Mining the Data: Analyzing the Economic Implications of Mining for Nonmetropolitan Regions

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Extractive industries such as logging and mining are generally expected to bring significant economic benefits to rural regions, but a growing number of findings have now challenged that common expectation. Still, it is not clear whether the findings of less-than-desirable economic outcomes are isolated or representative. In this article, we assemble literally all of the relevant quantitative findings on mining that we have been able to identify in published and/or technical literature from the United States. In the interest of rigor, we limit the assessment to cases in which strictly nonmetropolitan mining regions are compared against other nonmetropolitan regions and/or against those regions' own experiences over time. Overall, 301 findings meet the criteria for inclusion. Contrary to the long-established assumptions, but consistent with more recent critiques, roughly half of all published findings indicate negative economic outcomes in mining communities, with the remaining findings being split roughly evenly between favorable and neutral/indeterminate ones. Positive findings are more likely to be associated with incomes than with poverty or (especially) unemployment rates, and they are more likely to come from the western United States, where much of the mining involves relatively large, new coal strip mines. Over half of all positive findings come from the years prior to 1982. In virtually all other categories, the plurality or majority of findings have been negative. When the patterns of findings are subjected to one-sample means tests, the only way to produce a significantly positive outcome is by combining all neutral/indeterminate findings with the positive ones, while focusing exclusively on incomes; by contrast, in the case of poverty or unemployment rates—as well as for the overall body of findings—the results are consistently and significantly negative, whether the neutral/indeterminate findings are combined with negative ones or omitted from the equations altogether. Until or unless future studies produce dramatically different findings, there appears to be no scientific basis for accepting the widespread, "obvious" assumption that mining will lead to economic improvement.

Both in academic and popular discourse, the common assumption has long been that the potential environmental threats from extractive industries such as logging and mining will be accompanied by economic benefits for the industries' host regions (see, e.g., Imrie 1992; Thompson and Blevins 1983, p. 153; cf. Humphrey et al.1993; see also Lewan 1993). Indeed, particularly for areas that are remote from urban agglomerations and industrial development, the extraction of raw materials from nature is often seen to be the only hope for economic

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development. At least in principle, it would seem reasonable to expect a rich natural resource endowment to translate into increased prosperity, because resource-dependent industries have significantly less locational flexibility than do most other industrial activities. New mines, for example, can only have a realistic opportunity to be profitable in locations where actual mineral deposits are available. In recent years, however, the common assumptions have begun to be undercut by a growing body of findings.

To date, it is not clear whether the findings of less-than-desirable socio-economic outcomes are idiosyncratic or systematic. In this article, accordingly, we seek to provide a comprehensive summary and assessment of the accumulated findings, focusing on mining-dependent communities. We begin with a qualitative review of the existing literature, including known technical reports and other "gray" literature as well as the findings published in peer-reviewed journals. We follow with a quantitative analysis of the key categories of available socioeconomic findings—those on income, unemployment, and poverty rates—that permit "apples to apples" comparisons of the experiences of nonmetropolitan mining regions against those of nonmetropolitan comparison regions and/or against their own experiences over time. The closing section considers this study's implications for future research on natural resource development in nonmetropolitan regions.

Overview of the Literature

Over the past several decades, researchers have begun to question the once-common assumption that mining would bring socioeconomic prosperity to host regions. The questioning appears to have begun outside of the United States, when authors such as Frank (1966, 1967) began to draw attention to "underdevelopment," which was argued to be due in part to unfavorable terms of trade—with raw materials being sent out from extractive regions at relatively low prices, in unequal exchange for finished products that needed to be imported at high prices. In subsequent years, other international studies (see, e.g., Barham and Coomes 1993; Bunker 1985; Repetto 1995; Schurman 1993) have indicated further reasons for concern. Indeed, careful quantitative analyses have found that—even after controlling statistically for other variables, ranging from the openness of a national economy, to the efficiency of national bureaucracy, to the degree of inequality in national income concentration—nations with high rates of natural resource exports have had abnormally low rates of subsequent economic growth (see, e.g., Sachs and Warner 1995; for a careful review of the larger literature on this "resource curse," see especially Ross 1999).

The work of Corden and Neary (1983) helped to draw increased attention to the paradoxical implications of extractive industries in industrialized countries, highlighting what the authors called "Dutch disease": Holland's massive North Sea oil revenues were actually found to be associated with declining rather than

improving economic fortunes. At least initially, however, such findings received relatively little attention in U.S. community studies. As many rural community leaders have been quick to point out, after all, jobs in logging and mining tend to pay far higher wages than do service jobs such as cleaning hotel rooms or serving fast-food hamburgers. This point is not simply a widespread belief with no empirical support; instead, the nationwide study by Mills (1995), for example, found that earnings per worker were higher in mining than in many other economic sectors—whether considering metropolitan or nonmetropolitan regions, and whether focusing on the "mining boom time" of 1980 or on the nonboom years of 1970 and 1990. In important respects, accordingly, it has long seemed "obvious" to many commentators that extractive industries should be associated with significantly increased local prosperity. In addition, while examinations of the economic characteristics of mining communities have had a long history in the social sciences (for a review, see Field and Burch 1991), few studies seriously questioned the common assumptions and expectations until the 1980s.

Moreover, in one of the first studies to look at the topic in a broad-brush fashion, Bender et al. (1985) obtained results that were reasonably consistent with the usual expectations. Drawing data largely from the 1980 Census of Population and Housing and using a definition that would later be followed by many other authors—with "mining-dependent" counties being those where 20 percent or more of total labor and proprietor income came from mining—Bender et al. found that mining-dependent counties had higher population growth rates, higher incomes, and fewer people receiving social security than the nonmetropolitan average of the times. The study did note, however, that "the variations among counties . . . were large," and that decreases in demand for fuels and minerals between 1979 and the time of their study in 1985 had "produced income and population declines" that did not show up in their study's quantitative analyses (Bender et al. 1985, p. 9).

The subsequent trends were soon to be documented more systematically. Hady and Ross (1990), both of whom were coauthors on the original Bender et al. study, conducted an update, examining the differences between counties that were mining-dependent by the same definition in 1979 (during the height of the energy crisis and mineral prices) and in 1986 (after both a recession and a drop in mineral prices). In the 7 years between 1979 and 1986, mining employment in the nonmetropolitan United States declined by 14 percent; 50 counties ceased being mining-dependent, while only 19 others became mining-dependent during that period. On average, whether focusing on the counties that were mining-dependent in 1979, 1986, or both, the follow-up study found declining personal incomes and increasing unemployment from 1979 to 1986.

Other researchers soon found evidence that less-than-favorable findings were not limited to a 7-year period. In a more comprehensive review of

natural-resource-oriented industries, for example, Weber, Castle, and Shriver (1987) found that, while counties with energy-related mining experienced growth in both employment and earnings during the generally "booming" years of 1969–1985, counties with metal mining experienced declines in both indicators, even during those years.

These kinds of results have raised questions about the degree to which the findings from Bender et al. (1985) may have been influenced by the extraordinary conditions in energy extraction that happened to be approaching their peak around the time period considered in that initial study. One of the points that has become quite clear, for example, is that the areas of the United States having the highest levels of long-term poverty, outside of those having a history of racial inequalities, tend to be found in the very places that were once the site of thriving extractive industries—most notably in Appalachia (Gaventa 1980), but to a lesser extent also in other one-time mining and logging areas such as the "cutover region" of the Upper Midwest (see, e.g., Landis 1938; Lisheron 1991; cf. Schwarzweller and Lean 1993). Perhaps more ominously, the reasons for concern are not limited simply to the implications of ultimate shutdowns or "busts." Several studies have found evidence of problems even while extraction is occurring (e.g., Cook 1995; Drielsma 1984; Elo and Beale 1985; Freudenburg and Gramling 1994; Krannich and Luloff 1991; Peluso et al. 1994; Tickamyer and Tickamyer 1988).

In subsequent years, a number of studies have compared census data from different regions and times. Perhaps the most systematic of these analyses can be found in the work of Nord and Luloff (1993), who offered three kinds of comparisons—comparing data from the 1980 and 1990 censuses, from three regions of the country (the west, the south, and the Great Lakes), and from three different sectors of the mining industry (coal, petroleum, and "other," the last of which includes metal mining and quarrying). These authors' analyses mirrored the findings of Bender et al. in showing that conditions were relatively favorable at the time of the 1980 census, but further analyses showed that the economic implications of mining in all three regions of the country, and in all sectors of the mining industry, had deteriorated since that time. Except in the western region, in fact, unemployment was found to be consistently higher in mining counties than in other nonmetropolitan counties, in each respective region of the country, both in 1980 and in 1990. By 1990, in all but the western region, mining-dependent counties had lower incomes and more persons in poverty than did the nonmining counties. In all regions of the country, including the west, mining-dependent counties experienced greater increases in poverty rates from 1980 to 1990 than did other nonmetropolitan counties. All in all, the only favorable findings associated with mining areas in the 1990 census were found in the western United States—and even there, the findings provided less reason for optimism than had appeared to be the case in 1980.

Other studies have found that local residents' widespread expectations for improved employment may be particularly problematic. In analyzing a decade's worth of data compiled by Weber et al. (1987), for example—a period that included both the "boom years" of extractive industries in the late 1970s and the "agricultural crisis" years of the early 1980s—Krannich and Luloff (1991) found that mining-dependent counties had higher levels of unemployment than did agriculture-dependent counties, in every single year, even during this period. In addition, there is at least suggestive evidence that mining communities' economic problems tend to become increasingly pronounced over time, exacerbated by the volatility of commodity prices, the potential for a cost–price squeeze, and the problem of "flickering" (i.e., the periodic shutting down of extractive operations, as prices fluctuate above and below the costs of operation in specific locations—see Hibbard and Elias 1993). This flickering can contribute to problems of unemployment and poverty, given that laid-off workers will often choose to remain in the area, sometimes for extended periods, in the hope or belief that the high-wage jobs will ultimately return (see, e.g., Freudenburg 1992; Krannich and Luloff 1991).

Perhaps in part because of findings such as the ones being summarized here, there is a potentially telling contrast in two types of studies that have gauged the reactions of local leaders. In regions that are expecting increased mining or just beginning to experience a "boom," it is common to find what Gulliford (1989) calls "euphoria." Unfortunately, in regions that have actually experienced natural resource extraction, local leaders have been found to view their economic prospects less in terms of jubilation than of desperation (e.g., Krannich and Luloff 1991; Freudenburg 1992; Gulliford 1989; Peluso et al. 1994; cf. Cottrell 1951, 1955; Gaventa 1980). Thus, while the largest of the nine working groups established by the Rural Sociological Society's Task Force on Rural Poverty was the one that focused on natural resources, the working group ultimately identified resource extraction not as an antidote to poverty, but as something more like a cause or correlate. In the authors' terminology, they found resource extraction to have a "systematic relationship" with "the impoverization of rural people"—so much so that the bulk of their review was devoted to an effort to identify "social forces at work in resource-dependent rural communities that lead to the creation of relative and/or absolute poverty" (Humphrey et al. 1993, pp. 137–8; see also the responses to this report, including Freudenburg and Gramling 1994; Peluso et al. 1994; Nord and Luloff 1993).

Quantitative Analysis of Available Findings

While even a qualitative literature review can illustrate the need for caution, there is clearly also a need for a more systematic assessment of the relevant evidence. Mining would appear to deserve particularly close attention in that, to

repeat, jobs in mining tend to be associated with some of the highest incomes in any economic sector (Mills 1995). In response, we have sought to bring together and analyze the available findings in a way that would be more systematic, and yet that could be reported in a manner that is as straightforward as possible.

As suggested by the foregoing review, there are many differences across the available studies—a fact with a number of important implications. First and most clearly, differences in the units of analysis and the operationalization of variables mean that any comparisons need to be interpreted with caution—as being indicative of overall patterns, rather than as providing definitive or clearcut answers. Second, the available findings are not independent; instead, there are multiple overlaps but also differences across studies. In terms of overlaps, for example, many authors use statistics from the Census and/or the Bureau of Labor Statistics, but at the same time, there are many differences in the time periods and specific sets of counties being considered. In terms of differences, some authors distinguish carefully between "community-level" versus "county-level" data, while others use the terms more or less interchangeably, and some authors focus on officially "rural" communities (those with fewer than 2,500 residents), while many other studies include nonmetropolitan regions more broadly.

Such overlaps and differences would make it inappropriate and potentially misleading to perform extensive statistical transformations or analyses; instead, the more responsible approach is to assess the findings in terms of simple and easy-to-understand categories. In the analyses that follow, accordingly, we have classified the results in terms of a three-way typology—as indicating, in other words, conditions that are more favorable, less favorable, or no different from the conditions prevailing in relevant nonmining areas and/or during earlier time periods. In the effort to avoid the imposition of our own views, we have deferred to the original authors' interpretations of the data whenever such interpretations are available. A "favorable" finding, for example, thus usually reflects the judgement of those who wrote the report or article in question, whether the judgement was based on statistical analyses or on simple comparisons of descriptive data.

It is also important to recognize that the available literature poses still other challenges for an effort that is intended to be both careful and conservative. In particular, while the overall body of literature addressing the economic well-being of mining-dependent areas is vast, the number of studies explicitly offering systematic, quantitative data on the impacts of mining in the rural United States is actually much smaller. In the process of selecting the findings for analysis, accordingly, we needed to proceed in two main steps. The first step was to conduct an extensive search of articles published in peer-reviewed journals, books and chapters, technical reports, and governmental documents and publications. Because of this process, we ultimately identified several hundred reports and

publications in all. In the second step, however, we found it necessary to deal with the potentially misleading variations across studies by requiring an appropriate degree of consistency in the studies that were selected for more detailed examination. This process ultimately led to the identification of four relatively stringent criteria that were necessary to permit direct and meaningful comparisons and to the elimination of all studies that were unable to meet the criteria.

The first criterion was the most straightforward. The studies needed to present enough comparative data—whether across locations, across time, or both—to permit a reasonable assessment of net economic impacts for the areas affected. Second, the studies needed to provide quantitative assessments of the impacts of mining activity in nonmetropolitan communities or regions in the United States. This criterion alone was enough to eliminate roughly half of the otherwise ''available'' studies (e.g., those from other nations), and even in the remaining studies, there were a number of variations in the definitions of ''mining'' and mining dependency. Most studies have used broad definitions, encompassing the full range of metal, coal, and oil-extraction activities, as well as quarrying, while a smaller number have focused on one type of mineral. Nearly half of the studies defined ''mining dependency'' according to the criterion used by Bender et al. (1985), including only those counties that received at least 20 percent of their total labor and proprietor income from mining during the period specified. The remaining studies followed one or more mining areas over time, required that a given percentage of local employment be from mining, or relied on measures involving a mixture of income and employment from mining.

The third criterion also requires additional discussion: For purposes of comparability, the data in question needed to present at least one of the three variables most commonly included in such studies—namely, incomes, unemployment rates, and poverty rates—corresponding closely to the three kinds of local economic benefits that are commonly expected to be associated with mining. Even among the studies meeting this criterion, however, there proved to be a number of variations, particularly in the definitions of ''poverty'' and ''income.'' In the comparisons that follow, accordingly, the ''poverty'' category will include all findings regarding the percentage of persons in poverty, the percentage of children in poverty, and the percentage of families in poverty, while the ''income'' category includes studies that provide data on median household income, per capita income, and/or wage and salary earnings. The measures of ''unemployment,'' by contrast, involve fewer variations, usually referring to the percentage of the workforce unemployed at the time of data collection, although a few studies use analyses of unemployment insurance payments.

The fourth and final criterion proved to be particularly conservative. Even after the application of the first three criteria, there were still 363 known, quantitative findings in the available literature. The fourth criterion, however,

required the exclusion of all areas that were merely "predominantly" rural or nonmetropolitan, although many people think of predominantly rural states, such as North Dakota, or cultural regions, such as upstate New York or Appalachia, as being "rural." The reason was straightforward: Given that metropolitan areas tend to have significantly stronger economic conditions than do nonmetropolitan areas, important biases might be created by comparing (genuinely) nonmetropolitan mining regions against "control" regions that actually included one or more metropolitan areas (e.g., by comparing the nonmetropolitan mining counties in a given location against the average for the entire region, or for the United States as a whole). The net effect of this fourth criterion was to lower by 51 the number of "adverse" findings on the economic implications of mining, while lowering "positive" findings by only 11. Still, even after the application of this fourth and final criterion, there remained 301 of the "more conservative," quantitative findings, derived from 19 separate studies.

As indicated by Figure 1A, by far the most common findings in the literature are those involving adverse economic outcomes in mining regions. The dashed-line totals indicate that adverse findings constitute an outright majority of the "known" findings (those meeting all but the fourth criterion). Even after the imposition of the fourth and most conservative criterion, just under half of the findings that remain—139 of the remaining 301 findings, in other words, or 46.1 percent of them—indicate the economic conditions in mining regions to be worse than those in the relevant comparison regions. The remaining findings are split roughly evenly between neutral and favorable outcomes, at 74 (24.6%) and 88 (29.2%), respectively. For purposes of clarity, Figure 1B includes only the "more conservative" 301 findings, and in the remainder of this article as well, we will analyze only the 301 findings that meet all four criteria for inclusion. What Figures 1A and 1B show, at least at an overall level, is that favorable or improving economic conditions need to be recognized as being considerably less common in the empirical literature to date than are unfavorable or declining conditions.

Still, to leave the matter there might be too simple. As could be expected on the basis of the preceding literature review, there are a number of variations in the relationships between mining and economic well-being. While the variations among available studies suggest that more detailed analyses should be undertaken only with caution, as noted earlier, there are three types of additional comparisons that are particularly worthy of attention. First are those that focus on the differences that emerge from examining specific indicators of socioeconomic conditions (i.e., incomes, unemployment, and/or poverty rates); second are those that deal with regional variations; and third are those that offer insights into change over time. We will discuss the three in that order. In the interest of conservatism, all of the more detailed comparisons that follow will use only the

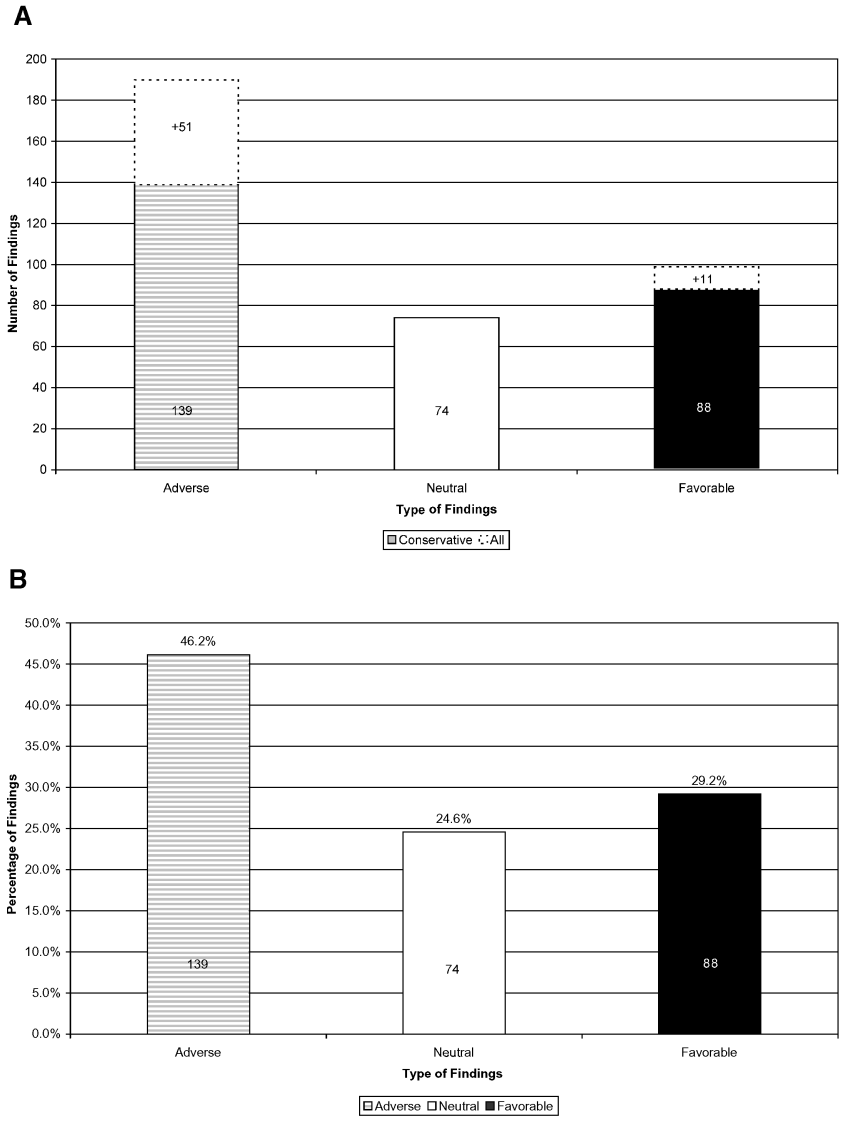

Figure 1
(A) All findings versus "conservative findings." (B) Summary of findings (used in final analysis).

301 findings that meet all four of the criteria for inclusion, and tests of statistical significance will be presented only for the overall totals and for the comparisons involving overall socioeconomic measures or indicators.

Differences across Indicators

The first set of more detailed comparisons involve differences across the three different socioeconomic indicators noted above—income, unemployment rates, and poverty rates. Of the three indicators, the most positive picture emerges from studying incomes, as illustrated in Figure 2. The available studies provide 118 quantitative findings on income differences; in 56 of these cases, or nearly half of the time, mining activity has been associated with higher incomes than in nonmining areas or in previous time periods. Incomes are lower in about one-third of the findings (40, or 33.9%) while the remaining 22 findings (18.6%) indicate a situation that is "no different." Thus, while it may not be literally accurate to describe mining as leading to improved incomes, more findings do fall into the "favorable" category than into the other two, suggesting that mining has indeed been associated with higher income levels in many cases.

A less favorable picture emerges, however, when we consider the fuller range of economic findings. Despite the fact that impoverished rural communities often expect mining to reduce their poverty rates, for example, the findings fail to

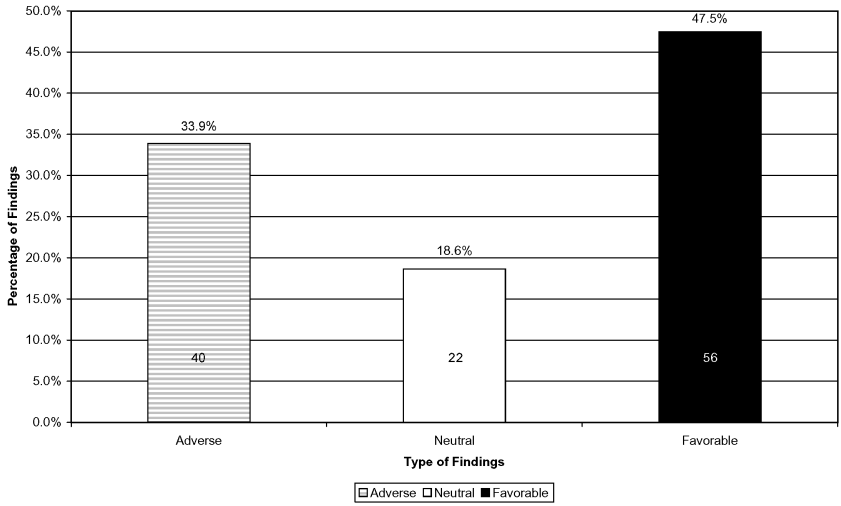

Figure 2
Summary of income findings.

support this common assumption. As can be seen from Figure 3, only about 20 percent of the 59 available findings on the topic indicate mining areas to be associated with lower poverty rates. Instead, more than twice as many findings—26 findings, or 44.1 percent—indicate higher levels of poverty in mining areas, while the remaining 21 findings (35.6%) indicate poverty levels that are neither higher nor lower than in the relevant comparison areas. Likewise, despite the usual assumption that mining will reduce the unemployment problems of rural areas, studies to date have actually tended to find higher levels of unemployment in mining areas than elsewhere. As can be seen from Figure 4, which summarizes the available findings on unemployment rates, a clear majority of the available findings (73 of the 124 findings, or 58.9%) indicate higher levels of unemployment in areas characterized by high levels of mining activity, while another 25 percent of the findings (31) point to conditions that do not differ between mining and comparison areas. Despite the widespread expectation that mining will lower local unemployment rates, actual findings of such favorable conditions prove to be relatively rare, making up the smallest category of all, with just 20 findings (16.1%) suggesting unemployment rates to be lower in mining areas than in comparison areas.

In addition to the graphic presentation of evidence in Figures 1–4, we have provided a quantitative summary and a set of significance tests in Table 1. The

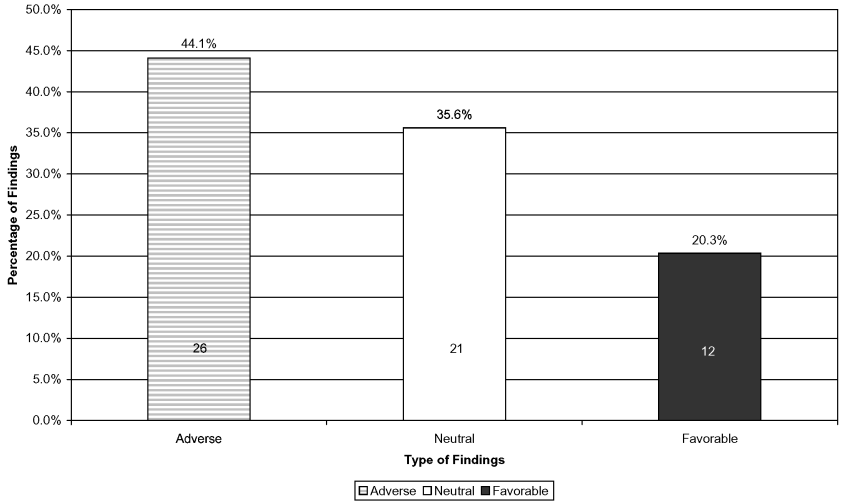

Figure 3
Summary of poverty findings.

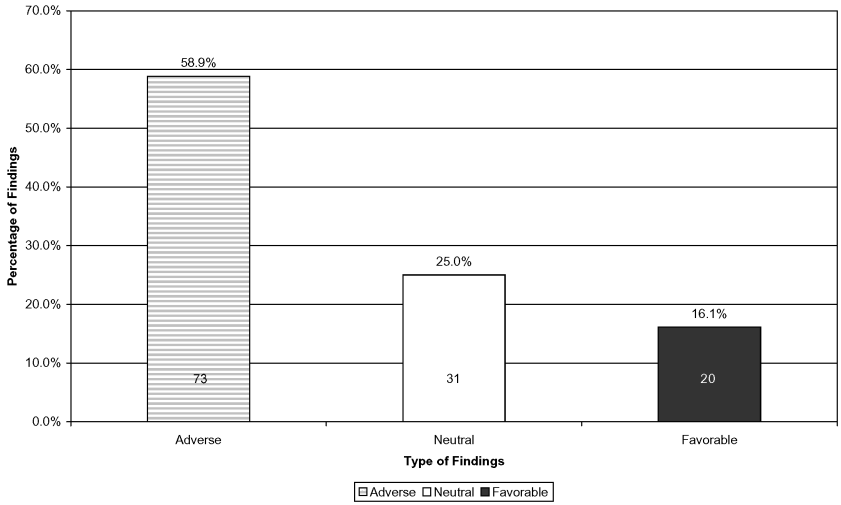

Figure 4
Summary of unemployment findings.

top three lines of the table focus on the overall findings from Figure 1; for the convenience of those who prefer a more detailed examination, the remaining lines of the table summarize the findings in more specific ways. The first column reports the raw number of findings of each type. The second column expresses this number as a percentage of the findings within a given category—that is, as a proportion of all the relevant findings on income, poverty, and unemployment rates—thus repeating the information from Figures 1–4 in tabular form. The final column of the table provides new information, expressing each subcategory of findings (e.g., adverse findings on income, or favorable findings on unemployment rates) as a percentage of the grand or overall total of 301 findings that meet all four of the criteria for inclusion in this analysis.

For each panel of the table, we also present the result of statistical significance tests. Before we turn to the tests themselves, however, four warnings are in order. First, as statistical textbooks routinely note, tests of "statistical significance" should not necessarily be taken as indicating "substantive significance." The tests, instead, are meant to assess the relative consistency of (and hence the degree of statistical confidence that can be placed in) any given pattern. Second, because we are looking at findings from the existing research literature on the three main categories of findings (i.e., incomes, poverty, and unemployment rates), the statistical tests reported here can only be generalized to the research literature addressing these comparative, quantitative results from

mining-dependent, nonmetropolitan regions of the United States. Third, given our earlier warning that outcomes reported in the existing literature are often not independent of one another, an important degree of caution is needed in drawing even these inferences; the major advantages of the significance tests have to do with clarifying and systematizing the available findings. Fourth and finally, in keeping with our earlier warning about the need for caution in interpreting the relatively small number of some of the more specific findings, we will perform the statistical tests only for the largest categories of findings, namely, those already noted—the results on incomes, poverty and unemployment rates, and overall patterns.

The simplest possible approach for testing the statistical significance of these findings is to focus on what are technically known as "binomial" outcomes—that is, those that allow for just two possible outcomes. In accordance with the need for caution, the "cost" of this simplicity is that the tests can be carried out in three different ways—with the neutral findings being combined with positive ones, with negative ones, or being omitted altogether.

In Table 1, we present information on statistical significance only for those comparisons that produced significant results. For the overall findings that are summarized in the top panel of Table 1, for example, the binomial tests show adverse findings to be significantly more common than favorable findings according to two of the three possible comparisons—those where the neutral findings are combined with the adverse findings or where they are omitted from the analysis—although not when the neutral findings are combined with positive ones. For the most favorable of the available sets of findings, by contrast—those for incomes—the only way to obtain significantly more favorable findings than negative ones, according to normal standards of statistical significance, is to treat all of the neutral or indeterminate findings as being "favorable" ones, as well. Finally, unlike the case for the income findings, there prove to be significantly more adverse findings than favorable ones in the cases of poverty and unemployment, whether the neutral findings are treated as being negative or are removed from the analysis altogether. In the case of the unemployment findings, in fact, adverse findings prove to be so much more numerous than positive ones that there are significantly more negative than positive findings even if the neutral or indeterminate findings are explicitly treated as positive ones.

In response to reviewer concerns about the extent to which this overall pattern might be shaped by methodological anomalies of one or more studies—whether through shifts in units of analysis or definition of variables, or simply by having one or two studies that contribute a significant fraction of the findings—we have conducted the additional analysis summarized in Figure 5. As can be seen from the dashed horizontal line and the bar at the far right end of this figure, the overall average, across all studies, is for negative findings to be 1.58 times as

Table 1
Percentages of Adverse/Neutral/Favorable Findings, Overall and by Measure

	No. of Findings	% of Category	% of Total
Overall			
Type of Finding			
Adverse	139	NA	46.2
Neutral	74	NA	24.6
Favorable	88	NA	29.2
Total All Findings	301	NA	
"Adverse Findings" are significantly more likely than "Favorable Findings" by two of three tests:			
$t = -7.907$, $p < .000$ when neutral findings are coded as negative.			
$t = -3.466$, $p = .001$ when neutral findings are excluded.			
By Measure			
Income Findings			
Adverse	40	33.9	13.3
Neutral	22	18.6	7.3
Favorable	56	47.5	18.6
Total Income	118	100.0	39.2
"Favorable Findings" are significantly more likely than "Adverse Findings" by one of three tests:			
$t = 3.679$, $p < .000$ when neutral findings are coded as positive.			
Poverty Findings			
Adverse	26	44.1	8.6
Neutral	21	35.6	7.0
Favorable	12	20.3	4.0
Total Poverty	59	100.0	19.6

(continued)

Table 1 *(continued)*

	No. of Findings	% of Category	% of Total
"Adverse Findings" are significantly more likely than "Favorable Findings" by two of three tests:			
$t = -5.612$, $p < .000$ when neutral findings are coded as negative.			
$t = -2.411$, $p = .021$ when neutral findings are excluded.			
Unemployment Findings			
Adverse	73	58.9	24.3
Neutral	31	25.0	10.3
Favorable	20	16.1	6.6
Total Unemployment	124	100.0	41.2
"Adverse Findings" are significantly more likely than "Favorable Findings" by all three tests:			
$t = -1.999$, $p = .048$ when neutral findings are coded as positive.			
$t = -6.652$, $p < .000$ when neutral findings are excluded.			
$t = -10.213$, $p < .000$ when neutral findings are coded as negative.			
Total across Measures	301	NA	100.0

common as positive ones. As can also be seen, however, there are very few cases in which the removal of a study or studies could be said to exert major or undue influences on the overall pattern of results.

The largest change in ratios would come from dropping the study of Mills (1995)—removing this study would increase the overall ratio of negative to positive findings from 1.58:1 to 1.82:1—yet such a change would scarcely be surprising: Mills focuses on incomes, and as noted earlier, incomes provide a consistently more favorable picture of overall socioeconomic outcomes than do

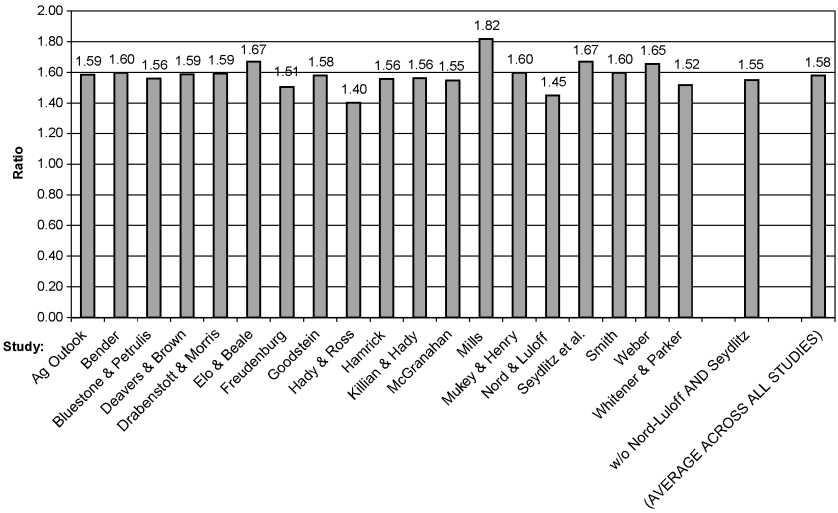

Figure 5
Ratios of adverse to favorable findings without the indicated sources.

poverty or unemployment rates, or for that matter, the overall distributions of findings. The greatest reduction in the overall ratio would come from omitting Hady and Ross (1990); as noted earlier, this study was done as an update to the original report by Bender et al. (1985), and thus it includes a strong emphasis on the years from 1980 onward, when findings have tended to be significantly more negative than in earlier years. Finally, the two studies contributing the largest number of findings are those of Nord and Luloff (1993) and of Seydlitz, Jenkins, and Hampton (1995); these two studies, in combination, provided 141 of the 301 findings just analyzed, but neither of the two studies exerts as much influence in changing the overall total as do Mills (1995) or Hady and Ross (1990), and in combination, the two studies' effects largely counterbalance one another. As can be seen from Figure 5, in other words, the effect of removing the Nord and Luloff findings would be to reduce the overall average from 1.58:1 to 1.45:1, while the effect of removing Seydlitz et al. would be to increase the overall ratio to 1.67:1. As shown by the bar near the extreme right end of the figure, the net effect of removing both studies would be a degree of shift in the overall ratio of negative to positive findings that is remarkably small—a reduction from 1.58:1 to 1.55:1.

Still, in the interest of caution, it should be noted that there would be one clear effect of removing one or both of these studies that is not reflected in Figure 5: Partly because both Nord and Luloff (1993) and Seydlitz et al. (1995) used tests of statistical significance to assess whether findings were positive,

negative, or indeterminate, these two studies reported a higher proportion of "indeterminate" outcomes than for the studies that did not use statistical significance tests. Except for these apparently minor variations, however, the simple form of sensitivity analysis presented in Figure 5 shows a considerable degree of robustness in the comparison that is likely to prove most salient to readers, involving the ratio between negative and positive findings. Indeed, there is no other study of the 19 included in the final analysis that has enough of an effect on the overall findings that the removal of that study would shift the overall ratio of negative to positive findings by as much as 0.10; instead, the overall ratio would stay within the range of 1.58 (± 0.10):1.

Variations by Region and Era

Despite the fact that the overall patterns of findings appear to be relatively robust, the existing literature suggests that more finely grained patterns may be present, as well. Given our earlier warnings about the many variations across studies, plus the exploratory nature of any further comparisons, our judgement is that further tests of statistical significance would be inappropriate for these more fine-grained assessments, but there is still a need to ask whether the findings differ systematically in other ways. In particular, given the number of findings that have come from the western "energy boomtowns" of the late 1970s and early 1980s, there is a need to consider whether the available findings differ systematically by region and/or by era.

Regional Variation. As noted by Nord and Luloff (1993), the question of regional differences is particularly relevant in light of the number of mines in the western United States that are new, that use open-pit mining techniques, and that exploit particularly rich deposits of easily accessible coal. As can be seen from Figure 6A, which summarizes the variations in findings across regions, the western mines are indeed associated with the most favorable economic findings. Only in the western United States, in other words, do the available studies provide more favorable findings than adverse ones; in the west, just over half of the 73 available findings are favorable, while 27.4 percent are adverse, and the remaining 20.5 percent are neutral. Findings from the south point to greater economic distress, with 37.2 percent of the findings indicating adverse conditions in mining regions, but only 15.4 percent indicating favorable conditions. The 31 available findings from the Great Lakes region point to even greater distress: Only two of the quantitative findings from this region (6.5%) indicate mining to be associated with favorable economic outcomes; instead, most of the available findings are split into roughly equal numbers of "neutral" and "adverse" outcomes. Finally, the results from "other" regions of the country, or from the nation as a whole, point to conditions in mining areas that are more than twice as

likely to be adverse (63.0%) than to be favorable (30.3%), while the remaining 6.7% of the findings show no differences.

Differences across Eras. Figure 6B responds to another need that was pointed out earlier—the need to assess potential changes in the relationships between mining and economic well-being over time. Although the preliminary findings from Bender et al. (1985) were relatively favorable, for example, subsequent studies indicated that those preliminary findings may have reflected the unusually prosperous or "boom" conditions that existed in many mining regions during the mid- to late-1970s.

As any number of authors have noted (see, e.g., Gulliford 1989), the era of "western energy boomtowns" came to an unexpectedly abrupt halt on a date that many residents of the Rocky Mountain region still remember as "Black Sunday"—May 2, 1982—when Exxon shut down its massive oil shale operations near Parachute, Colorado, and the mining-dependent portions of the region suddenly found themselves in a deep bust, with no "next boom" on the horizon. While many oil-extraction regions managed to avoid a serious bust for a few more years, largely because oil prices initially avoided the declines that characterized so many other commodities during the early 1980s, world oil prices ultimately dropped from $24.51 to just $9.39 per barrel in the 6 months between December 1985 and June 1986, bringing the end of the boom for oil regions as well (Freudenburg and Gramling 1998). Findings from the era that ended by the early 1980s, accordingly, might be expected to be quite different from those that have been documented in more recent years—a possibility that will be considered next.

Two main types of temporal comparisons are included in the available studies. The first involves longitudinal analyses—those that assess change over time within a given mining region or locality. The second involves cross-sectional comparisons—that is, between mining counties/communities and a matched or "control" set of counties/communities, at a given point in time. In the interest of simplicity, we use the end of 1982, after the end of "boom times" in most U.S. mining regions, as our cutoff point, comparing the findings from data collected during the years up through 1982 against those from data collected in 1983 or thereafter. Given that the overall conclusions from longitudinal analyses are inherently shaped by the conditions that prevail at the end of the study period, any longitudinal studies that straddle the 1982–1983 cutoff point are classified here with the other studies in the "1983 and thereafter" category, while the longitudinal studies that began and ended before 1982 are analyzed with the other "1982 and earlier" findings.

As shown in Figure 6B, the era of data collection does indeed appear to exert an important influence on the favorability of findings. In the years up through 1982, there were more favorable findings (52 of the 123 findings, or

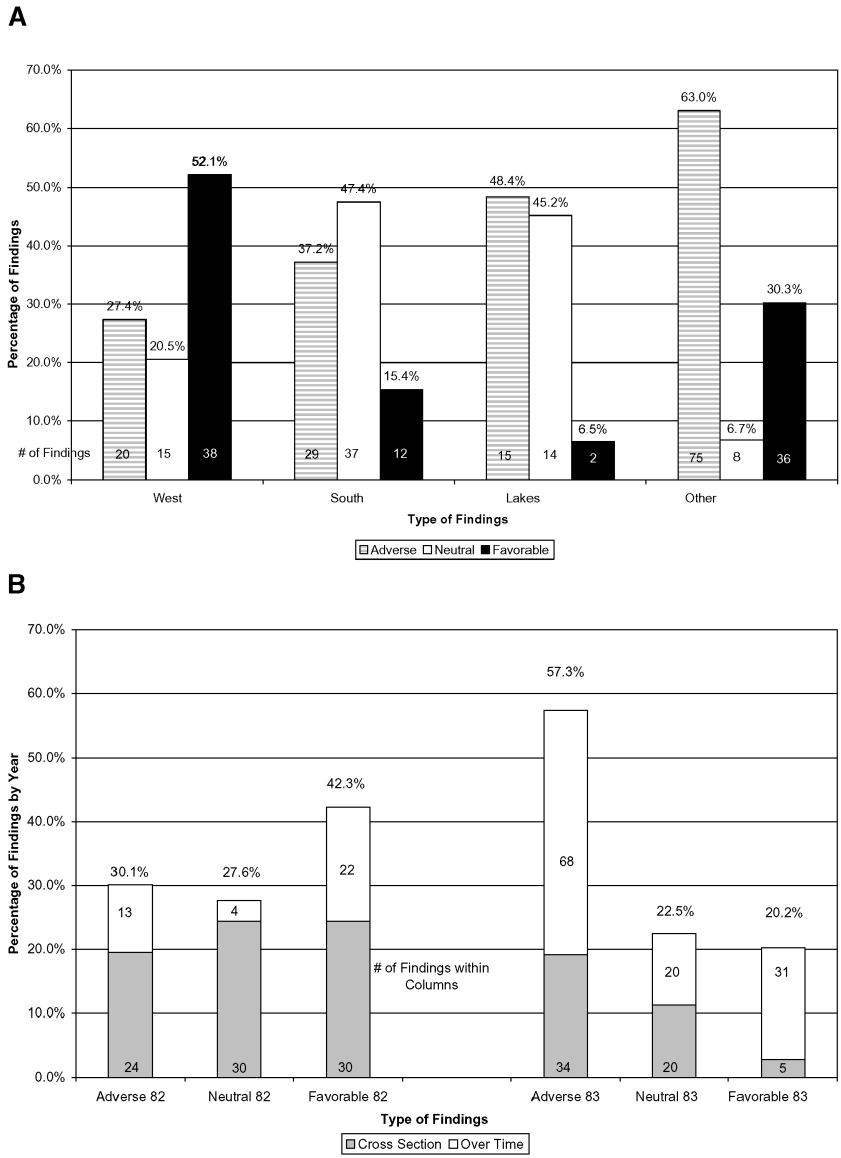

Figure 6
(A) Summary of findings by region. (B) Summary of findings by time.

42.3% of the total) than adverse or neutral ones (37 and 34 findings, or 30.1% and 27.6% of the total, respectively). In the years since then, however, the picture has been much less favorable. An outright majority of the findings since 1982 have been adverse, with 102 adverse findings constituting 57.3 percent of the 178 available findings for the era since 1982. While favorable findings were the most common category for studies that focused on the "boom" conditions that existed up until early 1982, in fact, favorable findings make up the smallest category of the findings since then—just 36 such findings, or 20.2 percent of the total—meaning that there are only about one-third as many favorable findings as adverse ones in studies using data from the years since 1982.

While the cross-sectional findings do not allow us to assess actual change over time in mining areas, a small number of studies have reported "before and after" or longitudinal findings; these findings are reported in the unshaded portions of the bars of Figure 6B, and they do indeed indicate mining to be associated with declining local economic conditions. Intriguingly, save for the fact that the longitudinal studies appear to have produced fewer neutral findings, proportionately, than have the cross-sectional studies (particularly for findings from 1982 and earlier), Figure 6B shows that the overall conclusions suggested by the two different types of methods appear broadly similar to one another, particularly with respect to the dramatic differences between findings from the "boom" era that ended in roughly 1982 and the less "euphoric" times (Gulliford 1989) that have characterized U.S. mining regions ever since. The 68 adverse findings from longitudinal studies, for example, represent 56.2 percent of the 121 longitudinal findings for the period from 1983 to present, while the 34 adverse findings using cross-sectional data represent 57.6 percent of the 59 cross-sectional findings for the same period.

Table 2 presents a summary of the comparisons that are illustrated in Figure 6, doing so in a format that mirrors that of Table 1. As can be seen from a closer examination of the findings from the two tables, most of the more favorable conclusions about economic conditions in mining areas come from a relatively small subset of the available findings—principally those focusing on incomes, in the western United States, before the end of 1982. As shown earlier by Table 1, in other words, only 88 of the 301 findings indicate favorable economic conditions in mining regions, and the clear majority of those findings (56 of the 88, or 63.6% of all favorable findings) involve incomes. Of the greater number of findings that have to do with poverty or unemployment, less than one-fifth—just 32 of the 183 (12+20 of the 59+124), or 17.5 percent—are favorable.

As shown in the top half of Table 2, similarly, it is only in the data from the western United States that favorable outcomes make up as many as one-third of the available findings; across the other regions of the United States as a whole, only 50 of the 228 remaining findings, or 21.9 percent of the total, are favorable,

while another 119 findings—52.2 percent, or an actual majority of the remaining 228 findings—point to adverse economic conditions in mining areas. As just noted, finally, the bottom half of Table 2 shows that findings of favorable economic conditions in mining regions have become relatively rare since 1982, making up only about 20 percent of the available findings that come from 1983 and thereafter, while adverse findings make up nearly three times that number, or 57.3 percent of the overall total, for the same era.

Discussion and Conclusions

These analyses strongly support the warnings of those who have expressed skepticism about the socioeconomic benefits of mines. There are clearly more positive than negative findings for incomes, but the only way for this pattern to be statistically significant is for the neutral findings to be treated explicitly as positive ones. By contrast, for the other three main categories of findings—those for poverty, unemployment, and overall—the test results are strongly significant, statistically, in the opposite direction, indicating that adverse economic outcomes are significantly more likely in the accumulated research literature to date than are positive ones. These findings for poverty, unemployment, and overall patterns remain significant when neutral findings are omitted from the analysis, and not just when the neutral findings are treated as negative ones.

Our findings also reinforce the warnings of Nord and Luloff (1993), who note the importance of analyzing the differences in findings across regions and across time; like Nord and Luloff, we find the problems to be particularly severe in the older eastern and nonfuel mining areas. In addition, our findings mirror what Elo and Beale (1985) called a ''curious anomaly''—with mining-dependent counties in that study having had higher median incomes, but also higher proportions of households living in poverty. Our results, in other words, also indicate that, even when higher incomes are associated with mining, those incomes do not prove sufficient to alleviate the problems of poverty and unemployment so often associated with mining-dependent regions.

As a reviewer has noted, one partial explanation for the ''anomaly'' may involve the mechanization that has had particularly strong impacts on mining employment and income inequality in Appalachia. Mechanization has become associated with relatively high wages in most U.S. mining operations today, but only for the smaller number of workers still employed; many other workers once employed in mining have been displaced by the mechanization. This pattern may well be reinforced by the increasing number of ''mining workers'' whose jobs are professional and/or technical in nature—geologists, engineers, computer specialists, and so forth—such that the traditional blue-collar ''mining jobs'' are decreasing in proportion as well as in number.

Table 2
Percentages of Adverse/Neutral/Favorable Findings, by Region and Era

	No. of Findings	% of Category	% of Total
Region			
West			
Adverse	20	27.4	6.6
Neutral	15	20.5	5.0
Favorable	38	52.1	100.0
Total West	73	100.0	24.2
South			
Adverse	29	37.2	9.6
Neutral	37	47.4	12.3
Favorable	12	15.4	4.0
Total South	78	100.0	25.9
Lakes			
Adverse	15	48.4	5.0
Neutral	14	45.2	4.7
Favorable	2	6.5	0.7
Total Lakes	31	100.1	10.4
Other/Nation			
Adverse	75	63.0	24.9
Neutral	8	6.7	2.7
Favorable	36	30.3	12.0
Total Other/Nation	119	100	39.6
Total across Regions	301	NA	100.1
Era			
1982 and before			
Adverse	37	30.1	12.3
Neutral	34	27.6	11.3
Favorable	52	42.3	17.3
Total 1982 and before	123	100.0	40.9

(continued)

Table 2 *(continued)*

	No. of Findings	% of Category	% of Total
1983 and after			
Adverse	102	57.3	33.9
Neutral	40	22.5	13.3
Favorable	36	20.2	12.0
Total 1983 and after	178	100.0	59.1
Total across Eras	301	NA	100.0

Another potential factor behind the apparent anomaly may involve methodological variations: Unlike data on poverty and unemployment rates, which are almost always collected at the level of the households and hence in the communities or counties where people actually live, income data are often collected at the level of the firm—that is, where people work, rather than where they live. The potential importance of this distinction is illustrated by the recently closed White Pine Mine of Michigan's Upper Peninsula (see Wilson 2001). Income data coded by place of work show this mine's county (Ontonagon) to have had far higher incomes than those of Michigan's Upper Peninsula as a whole, but income data based on place of residence, taking cross-county commuting into account, show the same county as being at or below the average of the Upper Peninsula. As shown by recent fieldwork by one of the authors of this article, a key reason is that a significant fraction of the mine's workers lived in different counties or even a different state.

When looking toward the future, perhaps the logical starting point is to note again what this article's analyses do not support–namely, the widespread expectation that mining can be expected to increase the prosperity of isolated rural communities. Indeed, this is perhaps the central implication of our analysis, and one that will require additional examination in future research.

To date, sociologists have offered a number of attempts to explain distressed socioeconomic conditions in resource-dependent areas, drawing on theories of segmented economy, underinvestment in human capital, deindustrialization, and changes in the global economy, as well as on more resource-related or ''resource contingency'' approaches. Given that the findings of the present study show the experiences of mining communities to have differed significantly from the experiences of other rural regions in recent years, there appears to be a particular

need for greater attention to be paid to the last of these approaches—analyzing communities' relationships with the characteristics of natural resources themselves and with the specific technologies that are developed to exploit the resources.

As past studies have noted, most nonmetropolitan communities have little direct control over broader social, demographic, and economic trends, which can include industrial restructuring, the aging of the population, and global recessions (see, e.g., Humphrey et al. 1993; Fitchen 1995; Gaventa 1990). Still, a growing body of research indicates that certain characteristics tend to have important effects on how local economies fare within the broader changes (see, e.g., Baum 1987; Drabenstott and Smith 1995; Garkovich 1989; Malecki 1994). What has been noted in previous work on "resource contingency" (see, e.g., Freudenburg 1992; Freudenburg and Gramling 1998), in a line of logic that is reinforced by the present study's findings, is that there is a need for the range of "local characteristics" to be extended, to include the examination of characteristics of the actual natural resources and of the ways in which they are extracted. To be more specific, there appears to be a need to pay greater attention to the dynamics of resource dependency, over time, such as the potential that, as mines age, the costs of production may rise (and/or the incentive to invest in newer and more efficient technologies may drop). Such changing relationships could well contribute to what Hibbard and Elias (1993) have termed "flickering" operations (characterized by shutdowns during periods of low prices) and to what Freudenburg (1992) has termed the "extraction of concessions"—with workers, communities, and regulators being asked to make wage, tax, and/or regulatory concessions to mining operations in the interest of keeping the mines open.

While we believe our assessment is by far the most systematic appraisal ever to become available for the existing body of research, it is important that our findings be kept in perspective; other studies or methods could potentially come up with more (or less) favorable results—and in any case, it is important that the needed future research in fact be carried out. Our findings, in short, should be interpreted with caution. What is abundantly clear, however, is that caution is also in order for a set of conclusions that have rarely been treated with caution in the past—namely, the common conclusion or in some cases even the strongly asserted conviction that mining must be good for local economies. Despite the intensity with which such beliefs are often stated, the present analysis has shown that there is remarkably little evidence to support them; instead, most of the more systematic approaches to the data point instead to the opposite conclusion, often at high levels of statistical significance.

For the future, in short, it is important that more research be done; for the present, what is perhaps more important is to recognize that it can no longer be responsibly asserted that the socioeconomic impacts of mining for rural

communities will be favorable ones. Such findings have always been sporadic at best, and at least since 1982, they have become quite rare. To the extent to which past experience is to be our guide, in other words, there is surprisingly little evidence that mining will bring about economic good times, while there is a good deal of evidence for expecting just the opposite.

ENDNOTES

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