40) between 1973 and 1976. The small base numbers mean that the exact percentage increases should be interpreted with caution; it is the general pattern of increase that is of interest here. My own computations are generally consistent with the Lantz and McKeown figures. Under the most conservative coding rules, the full annual statistics from local law enforcement agencies showed at least a 340% increase in annual offenses known (from 1,325 to 5,689) between 1973 and 1977. Less conservative coding rules would increase the 1977 total to over 8,000 incidents, reflecting more than a 500% increase in offenses known.³

Even these figures should be interpreted with some caution, since the boomtown greatly expanded its formal deviance control functions during

³ The 340% increase considers only the offenses that took place within the city limits of the boomtown in 1977 but all offenses in the entire county in 1973. The sheriff's department changed reporting systems in 1976, destroying comparability, and thus the 1977 statistics from the sheriff's department are simply excluded from the more conservative figures reported here. There would have been over 8,000 incidents in 1977, however, if the ratio of reports between the sheriff's department and the police department remained the same through 1977 as during the brief period for which comparable data are available. See also Colorado Division of Criminal Justice (1981).

the period of the boom. The community's police and sheriff's departments had been administered jointly for several years before the boom; they were separated again in November 1975, and by early 1977, the police department alone had more than 20 full-time officers and an annual budget of over a third of a million dollars. In general, the growth in formalized law enforcement appears to have been a response to the increase in crimes, not its source, but it is possible that some of the increase may have been caused by increased staffing because the additional officers may have seen and thus recorded more crimes.

Given factors such as the increase in law enforcement staffing levels and the small number of preboom crimes, some authors have argued that boomtowns' increases in crime rates may be statistical artifacts (see esp. Wilkinson et al. 1982; but see also Albrecht 1982; Finsterbusch 1982; Freudenburg 1982*a*, Gale 1982; Murdock and Leistriz 1982). The increased crime rate in this study's boomtown is generally consistent with increases reported in other case studies of rapidly growing communities (see Baring-Gould and Bennett 1976; Edgley 1979; Freudenburg 1982*a*; Gilmore and Duff 1975; Lovejoy 1977; Montana Energy Advisory Council 1975; Suzman et al. 1980; Thompson, Blevins, and Watts 1979; but see also Krannich, Greider, and Little 1985), although cross-sectional data from a larger number of counties present a more mixed picture (compare Colorado Division of Criminal Justice [1981] against Wilkinson et al. [1984]). It is thus particularly instructive to turn to this study's survey data on criminal victimization—data that are not subject to the same kinds of methodological problems, such as possible changes in police record-keeping practices, that have been identified for the use of aggregate-level data (Krannich et al. 1985).

Although precise quantitative comparisons are not possible, survey data also indicate that the boomtown's crime statistics reflect community experiences with reasonable accuracy. It is important to note that the survey data include relatively few cases of criminal victimization and are cross-sectional, rather than longitudinal, but the survey findings are clearly consistent with the hypothesis that boomtown residents are experiencing significantly increased criminal victimization. To control for the possibility that the newcomers might be victimizing each other or that the increase in crimes might be limited to the new mobile home developments on the fringes of the preexisting community, table 3 provides data for long-time residents only. As can be seen, the long-time residents of the energy boomtown were less than one-fifth as likely as the long-time residents of the other three communities to report that they did not need to lock their doors when away from their homes for extended periods of time, and they were more than twice as likely to report having feared for their safety. When asked about their actual experiences with criminal

TABLE 3
CRIME AND FEAR OF CRIME

Safety of Home:			
"Do you find it necessary to lock the doors of your house when you are gone for a short period of time—say two hours or less?" (Percentage answering "no")*	Comparison Communities		65.0%
	Boomtown		28.4%
"What if you are gone for a longer length of time—all day or more?" (Percentage answering "no")*	Comparison Communities		28.7%
	Boomtown		4.9%
Fear for Personal Safety:			
"Have you ever feared for your safety when you were alone at night in this area?" (Percentage answering "yes")*	Comparison Communities		10.2%
	Boomtown		28.8%
Percentages:		0 10 20 30 40 50 60 70	
Criminal Victimization:			
"Have you been the victim of any kind of crime in the last twelve months? (If so, what happened? Where and when did it take place?)"* (percentage indicating minor victimization** in their own community)	Comparison Communities		4.4%
	Boomtown		12.9%
(percentage indicating major victimization** in their own community)*	Comparison Communities		1.1%
	Boomtown		7.1%
(percentage indicating repeated victimization in their own community)	Comparison Communities		1.5%
	Boomtown		2.9%
Percentages:		0 5 10 15	

* All differences between the boomtown and the comparison communities are significant beyond the .001 level

** According to coding rules "major" cases of criminal victimization were those in which the value of property taken or destroyed was greater than \$50 or in which the victim experienced a personal threat. All other local victimization cases were coded as "minor," and nonlocal cases were excluded from analysis.

victimization, moreover, the long-time residents of the boomtown were more than three times as likely to report having been victims of both major and minor crimes; the proportionate difference, as table 3 shows, was greatest in the case of major crimes.

Socialization of the young.—In the three stable communities, adolescents often complained about the effective enforcement of community

standards. As one of them put it, "A guy can't get away with anything around here. It seems as though, whenever I do anything wrong, my old man's found out about it before I even get home." Such comments are reminiscent of an observation offered informally by another sociologist: "I can't see why cities are supposed to be such bad places for raising kids. I grew up in a small town, and I couldn't *wait* to get out."

Data from the boomtown, however, indicate not only that the boom disrupted the effectiveness of the community's socialization mechanisms but also that the impaired enforcement of community norms may have proved more stressful for the boomtown adolescents than was the more effective enforcement found in the comparison communities. Except when describing the way things "used to be," boomtown residents offered no examples of the community-wide socialization and watchfulness that were common in the other study communities. Complaints about youthful misbehaviors, by contrast, were considerably more common in the boomtown, both among the adolescents and the adults. Yet it appears the adolescents often found the loss of watchfulness to be stressful, not liberating.

The watchfulness of the stable communities perhaps was best illustrated by this woman's comment:

People in cities don't watch their kids as carefully. They couldn't keep an eye on them as well [as we do here]. . . . Here, if you don't, somebody else will. I know, many times, I've corrected somebody else's kids just as I would my own. As a matter of fact, when my daughter was still very small, a bunch of us mothers got together kind of informally, and we agreed that if we ever saw any of the kids misbehaving, we'd correct them just as though they were our own kids. But even kids that aren't in that group—if I see 'em doing something, and if I know them and I know their mothers, which I usually do, I'll chew 'em out a little. Then I'll ask them if they're going to go home and tell their mothers what happened, and they know they'd better, because they know that if they don't, I will.

By contrast, the director of the local mental health center in the boomtown had this to say:

I think things were much easier for [the youngsters] in the past—they had more limited outlets, fewer acceptable ways of behaving. For the guys, for example, it was all right to drink, all right to swear, all right to get into fights, and all right to raise a little hell now and then, because that kind of fit in with the cowboy life-style. But that was about it. And then there were all these new kids coming in, who were doing a lot of other things, other kinds of drugs and so on, and it was like being in a candy store. They didn't know which way to turn. . . . That seems to be one of the stresses—it's easier to have a well-defined situation than one where there's a lot of blending.

Again, the available quantitative data from other studies support the ethnographic data. Perhaps the best single indicator is provided by Lantz and McKeown (1979, p. 45), who note that the boomtown's "child behavior problems" rose 1000% (from six cases to 66) between 1973 and 1976. The small base number in 1973—while it may be an accurate indicator of the relatively minor magnitude of problems before the boom—also means that the exact percentage increases should be interpreted with caution.⁴ The central point is that juvenile delinquency and related forms of youthful misbehaviors increased substantially. Additional evidence comes from Knop (1982), who performed community-wide adult surveys in a boomtown in 1971 and 1981; his before-and-after comparisons showed very few significant differences between the two surveys, but he did find a significant difference in the proportion of respondents who saw the community as a "wholesome place for raising children." Only 6% disagreed in 1971, but nearly four times that many (23%) disagreed in 1981. Finally, a comparison of survey data from adolescents in this boomtown with adolescents in the same three control communities studied here (Freudenburg 1979, 1984) indicates similar findings. The high school students in the boomtown were roughly twice as likely to report having felt "physically threatened in this high school," more than twice as likely to have feared for their safety when alone at night in the area, and significantly more likely to report hostility (and even "open hatred") than the students in the control communities (Freudenburg 1979, pp. 241–44).

There was also no evidence that the students regarded these changes as

⁴ In part, these statistics may also indicate an increase in the *seriousness* of juvenile misbehaviors, rather than (or in addition to) merely reflecting an increase in *number*. Adolescents in all the study communities showed a tendency and perhaps even a need to rebel against community standards. In the nongrowth conditions, however, community standards tended to be clearly understood and effectively enforced; young people did flirt with the fringes of acceptable behavior, but most deviant activities were minor, if not ritualized—Halloween pranks, staying out too late on dates, sneaking away from school dances to drink beer in the countryside, and so forth. After the boom was well under way, many of the boomtown's adolescents seemed to have a continued need to elicit the same degree of negative reaction that they had been able to inspire with minor misdeeds in the past (cf. Erikson 1966, p. 13). Although the boom changed many aspects of socialization, it did not appear to change the expectation, expressed often in all four study communities, that "kids around here will do anything they can get away with." The decline in the effectiveness of the enforcement of community standards in the boomtown meant that much more serious acts of deviance were required to test the limits of what one could "get away with," even though the deviant acts could often be seen as exaggerated versions of preboom misbehaviors—with Halloween pranks being replaced by far more serious and frequent acts of vandalism, "drinking a few beers" being replaced by serious and chronic abuse of alcohol and other drugs, and so on.

positive ones: in comparison with students in the other communities, those in the boomtown reported higher alienation and a lower quality of life. They also reported lower levels of satisfaction with the locality, the school, the quality of their social lives, the amount of fun they were having, the local and federal governments, and the local physical environment. Even at statistically nonsignificant levels, there was literally nothing about which the boomtown's youths felt "better." In identifying factors that were important for young persons to be accepted by their peers, the boomtown students were significantly less likely to say it was important for a person to be friendly, honest, confident, have a good sense of humor, or "just be himself" than were the students in the comparison communities. Boomtown students felt it was significantly more important to be good-looking, have money, be a "party" type, show off, have a car, and have parents in the "right" occupations (Freudenburg 1984, pp. 700-701). It was only in the boomtown that a majority of the students with an opinion agreed that "this is really a 'nothing' town" (Freudenburg 1979, p. 259). Still other research indicates that industrialization does not actually slow the rate at which young persons will leave a rural community, contrary to the expectations of industry spokespersons and most community adults (Seyfrit, in press; Andrews and Bauder 1968; Summers et al. 1976; Freudenburg, in press). Ethnographic observations and conversations with a number of the young people strongly support the interpretation suggested by the survey data: although the students in the comparison communities often complained about the effectiveness of community watchfulness and socialization, greater stresses seem to have been created by the boomtown's loss of such an effective set of community standards against which to rebel.

Caring for those in need of help.—In the case of caring functions, by contrast, ethnographic fieldwork revealed relatively few differences between the boomtown and the control communities, at least in examples of "small-group caring." Indeed, as noted in the introduction, previous research has indicated that even residents of the largest cities can usually turn to kin and friends for support in time of need. Substantial changes were visible, however, in what might be called community-wide examples of caring, with the boomtown not being able to provide a type of support that was visible in the comparison communities—a kind of shared responsibility for certain "community characters" who were generally recognized and known throughout the community as requiring extra assistance and/or tolerance. Such persons could still obtain special attention within specific social contexts of the boomtown; the major difference was in their inability to obtain the same types of consideration and assistance outside those relatively narrow segments of community life. The boomtown, for example, had several men who showed some of the char-

acteristics of proverbial “town drunks,” but while they were known on a first-name basis and treated with what appeared to be relatively affectionate kindness in certain bars that had a well-established clientele, they could no longer expect to be looked after with such concern in other bars, let alone in the community at large.

It is more difficult to obtain quantitative verification of ethnographic observations in this functional area than in the previous two, and for two reasons. First, communities usually do not collect extensive statistics on their residents’ “helpfulness” or on informal community caring functions. Second, as was the case with deviance control, the increased “caring” caseloads may reflect not only an increased level of problems in the community but also the provision of formal caring functions as a partial substitute for the loss or impairment of informal functioning. It is even possible that a small part of the boomtown’s increase in reported deviance rates, particularly for minor crimes such as vagrancy, might have been caused by behaviors that would not have been considered deviant if they had been committed by someone known personally by the individual who reported the “offender” to the police (cf. Erikson 1976). It is worth noting, however, that the magnitude of the increase in crimes, along with the ethnographic findings and the survey data on criminal victimization reported in table 3, make it unlikely that the increase in crime rates could be a mere artifact.

With these caveats in mind, however, other available sources of evidence generally support the ethnographic observations on the impairment of informal caring functions. Although certain formal care provision services were established well before rapid growth began (e.g., social services and a mental health center), several new and more specialized formal services were begun, including a crisis line, a detoxification center, and a rape crisis assistance system. In addition, the number of annual new intakes at the mental health center increased from 99 in 1973 to 357 in 1978—more than a tripling of the caseload, and roughly a doubling on a per-person basis, within five years (Bacigalupi and Freudenburg 1983). The substantial increases in alcohol and other drug abuse problems reported by Lantz and McKeown (1979)—a 623% increase, from 13 to 94 cases, between 1973 and 1976—are also certainly consistent with the possibility that the community may not be supporting its weaker members as well as it once did. Another study of both growing and declining communities even found that the rapidly growing communities appear to have “a more serious problem of substance abuse associated with economic change indicators than do communities suffering sudden economic decline” (Milkman et al. 1980, p. 1).

Two indirect checks from this study’s survey also provide some degree of support. Boomtown residents were rated by the interviewers as having

been significantly less “interested and helpful” toward the study ($p < .01$) than those in the comparison communities, and the boomtown residents themselves were significantly less likely than the other respondents to agree that “people who live around here are more helpful than they are in other places” ($p < .001$).⁵

Maintenance of psychosocial morale.—Up to this point, the findings from the boomtown basically have been in accordance with what Durkheim, for example, might have predicted, with social change leading to individuation and disorientation and with social problems increasing as a result. But to support the traditional version of this analysis or to support the simple version of what Wilkinson et al. (1982) call the “boomtown disruption hypothesis,” we would also need to find increased evidence of psychopathology. Previous studies, however, have produced little such evidence, and my more detailed data also show no such increase.

Of the previous studies, two have provided limited evidence of psychological disruption under situations of rapid community growth. First, in a community survey in Gillette, Wyoming, Pattinson and his colleagues (1979; see also Weisz 1980) found a mean level of “stressful life events” on the Social Readjustment Rating Scale (Holmes and Rahe 1967) that fell in the highest stress range reported by Holmes and Masuda (1974)—that of “major life crisis.” That study, however, did not employ measures of symptomatology or psychological disruption to indicate whether the stressful events had led to deleterious psychological outcomes. Second, in Wheatland, Wyoming, Bougsty and his colleagues (Bougsty, Good, and Marshall 1981) found that roughly 30% of the community’s population displayed a level of symptoms high enough to call for professional treatment. This second study did not include preboom or control community data, but Bougsty, Good, and Marshall report the level of symptoms to have been double the proportion of persons who, on the national average, would be expected to show such high levels of distress (see also Bougsty and Marshall 1981).

Other studies to date, however, have failed to find evidence of psychosocial disruption among the adults of rapidly growing communities. Perhaps the most extensive study focused on the impacts of North Sea oil development among the Shetland Islanders of Scotland (Suzman et al. 1980): little evidence of impact was found. The Shetland Island situation differs from the usual experiences in the western United States, both in

⁵ Indirect supportive evidence is also provided by Fischer (1973), who found that “alienation”-style measures of social isolation were correlated with urbanism (although measures of “powerlessness” in alienation scales showed no such correlation). One boomtown study (Freudenburg 1981) reports a similar finding—that boomtown residence was associated with “alienation from other people” but not with other forms of alienation (see also Fischer 1981).

terms of the indigenous culture and in the extensive planning that helped to protect the predevelopment population from many of the stresses of the development. Nevertheless, a before-and-after comparison (1975–78) found no significant changes in medical symptoms or in stress-related psychiatric symptoms; a comparison of the impact area against a control area showed that the control group actually fared slightly if insignificantly *worse* than the impact group, with more of its residents gaining symptoms and fewer losing them. Other studies of rapidly growing communities in the western United States and in Canada have also reported no evidence of psychological disruption among adult samples (see esp. Krannich and Greider 1984; see also England and Albrecht 1984; Freudenburg 1981; Gartrell et al. 1980; Greider and Krannich 1985; Knop 1982; Murdock and Leistriz 1979).

Roughly half of the survey questionnaire in this study was devoted to measures of social-psychological adjustment, stress symptomatology, and perceived quality of life. Because questionnaire items consistently failed to show meaningful differences between the boomtown and the three comparison communities, only the results from three representative items and three scale totals will be reproduced here. The relevant evidence is presented in table 4. It is important to emphasize that the survey comparisons are cross-sectional, not longitudinal, but they are clearly not consistent with the hypothesis that boomtown residence would be associated with a significant increase in problems of personal adjustment. When the boomtown residents are compared against the persons in the three control communities, all differences on the individual items are so small that they would occur more than 45% of the time by chance alone. A similar lack of significant differences is evident when we examine the three scale totals. The first is the “alienation” scale of McClosky and Schaar (1965); the second is the “mental status index” of Gurin, Veroff, and Feld (1960), which asks how often a given respondent has experienced such stress-related symptoms as shortness of breath, trembling hands, and nightmares. On both of these first two scales, answers were simply summed in the manner indicated in table 4. The third scale is constructed in accordance with a factor analysis that identified the eight items of the Gurin scale most directly related to psychosocial stress ($\alpha = .77$; further details are reported in Freudenburg [1979]). Even on this third scale, no meaningful boomtown/control differences are found. Finally, a series of controls for age, sex, status, length of residence, and so on still produced little in the way of significant differences between the boomtown and the other three communities (for further details, see Freudenburg 1979, 1981).

These findings are unambiguous, but two considerations do suggest that they be interpreted with caution: (1) stress levels among adolescents

TABLE 4

PERCEIVED OVERALL QUALITY OF LIFE, COMMUNITY-WIDE DATA

ITEM AND SOURCE	Mean Score	F Ratio of Difference	Level of Significance
Taking all things together, how would you say things are these days—would you say you are very happy, pretty happy, or not too happy? (“very happy” coded 3, “not too happy” coded 1 [Gurin et al., 1960]):			
Comparison communities	2.11		
Boomtown	2.08	.2604	.6101
How satisfied are you with your life as a whole these days? (responses ranged from “completely satisfied,” coded 7, to “completely dissatisfied,” coded 1 [Campbell et al., 1976]):			
Comparison communities	1.17		
Boomtown	1.19	.4996	.4799
I think life . . . (mean scores on a 1–7 scale, where 7 = “brings out the best in me” and 1 = “doesn’t give me much chance” [Campbell et al., 1976]):			
Comparison communities	5.00		
Boomtown	5.14	.005	.9438
McClosky and Schaar (1965) Scale of Alienation (summed scores on a nine-item scale, where each “alienated” response was coded 2, each “nonalienated” response was coded 0, and each “neutral” response was coded 1):			
Comparison communities	9.36		
Boomtown	9.70	.529	.4672
Gurin et al. (1960) Mental Status Index (summed responses on a 20-item scale of symptoms, where scores on each symptom ranged from 3 = “often” experienced lately to 0 = “never” experienced lately):			
Comparison communities	17.20		
Boomtown	17.89	.6494	.4207
Factor-analyzed Gurin (1960) Mental Status Index (total score on an eight-item scale):			
Comparison communities	9.28		
Boomtown	9.31	.0016	.9678

evidently have increased during situations of rapid community growth, a clear contrast to the findings on adults (Freudenburg 1984), and (2) the present survey results were obtained only a year after the start of truly rapid growth in the boomtown, and recently published data from the same boomtown (Bacigalupi and Freudenburg 1983) suggest that a later survey might have produced more negative findings. In late 1976, when my survey was conducted, the community's mental health center caseload had shown an increase only slightly greater than the increase in population; the caseload continued to increase, however, even after the population increase leveled off, so the total caseload increase from 1973 to 1979 was roughly twice as great as the population increase during the same interval. A similar "caseload lag effect" was apparently observed in Wheatland (Bougsty et al. 1981).

In sum, just as the data do not support the simpler versions of the "boomtown disruption hypothesis" (Wilkinson et al. 1982), accumulated findings do not support the equally simplistic claims that rapid community growth is free of negative consequences. Instead, more careful specification is needed. Evidence of disruption can be seen in the three functional areas of socialization, deviance control, and caring for the community's weaker members. In the area of psychosocial functioning, however, previous literature provides no convincing evidence that rapid growth leads to psychological disruptions among adults, and the present study also finds no evidence for such an association. The general lack of findings on accentuated psychopathologies in urban settings (Dohrenwend and Dohrenwend 1972) would suggest that, if boomtowns do indeed create increased levels of psychosocial stress in individuals, the causes would include the many other social changes that take place in rapidly growing communities and not the changes in a boomtown's density of acquaintanceship, the variable that is the major focus of the present paper (cf. Pattinson et al. 1979).

ALTERNATIVE HYPOTHESIS: DIFFERENTIAL POPULATIONS

While the findings are clearly consistent with the reasoning outlined in the introduction, this fact alone is not sufficient to rule out alternative hypotheses. Perhaps the most important of the competing hypotheses is that the apparent "social problems" in the rapidly growing community may have been caused by differences between the newcomers' behavior and that of the long-time residents, thus primarily reflecting a change in community composition. This hypothesis will be called the "compositionalist" argument (cf. Fischer 1976).

Sociological common sense would suggest that the compositionalist hypothesis has at least some merit; the newcomers are disproportionately

likely to be young males and are thus part of a population segment normally associated with a higher crime rate than would be found, for example, in a well-to-do retirement community (cf. Milkman et al. 1980). The key question, however, is whether the compositionalist hypothesis can actually explain a major portion of the increase in community problems. On the basis of the three different types of data—obtained from ethnography, survey research, and publicly available statistics—the answer appears to be negative.

Ethnographic data.—These include both direct observations and interviews with relevant service providers. The directly observed behaviors could not be expected to be a random sample from the universe of all possible behaviors—particularly in the case of deviant acts—but the direct observations provide no basis for concluding that the increases in social problems were created exclusively or even primarily by newer community residents. The changes in socialization, in particular, were actually more noticeable among the long-time residents than among the newcomers, and problems in deviance control and community-wide caring functions appeared to be roughly equally prevalent among both groups. The interviews with service providers, moreover, consistently revealed that increased problems were being found among old-timers as well as newcomers. In the words of one human-service professional, “I think we may *notice* the new people more, simply because they’re new, but we’re also seeing quite an increase from people who’ve lived here basically forever.” Or as one police officer put it, “We’d kind of expected some problems from the newcomers—not necessarily the workers, you understand, so much as the riff-raff that’ve come to town because they’ve heard it’s a boomtown. And we’re getting some of that. What’s surprised us is that we also seem to be getting more crime from the old-timers—and that includes some people from pretty good families, especially their kids.” (For similar findings from other research efforts, see Lantz and McKeown [1979]; Wisniewski and Freudenburg [1981].)

Survey data.—These also fail to provide support for the compositionalist hypothesis. As has already been noted, survey data from both this study and others (Gilmore and Duff 1975; Massey and Lewis 1979; Marsh, Thomson, and Collins 1982) provide no support for the common assumption that the newcomers will tend to be relatively isolated or “drifter” types. In fact, as Murdock, Leistriz, and Hamm have noted in an important recent summary (1985), most of the energy-related in-migrants appear to be anything but “riff-raff”: “Comparisons of long-time residents to migrants reveal that migrants to [energy] developments—like migrants in general (Ritchey, 1976)—are positively selected on the basis of age, education and income” (Murdock, Leistriz, and Hamm 1985, p. 20; see also Gilmore et al. 1982; Mountain West Research 1975; Murdock

and Leistriz 1979; Murdock, Leistriz, and Shriner 1980, 1982; Wieland, Leistriz, and Murdock 1979; for a useful historical comparison, see Hamilton 1978). Although “value differences” between long-time residents and recent in-migrants may be significant in other contexts where the long-time residents do not share so strongly in mainstream American culture, other quantitative analyses have indicated that such value differences are largely mythical in the case of energy boomtowns (Baring-Gould and Bennett 1976; Christenson 1979; Freudenburg 1979, 1982*b*; Rank and Voss 1982; Uhlmann 1978). Finally, to the extent to which crimes are committed in the perpetrators’ home neighborhoods, even this study’s survey data on criminal victimization run counter to what would be predicted on the basis of the compositionalist hypothesis. The survey data in table 3 showed significant differences between the residents of the boomtown and the three comparison communities, and in all four communities, these data were drawn from long-time residents alone.

Agency data.—These also lead to the rejection of the compositionalist hypothesis. The clearest data on this point come from a longitudinal analysis of the mental health center caseload from the present study’s boomtown—apparently the only analysis to date that has provided actual before-and-after agency data on an individual-level basis from a rapidly growing community. It also used a very strict definition of “long-time residents”—persons who had lived for 10 years or more and/or been born in a given community. A preliminary analysis found that the long-time residents’ utilization rate remained essentially constant for the last two years before the start of energy development and for the earliest period of energy-related growth, when the population growth rate was relatively modest, but that the caseload doubled within the next two years, when population growth became more rapid, and that it then remained at the new, higher plateau (Freudenburg, Bacigalupi, and Landoll-Young 1982). A second analysis included the total caseload of the mental health center (the only professional mental health treatment facility in the county) from 1972 through 1979; populations at risk were calculated from additional data sources that included energy company reports, environmental assessments, and a special census. In 93.6% of the more than 1,700 cases opened, the mental health center records made it possible to determine whether the client and/or the client’s family were related to energy development. Neither the energy-related construction workers nor the coal miners had higher treatment rates than the non-energy group during the years of the disproportionate caseload increases. Significantly, moreover, the so-called riff-raff or camp followers—unemployed persons who came to the community seeking energy-related work but were unable to obtain it and who have often been blamed for the increases in crime rates, mental health treatment problems, and so forth—accounted for

just eight of the 1,700+ cases opened during this eight-year period, less than 0.5% of the total. Usage among the non-energy population, meanwhile, “*roughly doubled on a per-person basis between the pregrowth years of 1972–1973 and the boom to post-boom years of 1977–1979*” (Bacigalupi and Freudenburg [1983], p. 314; for corroborating evidence from other studies, see Denver Research Institute [1979]; Dixon [1978]; Lantz and McKeown [1979]; Nielsen, Ellington, and Endo [1982]). Thus the available data, whether from ethnography, surveys, or agency records, consistently lead to the rejection of the compositionalist hypothesis.

CONCLUSIONS

While versions of the density of acquaintanceship concept have been discussed for many years, little evidence for the importance of the concept has previously been obtained. This study’s findings suggest, however, that renewed but refocused sociological interest would be warranted—both in other studies of rapid community growth and in other contexts for community research.

Fieldwork indicates that the present boomtown’s decline in the density of acquaintanceship has *not* meant “the replacement of primary by secondary ties.” In fact, the importance of intimate social supports actually may have increased, not decreased (cf. Gartrell et al. 1980). Nor could the data be said either to disprove or to support the simplistic or undifferentiated versions of the “boomtown disruption hypothesis” (see also the discussion in Freudenburg, in press). Although some disruptions have been created, they have fallen short of the dissolution of community described by some commentators.

What has occurred in the boomtown is not an “atomization,” but rather a kind of “cell division”—a process which, although similar in some ways, may have some very different implications for human well-being. These changes do not constitute a “disintegration” of community unless we use that term in a very narrow sense. It is no longer reasonable to refer to the boomtown as being a single, integral entity, although the image of an “integral” community may always have had as much of metaphorical as literal truth. Rather than a shredding or disintegration of the social fabric, the boomtown appears to have experienced something more like a popping apart at the social seams—with the emphasis here on the fact that numerous patches of the social fabric have remained very much intact. What had once resembled a relatively even “blanket” of social ties might now be better represented as a patchwork quilt.

Robert Ezra Park spoke of the city as being a “mosaic of little worlds that touch but do not interpenetrate” (Park 1925, p. 40), and with some modification, the description could be applied to the emerging social

structure of the boomtown as well. Park was speaking of major divisions in an urban social environment—entire cultural or racial groups, neighborhoods of several thousand people—whereas the relevant groups here are much smaller, being “personal-size” reference groups: four couples in a bridge group, three neighbors who see each other often, a worker and her closest friends at the office, or a group of friends who get together to watch football games. What emerges is a mosaic of primary groups—people who are close to one another personally, and who can provide each other with the support that their closeness allows. The primary patches of the social fabric have not been “destroyed” by rapid growth, despite the decline in the density of acquaintanceship; their survival has permitted social buffering of individuals and the maintenance of psychosocial morale, even while disruptions have been occurring in other areas of community functioning.

The obvious question for the future is the extent to which this reasoning will apply elsewhere in a “modernizing,” “urbanizing” world. Actual applicability will need to be tested empirically, but logic suggests the necessity for new research. Previous studies have tended to assume, at least implicitly, that a decline in the community-level density of acquaintanceship would be accompanied by an increase in individual-level isolation; partly as a result, most studies have searched for just the types of consequences that this article considers the least likely. In fact, with the exception of efforts to describe the changes in unwritten “rules for interaction” that are required for dealing with strangers (Goffman 1963, 1971; see also Lofland 1973; Park 1925, p. 40) and Bahrdt’s analysis ([1961] 1977) of the emergence of the distinction between “public” and “private” spheres of interaction in cities (see also Fischer 1981), existing literature on the density of acquaintanceship has focused almost exclusively on psychosocial outcomes.

It may be time for a different focus, and it may be time for different assumptions as well. The presence or absence of disruption in one area of social functioning may or may not have implications for other areas of functioning, and “atomization” may tend to be the exception rather than the rule, particularly for those who have the ability to choose. Indeed, given how seldom studies have documented anything approaching widespread atomization, it may be that “cell division” will prove to be by far the more appropriate metaphor. It may be *human* nature that abhors a vacuum—particularly around oneself.

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