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Timothy D. Pippert

Augsburg University, pippert@augzburg.edu

Rachel Zimmer Scheider

Ohio State University - Newark Campus

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“Have you been to Walmart?” Gender and Perceptions of Safety in North Dakota

Boomtowns¹

Timothy Pippert²

Department of Sociology

Augsburg University

pippert@augsb.org.edu

Rachel Zimmer Schneider

Ohio State University – Newark

schneider.831@osu.edu

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² Authors are listed in alphabetical order.

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Boomtowns³

Between 2010 and 2015, North Dakota’s economy was out of sync with the rest of the U.S. As a result of the Bakken oil boom, unemployment registered approximately 1% in northwestern North Dakota while the rest of the country suffered the lingering effects of the Great Recession. As one of the only sharply growing economies during that time, job seekers descended from every state in search of high-paying oilfield jobs. The majority of those job seekers were men, and this study examines how the hypermasculinized environment altered perceptions of safety and security for men and women living in the Bakken.

Introduction

Oil was first discovered in North Dakota in 1951, but the expense of extracting it from the Bakken formation, a layer of shale approximately two miles below the surface, has until recently inhibited drilling activities. While the Bakken oil patch includes portions of Montana, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba, most of the drilling takes place in northwestern North Dakota. Although the region has been the site of sporadic boom and bust cycles since the 1950s, what began in the mid-to-late 2000s amounted to a level of growth more significant in scale and impact than any previous boom. Technological advances in hydraulic fracturing (fracking) and

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horizontal drilling, coupled with several spikes in oil prices, led to an in-migration of workers and a significant escalation of production between 2008 and 2015. Many North Dakotans benefited from the oil boom through increased state revenue, diversification of the farm economy, low unemployment, and expanded business opportunities. However, the agriculturally-based state also experienced incredible social disruption and relative chaos in its communities.

This social disruption was partly due to the fast migration into the area. With almost every other state experiencing a devastating recession, the call of high paying jobs got the nation's attention in 2008, resulting in historic growth throughout the region. This quick and excessive influx of oil workers (and others connected to the boom, such as construction workers) created havoc for the local residents leading to many social disruptions. Additionally, most of the migrants were young, single men or geographic bachelors—men whose families did not accompany them to the Bakken, which severely skewed the gender ratio in the area. Thus, our research focused on how gender intersects with these social disruptions. Do men and women in the Bakken experience the same disruptions? How might gender play a part in how they deal with these disturbances? In other words, how does gender guide the interactions and structure the lives of male and female boomtown residents differently? The feminist lens offers us a viewpoint beyond the myopic – a view that does not consider gender as a central organizing construct. Though numerous themes surfaced when assessing how residents perceived the impact of the boom, the most prominent area dealt with men's and women's feelings of safety and security in their community. This

paper, then, focuses on how men and women “did gender” (West and Zimmerman 1987) in relation to their sense of wellbeing and safety in the Bakken.

The Disruption of Boomtown Communities

Boomtowns are not new to the American landscape. Whereas most attention paid to early boomtowns came from historians, domestic energy booms of the 1970s and 1980s sparked an interest among sociologists. The most interesting outcome of that era’s literature was the debate over the utility of the social disruption model of boomtowns. The social disruption model focused on growth issues from the community perspective, often leading to assumptions that boomtowns faced inevitable crises.

In 1982, *The Pacific Sociological Review* published a critique of the disruption model by Wilkinson, Thompson, Reynolds, and Ostresh, followed by a series of commentaries. Wilkinson et al. (1982) maintained that research commonly cited in support of the model relied on questionable evidence and exaggerated claims of disruption. While acknowledging Wilkinson’s critiques, Albrecht et al. (1982) offered rebuttals arguing that a cautious application of the model is appropriate for framing boomtown research. The research of this era also demonstrated that not all boomtowns experienced the same level of disruption, finding that it was more difficult for rural areas with a lack of infrastructure to absorb the population growth (e.g. Murdock and Leistritz 1979; Rogers 1982; Winter and Morris 1982).

According to Green (1975) and Krannich and Greider (1984), boomtown scholarship of the 1970s and 80s lacked the perception and framing of rapid population growth by local residents. This remains true, in part, but the recent surge in domestic energy production and renewed boomtown scholarship provided an opportunity to assess how host communities may be impacted. For example, Brasier et al. (2011) used the rapid expansion of natural gas exploration and extraction in the Marcellus Shale and Forsyth, Luthra, and Bankston (2007) focused on coastal Louisiana to examine the perceptions of local residents across several communities. In addition, Jacquet and Kay (2014) recently updated the social disruption model/boomtown impact model that allows for its application in the analysis of unconventional boomtowns. They demonstrated that past assumptions of a one-time boom-bust event do not fit current resource booms. For instance, areas such as the Bakken and Marcellus Shale will likely undergo several mini-boom-bust cycles given the fluctuation of prices and their vast reserves.

This resurgence in the sociological literature on boomtowns, what Jacquet and Kay (2014) label a second wave, has revealed compelling and sometimes contradictory findings. For example, research by Brown and colleagues show booms are not always associated with social disruption and they often include positive effects such as local business expansion and long-term involvement and commitment by oilfield workers (Brown, Bankston, and Forsyth 2013). Most of the research that shows little impact, or positive developments in host communities, however, has been located in areas with decades-long relationships between oil and gas companies and

where production takes place either offshore or in close proximity to urban areas (see Forsyth, Luthra and Bankston 2007). Research on western boomtowns tends to provide a stronger argument for at least temporary disruptions (Archbold, Dahle, and Jordan 2014; England and Albrecht 1984; Freudenburg and Jones 1991; Ruddell et al. 2014). While studies with a longer time frame have found that several measures of community well-being tend to rebound in the years after the boom (Brown, Dorius, and Krannich 2005), it has also been argued that the same can be said of some of the presumed positive effects of resource booms. In an examination of western U.S. counties with high levels of oil and natural gas specializations, Haggerty et al. (2014) demonstrated that job creation and economic prosperity for host communities and their residents are often overestimated and these economies do not grow over the long-term as quickly as more diversified areas (also see Douglas and Walker 2016 for an examination of coal mining on local economies).

Our analysis of the literature not only highlights the need to continue the debate concerning the impact on host communities, but also emphasizes how important it is to examine the role gender plays as people experience social disruptions. Research dating back to 1985 in an Oklahoma boomtown described the presence of “roughneck machismo” (Walsh 1985:133) correlating with the heavily male-dominated population. This environment put women on guard and made the “simplest activities threatening” (p. 134). More recent research documented that gender was one of the key statuses that determined residents’ levels of security in boomtowns. O’Connor (2015)

interviewed young adults in Alberta, Canada, and while the sense of risk increased for both men and women, he noted that women regularly spoke of feeling on edge and taking more precautions when out in public compared to men. Furthermore, Filteau scrutinized this heavily masculinized culture (2014; 2015), suggesting that the gendered organizational structure of the oil companies and the workers they hire have a trickle-down effect on oil boom communities and residents. This structure alters the definition of manhood for the male residents, making it more difficult for the male populace to uphold definitions of masculinity that differ from the hyper-masculine prototype. Other forms of masculinity do not disappear but become harder to see (Filteau 2015). This traditional hegemonic masculinity at a structural level greatly influences women's abilities to move freely and without fear. Additionally, research on policing in the Bakken (Archbold et al. 2014) described the existence of a "bachelor culture" (p. 399) reminiscent of the California gold rush that embodied a hegemonic masculine standard of risk taking, excessive alcohol use, financial greed, and sexual conquests.

It should come as no surprise that women experience oil booms in a different way than men. Indeed, feminist theorists have marked that, "...gender is a central organizing principle of social life and that being a male or female affects almost every aspect of one's life" (Fothergill 2004:9). Therefore, when we analyze the social disruption of boomtowns it is imperative that gender is accounted for in these stories. Even if Wilkinson et al. (1982) are correct that social disruption claims may be exaggerated, it is still important to assess if men's and women's

perceptions of unsafe neighborhoods alter how they feel about their communities as well as how they “do gender.” O’Connor (2015) demonstrated that women in boomtowns were more likely to take precautions when in public, so how might boom-related disruptions influence the ways men and women interact with each other in their communities? Are we likely to find support for Filteau’s (2015) claims that men are apt to revert to more traditional modes of masculinity in order to manage this oil boom chaos? These issues are addressed in our paper, drawing on interview data from 101 residents in the Bakken to examine how social disruption is shaped by gender in an oil boomtown.

Methods

Data and Analysis

The literature on natural resource booms reveals that despite a resurgence of interest among sociologists, questions remain as to the social impact on host communities. The Bakken’s remote location and the fact that the recent boom coincided with the “Great Recession” provides an opportunity to further assess the utility of the boomtown disruption model while also expanding the discussion to include how gender informs the way residents perceive and react to disruptions. To address these questions, this paper pulls from two qualitative studies conducted in the Bakken between June 2012 and July 2015. Study 1 assessed how long-term residents and community leaders of Williston (N = 78) characterized the changes to their town as it became engulfed in the boom. Interviews were conducted during five research trips to the area: three in 2012, and the

remaining in 2014 and 2015. Study 2 took place between June 2013 and July 2013 and focused on the lived experiences of women (N = 23) in and around the Bakken oilfields. More specifically, Study 2 paid particular attention to the link between women's public and personal lives and how the boom affected them at both levels.

Both researchers determined independently that the use of semi-structured interviews would be optimal in capturing the breadth of changes from the perspective of area residents. Interviews were designed as a series of question-based conversations, lasting between 30 and 90 minutes. The questions addressed crime, safety in the community, health care, civic involvement, education, cost of living, and benefits associated with the boom. After each research trip to the area, interviews were transcribed and HyperRESEARCH (Study 1) and NVIVO (Study 2) were used to aid in analysis. Both studies used a grounded theory approach (Glaser 1992) to allow themes to emerge from the interview data. Each researcher independently identified relevant themes to the research through open coding and then employed the respective software to organize and further classify the themes, resulting in a focused set of codes (Lofland and Lofland 1995).

When the collaborative process began, co-authors compared the respective themes from their studies, identifying the main commonality as the way in which the boom had invited the navigation and redefinition of gender norms within each of the initial themes. Qualitative analysis software was then used by each researcher to organize and classify the themes in order

to identify how gendered language was being used to describe changes within Bakken communities. This led to a further refinement of themes, identifying perceptions of safety as the main focus of this research. One might not be surprised that women's safety was the main theme in Study 2 (23 women), but the inclusion of Study 1 (42 men and 36 women) reinforced the finding that concerns about personal safety were voiced by both men and women. In addition, the combined analysis of both studies allowed for an examination of how men and women performed gender when they reacted to the disruptions in the Bakken. Even though respondents were drawn from a large geographic area, the combined analysis demonstrated consistency of experiences across the region. As will be argued in the paper, residents of Dickinson, Minot, Watford City, and Williston expressed similar concerns for safety while also describing parallel reactions to those threats.

Sample

The sample included 101 residents of northwestern North Dakota. Study 1 included in-depth interviews with 78 respondents (42 men and 36 women). Respondents were eligible to participate in the study if their permanent residences were Williston, North Dakota or the immediate area since at least 2007. As in-migration of workers began to ramp up significantly in 2008, 2007 was set for a baseline so respondents could provide insight about living in the area prior to the most pronounced disruptions in the community. This amounted to a five-year baseline for respondents interviewed during the first three research trips to the area in 2012 and

subsequently longer periods of residency for respondents interviewed in 2014 and 2015. There were four exceptions to using 2007 as a cutoff. These respondents had moved to Williston after 2010, but held key positions in the community and were able to address how the institutions they led responded to the rapidly expanding population. Even with setting 2007 as the baseline, the goal of securing a sample of long-term residents and community leaders was achieved. Sixty-three of the 78 respondents (80%) had lived in Williston or the outlying area for more than 10 years prior to their interview and the mean length of residency for the entire sample was over 31 years. Given the focus on long-term residents of the area as well as the inclusion of individuals holding prominent positions in the community, the respondents tended to be highly educated (55% held bachelor's degrees or higher), almost exclusively white (98%) and older than the overall community. Age of respondents ranged from 18 to 87 with a mean of 52.1 years. The mean age of the respondents proved to be advantageous as the majority were able to compare the most recent changes to the community to the boom-bust cycle in the late 1970s and early 1980s.

The majority of Study 1 respondents were secured through snowball sampling, but interviews were also obtained through personal contacts (n = 6) or if they held public or private leadership positions (n=18). In addition, people who had letters to the editor published in the *Williston Herald* in 2012 addressing themes that had emerged from the interview data were contacted and invited to participate. Seven of the nine letter writers contacted were interviewed.

Whereas Study 1 focused on long-term residents in one specific community, Study 2 was

interested in women's experiences throughout the Bakken, which could include both long-term residents and migrants. The women included in this study had to reside in one of the four largest communities in the Bakken: Williston, Watford City, Dickinson, and Minot. Although Minot is not in a high producing area, as the commercial hub and largest city in the Bakken, it did see a dramatic increase in population (see Table 1). As such, the city experienced substantial changes as a result of the oil boom. Women in these areas reported similar experiences and concerns related to the oil boom. As a result, our analysis included all women interviewed in Study 2. In our findings section, we do not note where the women are from (Williston, Dickinson, Watford City, or Minot) because their stories are comparable regardless of their place of residence. Among the women interviewed in Study 2, residence in the Bakken was the defining variable. Twenty-three respondents were recruited initially through personal contacts in the area (n = 5). After the first interviews, the majority of contacts were secured through snowball sampling. As was the case with Study 1, the sample was overwhelmingly white (86%) which closely matches the 2010 Census (90% of North Dakota residents are white). However, a significant limitation of Study 2 is the high percentage of those with at least some college (n = 20). While North Dakotans tend to have slightly higher educational attainment than the national average, this sample over-represents this population. Furthermore, this sample is similar to that of Study 1 in that respondents tended to be somewhat older. North Dakota's mean age of women is 38 years. However, in this sample the age of respondents ranged from 22 to 94 with a mean of 47 years.

Findings

When an area with a dormant population and few amenities more than doubles in just a few years, it is as one Williston resident described, “Like throwing a boulder into a puddle.” As evident in Table 1, rapid population growth between 2010 and 2015 was the norm for the Bakken. The population explosion and accompanying economic surge resulted in both costs and benefits to area communities. Interviewees reported such benefits as accelerated construction of housing, businesses, medical facilities, and schools. The costs, however, were steep and our respondents spent most of their interviews describing life as more stressful and chaotic compared to life before the boom. Residents routinely mentioned a lack of daycare facilities, no affordable housing, and overcrowded schools as causes for concern.

(Insert Table 1 about here)

While these are all examples of disruption, the focus of this paper is on one major disturbance that men and women both experienced, but in relatively different ways. Both men and women were concerned about safety in their communities because of mounting fears and suspicion of outsiders. However, these concerns were deeply gendered. Whereas women’s distress centered on protecting themselves, men, on the other hand, were worried about keeping women safe. This in part stemmed from not just an awareness of increasing crime, but also as a response to a very high-profile abduction and murder of a local woman that shocked these communities. Along with actual crimes that put people on edge, there was much talk and speculation about the oil

migrants. Rumors were rampant about these outsiders and their deviant ways, which provided a cautionary tale not to trust the oilfield men. Finally, women's daily experiences with these male outsiders sometimes reflected the scary narratives of the rumors. Women discussed the variety of types of street harassment they experienced on a regular basis. All of these issues led to heightened levels of fear among male and female residents and also served to illustrate how men and women "did gender" (West and Zimmerman 1987) differently when experiencing social disruption.

While the women respondents resided in several different towns in the Bakken, there was very little variability in their stories. This does not suggest that women's experiences were the same across all areas of the Bakken, but it is telling that women in Williston, Watford City, Dickinson, and Minot reported significant disruptions to their safety. As evidenced by other research on the Bakken (Archbold, Dahle, and Jordon 2014; Weber, Geigle, and Barkdull 2014) the oil boom impacted policing, housing, and social services across North Dakota. Our research furthers the claim that the oil boom had far-reaching effects on North Dakota residents.

Perceptions and Realities of Safety in the Bakken

Increasing Crime in the Bakken and Unthinkable Events

Beyond exceptions in communities supporting offshore drilling, (see Luthra et al. 2007) an increase in the level and severity of crime is a commonly noted social disruption in rural

boomtowns (Ennis and Finlayson 2015; Freudenburg and Jones 1991; Hunter et al. 2002).

Determining the actual crime rate is difficult due to the population explosion, but the locals perceived that the level and severity of crime increased. Prior research on people's perceptions of crime in the Bakken support our findings that people were indeed more fearful (Archbold et al. 2014). However, the actual (or perceived) increases in crime proved less notable than the gendered nature of these crimes.

One particular crime happened in 2012 that appeared to have the greatest impact on feelings of fear, altering the way men and women interacted in public and at home. Two Colorado men, drawn to the area by oilfield jobs, abducted and murdered a teacher from Sydney, Montana. They purchased a shovel from the local Walmart, buried her body outside of Williston, and then returned the shovel for a refund (Caulfield 2012). Mentioned in nearly every interview, the crime redefined how local men and women "did gender" (West and Zimmerman 1987) and tainted the perception of safety in the Bakken, especially for women. It also exacerbated patriarchal beliefs that men should protect women (especially white women). Men, typically through gendered language, often expressed concern about "letting" their wives and daughters take walks or go shopping without them and many referenced this crime as an explanation for their need to protect women.

The following is a typical illustration of how this played out in one such family. Tracy (all names are pseudonyms), a mother of five, expressed why she no longer goes to Walmart alone. "There's

a reason to be aware of your surroundings. When that gal in Sydney got abducted, my husband said my daughters and I aren't going to the store by ourselves...." She also voiced her own concern about the safety of her children, especially her daughter:

One of my daughters is a recent graduate and before she started her job she asked me if she could go get some pepper spray. I didn't dream that we would have had that conversation three to five years ago. So she bought a little pink container of pepper spray and carries it with her, even if she is not that far from her house.

Likewise, Darlene, a woman in her 50s, provides another example of how this local woman's murder impacted her sense of safety. For instance, she mentioned she is much more aware of her surroundings and now pauses even before taking out the garbage at night "because of that woman from Sydney." Thus, it was not simply a general sense that crime was increasing that upset the gendered interactions between men and women. It was also the fact that a local woman was abducted and murdered by oil field men which prompted this change in gendered behavior.

Urban Myths

This mix of increased crime and the high profile murder of a local woman created a climate of fear and uncertainty and led to the gendering of urban myths. The most common urban myth reported dealt with Walmart. In fact, when asked about crime and safety, most interviewees approached the topic by asking, "Have you been to Walmart?" Walmart was regarded as an unsafe place for women to shop because the vast majority of shoppers were migrant men.

Walmart stores across the Bakken were described as having empty shelves, long lines, and occasionally had men waiting to rape unaccompanied women. With a reputation for being an unpleasant shopping experience at best, and at worst potentially dangerous, almost every respondent mentioned Walmart as a place they avoided.

While many respondents were able to describe specific instances when they or their family members had been leered at, propositioned, and made uncomfortable, there was one story that was retold in several interviews. The story described a local woman who knew “just enough” Spanish to understand that the men in line behind her were planning to rape her. Despite the recurring storyline, no respondent could ever confirm its credibility or identify the victim more accurately than “a friend of a friend.” A few locals called the story an urban myth because police officers had tried to determine its validity, but they could not locate the source of the story. Still, the perception that Walmart was a dangerous place for women meant that many local women did not shop there alone. Kelly, a 25-year-old, discussed how she, like her friends, actively avoided going to Walmart by herself:

I never want to go to Walmart. I get followed every time I am out there. Every time! And it happens to be the same ethnicity that follows you. I never go directly back to my car. Last time I had to duck behind a car and then get to my car. I always try to go with someone. If it is during the day, I go with another girlfriend. If it is at night, I go with my mom or boyfriend. Even going to the grocery store at night. I just don't do that.

As demonstrated by Kelly, placing self-limitations on shopping routines was common, but most

women also mentioned parameters set by loved ones. Such limitations, like those previously mentioned by Tracy, were regularly placed on daughters (even adult ones) but never mentioned in reference to sons. Susan, a county employee, provided advice to her adult daughters. “I tell my daughters not to go to Walmart after dark. If they do, [I tell them to] ‘take your spouses with you.’ We have good reasons for this ‘cause of some of the stuff that’s happened...It’s just known that if you’re a female, you do not go out after dark by yourself.”

Therefore, even though this urban legend has never been verified, it has greatly altered and disrupted men and women’s day to day living in very gendered ways. The women (who tend to do most of the shopping) are now encouraged to shop during daylight hours which meant they had to “fight the crowds and stand in line for a half-hour” or wait for their husbands, boyfriends, fathers, or friends to accompany them. If men helped with the shopping it was in direct relation to masculinized ideas of chivalry, and served to increase women’s dependence on men for safety in the community. Although this story of oilfield men conversing about raping women in Walmart is a supposed rumor, women’s chances of believing it was strengthened when they increasingly encountered harassing behavior at Walmart or in other public places.

Street Hassles

Women were, in fact, subject to harassment on a regular basis which provided credibility to these rumors. Analysis of interview transcripts revealed that street harassment became a common threat to women and that Walmart, along with other shopping venues, was a common site of

harassment. Even though the Walmart checkout story could not be substantiated, that did not mean that women felt comfortable in the store. The following comments illustrate the level of uneasiness women felt just simply grocery shopping: “it was very uncomfortable...you literally felt violated, and all you were doing was grocery shopping” and “I prefer not to be stared at when buying milk.” Renee, a 28-year-old explained: “A lot of these guys are single and probably don’t have a lot of contact with a female population, like sitting down and having a friendly conversation. So, ya know, you walk into the grocery store and you get catcalled which is really uncomfortable.”

Although the most frequent type of harassment the women encountered while shopping was catcalls and stares, Terri, a woman in her early 30s, described an encounter that violated her physical boundaries as well. She had two men approach her while shopping for lawn furniture. They got very close to her and started commenting on her legs. They circled around her and one man rested his hand on the metal shelf on the right and the other put his hand on the opposite side of the shelf. Terrified, she screamed out for help, ducked, and ran out from underneath their arms.

These examples highlight how everyday activities such as shopping became fear-inducing for the local women. However, the harassment was not limited to shopping excursions but also moved into women’s workplaces, especially those in the service industry. Local coffee shops and restaurants were also places where harassment was routine. Jennifer had a summer job at a coffee

shop to earn money for college in the fall. She described one of the hazards of her job: “It’s pretty crazy. I get creeped on a lot at the coffee shop, but I’m to the point where I can handle myself now. It doesn’t freak me out too much anymore. My friend is a waitress at a pizza shop, and she gets hard-core creeped on. There are definitely some weirdos.” She went on to explain how she characterized the area to one of her friends, a college student in New York who considered moving to the Bakken to work for the summer. “I was like, you might make a lot of money, but you will definitely be creeped on all the time, you will have gross hours, and you won’t like anybody that you work with. So come if you want, but you’re probably not gonna like it.”

Likewise, Taylor, a 22-year-old recent college graduate, was home for the summer working at a coffee shop. She discussed “creepy men that come up and like, touch you” and being propositioned to have sex for money while serving coffee. Although harassment at workplaces was a theme in our research, it was limited to younger women working in service sector jobs. Middle-aged, professional women in the study were not immune to street hassles, but did not report encountering these same types of interactions at their jobs.

The safety disruptions that some women encountered, though, did not stop once they left their workplaces. When women attempted to have a “girl’s night out” they dealt with constant harassment to the point that some just stopped going out, while others only went to certain bars that were less likely to have a lot of oil migrants and were therefore considered “safe.” Sheila, a

single woman in her 50s, would play bingo or sing karaoke at a local bar prior to the boom. During our interview, she stated she no longer felt safe going alone to do these activities. In general, bars are common places for harassment toward women, but those in the Bakken were described by local men and women as the worst they had ever experienced and were particularly unsafe for single women.

When women talked about going out to the bars, they spoke of parallel experiences to grocery shopping, like stares and catcalls, but at a heightened level. For instance, Claire described a popular local bar:

If you go down on the dance floor the whole perimeter is lined with guys - not even kidding, like literally a wall of guys. I don't go there anymore because of that. I'm sick of the ogling and 'look at what she is wearing!' And if I wear a dress - oh my God!

Similar to the harassment while grocery shopping, there were also a few unfortunate instances where women's physical safety was threatened while at these bars. One such incident that really rattled Taylor, the 22-year-old college graduate, happened when she was bar-hopping with her friends. They had just left a bar and were on their way to the next one. Her cousin stayed behind to smoke a cigarette before joining them. During this time, Taylor explained: "a car pulled up and they tried to put her [her cousin] in the car and she like kicked 'em in the balls and ran away." These harassing experiences that women dealt with on the streets, in the grocery stores, and at local bars and restaurants, coupled with the murder of a local woman and rumored rapes

happening at Walmart, led to significant gender differences in coping strategies for men and women of the Bakken.

Living Disrupted Lives – Gendered Differences and Self-Limits

As women tried to manage and make adjustments to their lives in order to handle these disruptions in safety, one common theme was to go out less. The women in this study reported they stopped going out for “girl’s nights,” were afraid to walk or ride bikes by themselves in the early mornings or at dusk, and felt the need to stay home with their doors locked. For instance, Kelly lamented that she no longer felt being out at night was a good idea:

As a kid, we would be out at night, roller blading and stuff. If you look around now, you don’t see lots of kids, which is sad. You don’t see anyone out, especially after dark. I am a lot more aware now. I keep the blinds shut in case there are peeping toms.

Ironically, though, staying home did not alleviate their worries. Claire described how women could be hassled through random interactions while sitting in their home. The week before she was interviewed, she received a random text message from an unknown number. Since she used the phone for work, she replied. “It was this guy, so I asked him how he got my number. He said he just made it up to see if he could find someone! When I asked him what his name was, he didn’t tell me. He said I am just looking for a female. And I was like OMG you’ve got to be kidding.” Two other middle-aged women told stories of random men showing up at their doorsteps and one young woman recalled that her mom’s friend came home to find an uninvited

oil worker sleeping on her couch.

Finally, Jamie, who is 42, talked at length about ordinary events at home putting her on edge. For instance, she recently had the carpets in her home professionally cleaned. She was anxious while the male workers were there and after they left was still troubled thinking they might have been “casing the house” for a burglary. “I’m just a little paranoid all of a sudden,” she recalled saying in a conversation with her husband: “We’re talking a lot about, you know, we need to gun up.” Both she and her husband work in human services with vulnerable populations and initially, they felt they had a good grasp on some of the social ills occurring in the Bakken area. However, as rumors ran rampant, it was hard to discern the truth and she said she often heard contradictory information from the news, friends, and her husband.

Like Jamie, the majority of women in our interviews discussed feeling on edge in their communities and in their homes. Faced with catcalls, whistles, stares, and threats to physical safety, women began to alter their day-to-day activities. Conversely, local men only mentioned two ways in which they limited their behavior as a result of the social disruptions facing their communities. They did not go out to eat as much, not because they were afraid, but because the waits were too long and they were less likely to run into friends than before the boom. The only self-limiting act that could be tied to concerns for their well-being involved avoiding local bars. Most men stated that they would not frequent bars anymore because the locals had been pushed out or the bars had become too rowdy. That being said, the men of the Bakken did modify their

behavior by over emphasizing chivalrous behavior, highlighting an important way they “did gender” (West and Zimmerman 1987).

The local men of the Bakken handled the safety disruptions in their community by feeling motivated to protect local women. This was evident early in our analysis when many fathers and husbands felt their wives and daughters should not go to Walmart alone or carved out time to accompany women on evening strolls through their neighborhoods. Interestingly, this chivalrous behavior was predicated on the assumption that sexual aggression was inherent to being a man. The following quote from a local retired doctor exemplifies this supposition when he was asked about the situation in the Bakken. He dryly stated: “we have fifteen, twenty thousand hormonally active young men and no women. We have the potential for significant problems.”

Robert, an Iraq war veteran in his late 20s, argued a similar stance when he talked about the change in the bar atmosphere:

I mean the amount of testosterone!...I think what happens is a lot of these guys are alone, have no female companionship, work 14 hour days, and drink. I mean, what the heck is going to happen? It was like that in Iraq. I know what happens. Your testosterone builds up. You get angry. You wanna release it somehow, and I think the only way to release it is to fight. The majority of bars are filled with guys, not women to court or take to the movies.

Therefore, when men discussed concerns about safety, they laid out suggestions and rules that they wanted their wives and daughters to follow. With the exception of expressing concerns

about the safety of all children in relation to heavy traffic, not one respondent singled out boys or men as being in need of protection. The only mention of sons was in general statements about kids riding bikes to school or crossing the busy truck bypass. Discussing the need to protect women, however, was a theme expressed in the majority of interviews.

Jeff, a retired government employee stated: “My youngest daughter is 16. I won’t let her go anyplace alone. She’s either got to be with a friend or she rides with one of her brothers.”

Sometimes, these rules involved adjusting previously held beliefs. For example, a college professor, Thomas, discussed how his oldest daughter rode her bike to the pool in the summer before the boom. He won’t let her do that anymore, wanting to know where she is at all times. Out of concern, he changed his mind on an appropriate use for a cell phone for his daughter:

I mean I can’t believe I would have even consented to this, but my oldest daughter is ten and she got a cell phone last year. I swore I would not let her have a cell phone until much later. I want to know where she is.

Thomas’s concern for safety also included limiting an activity that had once been a family favorite. They liked to take after dinner walks. Now, “I’m very concerned about letting my wife take walks. I walk with her whenever I can, but going out for an evening walk isn’t what it used to be. Just some basic fears.” He went on to say that while he is not going as far as his friend who sleeps with a loaded shotgun in the bedroom, there is “a lot of anecdotal information that makes you concerned. It’s to the point that we installed a home security [system] here in the spring.”

While interviewing Cynthia, a thirty-year resident of Williston, we also discussed her role at a local college. After seeing an increase in online course enrollment, she conducted an analysis on where the students were living. She discovered that several students were from the local area. She called the home of one online student, a young woman who lived less than 20 miles from town, and learned that her father would not let her drive to campus for safety reasons:

The only way she is going to get her college education and be able to take that class is through online. You've got that whole group...they won't let their children drive even if they are within that short radius of the town.

Finally, there was a sense that this perceived chivalry extended beyond family and friends to a general need to protect women. Lars, a widower in his 60s stated:

And, you know years ago if you were a single gal or a woman you'd go out to a nightclub or bar you didn't think anything of going out to the parking lot, hopping in your car, and driving home. I don't think I'd let anybody do that anymore.

Lars's comment is indicative of the main finding from this research. When formerly safe communities, as described by locals, became "overrun" by outsiders, a hypermasculinized environment ensued. Local men and women responded to the threat in ways informed by traditional understandings of gender and male aggression, resulting in limits placed on the daily routines of women. Whether the limits were self-imposed or defined as chivalrous, the outcome was the same in that the boom disproportionately disrupted the lives of women and girls.

Discussion and Conclusion

As documented through an analysis of in-depth interviews with over 100 Bakken residents, it became clear that the safety and security of local citizens were disrupted by the influx of oilfield workers to their communities. In conducting this research, we were keenly aware that earlier research on boomtowns suggests that some of the reported social disruptions may be exaggerated (Wilkinson et al. 1982). The only evidence to support this in our study, however, comes from unsubstantiated rumors. Beyond these rumors, our data suggest women's experiences with street harassment and concerns about personal safety in their towns resulted in very real disruptions. By including gender as the framework of our analysis, this research contributes to the debate on the utility of the boomtown disruption model by expanding the discussion to include differences in how men and women both perceive and react to the social disruptions experienced in boomtowns.

Along with the analysis of gendered personal stories of social disruption, we also expanded on Filteau's (2015) theoretical assumptions that local men are influenced by the hegemonic oilfield subculture. Filteau (2015) focuses specifically on masculinity, but as Connell (1995) advises, gender enactment is not one sided. In order to understand hegemonic masculinity, we must recognize women's inferior status. We furthered this discussion by including both men's and women's voices in the descriptions of how the communities were impacted. We found that without women's inferior status, implicated by their victim status in the high-profile crime,

rumored rapes, and street harassment, men would not have felt such a need to protect them. Ironically, this protection continues to heighten men's status in the community by making women more dependent on the men in their lives. In line with Filteau's (2015) findings, our research indicates that men of the Bakken reverted to hegemonic masculinity in handling safety concerns in their communities which create inequitable relationships between men and women. Future research could examine whether this chivalrous behavior continues in other areas of men's and women's lives. For instance, are we apt to see more patronizing behavior by men towards women in the workplace? Or would more men restrict women from working outside the home in order to keep them safe?

Moreover, our research supports and adds to Ennis and Finlayson's (2015) work that addresses masculinity in boomtowns. In their review of scholarly work in this area, they concluded there were three main areas that furthered social disruptions in boomtown communities: social isolation of migrant workers, the oilfield workplace culture emphasizing hegemonic masculinity with male-only shared living spaces, and competition between local men and migrant men. All of these contributed to increased violence in studied communities that proved harmful to individuals, families, and neighborhoods. Even though some of our respondents occasionally reported that there were a few "good" oilfield families, we did find that very few locals knew migrants personally. This stemmed from the oilfield workers mostly living in man camps. According to Ennis and Finlayson (2015), these man camps are problematic for two reasons.

First, they socially isolate the migrants from the locals. Second, they are usually male-only spaces that stress hypermasculine behavior and attitudes. Additionally, we found local men in competition with oilfield men when they called attention to the fact that they needed to defend their wives, girlfriends, and daughters from the migrants. This competition was naturalized when the local men continually spoke about men's sexual aggression as intrinsic to manhood and therefore the primary reason women needed protection.

Although this research does confirm competition between the local men and the migrant men, it is hard to determine causation. One of the limitations of our argument is that we do not possess a baseline of masculine behavior in the Bakken. Carrington, McIntosh, and Scott (2010) found the competition between these two groups was a result of the two cultures (frontier culture and oilfield culture) being similar. Thus, it is possible that the rural, aging communities of the Bakken might have been described as hypermasculine prior to the boom. While possible, our analysis rests on the perception of Bakken residents as to how and why their lives had been impacted by an influx of oil workers. In that sense, the findings were clear. All respondents described how the boom brought about significant changes to their social activities and relationships. When discussing the topic of limiting behavior, either self-imposed or defined as chivalrous, every respondent put such limits on activities as a response to the boom.

A final takeaway from this study has to do with change. How might the Bakken and other energy boom communities reduce the social disruption experienced by local residents? The studies

looking at alcohol use and masculinity (Parkins and Angell 2011; Joyce et al. 2013) suggest a community level approach that tackles these issues as long-term problems rather than short-term issues that accompany a boom. If, for example, the Bakken incorporated community policing as part of standard policing practice, this could help lessen the street harassment of women before, during, and after a boom (MacMillan et al. 2000). Additionally, Filteau (2015) argues that these disruptions and the constant boom-bust cycles go hand-in-hand with hegemonic masculinity and the only way to upset this is to challenge the oilfield culture that favors hypermasculinity. This is similar to Carrington and colleagues (2010) advising that cultural change can only happen when policy changes are enacted. Brown et al. (2013) found long-term, sustainable booms can enhance communities because of increased involvement and commitment in these towns by the oilfield workers. Based on this, if communities set restrictions on the number of man camps allowed, would it force oil workers to secure more permanent housing and therefore be more likely to become long-term residents? Would this alter the oilfield hegemonic culture and thereby also change the enactment of masculinity at the local level?

These are all areas that need further investigation. This study provides evidence that men and women do experience the social disruptions of oil booms differently. Consequently, future work should continue to include gender as a central concept to understanding the impacts of energy booms. As a final point, our study focused on men's and women's experiences at the start and during the early stages of an oil boom. Some have found that these communities are likely to

recover after the boom (Brown et al. 2005), and scholarly work on post-boom communities should also take into consideration whether men and women revert back to old ways of “doing gender” (West and Zimmerman 1987) in the aftermath.

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Table 1

Estimated Population Increase 2000-2015

	2000	2010	2015 (Estimate)	Change in Population From 2010 to 2015 (%)
Dunn County	3,595	3,536	4,646	+31.39
Killdeer	713	751	1,173	+56.19
McKenzie County	5,737	6,360	12,826	+101.7
Watford City	1,435	1,744	6,708	+284.6
Mountrail County	6,631	7,673	10,331	+34.6
Stanley	1,279	1,485	2,721	+83.23
Stark County	22,636	24,325	32,139	+32.12
Dickinson	16,101	17,877	23,765	+32.94
Ward County	58,795	61,675	71,275	+15.6
Minot	36,567	40,967	49,450	+20.7
Williams County	19,761	22,398	35,294	+57.6
Williston	12,512	15,913	26,977	+69.5

Notes: The table includes the four highest-producing oil counties (Dunn, McKenzie, Mountrail, and Williams) as well as Ward and Stark counties. Ward and Stark counties were included because they contain two of the largest communities in the area (Minot and Dickinson) and were home to several respondents. Population Data presented in Table 1 come from the United States Census website (www.census.gov) with the exception of Stanley. Because of Stanley's small population, data was accessed through the North Dakota Demographics website (www.northdakota-demographics.com).

Notes on Contributors

Timothy D. Pippert is Professor of Sociology and Director of the Center for Teaching and Learning at Augsburg University. Taking advantage of the close proximity of the Bakken to Minneapolis, he began conducting research on the social implications of the oil boom in 2012. In addition to his work in North Dakota, he has published on the social ties of homeless men as well as photographic portrayals of student body diversity in college recruitment materials.

Rachel Zimmer Schneider is Lecturer of Sociology at The Ohio State University – Newark. Because she is a native of North Dakota and still has family in the area, she was inspired to study the gendered impact of the oil boom on the lives of North Dakotans. Besides her work on the Bakken, her primary publications have been on battered women who have killed their abusers and the Ohio Battered Women’s Clemency Movement.