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# Different Strokes from Different Folks: Community Ties and Social Support<sup>1</sup>

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Community ties with friends and relatives are a principal means by which people and households get supportive resources. Quantitative and qualitative data from the second East York study are used to evaluate six potential explanations of why different types of ties provide different kinds of supportive resources: tie strength, contact, group processes, kinship, network members' characteristics, and similarities and dissimilarities between network members in such characteristics. Most relationships provide specialized support. The kinds of support provided are related more to characteristics of the relationship than to characteristics of the network members themselves. Strong ties provide emotional aid, small services, and companionship. Parents and adult children exchange financial aid, emotional aid, large services, and small services. Physically accessible ties provide services. Women provide emotional aid. Friends, neighbors, and siblings make up about half of all supportive relationships. The ensemble of network members supplies stable and adaptive support.

## EXPLAINING THE SOCIAL PRODUCTION OF SOCIAL SUPPORT

The conditions under which members of a community help each other has worried humanity ever since Cain first raised the matter (Gen. 4:9). This is because the *social support* that community members provide is a princi-

<sup>1</sup> This is a condensed and revised version of Wellman and Wortley (1989b). We thank the following: Susan Gonzalez Baker, Vicente Espinoza, Kristina Makkay, Clayton Mosher, Cyndi Rottenberg, and Susan Sim, for their assistance in the analysis; Karen Campbell, Bonnie Erickson, Bernard Farber, Claude Fischer, Nancy Howell, Charles Jones, Peter Marsden, Judith Merrill, John Mogeey, Endre Sik, Stanley Wasserman, and especially Bev Wellman, for their advice; and the National Health Development and National Welfare Grants programs of Health and Welfare Canada, the Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada, the Institute for Urban and Regional Development (University of California, Berkeley), and the University of Toronto's Centre for Urban and Community Studies, Programme in Gerontology, and McLuhan Programme in Culture and Technology, for their support. Requests for reprints should be sent to Barry Wellman, Centre for Urban and Community Studies, University of Toronto, Toronto, Ontario, Canada M5S 1A1.

pal way by which people and households get resources, along with *market exchanges* (as purchases, barter, or informal exchanges), *institutional distributions* (by the state or other bureaucracies as citizenship rights, organizational benefits, or charitable aid), and *coercive appropriations* (by interpersonal or institutional bullies).

*Community ties* with friends and relatives provide social support that transcends narrow reciprocity. They make up much of the social capital people use to deal with daily life, seize opportunities, and reduce uncertainties (Kadushin 1981). They underpin the informal arrangements crucial for a household's survival, expansion, and reproduction (Pahl 1984). Hence, they are both a product and a cause of role relationships.

Yet not all community ties are supportive, and not all types of ties provide similar kinds of support. A "personal community network," a person's set of active community ties, is usually socially diverse, spatially dispersed, and sparsely knit (for reviews, see Wellman [1988, 1990]). Its ties vary in characteristics and in the kinds of support they provide. Until now, community (and kinship) analysts have concentrated on documenting the persistence, composition, and structure of these networks in order to show that community has not been lost in contemporary societies. They have paid less attention to evaluating how characteristics of community ties and networks affect access to the supportive resources that flow through them.

Studies of social support, the only other research area to pay much attention to these matters, have concentrated on the health-promoting consequences of personal community networks and neglected the causes of social support. Support researchers have often seen social support as a unidimensional construct and rarely extended the analytic chain backward to study why certain ties are supportive (among the many reviews are House, Umberson, and Landis [1988]; O'Reilly [1988]; and Lin and Ensel [1989]).

The diverse explanations that social scientists, philosophers, and biologists have proposed for the provision of social support include the familiarity of frequent contact, social pressure from peers, altruism toward intimates, preferential selection of kin, and the greater empathy of women.<sup>2</sup> Their debates have involved a fundamental sociological issue of the extent to which relational, social structural, or personal characteristics affect social behavior.

To address this issue here, our research draws on the work of community, kinship, social network, and social support analysts. We evaluate

<sup>2</sup> For example, Simmel ([1908] 1971); Kropotkin ([1902] 1955); Sorokin (1950); Polanyi (1957); Titmuss (1970); Hamilton (1971); MacIntyre (1981); Cook (1982); Ignatieff (1984); Bellah et al. (1985); Cheal (1988).

six proposed explanations for the interpersonal provision of support. Although each of the six plausibly explains the provision of support when analyzed by itself, it is unlikely that each explanation will be significant when analyzed in combination with the others. We use quantitative and qualitative data from the second East York study to extend the analysis of the baseline first East York study (Wellman 1979). We examine several types of support, provide detailed information about the characteristics of network members and their relationships, and compare the supportiveness of strong and weaker relationships.

Two of the six proposed explanations examined here are relational. They argue that, because relationships convey social support, relational characteristics should best explain the provision of support. They contend that supportive ties are a function of either (1) the *strength* of the relationship or (2) the *access* that two persons have to each other.

Another explanation is (3) more *structural*, derived from the core sociological belief that collective phenomena affect interpersonal behavior. It suggests that a group's capacity to communicate, coordinate, and control should increase the flow of support to its members. Another proposed explanation, (4) *kinship*, combines structural and cultural elements in its stress on densely knit relationships and normative obligations among kin.

By contrast, (5) *positional resource* explanations are based more on the characteristics and resources possessed by network members themselves than on the characteristics of relationships. They suggest that those who occupy social positions that control many resources (such as money or empathy) may provide more support. Finally, (6) *similarity* and *dissimilarity* explanations combine positional and relational elements. One form of this explanation argues that ties between similar persons may be more empathetic and, hence, more conducive to supportive exchanges, while another argues that ties to *dissimilar* persons provide wider access to diverse resources.

We consider the usefulness of these six proposed explanations for understanding the provision of five kinds of social support: emotional aid, small services, large services, financial aid, and companionship. We ask whether different types of community ties are likely to provide different kinds of social support. The types of ties that provide one kind of support may well differ from those that provide other kinds. For example, kin may provide large services, while neighbors may provide small services.

One additional concern is with the extent to which different types of relationships provide broad or specialized support. If social support is specialized, people may have to spend much time and effort shopping among their network members for aid. Are some types of ties narrowly focused in the kinds of supportive resources they provide while other

types provide a broad range of resources? This matter of relational breadth links social support research to “community question” research into how large-scale divisions of labor have fostered specialized or broadly based community relationships.

Our research addresses broader aspects of the community question (Wellman and Leighton 1979). What crucially affects the interpersonal provision of resources: the characteristics of ties, their social context, or the characteristics of network members? Our focus here is on (active) relationships between network members and those at the centers of personal community networks. Other articles examine how the composition and structure of the networks themselves affect the provision of support (Wellman et al. 1987) and the fit between support from household members and from personal community networks (Wellman and Wellman, in press).

### STUDYING TIES IN NETWORKS

#### The Second East York Study

East York is a densely settled residential area with a population of about 100,000, a half-hour trip (by car or subway) from downtown Toronto. Most respondents are British-Canadian, married (with children), and hold regular blue-, pink-, and white-collar jobs (Wellman, Carrington, and Hall 1988*a*). Medical services and many social services are free in Canada, the Canadian government views informal social support as central to maintaining health (Epp 1986), and East York itself has a long tradition of communal aid and active social service agencies. Hence, informal social support is often interwoven with institutionally provided care. Most respondents own their homes, even though mortgage interest is not tax deductible. Such differences between Canadian and American situations suggest that Canadians may rely on their network members somewhat less for health and welfare and somewhat more for purchasing homes.

Our information comes from interviews (lasting 10–15 hours) conducted in 1977–78 with a subsample of 29 of the 845 randomly sampled respondents in the first East York study (Wellman 1979).<sup>3</sup> The respon-

<sup>3</sup> As a check on the representativeness of findings derived from the interview sample, we did as comparable as possible an analysis using the larger data set from the first East York study (845 respondents with 3,930 ties). The survey's findings (Wellman 1979) fitted well with those reported here. The interview sample analyzed here is a random subsample of the survey respondents, stratified on residential mobility. We traced the addresses of 82% of this subsample and interviewed 77% of the chosen respondents. The average characteristics of our respondents are similar to those of the original survey sample and to East Yorkers in general (for details, see Wellman [1982];

dents told us about their relationships with the 344 active members of their egocentric networks. These network members—and their relationships with the respondents—are the units of analysis in this article.

Although we analyze fewer networks than do many community network surveys, we analyze a greater number and variety of ties in each network than most other studies that have looked only at the three to six strongest ties in a network. The respondents' active ties are with 137 socially close intimates and with 207 somewhat less intimate significant persons with whom they are also actively in contact.<sup>4</sup> The median active network has four intimate ties and seven significant ties. Most ties extend beyond the neighborhood to other parts of the 3-million-person metropolitan Toronto area. Most networks are a low-density mixture (mean density = 0.33) of friends and relatives (Wellman et al. 1988a). The active members of a network include only a small fraction of the respondents' 1,500 or so informal ties (Kochen 1989), although they usually include most living relatives up to and including first cousins (Wellman 1990). Thus our study provides information about the moderate to very strong ties that supply Canadians with most social support (Erickson, Radkewycz, and Nosanchuk 1988) and ignores the many weaker ties important for obtaining information and integrating social systems.

### Dimensions of Support

We used oblique promax factor analysis to avoid the inconvenience and unreliability of analyzing the extent to which network members provide 18 specific kinds of support (Wellman and Wortley 1989b). It suggested six distinct factors/dimensions of support supplied by different types of relationships. Five of these dimensions are our principal dependent variables:

1. Emotional aid, provided by 62% of the network members, includes minor emotional aid (provided by 47% of the network members), advice about family problems (39%), and major emotional aid (33%).
2. Small services (61%) include minor services (40%), lending and giv-

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Wellman et al. [1988a]). Quantitative interview data are on two linked Statistical Analysis System (SAS) files, available from the first author. All quotations are from interview transcripts, edited for anonymity and conciseness. The interview text base is available (in ASCII) from the University of Toronto's Centre for Computing in the Humanities. Textual analyses used techniques described in Wellman and Sim (1990).

<sup>4</sup> Intimate network members are those whom respondents "feel are closest to you outside your home." Significant network members are nonintimates identified by respondents as those who "are in touch with [you] in your daily life and who are significant in your life." Intimate and significant network members jointly make up the respondents' sets of active network members.

ing household items (38%), minor household services (35%), and aid in dealing with organizations (10%).

3. Large services (16%) include major household services (i.e., major repairs, regular help with housework [16%]) and major services (i.e., children's day care, long-term health care [7%]).

4. Financial aid (16%) includes small loan and gifts (13%), large loans and gifts (4%), and large loans and gifts specifically for housing (4%).

5. Companionship (59%) includes discussing ideas (47%), doing things together (39%), and participating together in an organization (19%).<sup>5</sup>

Although the dimensions obtained depend partly on the questions asked, they are congruent with other studies of social support (e.g., Barrera 1986). Moreover, the grouping of specific kinds of support into substantively different dimensions has its own interest. We could well have found one global support dimension that would have shown that network members usually provide many kinds of aid (as do most husbands and wives in our sample [Wellman and Wellman, in press]).

Most active network members provide specialized support. Although 87% provide some kind of support, 61% provide fewer than three dimensions out of a maximum of six (see also Wellman with Hiscott 1985; Wellman et al. 1988a). Hence, the support dimensions are only moderately associated with each other, with typical correlations between dimensions of about .20 (Wellman and Wortley 1989b). For example, less than half of the network members (45%) provide both emotional aid and small services.

The support dimensions are dichotomies in our multiple logistic regressions: "yes" (the relationship has provided some kind of support in this factor) or "no" (the relationship has not provided any kind of support in this factor). Thus, relationships that have provided one kind of emotional aid are treated the same as those that have provided many kinds of emotional aid. We use this dichotomous coding for several reasons. It

<sup>5</sup> A sixth dimension, job information (10%), includes job information and job contacts. One variable, information about housing vacancies, did not fall neatly into any of the six dimensions. We have excluded job and housing information from the analysis because of their low occurrence. Granovetter (1982) and Bernard, Shelley, and Killworth (1987) suggest that Americans rely more on weaker ties for information than they do for the five support dimensions analyzed here. These interview data correct the impression left by Wellman (1979) that only a minority of intimate ties are supportive. Those data came from the first East York survey, which asked only short-answer questions about receiving "everyday" and "emergency" aid. The more detailed interviews analyzed here find that the majority of active ties provide at least some kind of support. Moreover, these reports of support are no mere artifacts of respondents' enthusiastically checking questionnaire boxes. Almost all of the interviewed respondents report in detail about the help they have received and the differences it has made in their lives. To find such widespread support, investigators must ask in detail about a variety of aid and allow for a long-term perspective on relationships.

addresses the basic question of support and nonsupport in a relationship (“Does she or doesn’t she help with emotional problems?”). It avoids assumptions that the number of kinds of support in a factor is a continuous, equal interval variable (0–1 kinds of emotional aid does not necessarily equal 1–2 kinds). Moreover, the small range of possible values in these dimensions (0–3 or 0–4) is not suited to the assumptions of ordinary least squares (OLS) regression.<sup>6</sup> (See table 1.)

We organize the next section somewhat unusually to deal with the complexities of juxtaposing five kinds of social support with six potential explanations for their occurrence. We evaluate each explanation in turn by stating its rationale, operationalizing it, and discussing the kinds of support with which it is associated.

## EVALUATING THE SIX POTENTIAL EXPLANATIONS

### Strength

*Rationale.*—Do strong ties provide more support? This question became prominent with Homans’s (1961) assertion that intimate sentiments are associated with supportive interactions.

What are “strong ties”? Recent analyses of “personal relationships” (e.g., Duck 1983; Perlman and Fehr 1987; Blumstein and Kollock 1988) have suggested three related characteristics: (1) a sense of the relationship being intimate and special, with a voluntary investment in the tie and a desire for companionship with the tie partner; (2) an interest in being together as much as possible through interactions in multiple social contexts over a long period; and (3) a sense of mutuality in the relationship, with the partner’s needs known and supported.

Whereas the personal relationship research of psychologists has focused on interpersonal attraction between intimate spouses and lovers, sociologists have focused on nonromantic, voluntary ties with friends and kin. Their argument that such ties are reliable and flexible providers of support resources (Allan 1979; Wiseman 1986; Cheal 1988) fits well with recent studies showing the importance of voluntary ties in community networks (Wellman 1988). It also fits with the contention of network analysts that people with multiple-role relationships should have stronger ties because they have detailed knowledge of each other’s needs and multiple claims on each other’s attention (Verbrugge 1977; Ferrand 1989).

*Operationalization.*—An orthogonal varimax factor analysis of all independent variables showed the empirical association of three character-

<sup>6</sup> Mean substitution was used for missing values in all variables. Alternative analyses excluding missing values did not reveal biases. Analyses using the 18 specific kinds of support instead of the six broader dimensions of support produced similar results.



TABLE 1  
LOGISTIC REGRESSION ON SUPPORT DIMENSIONS

	Unstandardized Coefficient	Standardized Coefficient
Emotional aid:*		
Strength.....	.62	.25
Gender.....	.95	.17
Parent/child .....	1.31	.10
Small services:†		
Access .....	.18	.21
Strength.....	.52	.19
Parent/child .....	1.45	.10
Employment similarity .....	.63	.09
Age similarity .....	-.62	-.09
Couple .....	.80	.09
Organizational .....	-.87	-.08
Large services:‡		
Parent/child .....	1.90	.23
Access .....	.77	.18
Sibling .....	1.00	.13
Financial aid:§		
Parent/child .....	2.16	.29
Employment similarity .....	.77	.10
Companionship:		
Strength.....	.88	.29
Sibling .....	-1.49	-.20
Extended kin .....	-1.76	-.17
Parent/child .....	-1.22	-.11
Group .....	.86	.11
Support breadth:#		
Strength.....	.44	.37
Parent/child .....	.92	.20
Access .....	.05	.15
Extended kin .....	-.59	-.15
Employment similarity .....	.86	.11

NOTE.—Only variables significant at  $P < .05$  are shown.  $N = 334$ .

\* Model  $R = .32$ ; Somer's  $D = .46$ .

† Model  $R = .36$ ; Somer's  $D = .53$ .

‡ Model  $R = .29$ ; Somer's  $D = .35$ .

§ Model  $R = .29$ ; Somer's  $D = .35$ .

|| Model  $R = .41$ ; Somer's  $D = .56$ .

# OLS regression;  $R^2 = .32$ .

istics commonly associated with tie strength (details in Wellman and Wortley 1989b):

1. Respondents believe that the relationship is one of socially close intimacy (40%).<sup>7</sup>

2. Respondents interact with a network member voluntarily (53%) rather than because they are both members of the same social institutions. Note that it is voluntariness and not friendship (vs. kinship, etc.) that loads highly on the strength factor. Although the literature often conflates the two, our respondents do not.

3. Respondents interact in multiple social contexts with a network member (median = three contexts out of the nine studied).<sup>8</sup>

As these three variables have approximately equal factor loadings (Wellman and Wortley 1989b), we combine them into one strength measure. We define a strong tie as one that has at least two of the characteristics of intimacy, voluntariness, and multiplexity.<sup>9</sup>

*Findings.*—Strong ties provide broader support than weaker active ties, significantly more emotional aid, minor services, and companionship (table 1). They may also provide more large services and financial aid, although their differences from weaker active ties are not statistically significant. Thus about one-half (52%) of the strong ties provide more than two dimensions of support compared with only one-quarter (25%) of the weaker, significant relationships.

Respondents appear to get most of their social support—of all kinds—through their small number of strong ties. Although strong ties are a minority of all active ties, they are a majority of active supportive ties—constituting nearly two-thirds of all the active ties that have provided respondents with each dimension of support (table 2). Indeed, 94% of strong ties have provided at least one of these types of support.

The strength of a relationship has the strongest association of all variables with emotional support (table 1). Seventy-two percent of the strong ties provide emotional aid compared with 50% of the weaker, significant ties.

Strong ties also provide significantly more small services (table 1): 71%

<sup>7</sup> Percentages in parentheses refer to the percentage of network members having that characteristic; i.e., 40% of the active network members are intimates.

<sup>8</sup> These interactions took place in private homes, at vacation cottages, in the neighborhood, during informal interest activities, at work, at formal organization activities, by telephone, through the post, or by other means of telecommunication such as CB radio.

<sup>9</sup> To combine counts of contexts with the already dichotomous intimacy and voluntariness variables, we dichotomize the original multiple contexts variable into “low” (0–2 contexts) and “high” (3–9 contexts). We then sum the three variables (dichotomous intimacy, voluntariness, and multiple contexts) to get a strength score between 0 and 3 (mean = 1.6).

# Community Ties and Social Support

TABLE 2  
PERCENTAGE OF SUPPORT GIVEN BY ROLE TYPE

	Emotional Aid	Small Services	Large Services	Financial Aid	Companionship
Parent/child:					
Significant . . . . .	7	5	13	15	2
Strong . . . . .	8	7	11	15	6
Sibling:					
Significant . . . . .	8	7	8	7	7
Strong . . . . .	16	15	20	1	12
Extended kin:					
Significant . . . . .	5	5	0	2	2
Strong . . . . .	2	2	2	2	2
Neighbor:					
Significant . . . . .	8	10	11	2	8
Strong . . . . .	13	14	16	13	15
Friend:					
Significant . . . . .	4	5	4	6	4
Strong . . . . .	20	21	15	9	25
Organizational tie:					
Significant . . . . .	5	5	0	9	10
Strong . . . . .	4	4	0	6	7
Total . . . . .	100	100	100	100	100
All significant ties . . . . .	37	37	36	41	33
All strong ties . . . . .	63	63	64	59	67

NOTE.—*N* = 334.

of the strong ties provide these, compared with 49% of the significant ties. These services range from occasional baby-sitting—a service performed by women—to helping close vacation cottages for the winter—a male service hallowed in Canadian beer commercials. The services provide attentive, low-cost, and flexible aid in dealing with everyday problems. Moreover, the very act of exchanging services cements ties and reassures recipients that network members care about them.

Many strongly tied network members enjoy helping each other. For example, Robina Cook (married secretary, 49, three adult children) points out that a close friend's "idea of relaxing when he comes here is doing things, so he'll be out digging in the garden. I'll say, 'I wish I could get that done.' Next thing, he'll be doing it!"

Strong ties are also more likely to provide companionship (table 1): 71% of the strong ties are companions compared with only 42% of the weaker significant ties. Such companionship reduces loneliness, anxiety, and mortality (Marangoni and Ickes 1989).

For all their helpfulness, strong ties are not synonymous with support-

ive ties. Although feedback processes strengthening supportive relationships do exist (Leighton 1986), some strong ties are not supportive at all, and many are narrowly specialized in their support. Indeed, some respondents avoid burdening network members with requests for support for fear of overstressing ties. This may be the primary reason strong ties are not more likely than others to provide large services. Moreover, not all support is voluntary. Social constraints may deter strong relationships from being supportive and impel some weaker relationships to provide substantial support.

### Contact

*Rationale.*—Whereas tie-strength explanations of support look to degrees of intimacy, frequency-of-contact explanations look to interaction. They argue that the more contact between network members, the more supportive the relationship: frequent contact encourages the provision of support by fostering shared values, increasing mutual awareness of needs and resources, mitigating feelings of loneliness, encouraging reciprocal rounds of support, and facilitating the delivery of aid (Homans 1961; Galaskiewicz 1985).

Community analysts traditionally have thought that the accessibility of neighbors makes them good sources of support. Residential proximity fosters frequent contact, densely knit connections, mutual awareness of problems, and easy delivery of aid. Neighbors—especially neighboring women—provide companionship, child minding, emotional aid, and help with domestic chores.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, our own data show that proximity facilitates relationships: Of the active network members, 23% live within one mile of the respondents. Respondents also have more frequent contact with those network members who live nearby—both face-to-face and by telephone (Wellman et al. 1989). Yet routine contact at work and the widespread use of automobiles and public transit mean that people do not have to live nearby to see each other often.

*Operationalization.*—The supportive effects of frequent contact should operate independently of the strength of relationships (Marsden and Campbell 1984; Mitchell 1987). However, Granovetter's definition of tie strength (1973) links the two, and Homans (1950, 1961) argues that fre-

<sup>10</sup> See the reviews in Bulmer (1986) and Hunter and Riger (1986). The respondents refer to 20% of their active ties as "neighbors." They always use kinship terms to refer to kin living nearby (or kin working with them). However, they often use "neighbor" or "co-worker" to refer to similarly situated nonkin who live nearby or work with them. Hence, "friend" is somewhat of a residual and heterogeneous label applied to network members—intimate or not—who are neither kin, neighbor, nor co-worker (see also Fischer 1982*b*).

quent contact develops strong *and* supportive ties. Recent research bolsters Homans's suggestion that it is frequent contact with strong ties—and not with all ties—that fosters support (e.g., Rook 1984; Israel and Antonucci 1987).

However, our data do not show an association between the frequency of face-to-face contact and the strength of a relationship ( $r = .05$ ). Respondents rarely see most active network members more than twice per week. Most of their frequent contact is with weaker ties whom they encounter—less voluntarily—in workplaces, neighborhoods, and kinship groups. By contrast, the frequency of telephone contact is significantly correlated with the strength of a relationship ( $r = .13$ ). Telephone contact is usually more of a voluntary act than is face-to-face contact, at least on the part of the caller (Wellman et al. 1989).

Our analysis of contact started with three measures of contact between a respondent and a network member: (1) frequency of face-to-face contact (median = 24 days per year); (2) residential proximity (median = 10 miles); and (3) frequency of telephone contact (median = 12 days per year).<sup>11</sup>

Orthogonal varimax factor analysis revealed that frequency of face-to-face contact (.84) and residential proximity (.73) load highly on a physical access factor (Wellman and Wortley 1989*b*). Because these two variables have similar loadings, we standardize each and sum them into a combined physical access measure. Telephone contact remains as a separate variable. It does not load as highly on the access factor (.52) as the other contact variables, and it loads almost as highly on the strength factor (.43).

*Findings.*—Physical access promotes small and large services, which in turn increase the breadth of support (table 1). However, physical access is not related to other dimensions of support because people are able to provide some forms of companionship, emotional aid, and financial aid over large distances.

Physical access makes it easier for people to deliver services even when their relationships are not strong. For example, almost all active neighbors exchange small services. Thus Wendy Sherwin (married

<sup>11</sup> We use residential proximity instead of distance to create a positive association with the provision of support. These measures are logged because the effects of contact and distance decrease with increasing magnitude. Another possible contact variable, the length of time (in years) that the network members have known each other, is negatively correlated with the provision of companionship ( $r = -.19$ ) and small services ( $r = -.22$ ). However, length of contact is positively related to kinship and negatively related to friendship and organizational ties. When kinship and friendship are taken into account in the multiple regressions, the length of network members' contact is not related to the supportiveness of their ties.

homemaker, 33, two children) takes daily turns with her neighbor in baby-sitting and driving children to activities. Their husbands help each other with home repairs and improvements. In another case, Grace Creston (widowed purchasing clerk, 61, two children) has relied on a neighboring couple for large and small services since she suffered a chronic hip injury. "She does my heavy shopping for me every week, and he changes light bulbs and things like that. Once I was in terrible pain, and I just phoned and asked Pat to take me to the doctor. I knew I could count on her."

Neighbors often do not really like each other despite their frequent exchanges of services. They help each other much like (paid) co-workers do, out of convenience. As Jane Hazlitt (married clothing-store owner, 59, no children) confides: "We are very good neighbors, but as far as being close friends, well, I wouldn't go that far."

Although neighbors are the most likely people to provide services, other people who see the respondents frequently also provide many small services. For example, a brother-in-law of Patricia Fairgray (widowed secretary, 63, three adult children) often helps her although he lives in another part of Toronto. Although the proportion of relationships that have provided small services decreases with distance, 65% of those network members who live within 300 miles have provided such services to the respondents compared with only 36% of those living farther away. Up until a separation of 300 miles, frequent access is more important than sheer residential distance: the proportion of network members providing large and small services does not decline with increasing distance as long as they live within a day's drive of 300 miles (Wellman and Wortley 1989*b*; Wellman et al. 1989).

Despite the significant correlation of the frequency of telephone contact with small services ( $r = .11$ ), large services ( $r = .11$ ), emotional aid ( $r = .13$ ), and companionship ( $r = .16$ ), multivariate analyses show that telephone contact is not significantly related to any dimension of support when other tie characteristics are taken into account. Frequent telephone contact is a corollary of the strength of ties and the frequency of face-to-face contact. Rather than determining whether relations will be supportive, it assists the operation of relations that are already supportive. Thus Jane Hazlett says, "I'd only have to pick up the telephone and she [her best friend] would be there for me. I know she feels the same way."

### Interactions in Group Milieus

*Rationale.*—Are relations within groups more supportive than relations between couples or those that are essentially between two persons

(dyadic ties)? A group's interconnections could mobilize larger flows of supportive resources to its members, and participation in formal organizations can foster common interests and supportive interactions (e.g., Wireman 1984; Erickson et al. 1988). Yet researchers have found only modest evidence that a group's structure affects supportive relations (e.g., Lin, Dean, and Ensel 1986; Wellman et al. 1987).

Married respondents often interact with other married persons as couples. Such married couples may be so preoccupied with their own domestic concerns as to give little attention to network members (Perlman and Duck 1987; Milardo 1988). Moreover, married persons usually belong to sparsely knit networks because the kin and friends of each spouse are rarely interconnected (Wellman et al. 1988b).

*Operationalization.*—All ties were coded as to whether their interactions usually take place in groups (38%), as couples (25%), or as dyads (37%). Predominant interaction in either a group or a couple each became a dummy variable. Other variables show whether the ties are between co-workers (8%) or fellow members of voluntary organizations (5%).

*Findings.*—Different types of milieus are weakly and narrowly related to the provision of support (table 1). Interaction in groups is positively associated with companionship (table 1). Most significant (i.e., active, but not strong) relationships with active network members take place in groups (58%) rather than in couples or dyads. Group members are often companions who discuss ideas at work, participate in organizational activities, or get together with kinfolk. For example, Helen Troy (single bank clerk, 53, no children) reports that her "choir is quite a social group in itself. We meet and have little parties. We're friends as well as singers. We all seem to have a bond."

Some group leaders work hard to foster companionship. For example, Andy Capp (married mechanic, 45, three adult children) is an active "kinkeeper" (Rosenthal 1985). "We might throw a party here, gathering all of the clan in now and then just to make sure we get them all together, and everybody remembers that we are a family."

Couples exchange more small services than do those who interact in groups or dyads (table 1). Relationships between couples are specialized in their inward, domestic focus. Often they are ties between households at similar stages in the life course: young marrieds or families with children. These exchanges are more manifestations of mutual support among those with similar domestic interests than of group processes: "It's just little things back and forth. When we go on holidays, they have our key to the house and keep an eye on it. Likewise, when they go away" (Martha Ellis, married homemaker, 45, two children).

By contrast, relationships based on joint memberships in formal or-

ganizations are significantly less apt to provide small services: only 45% do so. Such relationships often have a narrow organizational focus that does not extend to domestic or community concerns.<sup>12</sup>

## Kinship

*Rationale.*—There are cultural, structural pressures and perhaps biological reasons for kin to be supportive. The densely knit structure of most kinship ties intersects with the norm that “blood is thicker than water” to encourage supportive relations among kin (Schneider 1984). Such norms idealize the promotion of family welfare, encourage kin to share resources, urge them to give other kin privileged access to these resources, and cherish long-term reciprocity.

Such views of kinship contrast with the personal relationship theorists’ views of strong ties as sparsely knit, voluntary relations requiring constant maintenance and go against contemporary concerns about the decline of kinship in Western societies. Yet not all kinfolk have active ties. Do kinship relations depend on intimacy to be supportive, or does the supportiveness of kin operate independently of tie strength or other relational factors?

Most North Americans and British distinguish sharply between kinfolk and friends and distinguish among types of kin (Allan 1979; Farber 1981; Willmott 1987; Wellman 1990). Echoing biologists’ interest in kinship selection, people feel they should have strong ties with their immediate kin—parents, adult children, siblings, and in-laws—and that bonds between parents and adult children should be especially supportive. They distinguish further between the mutual concern of parents and adult children and the mutual interest of siblings. They have lesser expectations for supportive relations with extended kin such as grandparents, uncles, aunts, and cousins.

*Operationalization.*—Through hierarchical cluster analysis, we empirically “discovered” the distinct nature of kinship roles by grouping 20 detailed role types into five broader types with similar patterns of relationship (Wellman and Wortley 1989a). These are (1) parent-adult child ties (9%): parents (in-law) (8%), children (in-law) (1%); (2) sibling ties (22%): sisters (in-law) (11%), brothers (in-law) (11%); (3) extended kin ties (12%): including cousins (4%), aunts and uncles (4%); (4) organizationally

<sup>12</sup> We are missing important information because of our focus on community exchanges. We know only about active ties with co-workers and organization members who are also seen socially. Our support questions omit the kinds of aid workers routinely exchange on the job. We also discovered that many neighboring relationships between women who stay home to care for children are really co-working relationships (Wellman 1985).



based ties (13%): co-workers (8%), fellow members of voluntary formal organizations (5%); and (5) friends (44%): including neighbors (20%). Category (5), friends, is the reference category for the set of dummy variables.

*Findings.*—Not only do kin behave differently from friends, but parents and adult children, siblings, and extended kin, each have distinctive patterns of providing support.

*a) Parent–adult child.*—The parent/child bond is the most supportive of all role types. It is also broadly supportive, usually providing all dimensions of support except companionship (table 1).

Ties between parents and children are so emotionally supportive that they transcend routine feelings of intimacy: 87% of intimate parent/child ties and 81% of such significant ties provide emotional support. Mother-daughter ties are especially supportive. For example, Betty Lancaster (married homemaker, 35, one child) recalls vividly how her mother helped her when she was a teenage drug addict and prostitute. “If there were ever any problem that she had or that I had, we know that the other person is always there. It wouldn’t matter what it was.” Similarly, Martha Ellis says, “I can discuss anything with my mother, and I know that’s as far as it’s going to go. Often through the winter on a Saturday night, if the children aren’t doing anything we’ll just hop over and spend a couple of hours with her. If I needed her to come to stay in an emergency, she’d be here immediately.”

Fathers are almost as emotionally supportive as mothers. Fathers and sons often show their emotional support by doing things rather than by saying things.

As with emotional support, parents and children do not hesitate to provide small services regardless of the strength and accessibility of the tie (table 1). Almost all parents and children with strong ties provide such services (93%), as do 75% of those with weaker ties. Such support is often a cooperative family enterprise with network members providing such services as taking telephone messages, painting, and baby-sitting.

Parents and adult children are also likely to provide large services (table 1). Thus several adult children help their parents with physical work around the house. For example, an adult daughter of Jenny Draper (married retired clerk, 64) cut down trees and cleared the land for her parents’ summer cottage. Dick Johnson (married sales manager, 35, three children) has been helping his mother-in-law for a decade. “I might at one time have preferred to sit and read a book rather than go and dig in her garden. But she’s such a great lady, so it’s flashed in my mind momentarily and I immediately discount it.”

Such help places stress on some relationships. Margaret Baillie (married claims examiner, 43, three children) complains, “My parents expect

their children to look after them. When you say, 'Gee, I look forward to my weekends too,' my mother says, 'Who else am I going to depend on if I can't depend on my kids?' "

Parents are the most likely of all network members to provide financial aid (table 1): 52% of them have given loans or monetary gifts. Despite their small numbers, parents make up 30% of all financially supportive relationships (table 2) and an even larger percentage of those giving sizable aid. Providing money to buy a home or deal with emergencies brings network relations to bear on the cash nexus of exchange. Martha Ellis says that if her mother-in-law "had one dollar left in her purse and I asked for it she would give it to me." Parents are just about the only network members who provide large sums (see also Sussman and Burchinal 1962). For example, the father of Penny Crawford (married part-time sales clerk, 35, three children) quickly gave her airfare to visit her dying father-in-law in Scotland.

Parents (and grandparents) are a key source of aid in buying homes in high-priced Toronto. They provide large cash gifts or low-interest loans. The father and grandmother of Eve Spencer (married homemaker, 31, two children) jointly came to her rescue. "First thing I know my grandmother is on the phone. She had my dad take her to the bank, she got out the money we needed, and my father was here with the cash in his hands."

*b) Siblings.*—Siblings are similar to friends in providing emotional support and small services. They are more likely (20%) than friends—and less likely than parents and children—to provide large services (table 1). Their sizable presence in these networks means that siblings are the largest percentage (28%) of role types providing large services (table 2). For instance, the brother of Douglas Freedman (married, 47, two children) helped to renovate his house. "I called him on the phone and said, 'I need your help, I'm doing aluminum siding. What are you going to be doing this weekend?' He said, 'Fine, I'm on holidays and I'll earmark the weekend for you.' "

*c) Extended kin.*—At the other extreme from parents, extended kin are the least likely of all network members to have provided any dimension of support (table 1). They make up a very small portion of the respondents' supportive active ties (table 2).

Many extended kin are network members because of their position in kinship systems and not because they are supportive or companions. Thus, John Williams (married self-employed tailor, 33, two children) keeps his distance from his kinfolk. "Family are great as long as they are just ties and not strangling. Don't drive it into me that because we're related you've got to come and see me."

*d) Companionship and friendship.*—For all their supportiveness in

other dimensions, immediate kin (48%) are less likely than friends (70%) to be companions. An even lower percentage of the (rarely supportive) extended kin (24%) are companions (table 1). Hence, only 31% of all companions are kin although they make up 42% of all active network members (table 2).<sup>13</sup> Tom Robinson (married printer, 30, no children) expresses a common sentiment. "I don't chum with my relatives. They're strictly out."

Most companions are friends and friendly neighbors (52%, table 2). Without companionship, many friendships would have little reason to exist. Many friends are not densely connected with other network members, and many do not provide any kind of support except companionship. By contrast, many kin have strong ties without being companions. Because kinship can substitute for companionship in maintaining strong ties, kinship ties are available to provide support even when they are involuntarily bound. As Leonard Dobson (married maintenance man, 36, three children) says of his brother: "I feel close to him but I couldn't say why other than that he is my brother. We don't go to places together. We don't go to hockey games or baseball games or anything like that. So I suppose our only tie is that we happen to be brothers."

Thus, although parent-child ties are the rare relations bridging the generation gap, differences in interests often discourage companionship. Diane Cressey (separated actress, 34, two children) says, "I feel close to my mother. But she is a lot older than I am, and her values are different from mine."

### Personal Characteristics

*Rationale.*—Personal characteristics are positional statuses that network members "possess" rather than qualities of their relationships. Characteristics such as wealth, empathy, and experience are resources in their own right, and their possessors may be useful sources of aid. Network members with many such resources may enjoy offering much support, and others may often seek their aid.

People with high socioeconomic status (SES) may experience frequent requests for instrumental support and companionship (see, e.g., Lin and Dumin 1986). As Homans (1950, p. 182) argues, "the higher a man's [*sic*] social rank, the larger will be the number of persons that originate interaction for him." Similarly, Campbell, Marsden, and Hurlbert (1986,

<sup>13</sup> Because friendship served as the reference category for the set of dummy variables for relational type, we do not have  $\beta$  coefficients for it. Its significant association with companionship can be inferred from the consistently negative  $\beta$  coefficients for all kinship types (table 1) and can be observed directly in table 2.

pp. 98–99) point out that “reaching diverse others is not sufficient if none of them is placed highly enough in the social structure to be instrumentally useful.”

Numerous analysts contend that women are more likely than men to provide emotional support: “women express, men repress” (Perlman and Fehr 1987, p. 21; see also Vaux 1985; Cancian 1987; Sherrod 1989; Wright 1989). They suggest that women interact “face-to-face” by exchanging companionship and emotional support while men interact “side by side” by exchanging material aid. Indeed, women are often the principal emotional supporters of men as well as of other women (Sapadin 1988). In addition, women exchange many small services that are “hidden in the household” (Fox 1980).

*Operationalization.*—Our interviews failed to ask respondents about their—or their network members’—possession of such useful resources as free time, wealth, or plumbing skills. Furthermore, the respondents’ lack of information about the SES of many network members limited the usefulness of the measures we did include: (1) *educational level*, years of schooling (median = 12); (2) *employment status*, a dichotomous variable indicating whether the network member currently has paid employment (62% full- or part-time)—most of those without paid employment are full-time homemakers; and (3) *occupational status*, as measured by the Blishen (1967) scale (median = 51).<sup>14</sup> We also asked about the network members’ (4) *gender* (60% women), (5) *marital status* (68% married), and (6) *age*—a crude proxy for experience (median = 45 years).

*Findings.*—Gender is the only personal characteristic directly related to support, with women providing more emotional aid than men (table 1). Mothers and daughters (86%) are the most apt to provide emotional support, followed by sisters (77%). Sisters often complement and sometimes replace mothers as emotional supporters. Lisa Foster (married waitress, 38, three children) counts on her sister. “If I have something I want to talk with her about, I know she is there to listen. When any of my kids get hurt, I get really wound up and I need her to be here.” The supportiveness of sisters-in-law (and the rifts between some sisters) suggest that similar current circumstances may be more important than shared childhoods. Since the death of her husband, Patricia Fairgray (widowed secretary, 63, two adult children) has relied on two of her sisters-in-law for emotional support. “I can share all my thoughts, my worries, everything with Marg.”

Although mothers and daughters are the most likely persons to provide emotional support, sisters and women friends are more numerous in these

<sup>14</sup> The scores of their spouses are substituted when network members are not employed full-time.

networks and have a greater number of emotionally supportive relationships (table 3). Women get much emotional support from intimate women friends and neighbors. Their neighbors are quickly accessible for routine first aid, while their friends help in dealing with large and small problems. For example, Diane Cressey has led a tumultuous life as a separated single parent and part-time actress. Her closest friend is “someone you can talk to when you can’t talk to someone in the house because there’s no husband. You can cry on her shoulder and say what an awful day I have had.”

At times emotional support is unspoken, provided simply by the presence of an intimate. Eve Spencer and her closest friend “sometimes just go for walks around the block. We don’t always talk even. We might just sort of look at the sky together. It’s calm.”

Male respondents exchange less emotional support than do women (Wellman 1985). Because men rarely have women friends, their networks contain few women, and their male network members are less likely than women to provide emotional support (table 3). But men can get emotional support from their mothers and sisters (as well as from their wives). Such support is especially important for coping with marital problems. For example, John Williams depends on his sister to lend a sympathetic ear. “We are able to talk to each other about our more sensitive problems. If I have any family problems, I go to her. It’s a close to the heart relationship.” Sisterhood is powerful—even for brothers.

Some men find substitutes when they do not have a mother or sister available. Jack Aitken (married civil servant, 30, two children) confides in an elderly friend. “I felt I could talk to her about things that I would discuss with my mom. I have told her things sometimes I haven’t even told my own wife. I feel that she protects. She is my idea of a mother.”

TABLE 3  
PERCENTAGE OF TIES PROVIDING EMOTIONAL SUPPORT BY NETWORK MEMBERS’  
GENDER, TIE STRENGTH, AND ROLE TYPE

ROLE TYPE	MALE		FEMALE	
	Strong	Significant	Strong	Significant
Parent/child . . . . .	83 (6)	66 (3)	90 (10)	83 (12)
Sibling . . . . .	58 (19)	56 (16)	85 (26)	62 (13)
Extended kin . . . . .	100 (1)	36 (11)	50 (8)	35 (20)
Friend . . . . .	46 (37)	45 (11)	89 (55)	50 (40)
Organizational . . . . .	50 (10)	46 (13)	80 (5)	42 (12)

NOTE.—*N* = 344. Sample sizes of individual categories are given in parentheses and represent the numbers of all ties in each category (not just those who have provided support).

By contrast, women rarely report looking to any men other than their fathers, brothers, and husbands for emotional support.<sup>15</sup> Penny Crawford echoes the scholarly literature: “I don’t look for emotional aid from men because they are less capable of providing it.” Like most women, she has several supportive women friends.

The SES of the network members does not seem to affect the supportiveness of their relationships.<sup>16</sup> Respondents do not—or cannot—go out of their way to get support from better-educated or better-employed network members. This may be because the networks provide support for domestic situations more than for paid work situations. The age of network members is also not related to the provision of any kind of support.

### Similarities and Dissimilarities

*Rationale.*—Do similarities or dissimilarities in the personal characteristics of people affect the supportiveness of their ties? Similarity analysts point out that similar people tend to flock together in strong friendships (Lazarsfeld and Merton 1954). They argue that network members are likely to have similar characteristics and that their shared interests—based on these similarities—foster empathetic understanding and mutual support (Feld 1982; Marsden 1988).

By contrast, dissimilarity analysts argue that network members who occupy interdependent structural positions will exchange support. Their argument reflects Durkheimian ([1893] 1933) and Simmelian ([1922] 1955) conjectures that relationships that cut across social categories foster solidarity and satisfy mutual needs (Kemper 1972; Blau and Schwartz 1984). Thus the “strength of weak ties” argument contends that weak ties provide better connections to different social milieus because they usually connect socially dissimilar persons (Granovetter 1982). Hence, such bridging ties should provide good access to information and services. A different analysis of dissimilarity suggests that people seek supportive relationships with network members who have more—not just different—resources (see, e.g., Lin and Dumin 1986). A third dissimilarity

<sup>15</sup> Male lovers—not discussed by the respondents—are possible exceptions (Wellman et al. 1988a).

<sup>16</sup> As neither occupational status nor educational level are significantly correlated with any support dimension, we omitted these variables from the final regressions because many respondents did not know much about their network members’ SES and preliminary regressions that included SES variables showed no significant relationships. We had a similar lack of results when we studied the relationship of support to the network members’ social classes, using a scheme derived from Wright’s (1979) categories of control over labor power, capital, and organization.

analysis suggests that more powerful people will command resources from others (Bodemann 1988).

*Operationalization.*—Our measures of similarity compare respondents and network members on the same personal characteristics discussed in the previous section:

1. educational level similarity: the difference between the network member's and the respondent's years of schooling (median difference = two years);

2. employment similarity: coded dichotomously as dissimilar/similar to show whether the network member and respondent both are doing paid work (or both not doing paid work) (58% similar);

3. occupational status similarity: the difference between the network member's and the respondent's Blisshen scores (median difference = six);

4. gender similarity: coded dichotomously to show whether the network member and the respondent are the same gender (71% same gender);

5. age similarity: the difference between the network member's and the respondent's age (median difference = seven years); and

6. marital status similarity: coded dichotomously to show whether the network member and the respondent are both married (or unmarried) or whether one is married and the other is not (62% similar).

*Findings.*—Respondents and network members who are in similar employment situations exchange somewhat more small services and financial aid (table 1). Sixty-five percent of those with similar employment statuses provide small services, and 19% provide companionship compared with 56% and 12% for those with different employment statuses. These associations hold whether both are employed in paid work or neither are employed.

The significance of employment similarity subtly reflects ways in which gender roles shape the exchange of small services and minor financial aid. The lack of statistical significance for gender similarity shows that women and men often give each other such support. But gender intersects with employment status. More men than women are employed in paid work. Although both those network members doing paid work and those not doing such work exchange services, the nature of these services is quite different. Women—especially those who are full-time homemakers (and not doing paid work)—help each other with child care, spousal care, and gender-linked domestic chores. Because homemaking is a lonely, grueling business without institutional support, these network members support each other in their work even when they are not intimate (see also Wellman 1985).

Men provide services more episodically, helping each other to maintain the homes and cars that are economically and symbolically important to

their households. Although the direct relationship is between two men, it is the household that benefits. Indeed, men often provide such services to women friends and relatives living without husbands or adult sons in their households.

Age dissimilarity is also related to the provision of small services. The significant exchange of small services between different generations reflects interdependence. Younger adults provide physical labor to the older generation, while older people provide knowledge and skill to the younger generation. No other form of status similarity or dissimilarity besides employment and age is related to the provision of any dimension of support.

## DISCUSSION

### Different Strokes, Different Folks

Are contemporary communities the densely knit, multiplex networks of the "community saved" argument or the more sparsely knit, segmented networks of the "community liberated" argument? (See, e.g., Wellman and Leighton 1979; Wellman 1988.) Rather than fitting one alternative, most networks fit both. One segment of a network is composed of immediate kin whose relations are densely knit and broadly supportive, while other segments contain friends, neighbors, and workmates whose relations are sparsely knit, companionate, specialized in support, and connected with other social circles. Only in part do these networks reflect the folk adage, "friends are for [expressive] pleasure; relatives are for [instrumental] business" (Manuel Castells, personal communication). Strong friendships as well as immediate kin provide much emotional aid and services, while siblings are often good companions. Yet friends and relatives usually are members of different clusters of relationships within these networks (Wellman et al. 1988*b*). The combination of kith and kin supplies both stable support from ascribed ties with immediate kin and adaptive support from achieved ties with friends, neighbors, co-workers, and other organizational ties.

Different types of ties are unequally represented in the networks. Hence, the availability of support from different types of ties depends on how many such ties are in the networks and on how likely that type of tie is to provide support. Our findings suggest that those scholars analyzing the implications of social support for health and well-being must take into account the varied nature of social support and of those who provide it.

Our data show that only two of the six proposed processes broadly affect support: strong ties and parent-child ties. Each is substantially associated with at least three dimensions of support. Indeed, it is simpler



to consider what they do not do. Strong ties are not significantly associated with providing financial aid or large services. That is the domain of immediate kin. By contrast, parents and children are not likely to be companions. That is the domain of friends, siblings, and organizational members, especially those with strong ties. One other relational phenomenon and one personal characteristic affect specific dimensions of support more narrowly. Physically accessible relations are more likely to provide large and small services, and women are more likely to provide emotional aid.<sup>17</sup>

With the exception of the emotional support substantially provided by women, no personal characteristics of network members are appreciably associated with the provision of any kind of support. Neither are similarities (or dissimilarities) in the personal characteristics of network members nor tendencies to interact in groups, couples, or dyads. Social support is a relational phenomenon. With the partial exception of emotional support, the delivery of support is not based on who you know but on how you know them.

The combination of abundance and tie strength means that strong ties with friends, neighbors, and siblings make up about half of all supportive relationships. Because friends make up a large portion of these networks, their supportiveness is crucial. However, the aid that friends exchange depends on the strength of their relationships. Yet friends who are rarely seen or who live far apart tend to have weaker, less supportive ties. Hence, the respondents also maintain a few accessible ties with neighbors and workmates who provide them with services. Such relationships usually operate dyadically or between couples; only full-time homemakers tend to be in densely knit networks of neighbors.

The extent to which respondents maintain active ties with immediate kin does not depend on the strength or accessibility of the ties as much as other relationships do. Some combination of normative obligations, structural connections, and genetic forces promotes the supportiveness of parents, children, and, to a lesser extent, siblings. Although immediate kin

<sup>17</sup> Our findings complement and extend previous work on the personal community basis of social support. They are largely congruent with our baseline large-survey study (Wellman 1979) that also showed the supportiveness of parent-child and strong ties. They are also congruent with Fischer's (1982) study of the supportiveness of kin and friends, although his research focus precluded an extended discussion of which types of ties provide which kinds of support. Where we have opted here for a detailed, partially qualitative examination of a small sample, Fischer opted for a large-sample survey designed to examine the effects of urban and rural residence on personal community networks. Hence his work focused on how the characteristics of respondents (and their locales) affect the summary characteristics of the networks in which they are involved. Other germane studies include Litwak (1985), Willmott (1987), and Oliver (1988).

make up a small portion of most networks, they are an important and reliable portion of supportive ties. Unlike the support of friends, the availability of support from immediate kin is not conditional on the strength of the relationship. Although support from siblings is linked more to the strength of the tie, the larger number of siblings means that they make up a sizable fraction of the supportive bonds.

Respondents usually see relations between immediate kin in terms of long-term reciprocity. In different sociocultural milieus, such substantial continuing support might create social subordination. But these respondents deal with immediate kin more as secure sources of aid than as negotiations of family authority. By getting much support from immediate kin, they avoid burdening friends or becoming their dependent clients.

It is the nature of the relationships themselves that principally affects the provision of support in these personal community networks. There is no significant evidence of group dynamics: interaction in group contexts does not substantially foster support, and the dearth of aid from the few active extended kin suggests that the supportive power of the kinship system rarely extends beyond a small number of immediate kin. Moreover, the personal characteristics of network members are not directly related to their likelihood of providing support. Most relationships are based on the mutual exchange of intangible or mundane resources, and differences in socioeconomic resources do not play a significant part in their supportiveness. The egalitarian nature of these ties—and the scarcity of patron-client relations—reflects North American material affluence and dependence on large institutions for material well-being.

Gender is the only personal characteristic that is directly associated with support. Yet gender is in many ways relational: it both reflects and determines social relationships. The involvement of women in providing emotional support to women friends and kin of both sexes is a product of their work as domestic relations specialists. Moreover, gender-linked employment statuses affect the kinds of services that network members exchange. Men fix things; women fix relationships and keep households and networks going. Men often repair others' cars and homes and help them deal with bureaucracies. Women often help with homemaking, child care, and health care. The recent attention paid to the lack of male emotional expressiveness has led to the downplaying of male contributions to domestic affairs. Yet the services men and women exchange contribute significant resources to their households' economies, with a value in the tens of thousands of dollars over a decade.

Most respondents realize that the quality of their relationships considerably affects the support that they will get through them. The networks' diversity and moderate density mean that the respondents must manage

and mobilize many specialized ties separately. They are acutely aware of whom they can ask for what kinds of help. Because so much support is related to social closeness, the respondents (and their spouses) put much effort into maintaining strong ties with friends and active ties with immediate kin. At the same time, they set limits. Few respondents want their mother-in-law living next door even though this strong, accessible tie with an immediate female kin meets all statistical criteria for supportiveness.

### Is Toronto the World?<sup>18</sup>

These networks support reproduction, not production. They center primarily on the household, secondarily on the community, and rarely have to do with earning a living. Just as few personal community ties are with co-workers, few work ties extend outside the job.

The networks are important to the routine operations of households, crucial to the management of crises, and sometimes instrumental in helping respondents change their situations. Many provide havens: a sense of belonging and being helped. Many provide bandages; routine emotional aid and small services that help the respondents cope with the stresses and strains of their situations. A sizable minority provide safety nets that lessen the effects of acute crises and chronic difficulties. Several provide social capital to change situations (houses, jobs, spouses) or to change the world (local school board politics, banning unsafe food additives, stopping cruelty to animals).

Although the diverse networks provide diversified support, the networks' segmentation and moderate density hinder the widespread communication of needs and mobilization of activity. Reflecting modern trends in marketing and community, the respondents shop for support at specialized interpersonal boutiques rather than at general stores. While the respondents get all five dimensions of support from somewhere in their networks, they usually get different types of support from different network members. Not only different relationships, but different types of relationships, often provide companionship, emotional aid, services, and financial aid.

The congruence of our findings with other North American and Western European studies suggest that our conclusions may apply beyond Toronto. However, we believe that supportive relations in comfortable First World milieus differ substantially from those in other circumstances. The low importance of the economic and political aspects of social support among these respondents distinguishes their networks from

<sup>18</sup> Vicente Espinoza's comments have contributed substantially to this discussion.

those First, Second, and Third World social systems that are less economically or politically secure. Our respondents are not coping with either shortages in consumer goods or extensive bureaucratic regulation of their domestic affairs. They rely on market exchanges for almost all of their production and much of their consumption. Despite some variation, their institutional benefits such as schooling and medical care are abundantly available as citizenship rights. Hence they do not pay as much attention as do members of central bureaucratic societies to having network ties with persons skilled in making and fixing things (such as in home building) or with strong connections to strategic bureaucratic circles (see Sik 1986; Walder 1986). Because the respondents have no urgent cares about daily survival, they can manage domestic resources with less apprehension than, for example, Latin Americans living on the margins (see Lomnitz 1977; Roberts 1978).

We suspect that important differences between these networks and those in less secure milieus are linked to the insecurities with which households must deal. This desire, in turn, affects the types of supportive resources they mobilize through their networks. Our respondents' main insecurities rarely come from economic stresses. Rather, their insecurities come from physical and emotional stresses in their personal lives and social relations. Hence, they seek social support from network members for emotional problems, homemaking chores, and domestic crises, and they look to markets and institutions to deal with their economic and political problems.

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