



Abandoned Communities: The Malignant Social Consequences of Modern Technology on Communities

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Abstract

This paper explores the effects of the automobile, television, and air conditioning on community life. It emphasizes how strongly we have become attached to the technologies without actually apprehending the way those technologies are destroying community life and making social life difficult. The study provides a brief exploration of community theory and an analysis of the process of community "de-development" through a combination of technologies and explores the impact of the technologies on communities as a whole, as well as, the families and individuals within them.

Introduction

In the South, we still find porches. Porches which once had people on them, but now they have empty rocking chairs. The chairs are relics of bygone communities. Oh people "live" in the houses and interact somewhat, but the very life has been sucked out of the communities. This is a tragedy beyond what words can convey because while the life has been sucked out of communities, the life has also been sucked out of families as well. Ultimately, we humans shall receive no sustenance from them. The communities die and their members are absorbed into new structures. The new structures are no longer autonomous; they are primarily organized to provide energy for larger structures. They have been transformed from autonomous active social organizations to primarily residential and laboring units for the larger society. These reservoirs of labor are fed, clothed, sheltered, and nurtured from outside. Food, clothing, shelter, and therapies are generated from without the communities. The communities no longer generate their

rules, nor do they actively maintain the norms. When norms are broken, the infractions are reported to agencies of the greater social order. These agencies of the greater social order are responsible for exacting compliance with the rules of law. The informal rules of morality are less important than the rules of law because communities no longer generate the rules of morality and the rules that are generated are generated by those without the practical experiences of those within the "communities." Etzioni asserts that communities have lost their moral voices. In his view, "our society is suffering from a severe case of deficient we-ness and the values only communities can properly uphold; restoring communities and their moral voice is what our current conditions require" (Etzioni, 1993:26). Etzioni is correct in his observation that communities no longer have moral voices, or any voices at all. He is also correct in his observation that "if we care about attaining a higher level of moral conduct than we now experience, we must be ready to express our moral sense, raise our moral voice a decibel or two" (Etzioni, 1993:36). But Etzioni is unclear about what makes a moral voice of a community possible. He is unclear about what is required to make a community and what factors are actually making community life impossible. It is not sufficient to insist on a moral voice, many others (for example, Jerry Falwell, 1992) have made impassioned pleas to return to morality. The key question is whether or not it is possible to return to morality when the present conditions have led to a lack of morality. Obviously, it is not simply an act of will that will return the moral voice of communities. What is necessary is an understanding of the mechanisms of community life. Such understanding will reveal the problems and suggest solutions.

How did this abandonment of communities happen? Why doesn't someone do something to change this deplorable situation? Subsequently, I shall describe how communities lost their liveliness, but for now it is necessary to say a few words about why people do nothing to change the situations.

We have been sold a bill of goods about progress. We think that progress will always better our lives. We have also associated changes in technology with progress and consequently, we have associated changes in technology with improvements in the quality of our lives. We have gone along with technological changes that have been harmful to our families, our communities, and us.

There are at least three technological developments that we must take note of because they have had deleterious and malignant effects on our communities and the quality of our lives as human beings. I'll admit that these technologies have also brought with them certain benefits, but if we weigh the benefits versus the costs, we will find that the benefits are small relative to the enormous costs we have consented to in the name of progress. The three malignant technologies are the automobile, air conditioning, and television. All three of these technologies have histories beginning early in the twentieth century, but each one came into their own in the 1960s. Let us see how these technologies have impacted our lives. Before examining these technologies, let us review an important theory of community. We do this so that we may assess the impact of these technologies on residential communities. It is necessary to engage in a thought experiment with communities to see how they operate.

The Definition of Community

Community in its everyday sense is primarily a category that has a number of divergent meanings associated with it. A community can be a small autonomous group, which would be close to the meaning of the term society as defined in this paper. It could be a large subordinate group such as an ethnic group confined to a ghetto. It could also refer to a sprawling suburban neighborhood with few of the characteristics of a community as

it is viewed here. Thus, a community, in its everyday sense, need not be an autonomous group with solidarity. Nevertheless, some "communities" are social organizations, i.e., there are some things that are referred to as "communities" that are subsystems of societies. There are also some communities that are very small but are isolated from other communities and therefore function as societies.

There is a problem with making society the central theoretical concern in sociology. It is a problem that results from a convention of Germanic origins polarizing "social" reality into two fundamental forms: "community" and "society." In this way "society" is a category meaning an impersonal and formal organization pursuing its assigned purposes with a marked concern for efficient operation, and "community" is a category describing a relatively small group with informal ties among its members. This conception of "community" coincides with the conception of a reality I refer to as a polity and the conception of "society" as an impersonal and formal organization coincides with the conception of social reality as a polity. A polity should not be viewed as a type of social reality at all because it is structured and functions on the basis of a different principle from that of a community or society.

I have chosen to refer to this form of organization as a polity because it is the type of organization used in governmental activities; it is a usage that coincides with the Latin term *politia* and the Greek term *politeia*. A polity is organized hierarchically on the principle of authority, i.e., the lowest level of the hierarchy lacking all authority and the highest level being the source of all authority. It is an organization designed for a specific purpose, controlled by its progenitors who authorized its generation, and concerned only with attaining the purpose or purposes for which it was designed.

The origins of such an organization are political, not social. Therefore, the generic term should be polity, not society. Polity is the central theoretical object for a political science, not sociology. In this way both society and polity have a theoretical content that is only isomorphic, not identical, with the empirically observed phenomena captured in the conventional categories "community" and "society." For the reasons given here and for those that are developed in the body of this paper, I believe the distinction between community and society conventionally used by sociologists is inadequate, confusing, and theoretically unfounded. It will not be used in this paper.

Therefore, community will have the technical meaning of the term developed herein and above. When the term is used in some other way or when its meaning is ambiguous, it will be enclosed in quotation marks, viz., "community." A community can be viewed as a special kind of society and we can define it as a specific form of that generic reality society. I define society as an autonomous group with solidarity, cohesion, or togetherness. The technical definition for the term, community, is an autonomous face-to-face group with solidarity, cohesion, or togetherness. If we view community in this way, it is clear that the primary mechanism of society must also apply to community. In this way, the term community would be limited to a very specific form of society. That specific form of society turns out to be society's most primitive form; all other forms of society derive from it.

A Theory of Community

The theory of community used in this study is derived from Durkheim's theory of community developed in his study of *The Division of Labor in Society* (Durkheim, 1997). For Durkheim community is identical with society at an early point in its development. In his view, society is a moral reality: it is morally superior to the individual and provides the

individual with direction and focus. Because society initially is a single moral community, Durkheim's theory of mechanical solidarity is his theory of community.

A Durkheimian theory of community can be summarized in the following six ideas:

- (1) The members of a community are involved in regular and frequent face-to-face interaction with one another. In the course of the interactions a collective understanding of what is in the world and what should be done with those things is built up (developed). This collective understanding is referred to as a collective conscience. The development of this collective understanding or collective conscience is critical to the development and maintenance of community. In a way, the community is able to speak to its members. To do this, the community generates rules for behavior that align the behavior of the individual with the expected behavior of the group. Therefore, the actions performed by the members of a community must reflect the imperatives of the collective conscience of that community. A community is able to exist because its members are able to act and interact together as members of a community. The collective conscience binds the individuals into a collective whole, i.e., a community. As such, the community is a moral reality and the collective conscience is expressed through the continuous actions and statements of its members.
- (2) As a moral reality, a community binds its members into a group that acts through the medium of a collective conscience. The conscience constrains the behavior of its members to comply with the imperatives of the group of which they are parts. Experiences are preserved in things that represent the experiences, feelings, and sentiments of the members of the community acting together. The experiences are preserved in the things and representations of things reflecting the experiences of the group. The experiences of the individual members are integrated into the collective experiences of the group through the interaction of group members. In that way the things that are used to manipulate the world, the feelings, and the sentiments for these things are direct indicators of the contents of the collective representations of the group's experiences. The collective conscience is composed of these collective experiences and is therefore the sum total of the collective representations (the "things" representing collective experience and feelings).
- (3) A community is possible only because of the existence of these representations of collective experiences and the collective feelings. Conscience means the direct perception of the objects of the external world from the alignment of individual perception with the perception of the group, i.e., the group constrains the perception of the individuals. Such perception is seen as possible only in group life. The existence of a conscience demonstrates the commitment of individuals to a common set of moral imperatives and a set of understandings about what exists in the external world. That is why Durkheim refers to community as a society with mechanical solidarity.
- (4) A collective conscience is composed of collective representations. Collective representations are the vehicles through which a collective perceives itself and the medium of social relations. Social relations are only possible through collective representations. And collective representations are only possible because of shared experiences individuals have as members of a group. Social relations among individuals are perceived through collective representations. Relations among individuals that are not mediated through collective representations are by definition not social. Without collective representations,

there can be no communication between individuals with respect to objects of experience, since the objects of experience are perceptible only through media of collective sentiments.

- (5) Collective representations are based on a set of common experiences that Durkheim refers to as sentiments. These experiences and the representations of the experiences are possible only through the existence of a language. A language is the physical organization of collective representations and perceptions of collective experience.
- (6) The collective conscience is not perceived as the creator of social relations, but rather the medium through which social relations are possible. The collective conscience reflects the relations among individuals. Therefore, social relations are created through the development of a collective conscience; the collective conscience is then the instrument of social relationships. Collective representations are created and maintained through regular face-to-face interaction; such interaction is essential for the development of community. A failure to maintain regular intimate interaction, i.e., a failure to share experiences and feelings, will cause the extinction of collective representations. When the collective representations disappear, the collective conscience declines and the community is subject to demise. Thus, if face-to-face interaction is not possible, the community dissolves because it cannot act. Schutz describes this well. He observes that

By cutting off the community of space and time . . . the field within which the other's expressions manifest themselves and are open to interpretation has been narrowed. The other's personality is no longer accessible as a unit; it has been broken down into pieces. There is no longer the total experience of the beloved person, his gestures, his way of walking and of speaking, of listening and of doing things . . . (Schutz, 1970:300-301).

Using Durkheim's theory of community we can see that if something intervenes in the maintenance of face-to-face interaction, it will cause a decline in community. It is the assumption of this researcher that various forms of technology interrupt the face-to-face interaction of certain communities and destroy them. That which was a community is transformed into a structure that has the primary function of storing and restoring the energy for the larger system. The automobile, air conditioning, and television are particularly devastating to face-to-face interaction in communities. Therefore, it is hypothesized that with the increased use of such technologies, communities have to find other ways of maintaining what Durkheim calls moral solidarity. These new ways of maintaining solidarity may not maintain community organization.

Engaged and Focused Interaction

The result of the invasion of the automobile in residential communities is to make individual members autonomous, i.e., free them from others in the communities. Families are still able to exert some control, but the communities no longer have a voice in the behavior of their members; "community" members no longer share a common knowledge of the world. The interaction among individuals and in relation to community affairs is now much less frequent and intense than before the automobile. The automobile severs the arena of interaction. Face-to-face interactions within residential communities become less frequent and more focused or restricted. In fact, interactions both within and without residential communities become more formal and more restricted. It becomes physically more difficult to take part in face-to-face interactions. This contrasts tremendously with what might be called **engaged interaction**, i.e., open

interaction involving whole persons in ongoing face-to-face relationships. In engaged interaction, the face-to-face relations are frequent, intense, and global. Relations within the communities involve engaged interactions and therefore are face-to-face. In general, where social solidarity is strong the interactions are engaged; the interactions are frequent and intense (i.e., they persist over a long period of time). **Focused or restricted** interaction is very specialized; it is flaccid and usually requires only specific information and behavior. Focused interactions are usually brief encounters constrained by formal parameters. In fact, interactions both within and without the residential communities become more focused and more restricted. Physically it becomes more difficult to be involved with face-to-face interactions.

The Automobile

Old communities involved a lot of walking. Children walked to school, and elders walked downtown for the mail and a cup of coffee. Most people weren't automobile dependent, and that made talking to neighbors easy. There was usable civic space everywhere. Sidewalks and front porches connected families. Public squares, parks with benches, libraries, dance halls, churches, and community centers gave people places to meet. Old communities organized around reunions of all kinds—class reunions, ban reunions, club and family reunions (Pipher: 1999:87).

In early communities, people had to walk almost everywhere. In fact, if we go far enough back, we will find that people walked everywhere. But walking has an important consequence. When one comes upon another, one comes face to face with the other. So, with walking there are a lot more possibilities of face-to-face interaction. And in addition, people talk, they touch, they laugh, they smile, they shout, they tap and punch, etc. In short, people get to know one another. People wave and usually see and know who is coming toward their homes from a great distance. Everyone knows everyone else and this knowledge is continuously being added to and updated. This knowledge of one another extends over the generations in these walking communities and people know intimate details of the lives of all in their families and communities.

There is another important consequence of walking; one tends to walk out of necessity. So when one can get along without walking, one stays at home. One sits outside and interacts with the community in which one grows up.

The automobile changed a lot of that. And what the automobile did not change, air conditioning and television changed. With the automobile we can go wherever we wish without interacting face to face with anyone. We can go for miles without really having to acknowledge the personhood of anyone. Instead of walking down the street or road and greeting all persons encountered, one now drives past them. It may not be necessary to interact with anyone until you have traveled for 10 or 20 miles.

This means that most of the people one encounters now are either not known or hardly known. It also means that the "community" that one lives in today is now filled with strangers and acquaintances. Instead of knowing all of our neighbors as persons, we now know only one or two of them. It also means that the family is essentially cut off from other members of an extended family. Extended families are the hardest hit by this new trend of residential living. Extended families are dispersed throughout a large area, making extended family ties less likely.

Without close-knit extended families and communities, the function of caring for children has become much more difficult. Instead of having a whole community to raise a child you now have a single set of parents taking care of a child, and when the parents need someone else to care for the child, they turn to strangers. Even if they turn to relatives, when they need help, they usually seek help far away from the place they live. Usually it is near where the parents of the child work.

Over time residential communities have evolved that are dependent on automobiles almost completely. The businesses (banks, grocery stores, drug stores, bakeries, dress shops, hat shops, etc.) that were once located within walking distance and run by people we knew are now located far away from where we live. Usually located a few miles away and usually run by strangers.

The devastation has been much greater within ethnic and African American residential areas. In these areas a combination of automobiles and trucks have zapped the life of many of these communities that were located near the commercial and industrial centers. Trucks and automobiles made it possible, and in many cases, necessary to locate commercial and industrial activities in areas far away from the residential areas of the old commercial and industrial centers. Of course the old centers could not easily accommodate the number of automobiles necessary for profitable business. This meant that work moved from these communities and the work force either had to become mobile or die. Mobility meant shopping and playing in areas far away from the established residential areas. It also made it possible, for many who could afford it, to move to the outlying areas. They still commuted for some things such as hair processing and church, but for the most part they took part in the flight to the suburban areas away from their ethnic and racial neighborhoods.

All of this has occurred as a response to the introduction of the automobile. Now, I am not railing against the automobile, but I just want to point out how the automobile has affected the way we live. It has made living in residential **communities** a thing of the past and it has made our families much more isolated than they have ever been. It has also had a number of other devastating effects. Generally after rent or mortgage payments, the highest bill that people must pay is the automobile. This has often made it necessary, not just desirable, for both parents to work to help pay for the automobile and other necessities created by the automobile, such as child care, higher grocery and food costs, higher clothing costs (more frequent changes in clothing and more cleaning of clothing outside of the home), etc. This means that for large portions of time, children are left alone unsupervised. Essentially they must raise themselves. They often form their own "communities" (gangs or cliques) to help them take care of themselves. But most important of all, they are left to their own resources to get necessary things done such as eating and relating to others. They may stay in their own houses and not interact with others, which means that many important lessons in civility and social responsibility are lost. The many occasions when such lessons (community rituals and ceremonies) are taught are also lost. This whole process is reinforced by two other recent technologies: air conditioning and television.

Air Conditioning

The next piece of technology that has been devastating to the social life of communities is air conditioning. It used to be that people could not live in their houses when it was hot and they could not live out of doors when it was cold. When it was hot, people lived on their porches or in their yards under shade trees and when it was cold they gathered

around the stove and lived the highly interactive life that they lived on porches and under the shade of trees when it was hot.

When people sat on porches or in their yards under the shade of trees they would engage in story telling, news swapping, and gossip. They would tell stories about their families and about people in the community. People who no longer were among the living, lived in the collective memory of the people. They would also pass on the history of their groups. As they talked, people would walk nearby. Often they would walk right up to the house to pass the time of day. Or if you were working, they might hail you. Frequently they would help with the work. Often times you could see people walking from a long distance away and most people in the community could be recognized by their walks from a great distance. It was of considerable banter and discussion when no one could recognize the walk of a passer-by.

The social interaction of the porch, the yard, and those gathered around the stove allowed the younger generation to get to know the older. It also permitted the older generation to teach the younger. It often provided the basis of respect and hero worship. The values and beliefs of the older generation were transmitted undiluted to the younger generation. And there was a bonding through the collective conscience that was generated. Proper manners, demeanor, and decorum were continuously monitored. Indeed, each generation learned to appreciate the values, beliefs, and norms of the preceding generations.

Often many chores were shared while the family and friends sat around and grew together through talk. They would shell beans and peas and prepare other foodstuffs. They would sew, knit, or spin yarn. Sometimes they would prepare meals and share food under the shade of trees. And if someone (friend, relative, or stranger) came by, they were welcome to share whatever meal was available; they also often shared in the work that was being done. Each community and each family shared a common experience.

Often times people walking by would stop and talk or children would stop by and play. All of this impromptu interaction provides opportunities for members of a residential community to know one another and to bond into a community with SHARED values and experiences. And within this community, everyone had status and purpose. From the grocer, the butcher, the mailman, the preacher, and the town idiot to the farmer, the worker, the housekeeper, and child, everyone one had worth and value. Everyone knew everyone else, everyone appreciated what everyone else did, and the community was renewed on a daily basis. As people went about their work, they could usually stop and visit and then go on with their work. For many jobs, the visiting was a part of the work. Air conditioning has changed all that.

The automobile destroyed much of this community life, but air conditioning has contributed its fair share to its demise. While automobiles withdrew the interaction of individuals with one another and made neighborhoods and community businesses things of the past, air conditioning withdrew families from open community interaction into closed families in households.

"Domestic air conditioning meant that traditional architectural features --wide eaves, deep porches, thick walls, high ceilings, attics, and cross ventilation--were no longer needed to promote natural cooling. Also irrelevant was siting or landscaping a house that maximized summer shade and breezes, since mechanical equipment was able to maintain perfect indoor conditions independent of design" (How Air Conditioning Changed America).

This meant that many activities that were previously done out of doors and together were now done inside of the house and alone. Families were now cut off from

community life, and coupled with the effects of the automobile; the community was doomed to disappear. The effect of each of these inventions accentuates the effects of the others.

In his history of air conditioning, Mike Pauken (1999) observes how air conditioning was responsible for major demographic shifts after World War II, and how air conditioning made the South and the West desirable places to live. What he failed to observe is how air conditioning changed a whole way of life throughout the world. He also observes how suburban development after World War II utilized the availability of air conditioning.

"As a result of air conditioning, the growth of the suburbs after World War II was dominated by single-story houses with low-pitched roof lines, large plate glass windows that were sealed shut, ceilings that were 8 ft (2.4 m) high, and porches that were more ornamental than functional" (Pauken, 1999:40).

In the south prior to World War II and for a good period afterward, the boom in air conditioning did not have much of an effect on the design of houses. Perhaps communities could have been sustained if air conditioning was developed without the concomitant development of the automobile, but together they pose a formidable obstacle to community life. Even alone air conditioning would weaken community life. Again, as in the case with the automobile, we see that a piece of technology that has provided so many good things has also been detrimental to community life. Air conditioning has not been as disastrous as the automobile, but combined with the automobile, it has been devastating. Nevertheless, we can now see why rocking chairs sit empty on porches as empty, silent witnesses of a once vibrant community life and spirit.

Television

What must people do because they watch television? Television not only furthers the process of community deterioration, but also accelerates and deepens it. Television works on the family and forces it to be atomized. It invades the family with a number of issues that make it difficult for families to maintain rituals and contribute to community life. It is, of course, necessary to watch television inside rather than outside. Therefore, there is less chance for interaction with others in the community.

Many families own two or more televisions, which means that members of families will be watching television separately. This aspect of television breaks up family rituals and isolates individuals. Opportunities to work with children disappear as children disappear into their rooms. But even when sitting together to watch television the etiquette of television watching enforces separation rather than togetherness. One must watch television quietly without disturbing others.

There are other bad effects of television. Instead of the family meal together, an occasion of bonding and values affirmation, families take meals separately; which makes meals a ritual of withdrawal and functionally just a nutritional requirement. The bonding that may come from sharing prayers and the reading of scripture is gone. Through prayer the family is bound to a larger community of believers at each mealtime. It is a ritual that is traditionally shared by families throughout the community. However, as television eats into the vitals of family life, this bonding with family and community disappears. The family meal can also be an opportunity for family members to experience the tremendous power of the parents as the parents lead the family in prayer and discussion. Many problems of the day can be dealt with, and while all of them cannot be resolved at the table, they are shared and everyone participates in the lives of one another.

Instead of reading and telling stories, the family watches television. Much of the interactive activities that were done together in families and communities are now replaced by television. Family history used to be shared while families sat together and relaxed together. Now families separate themselves into their own separate rooms and watch television pretty much in isolation and freedom from other members of the family.

Television has also had the effect of making many collective activities unnecessary. Children play with their neighborhood friends less frequently because they have to watch "important" television shows. It is no longer necessary to attend ceremonies. Many watch television rather than going to church or attending church or community activities.

One of the more devastating aspects of television watching is the fact that parents use it to baby-sit and take care of their children. The result, as Marie Winn observes, is that parents and children can coexist "without establishing those rules and limitations that parents once had to impose on children simply for survival's sake" (Winn, 1984:45).

It is possible that the effects of television by itself could probably be overcome. However, as with air conditioning, it is clear that television in combination with the automobile and air conditioning has been devastating to community and family life. As community rituals have disappeared the ability to watch television and certain adult content has become an important rite of passage; a rite of passage that is not celebrated by a community, but is enjoyed by a solitary individual. The experience with the automobile has been similar. The child becomes an adult by getting his license and being able to drive alone. Again, it is a rite of passage that is not celebrated by community, but is enjoyed alone by a solitary individual. Rites of passage like communion and graduation are still present, but they have less significance. You can watch graduation on television and the mysterious experience of communion means little in relation to all the fantastic events that occur there as well. The experience with air conditioning is also similar. The family celebrates many events itself without community involvement. Birthdays are important. Holidays are also important, but these events are not necessarily community events.

Conclusions about Technology and Communities

There are a number of important observations that can be made about the malignant social effects of technology on communities. There are also numerous observations that can be made about the nature of communities. We have seen that living communities require face-to-face interaction, involvement, and participation of community members. This is required for communities to be maintained. When the interaction declines, communities become anemic and eventually die. Technologies have a tremendous impact on community life. They have probably always had that impact, but now their impact is so noticeable and so detrimental that it is difficult to ignore.

The Impact of Automobiles

We have seen that the impact of automobiles on the life of communities has been most detrimental. The main effects of the automobile on communities have been:

1. The atomization and isolation of individuals. By forcing individuals to walk less the individuals have interacted much less with others in the community. This has been so much so that individuals have been insulated from interaction with others. The result is that we do not know others as persons, but we know them only in a restricted and formal way. We no longer know what they value nor do

we care, and they don't know or care about what we value. We no longer share the values of our community.

2. The institutions are no longer attached to communities, but reflect the interests of those outside the community. Community businesses, churches and religious organizations, social services, etc. are now often outside of the community. The institutions that are there in the community represent interests outside of the community. Businesses represent large corporations, churches represent larger religious bodies, social services are provided by huge bureaucracies, and work places are provided by multinational corporations.
3. The community has shifted from a social structure that is basically egalitarian and self-directed to a social structure that is directed by institutions outside of the community. This makes it difficult for members of the "community" to interact with others about their common interests, to be involved in decisions about their common welfare, and to participate in the process of assessing and deciding what is best to do. All these decisions are made outside of the community and the families and individuals are forced to withdraw more and more from community life. This means that the community no longer has a voice in the affairs of its members.
4. Interactions among community members is restricted, focused, and limited. Engaged interaction is less frequent and much less intense than before the automobile. The result is that there is no longer a common world among "community" members.
5. The "community" that is left is primarily a reservoir of energy (labor) for institutions outside the "community."
6. New "communities" developed where families and individuals were unknown to one another. People living right next door were unknown or known only as the people next door. They are not persons.
7. Because interaction is infrequent and of short duration (visitation among community members is limited), individuals and families are even more isolated.

The Impact of Air Conditioning

Air conditioning by itself may not have been very detrimental, but combined with the effects of the automobile its effects have been devastating. The main effect has been the isolation of families. Families were removed from their communities and isolated in their houses. This movement reinforced the isolation that had already developed with the automobile. The isolation of families destroyed community interaction, which in turn made it difficult for communities to generate or pass on community values and experiences. This led to an isolation and insulation of the older generation from the younger generation. The experiences of the older generation were not a part of the experiences of the younger generation and the experiences of one family were not shared with other families. The families were disconnected from one another and interactions among them were less frequent and of brief duration.

The Effects of Television

The main effects of television are in what it does to interaction and not what is being shown. Family interaction and rituals are interrupted. Meals are shared less frequently and when meals are shared (that is, when they are eaten together at a table, the television is frequently also a part of the meal. The effect of the ritual of eating together

is greatly diminished. Mealtime is a major way families share values, experiences, and events (Bellah, et al., 1985). It is a major vehicle for maintenance of the collective conscience of the family. Interruption of meals diminishes the ability of families to transfer values and history. Television requires that its watchers are passive rather than interactive and if there is only one television in the house the interaction that occurs may often be conflictual rather than cooperative. The result is that household members are isolated within their own homes. Television also reinforces the isolation of household members from the outside world that automobiles and air conditioning spawns; it is a major source of entertainment, news, and information that is external to the family and community. This further isolates family members from the values and experiences of their own groups. Children play with their friends less, however, they may watch television together. This emphasizes the deleterious effect of television because as indicated previously, watching television is a passive experience. If more than one television is available within a household, it is clear that it further reinforces isolation.

Conclusions about the Nature of Communities

We have examined the effects of technology on intact communities. What conclusions must we draw about communities from this examination of the effects of technology on them?

Communities require regular face-to-face interaction. Without interaction on a regular basis community life cannot be maintained. The experience with automobiles illustrates how face-to-face interaction is especially important. When automobiles are used, community face-to-face engaged interaction declines. When they are used extensively, engaged interaction declines precipitously; interaction is less frequent and less intense. The character of the interaction changes too; it is brief and more restricted and focused. In a real sense, the interactions become superficial. Community life depends on face-to-face, engaged interaction.

Communities are open to its members; it involves sharing feelings, experiences, activities, and resources. In that way the feelings, experiences, activities, and resources become part of the collective memory of the community. There are no secrets within communities. There are no secret feelings, no secret behavior or activities, no secret experiences, and no secret food or other resources. Experiences and feelings are shown, exposed, and made accessible to others; behavior and activities are open to scrutiny; and food and other resources are shared. The lives of all members are transparent to all. It is in this way that communities have a voice in the lives of its members. When problems occur for individuals they are immediately seen as problems for the community. Strictly speaking, there are no individual (private problems). Mary Pipher (1999) described Margaret Mead's view of what an ideal community would be like:

Margaret Mead defined an ideal community as one that has a place for every human gift. An ideal community would somehow keep the best of the old ways and add the best of the new. We would have a mixture of races, generations, and viewpoints. We could enjoy the intellectual and cultural stimulation of cities and the safety of friendly neighborhoods. We'd have privacy and potluck dinners, freedom and civic responsibility. All the adults would take responsibility to help all children. We would have connection without clannishness, accountability without autocratic control. The Ideal community would support individual growth and development and foster loyalty and commitment to the common good (Pipher, 1999:89).

I have demonstrated how automobiles undercut community life by insulating the community member from regular interaction with other community members. This has the effect of providing feelings, experiences, and resources that are withheld from the community; the "individual" life of the community member is not shared with the other

members of the community. When automobile travel becomes extensive, the insulation and isolation involves almost everyone and a community life no longer exists. Air conditioning accentuates this pattern. Families are isolated from one another and interaction and sharing becomes less. Television compounds the effect.

I am sure that there are many other observations that can be made about the effects of the automobile, air conditioning, and television. I am also certain that other technological innovations have had a heavy impact on community life, but I have outlined some of the more obvious effects. I also have provided a rationale for being concerned about the effects of technology on our communities. I am not arguing that we should rid ourselves of these innovations. I feel strongly that we must be more innovative in bringing about more human-made mechanisms to supply what natural mechanisms provided before these innovations came on the scene.

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