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THE METROPOLITAN EXPERIENCE

by

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The central problem of the sociologist of the city is to discover the forms of social action and organization that typically emerge in relatively permanent, compact settlements of large numbers of heterogeneous individuals.

Louis Wirth, 1938

INTRODUCTION AND DEFINITIONS

The issue of concern in this paper is the social psychology of urban life. This means that it will deal with questions such as: How is the nature of individual experience affected by residence in a metropolis? How are the cognitions, beliefs and behaviors of people shaped by life in more versus less urban places? Our goal is to estimate the social psychological impact of variations in population distribution.

Before any discussion can proceed, certain definitions and clarifications are critical, for the confusion surrounding this topic is great and persistent.

1. Operational definitions of "metropolitan" and "urban." We will be concerned here with population concentration as a continuum ranging from the great metropolises to the archetypal farm house, a dimension commonly referred to as the "rural-urban continuum." In this paper, "rural/urban" and "non-metropolitan/metropolitan" are used as convenient terms for making comparisons along this size-of-place

scale, but we do not mean to imply real dichotomies.¹ The working definition which will be used here is a relatively simple, demographic one: population aggregation. The greater the number of people at a place of settlement, the more "urban" is that place; the greater the number of people in an individual's place of settlement, the more "urban" his or her experience. There are difficulties with this definition which will not be belabored here, but it is a far more sensible interpretation than many others which abound. (And, there are almost as many interpretations, explicit or implicit, of "urban" as there are authors on the topic [Dewey, 1960].) Take as warnings three serious confusions:

(a) "Urban" as a cultural variable. In this usage, where "urban" is often interchanged with "urbane," the term refers to unique social forms and psychological sets which presumably differentiate city from country people. The assumption -- that there are such differences -- is so strong that the term, "urban," is used equally to mean the physical, demographic phenomena and the cultural, psychological phenomena.² While it may indeed be

¹For an extended discussion of these terms as meaningful categories, see the Panel paper by Rex Campbell.

²One result of this usage has been the devotion of many printed pages to higher level semantic elaborations of the following sort: "While urban places are usually more urban and rural more rural, sometimes (and more and more these days) one finds urbanism among the rural and rurality among the urban."

true that there is such a correlation between demographic features of settlements and socio-cultural forms, we can hardly define "urban" by those forms since whether such a correlation exists is the problematic question of this paper. In short, to treat "urban" or "metropolitan" as a psychological or cultural variable is to beg the question.

(b) Urban as an attribute of a society. A similar usage crops up in the phrase "urban society." A society may be urbanized -- that is, have a large proportion of its population in concentrated settlements -- but, usually, the implicit translation of the phrase is "modern society," "industrial society," "bureaucratic society," or some such cultural statement. Again, this presumes that the cultural nature of a society is isomorphic with its demographic nature -- a presumption we mean to test.

(c) Another type of confusion arises from equating "urban" with some apparent coincidental or contemporary correlate of population distribution. An example is housing. While apartment buildings are more common in places with larger populations, multi-dwelling housing and urbanism are hardly the same thing. (Compare, for example, American Indian pueblos and metropolitan single-family-home tracts.) One of the stereotypes behind such a confusion is not even true: Crowding, at least in terms of the number of people per room, is slightly greater in more rural places (Duncan, 1957; Carpenter, 1960; U.S. Census, 1971).

2. The meaning of "experience." In assessing the impact of metropolitan life, we will take a behavioristic approach. Important experiential differences due to size of place will, it is assumed, manifest themselves in differential human responses -- behaviors. In this category are included verbal reports of internal states, as in expressions of loneliness, distrust or unhappiness.

3. Expected size of effects. In dealing with significant psychological experiences and responses, one should, as a rule, not expect major or dramatic effects of size of place. The metropolis is a very general social context for people. The forces which have the greatest impact are those much more proximate to the individual personality: genetic factors, childhood, social class, race, sex, etc. Therefore, the discussion will revolve largely about modest differences.

4. Searching for "intrinsic" effects. The discussion will not only cover contemporary American differences in urban/rural experiences, but will also be concerned with the "intrinsic" effects of urbanism. By this is meant the social psychological effects which are due to population aggregation alone rather than to some other factor currently associated with urban residence.³

³ Among the factors associated with urban residence in the United States are: ethnicity, religion, social class, region of the country, stage in the life-cycle, as well as the whole conglomeration of things currently labelled "urban problems."

This is important for at least two reasons: (a) The association of urban residence with many of these factors changes over time. If we are not careful to control for these variables in our analysis, the conclusions become extremely time-bound and dated. (b) In terms of policies governing population distribution, we must of course know what effects are due to that specific variable alone and would thus be changed by its manipulation.

The means for establishing "intrinsic" effects are essentially two: (a) examining cases of urbanism in other times and places where factors associated with it here and now are not present and seeing what effects occur; and (b) statistical procedures for simulating such cases. The following discussion will be based on social science literature utilizing both methods.

Another problem in discovering "intrinsic" effects -- one which is harder to deal with -- is "self-selection." People migrate from place to place; they "select" themselves into different settlement types. It is therefore difficult to know, when we discover that urban people are more "x" than rural people, whether that difference is due to living in metropolitan areas or whether it is due to "x"-type people moving to and staying in cities. In regard to subtle social psychological differences, it is often not possible to decide which is the case.

Yet another complication arises from inter-city differences. Communities of the same size vary among each other in many respects: economic structure, government, social composition, etc. Consequently,

there are differential experiences (see Milgram, 1970; Schuman and Gruenberg, 1970). What these differences are and why they exist is important. For example, working class communities of varying sizes are probably more similar to each other than they are to middle-class communities of the same size. However, for present purposes, these differences complicate the effort to assess the general metropolitan experience, the effects of population aggregation abstracted out of specific communities. Therefore, we will generalize across such inter-metropolitan differences. (This paper will deal with intra-metropolitan comparisons, in terms of city versus suburb, after the urban-rural discussion.)

A final prefatory caution: The state of knowledge (as opposed to opinion) in this field is definitely inadequate (cf. Fischer, 1972b). Therefore what follows is often based on fragmentary data and should be read with the appropriate skepticism.

PUBLIC OPINION

Popular conceptions of and attitudes toward urban life are important for several reasons. They may reflect more or less accurately the real experience of urban life. They may create expectations which if not met can lead to disappointment. They may determine the choices people make about where they live and thus be a force in the self-selection process. They may shape actual experience and behavior by leading people to act in what they feel to be appropriate "urban" or "rural" ways.

Historically, American intellectual opinions about urban life have been negative. The city has been seen as a corrupting influence on the human spirit, that spirit finding its highest ascendancy in contact with the soil (see, for example, White and White, 1961; Howe, 1971). European views have been somewhat more charitable, stressing, for example, urban "civilization" as opposed to rural "savagery" (cf. Schorske, 1961). Nevertheless, some of the same warnings about urban life have existed for ages: sin and secularism, anxiety and anguish, estrangement and alienation, as well as noise, dirt and crowds.

These attitudes persist today in various ways. For instance, surveys reveal a tendency for people to prefer places smaller than the ones within which they currently reside. Table 1 presents a composite of two Gallup polls on the topic. While people express preferences for places of the same size as the ones within which they presently reside, deviations from that preference are in the direction of small communities. A Harris (1970) survey revealed that two-thirds of the city dwellers interviewed expressed a desire not to be living in a city ten years hence.⁴

The irony of these findings is that, historically, when people have "voted with their feet," they have overwhelmingly chosen the cities.

⁴Such preferences are probably true of Europeans as well, given the growth of suburbanization and the results of at least one survey (in the Netherlands, Polls, Summer, 1967:66).

TABLE 1

Gallup Poll Results for Preferences for Place of Residence, by Present Size of Community. (Percentages add down.)*

Preferred Residence	Present Place of Residence**				
	Non-Metropolitan		Metropolitan		
	Under 2,500	2,500-50,000	50,000-500,000	500,000-1,000,000	Over 1,000,000
"Farm"	54.0	19.5	12.5	12.5	9.5
"Small Town"	28.0	56.0	30.0	22.0	25.5
"Suburb"	15.5	15.0	29.5	39.5	35.0
"City"	2.0	9.5	26.0	26.5	28.5

* Adapted from Gallup Opinion Index (February, 1970, and August, 1971).

Figures were derived from averaging the results of the two surveys.

Sample size was approximately 3,000. "No opinions" are not shown. The text of the question was, "if you could live anywhere in the United States that you wanted to, would you prefer a city, suburban area, small town or farm?" See Harris poll in Life (January 9, 1970) for similar results.

** Size of city or central city if respondent lived in a suburb.

And, that movement continues today in the United States and in the world at large. One reason for this pattern can be seen in the other side of the urban image -- the city as a place of opportunity, largely economic opportunity, but also of chances for entertainment and excitement.⁵

One of the outcomes of this approach-avoidance dilemma is compromise when possible, i.e., the suburb. The suburb grew as an attempt to meld the best of the city and country and continues to exercise such an attraction (Donaldson, 1971). A recent study indicated just such a popular desire for the best of both worlds. In a Wisconsin survey (Zuiches and Fuguitt, 1971), a large majority of the respondents expressed a preference for residing outside a city but within easy commuting distance of it (see Table 2).

Perhaps the most accurate summary statement is that there is a general American value preference for the rural or small-town ideal, even if it can only be realized in the suburban tract home. At the same time, the reality of economic life means that metropolitan residence is chosen. The implication, which may be serious, is that many if not most urban residents benefit materially from their place

⁵This does not deny that there are other factors explaining urban migration. For instance, many peasant immigrants to the United States had planned to become farmers but stayed in their ports of disembarkation due to lack of funds (Handlin, 1969).

TABLE 2

Preferences for Place of Residence When Desired Proximity to Large City was also asked; by Present Place of Residence; Wisconsin Sample. (Percentages add down.)*

Preferred Place of Residence	Present Place of Residence							
	Non-Metropolitan			Metropolitan				Central City
	Rural	1,000-10,000	10,000-50,000	Rural	1,000-10,000	10,000-50,000	Suburb	
More than 30 miles from a large city								
Rural	40	8	9	14	2	8	4	3
Small City	8	33	10	6	7	6	4	5
Medium City	3	5	22	2	0	4	6	5
Within 30 miles of a large city								
Rural	36	11	11	54	23	14	18	12
Small City	7	32	8	15	42	18	10	15
Medium City	4	5	24	3	14	36	9	13
Suburb	2	3	8	3	7	14	40	19
Center City	0	3	8	3	5	0	9	28
(Sample Sizes:)	(195)	(131)	(93)	(66)	(43)	(66)	(79)	(233)

* Adapted from Zuiches and Fuguitt (1971), Table 3.

of residence but feel that this is not where the "good life" is led.⁶
(An indication of such a feeling is provided by the first item in
Table 3: the larger the community, the less satisfied are the people
with the quality of life there.)

SOCIAL SCIENCE OPINION

Probably the first collection of writings on the city which
one could term social science rather than social philosophy or history
was that of the "Chicago School" led by Robert Park (1921). The
central work of the group was a series of classic demographic and
ethnographic descriptions of Chicago in the first third of the century.
The theoretical ideas about urban life-ways drew on the German
sociologist Georg Simmel (1905) and were best expressed by Louis Wirth
(1938).

In Wirth's statement, the essential nature of the city --
population size, density and heterogeneity -- was described as
producing a series of psychological and social consequences, in two
mutually-reinforcing ways. (1) On the individual experiential level,
urban life surrounds the resident with a constant bombardment of
stimuli: sights, sounds, people, social demands for attention, concern
and action. In response to this overstimulation, coping mechanisms

⁶The group which could be called "urbane," who view city life as the
good life, are a small minority.

TABLE 3

Association of Community Size with Survey Responses:

Comparison of Satisfaction with Community versus More Global Feelings.

Item	Community Size*				
	Under 2,500	2,500- 50,000	50,000- 500,000	500,000- 1,000,000	1,000,000+
"Would you say that you are satisfied or dissatisfied with the quality of life in your community?" -- % Satisfied (Gallup Opinion Index October, 1971)	84	81	69	77	61
"On the whole would you say that you are satisfied or dissatisfied with the future facing you and your family?" -- % Satisfied (March, 1972)	60	60	59	52	57
"Do you think life is getting better or worse in terms of happiness?" -- % Better (November, 1968)	23	24	25	30	27
"Taking everything into account, is the world getting better or is it getting worse?" -- % Better (March, 1972)	19	25	25	33	17

* Size of city or of central city if respondent lived in suburb.

are brought into play to defend the organism. Basically, they are means of isolating him from his environment and from other people. The urbanite becomes aloof from others, superficial in his contacts with them, blasé, sophisticated and indifferent to the events which occur about him. His relationships to others are restricted to specific roles and tasks in a business-like way (in contrast to the personal relationships of the small town). Thus, the urban individual, it is theorized, is estranged from his fellow man. (See Milgram, 1970, for a modern elaboration of this thesis.)

(2) On the aggregate level, the concentration of great numbers, in conjunction with economic principles of competition and comparative advantage, leads to a multi-faceted differentiation, or diversification. The larger the community, the more divided and specialized is the labor, the greater the number and variety of social groups and the greater the differences among neighborhoods. This fractionation, combined with a psychological fractionation of the individual's attention, prevents the existence of a "community" in which people are bound by common social ties and understandings (e.g., commonality of values, personal attention, social pressure, tradition). To hold such a splintered society together at all, different social mechanisms are needed and arise -- means of formal integration such as written laws, impersonal rules of etiquette, and special agencies of social control,

education, communication and welfare.⁷

Within the "non-community," the primary social groups that tie the individual and society together, particularly the family, are also weakened. The individual's diversified interests, associations and locales draw him or her away from the family; the specialized institutions of the city usurp family functions; the contacts with different persons and different value systems shake the normative foundations of the primary group.

The formal institutions which partly supplant these primary groups are, however, inadequate to avoid a state of anomie. This is a condition of society in which social bonds between individuals and their groups are weak, and, consequently, the norms -- rules of proper and permissible behavior -- are also weak. Such a state of anomie results in social and personality disorganization, deviance, and, once again, individual isolation.

Thus Wirth predicted that the urban experience would generate a series of interrelated social psychological phenomena, including relationships that are "impersonal, superficial, transitory and segmental," "anonymity," "sophistication," "rationality," "secularization," "competition," "aggrandizement," "mutual exploitation," "depersonalization," among others.

⁷ A current television announcement makes a similar point. The speaker states that, in the past, one could depend on one's neighbors for emergency help, but today one cannot, and must therefore instead turn to the Red Cross.

This theoretical perspective had been the dominant one in sociology. In the 1950's it increasingly came under attack by a group of urban ethnographers who have been labeled the "non-materialists" (Sjoberg, 1965). Basing their arguments on the "re-discovery" of kinship, social ties, and effective norms in certain urban communities, they argued that the ecological factors of numbers and space was essentially unimportant in determining social psychological consequences (cf. Lewis, 1965; Gans, 1962b). What matters is class, ethnicity and life-cycle.

There are several other sociological formulations about urban life (cf. Fischer, 1972b), but the debate over the Wirthian theory is the most central and important. It is also unresolved (Hauser, 1965). In the following discussion, it is essentially the Wirthian theory which will be used to orient the empirical review.

ELEMENTS OF THE URBAN EXPERIENCE

Characteristics of Urban Individuals

As a general rule, the more urban a person's place of residence, the higher his social class -- education, occupation, income and self-definition (cf. Blau and Duncan, 1965; Schnore, 1963; author's research). The degree of association between community size and

and socio-economic position is low,⁸ but it is consistent cross-culturally and historically. (One aspect of this pattern is the traditional location of elites within urban centers; see Sjoberg, 1960.) Some variations to this pattern occur, in particular, the presence of deprived groups -- many of rural origin -- in the center cities of large American metropolises. It is difficult to foretell whether this variation indicates future trends or whether it is transitory. The most accurate statement is that social class, with its accompanying perquisites, increases mildly with urbanism. This point must be constantly kept in mind.

To the degree to which urban residence is responsible for the high social class of individuals (Alonso and Fajans, 1970) and that, in turn, affects their life experiences and behaviors, urbanism can be said to have an indirect social psychological impact. To the degree to which urbanism increases the rates of social mobility (Lipset and Bendix, 1964), and that mobility in turn disrupts social relationships (Janowitz, 1970), it may have a deleterious social effect. However, our concern here is with the consequences of urbanism, if any, above and beyond such indirect effects (cf. Fischer, 1972b, for further discussion).

⁸For example, in a survey analyzed by the author, the correlation coefficients between size of S.M.S.A. and class variables were: education, .2; occupational prestige, .18; and income, .17 (Fischer, 1972a: Appendix B).

The more urban a place of settlement, the more socially heterogeneous the population. That is, the greater is the presence of minority religious and ethnic groups (see Schnore, 1963). This may not be a necessary consequence of urbanism, for anthropologists have noted many large settlements in under-developed societies composed of single, homogeneous groups. However, it does appear to be a general correlate in Western societies, most likely due to the economic opportunities of cities and their position on transportation paths. With these opportunities and placement, population aggregation increases heterogeneity by attracting widely-scattered groups to a central place.

Another form of heterogeneity is probably internally generated by population size. This is the variety of occupational, common-interest, and life-style subcultures (e.g., bohemia, the academic community, the small-business community, the criminal underworld, the "singles set"). Specialization and diversification increase with size and, thereby, spur the development of somewhat distinctive subgroups. At the same time, large numbers provide "critical masses" of people necessary for sustaining these communities of interest as distinctive and separate groups.

Urban persons are more likely to be single, usually beginning their careers, than are less urban persons. There is a fairly substantial increase in the proportion of persons living outside of a family as community size increases (within center cities; Fischer, 1972a: 154, n.3).

It should also be noted that urban persons are more likely to be non-Southern, and, given the historical migration pattern, more urban persons are raised in rural areas than the reverse.

The relevance of these individual differences is (1) that in comparing urban versus rural people on social psychological dimensions, it must be remembered that one is dealing with different populations in each case and (2) that the metropolitan experience includes living within an area inhabited by a somewhat higher class, heterogeneous and more frequently single people than does the rural experience.

The Physical Context of Urban Life

The physical nature of the city seems to be a persistent source of distress. A number of irritants increase in frequency with increases in community size, noise and pollution, in particular. A recent National Research Council study found air pollution to be fifteen times greater in large cities than in more rural areas (Los Angeles Times, September 11, 1972). The subsequent question is whether these irritants are inevitable concomitants of city life, or whether one can build quiet, clean, large cities. Most probably, some increase in both noise and dirt accompanies all population aggregation though the degree to which it occurs can probably be reduced below today's level.

Taking the analysis another step, are there differential biological or psychological effects of these irritants on urban versus rural persons? Regarding noise, a recent national examination of children ages 6-11 found no association between community size and hearing sensitivity (H.E.W., 1972). And, experimental studies suggest

that noise per se may not impair personality, but only unpredictable noise (Glass and Singer, 1972). Furthermore, there is little evidence of urban-rural differences in the psychosomatic symptoms which one might expect from noise. It seems that this disadvantage of urban life has been exaggerated.

Pollutions might be expected to influence health, and, historically, cities have been unhealthy places because of sewage problems and epidemics. In recent times, this difference has been reduced or erased by modern health methods and by the advantages of cities in health facilities. Yet, the difference is probably still to the rural advantage. For example, the National Research Council air pollution study concluded that the cost of smog for urban communities was a lung cancer mortality rate twice that of rural areas.⁹

On the whole, some amount of unpleasant irritants is probably an inevitable concomitant of urban life, imposing a degree of biological damage. The psychological consequences, however, are probably small if at all existent.

⁹ A challenge to the conclusions of that report illustrates some of the difficulty in making these sorts of urban-rural comparisons. The challenger argued that the mortality statistics were biased for reasons including (a) that rural persons go to cities for hospital care, and die there; and (b) that the unavailability of specialists results in lung cancer deaths in rural areas being attributed to "senility." (San Francisco Examiner, September 14, 1972.)

Large numbers of people form part of the setting of city life, and crowds are often considered one of the irritants of the city. We do not know to what extent people actually spend time in crowds, but the real picture can be nowhere near the stereotypic image. The assumption behind much of the current pop-ethology literature on urban life -- that city people spend a significant part of their lives crowded -- is questionable. Similarly, the other premise -- that population density has serious negative social consequences -- is also questionable. Other than a few animal studies with dubious relevance, there is little data to support that view. Both experimental work and studies of natural variation in population density done to date fail to support the proposition.

A sense of "crowding" is, of course, a subjective feeling, dependent on the individual's needs and on cultural norms (see the Marans and Rodgers paper). To the degree to which available space does not meet the personal demand, people will feel "crowded," and psychological effects perhaps result. Research on these issues is just beginning, but so far indicates that density per se has little effect (see review and experimental studies in Freedman et al., 1971).¹⁰

Related to this issue is that of housing. As argued earlier, multiple-dwelling units are not an intrinsic feature of urban life, but

¹⁰ A recent study suggests that high person-per-room density may have deleterious effects (Galle et al., 1971). However, that type of density does not increase with urbanism.

they are more common in American cities than in the countryside. Apartments are not the American dream homes, but neither do they seem to have serious negative effects -- if social needs are met; that is, if the space arrangement permits tasks to be performed and the cultural standards of privacy to be attained. The general thrust of the research is that there are few social psychological effects attributable to multiple-dwelling housing per se, other than some mechanical problems such as supervising children from apartments on the higher floors or inviting guests into the home (see reviews in Mitchell, 1971; Schorr, 1966).

One element of the physical environment which does vary to an important degree with community size is the presence of what might be termed "facilities": stores, amusements, public and private services, organizations and the like. Around 1940, Fenton Keyes (1958) tabulated cities by size and by whether or not they possessed 94 different sorts of facilities and services. A partial set of the results are presented in Table 4. As size increases, the variety of services do. One conclusion Keyes drew was that the 25,000 population level was an important "break" point for whether cities had facilities or not.

Similarly, the presence of specialists of various sorts seems to require minimum levels of population (Ogburn and Duncan, 1964). While these differences between rural and urban are being mitigated by efficiencies in transport (Webber, 1968), they persist and will probably continue to exist. The larger the community, the more likely is the individual to find just what good or service he is seeking.

TABLE 4

The Association of City Size and the Presence of Facilities:
 Threshold Size Levels for 50% and 95% Probability of Presence.*
 (circa 1940)

<u>Facility or Service</u>	<u>Minimum City Size at Which</u>	
	<u>50+%</u> <u>of Cities Have Facility</u>	<u>95+%</u>
Grocery Store	2,000	2,000
Restaurant	2,000	5,000
Furniture Store	2,000	25,000
Dry Goods	2,000	50,000
Household Supplies	2,500	50,000
Automotive Supply	2,500	5,000
Paint Store	5,000	50,000
Book Store	25,000	100,000
Hospital	5,000	100,000
Home for the Aged	50,000	250,000
Psychiatric Clinic	100,000	500,000
School for the Deaf	100,000	500,000
College	250,000	500,000
Art School	250,000	500,000
Nursery School	250,000	1,000,000
City Planning Board	25,000	500,000

TABLE 4 continued.

<u>Facility or Service</u>	<u>Minimum City Size at Which</u>	
	<u>50+%</u> <u>of Cities Have</u>	<u>95+%</u> <u>Facility</u>
Airport	25,000	250,000
Daily Newspaper	10,000	250,000
Radio Station	50,000	250,000
Lions Club	25,000	250,000
Music Organization	100,000	250,000
Y.M.C.A.	25,000	250,000
Municipal Tennis Courts	25,000	250,000
Playground	25,000	250,000
Symphony Orchestra	500,000	1,000,000

* Selected and adapted from Keyes (1958), Table 1.

The Social Context of Urban Life: The Individual's Groups

A simple truth too often forgotten in discussions at the level of towns and cities is that people actually lead their lives in much smaller milieus -- their immediate families, friends and co-workers. These are the groups which influence and, to a great extent, circumscribe the individual's experience -- both in country and city. Relatively few persons, mostly those at the upper rungs of the social ladder have in any sense large parts of cities as their meaningful social environments. And, only a tiny fraction can be considered cosmopolitans of the sort to whom "BosWash" and "SanSan" have any meaning. Thus, the metropolitan experience is largely an experience mediated by the individual's small number of significant others (his "networks"), usually within one portion of a city.

The most immediate personal context is the family. It was long part of sociological lore that urban life weakened, if not destroyed, the family institution. It is true that the traditional family structure appears less frequently in the more urban areas, where unmarried, childless or divorced households are disproportionately present. As discussed earlier, the problem of self-selection makes it difficult to call this an effect of urban life. Cities apparently attract young singles and unmarrieds without children (Zuiches and Fugitt, 1971).

A more general issue is whether the social force of kinship is affected by urbanism. The best conclusions which can be drawn from the fragmentary and largely qualitative data (and considering the

differences in individual characteristics discussed above) are the following: Urban residence, ceteris paribus, probably affects kinship by encouraging the geographic dispersal of relatives and by reducing the degree to which the family is called upon to provide aid and other services (Greer, 1956; Smith et al., 1954; Wellman et al., 1972). (The urban milieu provides alternative institutions to supply these needs; cf. Table 4.) However, contact with kin is probably no less frequent and they are still the major source of aid (Wellman et al., 1972). Nor is there sufficient evidence that the social psychological importance or the moral suasion of kin is any less in urban than in rural places. To some extent, though probably not a great one, the family is a more specialized, specifically socio-emotional, institution in cities. Whether this strengthens or weakens the family is debatable.

The same general statements can probably be made about non-kin primary ties. The proposition has been forwarded that friendships should be fewer or more shallow in the urban setting. There is little data to support either hypothesis and no empirical reason as yet to believe that urban life isolates people from important social relationships. As with the family, these ties are probably more dispersed, but still present. One study concluded: "Spatial mobility makes for city-wide ties; stability for local area ties; and most urban residents have both" (Smith et al., 1954).

Expanding the circle of the individual's associations, we can consider his more general membership groups -- particularly ethnic or religious groups, but also including occupational or life-style

subcultures. For descent-related ones such as ethnic communities, the expectation, based on standard sociological analysis and immigrant experience in America, is that the cohesiveness and importance of these subcultures should be reduced in the disruptive and distracting urban environment. However, anthropological studies from around the world (and America) suggest that this expectation is weakly if at all met. In fact, there is some evidence that ethnocultural identification and unity is greater in the city, especially the larger city, than in the country. For example, Africanists have described the rise of tribal consciousness in the new African metropolises (cf. Epstein, 1967). This phenomenon is probably due to (1) contrast and conflict with other groups which, as social psychologists have long known, strengthens the internal ties of the collectivity; and (2) due to the presence of sufficient numbers of members to support a vital subculture.

The geographical locality, or neighborhood, is another membership group for the individual. The stereotypic picture of urbanites being anonymous to their neighbors is, as with many other urban images, quite exaggerated, given the accumulating research revealing the existence of meaningful neighborhood communities (e.g., Gans, 1962a; Suttles, 1968). However, it is probably the case that the degree to which a person knows his neighbors, the importance of those people to him and he to them, and his attachment to the locality does decrease with increases in community size. (For one thing, friends, relatives and co-workers are less likely to be neighbors.) Thus, urbanites are somewhat more isolated from their neighbors than are ruralites. But, this does not mean that they are more isolated in toto.

The Social Context of Urban Life: Strangers

The stranger is the central character of the urban scene for many writers on this topic. While residence in a small town is depicted as a life among friends and acquaintances, residence in the large city is described as a life "in the presence of strangers" (Lofland, 1972).

This contrast has been much exaggerated, for the turnover of population in small communities is often high (in 1969, equal to that of metropolitan communities [U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1971]). The general disorder of small towns has also been ignored (Lane, 1970; Smith, 1968). Nevertheless, as a general rule, it is probably the case that the larger the community, the greater the number of encounters with "strange" people -- strange both in the sense that they are unknown and in that they are likely to look and act somewhat "strangely." The consequences of this situation have been the focus of theorists such as Simmel (1905), Wirth (1938) and Milgram (1970).

Two types of consequences can be specified: (1) psychological effects presumed to result from an environment of strangers; and (2) a set of adaptations which arise to protect the individual from these strangers. The first category includes anxiety due to the unpredictability of interaction with unknown others. Related to this anxiety is what James Q. Wilson (1971) has recently termed, the

"urban unease," and which he sees as the crux of the "urban problem."¹¹ In the analyses of Simmel and Wirth, the frequent encounters with (relatively) exotic strangers result in a blasé outlook on life, world-weary and cosmopolitan, perhaps sophisticated and certainly jaded. In Milgram's analysis, these masses of strangers are part of the overstimulation of city living -- they must be watched and guarded against. Thus, they contribute to psychic overload, with consequent irritation and nervousness.

The second category, protective adaptations, includes mechanisms described earlier to handle overstimulation and overdemands: isolation from others, maintaining only superficial, task-oriented, contacts. Such role-specific relationships imply that the other persons are treated mainly as means or obstacles to certain ends (e.g., the bus driver is only a means for transport; someone in front in a bank queue is only an obstacle to reaching the teller). In that way, people are simply objects and not full personalities in their own right. In such goal-directed, dehumanized encounters, mutual economic exploitation is an unsurprising outcome. In general, the adaptations involve maintaining a barrier between oneself and others, a barrier of constant

¹¹In Wilson's analysis, contemporary urbanites are surrounded and upset by what they sense to be public misbehavior, serious and otherwise. This is the sort of display strangers make.

suspicion and distrust. (This is but a partial list of adaptations.¹²)

In the midst of this negative-sounding description, it should be stressed that the rarely noted concomitant of all this isolation and estrangement is personal, individualistic, freedom. (Indeed, the moral and philosophical tension between community and individualism is frequently a subliminal theme in the urban literature.)

Whether these attitudes and modes of interaction are indeed effects of large community size is in many cases an essentially untouched research topic and, therefore, completely open. Other cases will be treated later in the paper.

One of the important points about the list of adaptive mechanisms is that, not only are they means of dealing with strangers, these modes and attitudes also come to permeate the entire lives of urbanites (so the theory goes). However, the discussion in the preceding

¹²Further adaptations include the use of impersonal media of interchange such as newspapers because of the impossibility of knowing all other urban persons; and the use of status symbolism (clothes, possessions, styles, etc.) because of the impossibility of all these strangers personally knowing each other's social position. A more ambivalent adaptation is moral relativity -- a suspension of judgment, or at least, action, against others' values and beliefs -- necessary if one is to conduct business with and pass peacefully among strangers. (This relativism has harmful repercussions, according to the theory, in the resultant weakening of attachments to one's own values.)

section implies that there is little empirical indication of such predicted estrangement in urban people's own personal circles.¹³

That the proximity of strangers is a concomitant of urban life more so than of rural life seems undeniable. (It would be interesting, though, to see figures on the degree to which urban residents actually encounter strangers.) The experiential importance of this fact is, however, another matter. It may be neither the case that the stranger makes a major impact on city-dwellers -- he may fade into the scenery, and the more strangers the more fading -- nor the case that adaptations, positive or negative, have relevance to anything beyond the stranger. All the above speculation remains just that.

In this discussion, the "stranger" has been treated as a blank figure. In point of fact, he is almost always embedded within his own social groups. Thus, a more accurate image of the urban resident is that he is likely, relative to rural persons, to be in the

¹³ Much of the influence of these ideas is due to the powerfully compelling logic with which the authors originally presented them. However, as A. Reiss (1955) has shown with some of these propositions, persuasive and equally plausible arguments can be made from the other side. For example, a line of analysis could begin with the proposition that life among strangers requires an etiquette of politesse as a social lubricant, one which culminates not in an atmosphere of ceremony but in one of mutual regard and friendliness, (See, for example, the chapter on "The City" in Margaret Wood's The Stranger [1934].)

midst of diverse social groups (whose members are, with rare exception, strangers to him). And, there is, as far as we know, an internal cohesion and vitality to these groups equal to rural ones. The implication this leads to is that urban life is not so much life in the presence of strangers as it is life among distinctly different others.

Thus, the metropolitan experience is more likely than the rural one to involve proximity to and perhaps contact with identifiably "foreign" groups. Based on our knowledge of small-group processes, one could expect this situation to be accompanied by contrasts of the "us" versus "them" kind, highlighting clear boundaries between the groups. And, there are some bits of evidence that such inter-group lines are sharper and conflicts greater, the larger the size of community. (For instance, social classes seem more distinctive [Lasswell, 1959] and more politically important in larger cities [Ennis, 1962].)

While population aggregation may lead to separate and conflicting subgroups, the presence of large, vital subcultures in close proximity probably also leads to positive contacts. Thus, the diffusion of beliefs and practices between culturally-distinct groups is likely to be greater in cities than in less urban places (where the other groups are either absent or present in weak numbers). Again, there are fragments of data indicating that this may be the case, at least in terms of the diffusion of new ideas from the more to the less educated.

Put grossly, part of the urban experience is (we suggest) to be both offended and influenced by "odd" people.

In the last two sections, we have sought to stress the point that cities are not composed, as much popular literature suggests, of masses of atomistic individuals crowded together at pathogenic densities, but are composed, rather, of many complex and vital social networks within which individuals lead lives not much social psychologically different from those led by rural persons.

The Social Context of Urban Life: Crime

A major contemporary concern about the metropolitan experience is crime. Though crime statistics are seriously questionable, there seems little doubt that the large-city individual is more likely than the person in the small town to encounter criminality of all sorts. Table 5 presents the 1970 F.B.I. crime statistics by community size. A recent survey in which respondents reported known crimes showed that F.B.I. statistics greatly under-estimated the frequency of crime, but the relative urban-rural differences were substantiated (Ennis, 1967).

The higher urban crime rates are reflected in individual awareness of danger. A Gallup poll, displayed in Table 6, shows that fear of walking the streets increases with community size.

As a general rule, the larger the community, the greater the rates of property crimes, crimes against the person, and vice crimes. The degree to which this is true -- i.e., the cost in serious crime for each increment in population -- is unknown but probably not high, all else equal. The reasons for this pattern -- that is, whether crime is an intrinsic feature of urbanism -- are partially known.

TABLE 5

Crime Rates by City Size, 1970*

<u>City Size</u>	<u>Crime Rates**</u>						
	<u>Total</u>	<u>Violent</u>	<u>Property</u>	<u>Murder</u>	<u>Rape</u>	<u>Robbery</u>	<u>Burglary</u>
Over 250,000 (N = 56)	7152	980	4355	18	40	589	1948
100,000-500,000 (N = 98)	6238	450	3746	10	24	199	1684
50,000-100,000 (N = 252)	4693	274	2686	5	15	110	1114
25,000-50,000 (N = 504)	4031	214	2334	4	11	82	940
10,000-25,000 (N = 1,177)	3354	159	1822	3	9	42	785
Under 10,000 (N = 2,394)	2682	141	1450	3	7	24	631

Suburban*** (N = 2,415)	3150	177	1960	4	13	58	872
Rural (N = 1,563)	1271	102	883	6	10	13	477

* Adapted from Uniform Crime Reports - 1970, Federal Bureau of Investigation, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1971, pp. 104-105.

** Offenses known to police per 100,000 population.

*** Suburban jurisdictions also included in other city size categories.

TABLE 6

Fear of Walking the Streets by Community Size (1972)*

"Is there anywhere right around here -- that is, within a mile -- where you would be afraid to walk alone at night?"

	Community Size**				
	<u>Under 2,500</u>	<u>2,500- 50,000</u>	<u>50,000- 500,000</u>	<u>500,000- 1,000,000</u>	<u>Over 1,000,000</u>
% YES	24	42	49	43	53

* Gallup Opinion Index (April, 1972).

** Size of city or of central city if respondent lived in suburb.

Property crime and vice seem to accompany population size in almost all cases. One probably will get the former with the latter, other factors held constant. This can be explained without recourse to ideas that the city generates social disorganization. It probably results from the fact that size creates the "markets" for such crimes -- centralized accumulations of property (especially given the greater wealth of urbanites) and of consumers of vice. Also, the aggregation of large numbers of criminals fosters the rise of underworld facilities (e.g., fences) and organization.

Violent crime is a different matter. (In this connection, one must always keep in mind that crimes against the person occur most of the time between relatives and acquaintances -- 90% of the cases of homicide; Wolfgang, 1967.) To a great extent, the metropolitan nature of violent crime in America is due to the concentration in Northern ghettos of poor blacks (and Southern culture groups generally -- Gastil, 1971). When factors such as class and ethnicity are taken into account, it is not clear that cities per se breed violence. Indeed, cross-culturally and historically, rural areas have predominated in violent lawlessness (see National Commission on Violence, 1969).¹⁴

¹⁴One can dismiss most of the best-selling pop-ethological descriptions of urban life in terms of "behaviorial sinks" populated by crowded "killer apes" as nonsense.

Contemporary American city-dwellers pay a price for their place of residence in terms of property loss and potential violence (with some accompanying anxiety). The cost in property probably comes with the city itself; the violence probably need not.

The Social Context of Urban Life: Ambience

There are other elements of the metropolitan experience which are harder to specify but which involve the sights, sounds, smells of a place, and the activities which one can or does engage in. To some, the buildings, people, facilities and bustle of cities is an attraction; others will gladly forsake it for fewer people and more trees. These are the "intangibles," hard to measure or even define, which fall within the category of personal taste. We can say little about this ambience except (1) it is not a major concern in residential moves (cf., for example, Rossi, 1956; Gans, 1967) -- housing needs are; and (2) to the degree to which affluence permits freedom of choice, town and country will come more and more to be inhabited by persons with the appropriate personal inclinations.

EFFECTS OF THE URBAN EXPERIENCE

On Personality

Many of the hypotheses about urban life predict certain effects, usually deleterious, on the individual personality. One set of such effects might be termed stress, strain or tension. The sensory

stimulation, the demands for concern, the strangers to guard against in the city are so great as to seriously overtax the organism. In the discussion earlier, doubts were raised about the assumptions behind these arguments -- that such over-stimulation is indeed a significant part of the average urbanite's experience, or that it cannot be handled. And, as far as consequences of stress are concerned, there is little evidence to support the theory that they are more common in cities. For instance, one international survey (Inkeles, 1969) reported no real urban-rural differences in psychosomatic symptoms.

Such strain, it is theorized, together with the hypothesized disintegration of close supportive social ties, should also lead to behavioral manifestations of the type called "psychiatric disorders." It is difficult to assess whether rates of such disorders increase with urbanism. One difficulty, for example, is that admissions to mental hospitals are partly a function of the availability of such institutions, and this availability is greater in urban areas. Also, forthrightness about psychological difficulties is affected by potential social stigmatization, which also varies by community size. One recent review of nine varied and international epidemiological studies concludes that there is a tendency for neurosis to be greater in urban areas and psychosis to be greater in rural ones (Dohrenwend and Dohrenwend, 1971). The most trustworthy conclusion is that there is little support for the prediction that city life impairs mental functioning in ways termed psychiatric disorders. However, most of the available data is mixed and generally inconclusive, especially if one seeks to isolate the specific effects of urban life per se.

There is a whole assortment of social psychological states labeled "alienation." That term has been nearly killed by over- and misuse, but some statements can be made if we employ the distinctions presented by Seeman (1959, 1972).

One type of alienation is powerlessness -- a low sense of control over one's life. It would be consistent with the theoretical lines discussed earlier to find more powerlessness in urban areas, but that is not the case in any substantive way (Fischer, 1972a: Ch. 5).

Meaninglessness is a low sense of predictability and comprehension about the events occurring to the individual. This has been little studied, but "doomsday" questions asked in various surveys (i.e., questions reflecting a general pessimism about the future) generally fail to indicate any meaningful differences.

Social isolation, a sense of rejection and loneliness is one of the core predictions of the Simmel-Wirth theory. Isolation is one of the means of adapting to the omnipresence of strangers and is also a consequent of the social disorganization of the city (so goes the theory). As discussed earlier, there is little evidence that urban people are actually more isolated than non-urban ones. Nor is there any reason to believe that urban people sense such an isolation, except perhaps in one regard. In American surveys, there is a tendency for urbanism to be associated with a general sense of distrust about "other people" (Fischer, 1972a: Ch. 4; Robinson and Shaver, 1969). (An example of such a question is, "Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted or that you can't be too careful in

dealing with people?") This effect is real but weak. It might be attributable to the greater crime rate in cities, or to the presence of those "strange" other people. At the same time, this finding should be placed in perspective. Ethnographers in many parts of the world report high levels of interpersonal suspicion and distrust within small, rural communities (see discussion in Foster, 1960-61).

Normlessness is a sense that normative, socially approved of means of achieving ends are unlikely to be effective compared to illegal or immoral ones. Survey items designed to measure this dimension (especially the Srole [1956] Anomia Scale) generally fail to show any urban-rural differences. However, given the greater crime rate and the greater frequency of deviant beliefs in cities (see below), this form of alienation is probably somewhat higher in urban areas.¹⁵

¹⁵ A clarification is necessary in regard to normlessness or "anomia." The complexity in this area involves who's norms are used as a reference. The conclusion that the crime rates indicate a higher urban normlessness means that such criminals are less likely to believe in the general society's rules. However, normlessness can also refer to the rules of the individual's specific subculture, rules which may differ from those of the wider society. In that case, there are probably no major urban-rural differences. (E.g., the urban ghetto-dweller is probably no less attached to his own group's rules of behavior than is the farmer attached to the traditional Protestant morality.)

Value isolation refers to holding values discrepant with the general values of the society (e.g., the archetypal bohemian). Little research has been specifically done on this alienation, but the fact that urban populations are more heterogeneous, and the data on values discussed below imply that this alienation probably increases mildly with urbanism.¹⁶

Another personality dimension sometimes considered to be positively affected by urbanism is intellectual ability, usually measured by I.Q. A study just published contends that the "multi-faceted" nature of city life -- during childhood -- promotes "psychological functioning" (Schooler, 1972). In this study, as in others, small differences are found to the advantage of the urban-bred. However, the differences are slight and explainable by correlated variables (e.g., class, ethnicity) and by self-selection.

In sum, there is little empirical reason to believe that the urban experience disturbs or changes the human personality in any significant way. Urban life may incline people to somewhat deviant perspectives and to suspect deviance by others (at least in contemporary U.S.A.), but even such an effect is small.

We can also consider one global state of mind -- general satisfaction with one's life situation. Worldwide, the persistent trend is for urban people to express greater satisfaction than do

¹⁶Self-estrangement -- alienated labor -- is another of Seeman's dimensions, but is not directly relevant to this paper.

rural people, largely though perhaps not only because of a better economic situation. However, in the United States today, there are slight differences in the direction of urban dissatisfaction (controlling for associated factors).¹⁷

Modes of Interaction

Certain ways of interacting with others are presumed to be more frequent in urban settings for reasons outlined earlier. One long-standing distinction in sociology is between "primary-group" and "secondary-group" relationships. In the former type, people relate as whole personalities involved with each other in a variety of ways (examples: family, close friends). In secondary relationships, people interact with and know only a single facet of each other (examples: store clerk and customer; teacher and pupil). In urban life, human interaction presumably becomes more secondary (one cannot know personally every clerk, customer, bus driver, etc. as one presumably does in a small town). Simultaneously, primary ties are weakened for reasons discussed earlier and because formal distance becomes a way of life.

There is a common-sensical appeal to the prediction that the frequency of the secondary contacts increases with population size, but we do not know the degree to which it is true. And, it does not

¹⁷This slight trend appears, in one analysis, to be due to relatively greater despair in the very largest metropolises, rather than to monotonic increases with population size (Fischer, 1972a: Ch. 7).

appear that such an increase has any important consequences, anyway. We know that there is little if any decline in the number or depth of primary relationships with increases in urbanism, nor any particular personality changes. Perhaps we should view urban life as offering a large number of potential secondary relationships in addition to, rather than in substitution for, personal ones.

Part of the urban style is described as an impersonality and superficiality in social interactions. (Recall that these are considered ways of protecting the individual against an overload of demands.) Again, there is little empirical reason to believe that this is true.

Living in a world of many strangers is hypothesized to develop an exploitative, materialistic orientation. There is some suggestion that American large-city-dwellers have slightly more distrust for "others," but little indication that they actually are more exploitative. One study of the "Machiavellian" personality (a type which has a cold, calculating approach to people) revealed no urban-rural differences in its frequency (Christie and Geis, 1971).

One of the most dramatic images of the urban mode of interaction is that of the city-dweller who refuses to "get involved" in aiding another person in need. The public slaying of Kitty Genovese spurred a series of studies on "pro-social behavior" (intervening to help others). Pilot studies reported by Milgram (1970) showed somewhat less willingness on the part of large-city (especially New York) people to extend themselves than on the part of small-town people.

Other research (e.g., Forbes and Gromoll, 1971) has come up with mixed results. Since the research has but begun, it would be premature to conclude whether there are urban-rural differences in this regard, and certainly whether any differences would be due to urbanism per se.¹⁸

A comment should be made about mob-psychology descriptions of urban life: what evidence exists suggests that city people are not any more likely than rural persons to fall sway to such collective behavior (see, for example, Tilly, 1969).

We conclude this section as we did the previous one, that differences, if they exist at all, are small. Changing population distribution alone is unlikely to have a significant social psychological impact on the way people interact.

Values and Beliefs

If there are substantial associations between size of place and social psychological phenomena, this is where they exist. It is

¹⁸A caveat to this conclusion: research by Darley and Latané (1968) indicates that the more people at the scene of an emergency, the less likely any individual is to act. This is due to the psychological processes involved in defining a situation as being indeed an emergency. To the degree to which crises in cities are more likely to occur in the presence of many people than are rural emergencies, one could find urban-rural differences in helping. However, this does not imply that city people are actually less caring. Presumably, the same dynamics would operate in a crowd of country people.

a repeated finding that the larger the city, the less traditional and conservative are the expressed opinions and behaviors of people. And, the differences are noticeable. This is true for realms of life including religion, life-style, law, race, drugs, sex, the family and politics. Table 7 illustrates these differences with poll results on marijuana.

A major reason for this correlation is the association of community size with factors such as region of the country, social class and the presence of minority groups. When these factors are taken into account, urban-rural differences become a good deal smaller, though still in an urban-liberal direction (Fischer, 1972a: Ch. 6).

The "deviant" nature of cities is consistent historically and cross-culturally, suggesting that it may be an "intrinsic" feature of urban life. Though the modal urban citizen (say, a middle-class WASP) holds about the same beliefs as does his rural counterpart (middle-class WASP), the city, more so than the country, harbors groups holding differing values and beliefs. Though it varies greatly by the composition of specific cities, generally, it is to the urban centers that deviants of all sorts have been able to come, find supportive comrades, and maintain distinctive subcultures. These sub-groups have protected their members and, also, have affected the community around them by disseminating their values.

In this way, cities have historically been the scenes of scientific, economic, social and political innovation. Combined with the earlier discussion of crime, we can generally say that population

TABLE 7

Attitudes Toward and Reported Use of Marijuana,
by Community Size. (1972)*

	Community Size**				
	Under 2,500	2,500- 50,000	50,000- 500,000	500,000- 1,000,000	Over 1,000,000
"Do you think that the penalties for the use or possession of marijuana should be less strict than they currently are, or not?"					
%YES (less)	23	20	29	42	43
%NO	72	72	63	55	51
%No opinion	5	8	8	3	6
"Do you think that marijuana should be made legal, or not?"					
%YES (legalize)	7	9	19	24	23
%NO	90	88	77	72	70
%No opinion	3	3	4	4	7
"Have you, yourself, ever happened to try marijuana?"					
%YES	3	10	13	15	20
%NO	97	90	87	85	80

* Gallup Opinion Index (April, 1972)

** Size of city or of central city if respondent lives in a suburb.

aggregation is associated with deviance -- some "bad" and called crime, some "good" and called invention, depending on one's values.

It is frequently argued that urban-rural differences are decreasing. We believe that, in this context, at least, such differences will persist. As long as cities are the generators of new ideas and there is lag in their diffusion, there will continue to be urban-rural contrasts.

Attitudes Towards the Community

One of the diagnoses of contemporary urban ills is the "loss of sense of community." If by community, we mean the local neighborhood, then there is some evidence that it is weaker in the metropolis. (That is, the community of associates and the physically proximate community overlap less.) And, if we mean the incorporated city, then there is evidence that this, too, has weaker attachments, the greater the size of population. As a real though quite weak trend, the larger the legal city, the less people are politically oriented to it and the more they are oriented to the national or international level (cf., e.g., Verba and Nie, 1972; Nie et al., 1969a,b; Fischer, 1972a: Ch. 4). The reason for this trend is partly though not totally the higher class level of urbanites. It is difficult to apportion the relative contributions of urbanism to this pattern between (a) the large size of metropolitan governments which might cause a sense of political futility (a sense which might be reduced by decentralization), and (b) the general decline of the importance of locality that comes with city size.

(As an indication of how individuals' personal worlds may be independent of their orientation to the local community, consider again Table 3. The first entry in the table shows the association between community size and satisfaction with local "quality of life." The other entries show the associations of community size with items reflecting either more personal or more existential concerns. The larger the community, the more the dissatisfaction with it. But, there is essentially no relationship with the other feelings.)

Summary

The best estimate at the moment is that the urban experience (that is, size of place) does not affect individual personality in any substantial way, nor does it seem to change the ways in which people relate to each other (or to whom they relate). The urban experience includes the presence of people with non-traditional beliefs, and, to some degree, these "deviant" values may be picked up by other city people. The criminal deviants can affect the urban citizen in less innocent ways. Finally, since the urban individual's groups are more dispersed from the local area than the rural person's groups, so may his attention and concern with the locality be less. The central thrust of the research is that personality effects of urbanism per se are essentially non-existent; the effects on attitudes and values are present -- in a non-traditional direction -- but modest.

CITY AND SUBURB

An important aspect of the metropolitan experience involves location within the metropolis. Center-city versus suburb is the distinction which is usually made. However, there are critical conceptual difficulties in employing this distinction for social psychological purposes. For one, the definition of suburb is usually a political one: a suburb is a district outside the city limits of the largest city of the metropolis. These lines -- usually arbitrary, often historical accidents or gerrymanderings (e.g., Los Angeles) -- do have serious consequences for society and are justifiably the concern of political scientists (and, by those consequences, of sociologists). However, it is doubtful that living one or the other side of a town marker has important psychological repercussions. Yet, the research which exists, small as it is, depends on this distinction.

The second conceptual problem with employing this distinction is that we may be simply mystifying a commonplace in urban sociology: neighborhood differences. Cities are divisible into sections with distinguishable populations -- Blacks, Jews, Italians, young singles, families with children, poor, nouveau riche, alcoholics, etc. -- and with accompanying housing and physical appearance. The general tendency in America -- and increasingly elsewhere -- is for the socioeconomic and ethnic rank of neighborhoods to increase with distance from the central business district, though there are a great number of exceptions to this pattern. Accompanying the higher class level and the better physical surroundings, one can expect less social

and personal disorganization, more happiness, trust and friendship, less crime (other than white-collar crime) and more liberal attitudes. This heterogeneity among neighborhoods applies to suburbia as well, for there are blue-collar suburbs, Black suburbs, singles suburbs, etc. In short, there may be very little sociologically interesting about city-suburb contrasts that are not also present in neighborhood contrasts within cities.

To make the suburban question a more sociologically meaningful one would require redefining it, perhaps in the following way: How is the nature of the metropolitan experience affected by residence at greater or lesser distances from city centers, all else equal? Even so, most of our data remains based on political lines. (One argument that city-suburb differences vary by size of metropolitan area [Schnore, 1972] is probably based on just such an artifact of boundary lines.)

The third problem is that people sort themselves out in terms of neighborhoods. They choose which places to live on the basis of the kind of people who are there, the life-style, the facilities, in sum, on whether the experience will suit them. This is particularly true about city and suburb (Bell, 1959; Fava, 1959; Zelan, 1968; Zuiches and Fuguitt, 1971).¹⁹ It therefore becomes quite difficult

¹⁹To clarify this statement with a previous one: Residence moves are made largely for housing reasons; social, life-style reasons are secondary, but exist. Where a person finds his new home can be more affected by the population or social climate than whether he moves.

to attribute inter-neighborhood differences to the nature of the areas rather than the nature of the people who choose those areas. (One rare study which could do that, Berger [1960] -- because the subjects were moved en masse to suburbia by their company -- concluded that there was no significant changes due to suburban residence.)

All this is to caution the reader about the following discussion.

ELEMENTS OF THE SUBURBAN EXPERIENCE

Characteristics of Suburban Individuals

The stereotypic pattern of suburbs being white and wealthy is generally true, though younger and smaller cities show this pattern less than do older, larger ones (Schnore, 1972; see Zimmer paper).²⁰ This class distinction is relatively large and accounts for most city-suburb differences.

Suburbs are also more likely to have families, while cities contain a disproportionate number of younger and older singles and of the childless (see, e.g., Hawley and Zimmer, 1971).

²⁰Historically, and in many places around the world, this pattern was and is reversed -- the wealthy gathered in the city center. Efficiencies in transport made it possible for the well-to-do to have their access to facilities and to spacious lands. In either case, the poor received the residue.

Suburbs are probably also more homogeneous in the sense that, within a given physical distance of his home, the average suburbanite is less likely to encounter different types of people than is the average city dweller.

The Physical Context

Distance from city center usually means lower population density and less noise, traffic, pollution and crowds. It also usually implies more housing space. Whether these elements have important social psychological consequences is doubtful or unknown, but the market prices for these commodities certainly imply that people are happier with them than without them.

"Facilities" are at a relative premium in suburbs (Hawley and Zimmer, 1970). However, as the center of gravity of the population and of the wealth moves out, it appears that facilities (stores, meeting halls, amusement complexes) are doing the same, perhaps eventually reversing the pattern. (Similarly with government services, as city centers starve and suburbs grow.)

The Social Context: The Individual's Groups

The thrust of most research is that there really are not major differences in the social lives of urban and suburban people once account is taken of characteristics of the individuals, the recency of their move, and the age of the suburb. We have already noted the demographic differences in the populations. Recency of move is critical because suburbs are composed to a large degree by recent immigrants.

The act of moving itself may have effects. More importantly, people move for certain goals. In most cases, those goals, be they an extra bedroom or an all-white neighborhood, are achieved, and thus the move is social psychologically positive. Finally, new suburbs may have an esprit which will fade over time.

City and suburban residents, who are otherwise similar, have probably the same total degree of personal involvement. For suburbanites, though, it includes more local contact -- neighboring, community civic groups, the immediate family -- and less contact with other relatives and former friends (Tallman and Morgner, 1970; Fava, 1959; Tomeh, 1964).

The Social Context: Strangers

The people immediately around the suburbanite are less likely to be strange or to be strangers than is the case for the city-dweller, but the differences are not great. One can speculate, however, that political identification as a small, separate entity may increase the "sense of community" for suburbanites.

A critical variable is distance. Given the automobile, it can be of little significance for the adult who is able to drive to facilities and other neighborhoods (though Hawley and Zimmer [1970] show that it decreases church attendance). The major impact is probably on relatively immobile children and car-less housewives, such that city ones can

more easily encounter strangers and diversity than suburban ones (see the Foley paper).²¹

Crime

The average crime rate is lower in the suburb than in the city (cf. Table 5), but increasing at a more rapid rate.

EFFECTS OF THE SUBURBAN EXPERIENCE

Two points must be understood regarding the following comments, in addition to the cautions advanced earlier: (a) little quantitative research has accumulated which would permit confident generalizations about city-suburb comparisons; and (b) the better qualitative work (e.g., Berger, 1960; Gans, 1967; Willmott, 1963) generally implies that the effects are negligible.

²¹Second-generation suburbanites, who would be better subjects for comparative study, are rarely studied. One analysis of survey data (Zelan, 1968) found no major differences in intellectual attitudes between suburban and center city-raised college students. (It did show that, in a sample of graduate students, those who were raised in a suburb, were married and relatively uninterested in intellectual cultural entertainment preferred suburban life over those who differed in these characteristics.)

Personality

Popular imagery suggests both that a respite from the maddening crowd is available in suburbia, and that a neuroticism is engendered by the suburban rat-race. Given the lack of research, the best conclusion is that there are probably no substantial effects on stress or tension. For example, British studies comparing residents of new towns with those of old city boroughs generally fail to find differences in psychosomatic or psychiatric symptoms attributable to the environment (Pahl, 1967: 125-127).

Neither can much be generalized about forms of alienation. Feelings of social isolation tend to be greater among those just separated by long distance from kin and friends, but compensated for among many by involvement in local circles. One recent survey of neighborhoods in Los Angeles (Seeman et al., 1971) found few social psychological differences among them.

Satisfaction and happiness, at least about their town, is likely to be greater among new suburbanites than among city-dwellers both because of greater affluence and because their move permitted them in most cases to achieve certain desires -- space, land, a life-style, quiet, etc. Whether second-generation suburbanites are more satisfied than their otherwise similar city counterparts is uncertain.

Modes of Interaction

One element of suburban imagery is that of perhaps overly-sociable kaffee-klatsching. To a certain extent, this may be true. With

somewhat greater mutual compatibility than in most city areas and with the greater importance of the neighborhood, a larger proportion of the suburbanite's local interactions may be close and personal than in the city. However, hard data is difficult to come by, and the Los Angeles study (Seeman et al., 1971) reports little evidence to support the proposition.

Values and Beliefs

It used to be thought that the suburban move Republicanized people, but that tends to be dismissed now. Perhaps, the new affluence which permitted the suburban move conservatizes, but there is little reason to conclude that suburban residence per se affects values. Suburbanites are likely to be liberal on social issues (though a recent study showed this was not so with regard to race -- Campbell, 1971), but that is largely attributable to class and ethnic differences.

Attitudes Toward the Community

In spite of the greater importance of the locality, suburban residents -- once social class is accounted for -- are probably less involved politically in their communities than are city-dwellers, though exceptions to this pattern no doubt exist in cases of community threat (e.g., busing) and for new towns. This relatively lower interest in politics, we speculate, is due to the apparent triviality or invisibility of suburban government in metropolitan areas dominated by single, large cities.

Summary

An apt conclusion about the suburban experience -- as best we know of it -- is provided by Herbert Gans in his almost definitive study, The Levittowners (1967, pp. 288-289):

The findings on changes and their sources suggest that the distinction between urban and suburban ways of living postulated by the critics (and by some sociologists as well) is more imaginary than real. Few changes can be traced to the suburban qualities of Levittown, and the sources that did cause change, like the house, the population mix, and newness, are not distinctively suburban. Moreover, when one looks at similar populations in city and suburb, their ways of life are remarkably alike. For example, when suburbs are compared to the large urban residential areas beyond the downtown and inner districts, culture and social structure are virtually the same among people of similar age and class. Young lower middle class families in these areas live much like their peers in the suburbs, but quite unlike older, upper middle class ones, in either urban or suburban neighborhoods.

The crucial difference between cities and suburbs, then is that they are often home for different kinds of people. If one is to understand their behavior, these differences are much more important than whether they

reside inside or outside the city limits. Inner-city residential areas are home to the rich, the poor, and the nonwhite, as well as the unmarried and the childless middle class. Their ways of life differ from those of suburbanites and people in the outer city, but because they are not young working or lower or upper middle class families. If populations and residential areas were described by age and class characteristics, and by racial, ethnic, and religious ones, our understanding of human settlements would be much improved. Using such concepts as 'urban' and 'suburban' as causal variables adds little, on the other hand, except for ecological and demographic analyses of communities as a whole and for studies of political behavior.

COMMENTS

The bulk of this report has dealt with what the metropolitan experience was thought to be and is not. We should state what the metropolitan experience is. It is, first and foremost, plural. Depending on the social characteristics of the individual, it is the experience of affluence or poverty; of being black, Italian or Jewish; of being young, or old; of being a professional or a laborer. Beyond that, there is a crude sort of commonality of the following sort. The metropolitan experience (relative to the non-metropolitan one)

is noisy and somewhat dirty. It involves a wide range of alternative opportunities, in terms of people, places and things. It means some isolation from the neighborhood, but involvement in translocal communities of interest. These communities are large and vital and they touch other vibrant subcultures, both in conflict and in trade. In this milieu, new, exciting and sometimes frightening events and ideas occur, for it is the vortex of change.

Before we take this description too seriously, we should reconsider Gans' statement about city/suburban differences, for they also express his non-ecological position on urban/rural differences: that, by and large, the correlation of size of place with social behavior is due to the composition of the populations which inhabit those places rather than to their spatial features.

The truth is that we lack adequate research to confirm Gans', or Wirth's, or our position. What is needed are comprehensive studies which place individuals within their meaningful social circles and then systematically explore the impact of urbanism on the structure and functioning of those personal worlds.

To the extent to which we can rely on the existing empirical data, it does support Gans' view, with certain important qualifications. That is, in the spectrum of meaningful life experiences, dimensions of personality and styles of interpersonal relationships, there are very few urban-rural differences which can be attributed to place of residence, and even those few are of modest size. This is our major conclusion.

However, those few differences deserve some attention.

Thus, one of the consequences of urbanism is spatial dispersion of personal networks. Perhaps due to the lack of an alternative, a rural person's neighbors are his friends and relatives (or vice-versa). In the city, these important associates are dispersed and neighbors relatively ignored. In suburbia, neighbors are rediscovered perhaps because (a) the distances are now too great for extended ties, and/or (b) the neighbors are more compatible.

Another feature of population concentration is the popular preference for less dense areas, combined with a desire to be near the social and economic opportunities of the metropolis. This implies a continuing push for suburbanization.

The facilities and opportunities of the metropolis are generated by size and their ready availability is an intrinsic element of the urban experience.

Granting that population composition is the primary causal variable, there remains a critical question for Gans' analysis: Why do the populations of city and country differ in consistent ways, historically and cross-culturally? It is the intrinsic features of urbanism per se -- of population aggregation -- which attract and retain certain types, repel and lose others. Population size means major and diverse economies, with consequent effects on social class (H. Gans, personal communication). Aggregation leads to the services and opportunities of the city which, depending on the individual, do or do not compensate for the physical context. And, more importantly, urbanism provides the opportunity to be among

similar people -- an opportunity more precious and dependent on the city, the more unique the individual. (For examples: the "Middle American" of media fame can probably find a suitable community of interest across the entire range of physical community sizes. However, an ethnic Italian-American or Jewish-American would usually be an outlander away from his metropolitan home. Similarly, an artist, intellectual or chess fiend would have great difficulty supporting his interests away from a sizable number of like-minded people, away from a major city.) In short, it is population size which makes the composition of urban places disproportionately one of groups outside the American mainstream.

A number of these groups are deviants of a serious and harmful sort: heroin addicts, organized criminals, skid row residents, etc. Others are deviants in approved ways: ethnic or religious minorities, artists, scholars, scientists, etc. Yet others have an ambiguous position: life-style experimenters, ethnic-culture militants, etc. The existence of all these groups (and their contacts with each other) means that the city is the site of cultural innovation of various sorts: pop art and the methadone black market; new fashions and the systematic burglary of school buildings, and so on. These inventions start among small urban groups, spread to other urban people, and then to the nation. Donald Cook stated it this way in an article entitled, "Cultural innovation and disaster in the American city," (1963:87): "...[T]oday's city is seen at once as the source of the most important values of our culture, and, at the same time, as the

source of its most characteristic and pressing problems...[T]he same basic structural conditions may in fact be responsible for both outcomes."

One of the ouths from what Cook calls a dilemma has been the search for an optimum city size -- one which would maximize facilities, services, innovation at a minimum of congestion, dirt and crime. The issue of optimal city size has been rarely tackled by sociologists (which is not surprising given the rarity of any comparative studies). However, Otis Dudley Duncan (1957) examined the distribution of various public goods across community sizes and concluded that no such simple optimum could be found, for it depended on the good to be maximized. Political scientist Robert Dahl (1967) used some of Duncan's data in his argument that the optimal city size, particularly for achieving a viable participatory democracy, was in the 50,000 to 200,000 range. Some data examined by this author (Fischer, 1972a: especially Ch. 7) imply that residence in the very largest metropolises may have a quite small but real disquieting or alienating effect.

The policy problems with seeking sociologically optimal city sizes include not only that mentioned by Duncan, deciding what value to optimize, but also the measure of good one uses (average returns, minimum standards, modal levels, etc.). Take an example used by Dahl: cultural institutions. Statistics show that the optimal size for achieving minimum standards and per capita use of cultural items (libraries, museums) peaks at a city size level well below that of our largest cities. In that sense, the lower size is optimal for

maintaining the highest average institutional use. This ignores, however, that peaks in cultural attainments come disproportionately in (and may require) large metropolises. Perhaps, this is one area where one might wish to optimize the chances for greatness (e.g., the Museum of Modern Art in New York) rather than the average rate.

A similar issue, put more broadly, is whether that which optimizes the average return to the average American may not minimize the return to the non-average American. (E.g., in the optimal community, there may be enough books, delicatessens and youth facilities for the average citizen, but will there be enough for the scholars, Jews and teen-agers?)

The problems of optimizing social variables introduces the broader policy issues. We can speculate as to the sociological and psychological effects of redistributing the population in the direction of smaller cities. We will assume that the economic factors remain constant. This is a precarious presumption, for individual and national income may well depend on the present hierarchy of city sizes. Also, it is a critical assumption, because most urban/rural, city/suburb differences are a function of class. But if smaller cities were the rule, with the present proportional distributions of class, occupational and life-cycle population characteristics, what might we expect to be different?

Not very much.

What might change, modestly, is the following: If more people could, without economic cost, move to smaller cities and more suburban

areas, more people would be pleased with their communities. In that sense, redistribution would be consonant with the popular will. It is unlikely that the national average of happiness with other aspects of life would change. For the average person, the networks of people important to him would be more constricted spatially and he may take a little more interest in his neighborhood and local town. The crime rate is likely to be slightly lower, as is the rate of non-criminal deviance.

On the other hand, the number of special services and institutions would probably be reduced somewhat. So would the size and vitality of minority subcultures. Non-criminal forms of innovation -- social, cultural and political -- would also be likely to become less frequent. In that way, social change, desirable and un-, would probably slow down.

More direct, fundamental, impacts on individual personality and personal relationships are unlikely.

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