HOUSING PERCEPTIONS OF LOW-INCOME SINGLE PARENTS

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ABSTRACT: Environment-behavior researchers, other social scientists, and environmental design professionals have not yet carefully examined the housing perceptions and needs of single parents and their children, a user group that constitutes an increasingly large component of the U.S. population.

This article first provides a brief overview of demographic trends, relevant previous research, and conceptual frameworks for pursuing research. Then, two studies are presented that examine the issues outlined in the conceptual frameworks. Study I, an exploratory work, examines the perceptions of 90 low-income residents, including 82 single parents, through the use of surveys at three housing developments in Peoria, Illinois. Study II examines a portion of these conceptual frameworks by analyzing the housing perceptions among different subgroupings of single parents. Results indicate that different sets of issues correlate with one another depending upon single parents’ current marital status and their prior family backgrounds.

AUTHORS’ NOTE: These research projects were originally funded by the Upgrade Companies of Peoria, Illinois; the Champaign County Housing Authority of Champaign, Illinois; and the St. Louis Housing Authority of St. Louis, Missouri. Initial exploratory research in this area and subsequent data analysis were partially funded by the Campus Research Board of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Additional data...
Study I raises significant issues that are examined in greater detail in Study II, which tests the conceptual models for single parents and married parents, and for various subgroups of single parents. It involves a larger sample from two additional data sets comprising 348 low-income families (312 with single parents), with children at home: 96 single parents from various housing sites in Champaign County, Illinois, and 216 single parents and 35 married parents from housing sites in St. Louis, Missouri. Resident surveys were again the data-gathering technique. The data were analyzed using factor analysis and stepwise multiple regression to determine which indices predict residential satisfaction for one- and two-parent families and for various subgroups of single parents.

Results from Study II demonstrate that different indices predict residential satisfaction for low-income single and married parents, and that indices predicting satisfaction for various subgroups of low-income single parents also vary. Single parents of different marital status (never married, separated, divorced, or widowed); with large, medium, and small families; and with children of varying ages (preschool, young school age, and teenagers) all perceive their housing environment differently, and different indices predict residential satisfaction for each group. Common to many of these subgroups, however, is the importance of site appearance and management in predicting satisfaction with their housing environment.

Results from both studies are linked back to the conceptual frameworks raised earlier, and implications for further research are drawn.

HOUSING PERCEPTIONS OF LOW-INCOME SINGLE PARENTS

Divorce, separation, and unwed motherhood have been the topic of rigorous study in many disciplines, especially psychology, psychiatry, sociology, family studies, and the legal professions. Research on the relationship between single-parent families and the physical characteristics of their housing environments, however, is practically nonexistent.

This article presents a review of some demographic information that documents the increasing numbers of single-parent families in the United States and elsewhere. In addition, a brief overview of existing research on single-parent families and relevant research on housing environments is provided. Conceptual frameworks for links between these two bodies of literature are proposed. Two studies focusing on low-income single parents are then presented as a means of examining some of these conceptual issues. Conclusions are drawn, some implications for theory are proposed, and suggestions for additional research are discussed.

THE INCREASE OF SINGLE-PARENT FAMILIES

The U.S. Census Bureau recently reported that of 33.4 million families with children last year, 8.8 million, or 26.3%, were headed by single parents. Compared to the percentage of single-parent households in 1970 (12.9%), this represents a sharp increase (Washington Post, 1986). Most recent statistics show that one out of every five American children currently lives in a single-parent household (Figure 1; Bianchi & Seltzer, 1986).

Recent census data show that out of all 33,246,000 American families with children under 18, 1 of 4 is headed by a single parent; as of 1984, the United States contained 8,544,000 single-parent families (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1984). The causes of single parenthood for women, from most to least frequent, are divorce, never having been married, an absent spouse, separation, and widowhood. For male single parents, leading causes, from most to least frequent, are divorce, an absent spouse, never having married, and widowhood.

The overwhelming majority of single-parent families are headed by women (7,599,000 female vs. 945,000 male) (Figure 2: U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1984). Statistics from 1980 show that almost half (49%) of the nation's female-headed families had incomes below the poverty level (National Low Income Housing Coalition, 1980, p. 1).
For black children, living with one parent is already more common than living with two; the latest census figures report that 60.1% of black families with children are maintained by a single parent, up 35.7% from 15 years ago (Washington Post, 1986).

The increase in single-parent families is not just an American phenomenon. It has been documented as well in Canada (Davis, 1985), France (Le Faucheur, 1980), Great Britain (O'Brien, 1980; Schlesinger, 1982), the Netherlands (Clason, 1980), Poland (Lobodzinska, 1983), Sweden (Trost, 1981), New Zealand (Lloyd, 1978), and the Soviet Union (Moskoff, 1983). In fact, in the USSR, the rate of divorce has seen extraordinary increases, making it now the second highest in the world (Moskoff, 1983). The radical transformation of the nuclear family seems to be universal.

Current estimates are that 45% of all children born in the early 1980s will experience their parents' divorce, 35% will experience a remarriage, and 20% will experience yet a second divorce (Wallerstein, 1986).

PREVIOUS RESEARCH ON HOUSING ENVIRONMENTS

Research in environment and behavior as it relates to housing environments has focused on several demographic variables, especially housing for the elderly (Lawton, 1975; Carstens, 1985), disabled (Anderson, Anthony, Weidemann, Bain, & Allen, 1988; Bednar, 1977; Lifchez & Winslow, 1979; Lifchez, 1987), and children (Cooper-Marcus, Sarkissian, Wilson, & Perlmut. 1986; Housing Research and Development Program, 1974; Weinstein & David, 1966). The housing needs of low-income people also have been rigorously researched (see, for example, Cooper, 1975; Fransescato, Weidemann, Anderson, & Chenoweth, 1979). A sizable body of information is now avail-
able on the special housing needs of these segments of the population, and research in these areas continues.

Many housing projects studied by environment-behavior researchers have contained high proportions of single-parent families (see, for instance, Cooper, 1975; Cooper-Marcus et al., 1986; Edwards, Kaha, & Anderson, 1985). Yet, with few exceptions (Ahrentzen, 1986, 1989; Cook, 1988; Sauer, 1986), data on the particular housing needs of this user group have not yet been specifically examined.

Many authors have documented the need to provide more innovative solutions for single-parent families and their housing problems (Anderson-Kkleif, 1981; Anthony, 1987, in press; Birch, 1985; Franck & Ahrentzen, 1989; Hayden, 1984; Kelleher, 1981; Leavitt, 1984, 1985; Soper, 1980; Sprague, 1985). More recently, excellent guidebooks for developing, designing, and evaluating housing for single-parent families have been published (Cook, Vogel-Heffernan, Lukernan, Pugh, & Wattenberg, 1988; McCamant & Durett, 1988; Pettit & Huchet, 1987; Sprague, Hayashi, Krapf, & Wallen, 1986; Wekerle, 1988), relating experiences in the United States, Canada, and Europe. However, much more work needs to be done in this area.

A few housing projects have been purposely built to serve the needs of single-parent families. Among the better known examples are Nina West Homes in London, England (Strong, 1975); the Hubertus Association project in Amsterdam, the Netherlands (France, 1985); and Warren Village Apartments and Warren Village II, both in Denver, Colorado (Sprague et al., 1988). Two architects recently won a design competition for “The New American House,” with the award-winning entry addressing the needs of single-parent families (Leavitt & West, 1985). Other than that, very little architecture literature addresses single-parent families. Thus, within the fields of environment and behavior, architecture, and planning, both research about and designs for single-parent families and their housing environments are scarce indeed (Anthony & Cornfield, 1987).

Information on the physical housing environments of single-parent families within the social science literature also is largely absent. Research on single-parent families has generally addressed independent variables such as the nature of parenting and disciplining, the level of outside parental interference, the nature of the divorce if one occurred, and the type of support groups available. Dependent variables that have been studied include levels of adjustment and incidences of psychopathology among parents and children, children’s performance in school, parent-parent relationships, economic outcomes such as welfare dependency, unemployment rates, and so on. Concerning the economic status of single-parent families, some of the most striking findings can be found in Weitzman’s (1985) pioneering work, which demonstrated that divorce leads to radically different economic consequences for men and women. Weitzman’s data indicate that during the first year following the divorce, the standard of living for most men rises an average 42%, while that for women plummets a dramatic 73%.

Yet even the most comprehensive literature reviews (Schlesinger, 1985) and methodologically sophisticated pieces of empirical research (Hetherington, Cox, & Cox, 1978; Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980; Wallerstein, 1986; Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1989; and Weitzman, 1985) have failed to examine the role of the physical home environment in the life of the single-parent family. One problem is that when discussing the single-parent family phenomenon, social scientists have typically defined the “home environment” as the psychological relationships between parents and children, and among siblings and extended family members. The location of the home within the community, the way in which it is planned, designed, and managed, and how the family perceives it may all be significant components of the overall life satisfaction of the single-parent family, but at present information on these issues is missing. Nonetheless, we do know that these components are significant contributors to residential satisfaction for occupants of multifamily housing in general, which includes both single- and two-
parent families (Anderson & Weidemann, 1979; Francescato et al., 1979; Selby, Westover, Anderson, & Weidemann, 1987; Weidemann & Anderson, 1985; Weidemann et al., 1988).

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORKS

Issues from two conceptual frameworks were selected and partially tested in the two studies described below. The transactional model developed by Wapner (1981) and further articulated by Altman and Rogoff (1987) provides one possible conceptual framework for research in this area. Wapner argues that the relationship between environment and behavior can best be explained by a transactional viewpoint, whereby the physical characteristics of the environment, the psychological processes of the individual, and the behavioral processes of that individual interact with one another.

In this context, it is proposed that a combination of the physical characteristics of the home environment and the psychological and behavioral processes of the individual and family might help to explain the complex set of relationships surrounding transition to single-parent family life. For the purposes of this research, Wapner's (1981) model has been refined to include such personal characteristics as marital status, age at first childbirth, and perceptions of childcare, as well as perceptions and beliefs about the housing environment. These may well make important contributions to residential satisfaction but have heretofore been unexamined (Figure 3).

Another relevant empirically derived model is that of residential satisfaction developed by Francescato et al. (1979) at the University of Illinois (Figure 4). It suggests that perceptions of the housing environment—specifically, factors such as safety, management, and others—may well play a role in residential satisfaction. The model has been tested for a variety of user types, primarily low-income, elderly, and, more recently, disabled individuals (Weidemann & Anderson, 1985; Anderson et al., 1988). It has not yet been tested specifically for single-parent families, however.

One of the key theoretical issues that needs to be addressed in this new area of research, and which can be tested using the second model, is whether single-parent families in fact have any special needs in their housing environments—that is, needs that specifically differ from those of two-parent families. How do the housing perceptions of one- and two-parent families compare? What factors contribute to residential satisfaction for one- and two-parent families?
BACKGROUND

During the summer of 1987, the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign's Housing Research and Development Program conducted a study evaluating the perceptions and needs of residents at three housing developments in Peoria, Illinois. The immediate purpose of this project was practical in nature—to produce recommendations that our client, the Upgrade Companies, could use to help improve programs and facilities for all three developments. That objective was fulfilled and is summarized in a report (Anthony & Westover, 1987). However, because the majority of residents at these three sites are single-parent families, the study provided an opportunity to address some of the conceptual issues described earlier. Specifically, it explores and compares the housing perceptions among various subgroups of single-parent families.

SITE DESCRIPTIONS

The three housing developments studied—Pierson Hills 1, Pierson Hills 2, and Lincoln Terrace—are owned and managed by the Upgrade Companies, a nonprofit corporation. Altogether, these developments contain 242 low-rise multifamily units. All are relatively new. Built in 1969, Pierson Hills 1, with 100 units, is the oldest; Lincoln Terrace, with 92 units, and Pierson Hills 2, with another 50 units, were both constructed in 1972.

METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

Sample

Each of the 232 occupied units was sampled, and 117 responded for a response rate of 50%. Of the total 117 respondents, 90 had children under age 18 living at home, and of this
group, 82 were single parents. Figures 5 and 6 provide a more
detailed breakdown of the sample.

Data collection. The approach used to collect data was
virtually identical to that of other research examining residential
satisfaction conducted at the Housing Research and Development
Program. Surveys were used to collect information from
residents. The survey was based on previous survey research
instruments specifically developed to test a conceptual model
of residential satisfaction, incorporating items that have been
tested repeatedly in approximately 100 housing sites in the
United States and abroad (Weidemann & Anderson, 1985).
These survey items have been found to produce results com-
parable to those of face-to-face interviews, and which can be
generalized to the population of adult residents studied with a
reasonable degree of confidence (Anderson & Weidemann,
1979).

As in previous residential satisfaction studies conducted
through the program, the index of residential satisfaction used
here was composed of the following four items: (1) How long do
you want to live here? (2) If you move again, would you like to
live in another place like this? (3) Would you recommend this
place to one of your friends if they were looking for a place to
live? (4) How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with living here, in
general? These items have consistently shown a high degree
of intercorrelation across a variety of sites and populations.

Note that not all the items that are typically used in the original
conceptual model were used in Study I. However, to address
portions of the conceptual framework of residential satisfaction
that are of special concern to single-parent families, and which
were not included in the original conceptual model, some addi-
tional items were included, among them age, marital status, age
at first childbirth, number of children, level of education, prior
family background; perceptions of safety, management, and
recreation in the housing environment; perceptions of child-
care arrangements, and self-perceptions (see original survey
in Anthony & Westover, 1987). Many of these issues were
measured through the use of indices, rather than through one
individual survey item.

The survey totaled 16 pages. A majority of the survey items
asked residents to respond along a 5-point scale; these ques-
tions were identical to previous survey items which had been
used in earlier Housing Research and Development studies. For
the purpose of this study, only a portion of these items will be
considered here.

The survey was pretested on a small group of residents. After
minor revisions were made to the survey based on responses
to the pretest, surveys and accompanying cover letters were mailed individually to the 232 households along with self-addressed, stamped envelopes. Each cover letter was personally addressed and signed. A postcard and a reminder letter, along with another copy of the survey, were sent to those who had not responded to the initial mailing.

Data Analysis

For those issues measured by more than one survey item, a combined index score was derived by computing each respondent's mean score for that issue. The data were then broken down in two different ways: by residents' marital status and by residents' prior family background.

Only the data obtained from the 82 single parents with children under 18 living at home were used in the first part of this analysis. Because only three widows were found, a group too small to compare, the sample examined in this first stage of analysis was reduced to 79. The data from this group of 79 single parents with children at home were divided into two groups according to residents' marital status: those who were single and had never been married, and those who were either separated or divorced.

In the second part of this analysis, data from all 90 parents with children at home were examined. These data were broken down based on respondents' prior family backgrounds: those who had been raised in a two-parent family, those who were brought up in a one-parent family, and those who were raised in some other family combination (blended family of one parent and one step-parent, or some other arrangement).

For each of these subgroups, correlation tests were conducted to determine the extent to which specific issues correlated with one another. The relatively small sample size of each subgroup did not permit the researchers to conduct additional, more sophisticated tests such as factor analyses or multiple regressions.

RESULTS

What patterns exist for single parents of different marital status? Results indicate that for separated and divorced parents, perceptions of residential satisfaction correlate most strongly with perceptions of safety ($r = .49, p < .005$) and management ($r = .43, p < .005$), but also with childcare and recreation (for both, $r = .32, p < .05$) (Figure 7). For those who have never been married, no items are found to significantly correlate with residential satisfaction (Figure 8).
What correlational patterns exist for those parents with different prior family backgrounds? Results show that for those raised in a single-parent family, their level of education ($r = -.56$, $p < .005$), and perceptions of management ($r = .48$, $p < .01$) and safety ($r = .47$, $p < .01$) correlate with perceptions of residential satisfaction (Figure 9). For those raised in a two-parent family, no correlations with residential satisfaction were found (Figure 10). Finally, for those raised in a blended household or some other arrangement, perceptions of recreation and safety (for both, $r = .37$, $p < .05$) and their age at first childbirth ($r = .32$, $p < .05$) correlate with residential satisfaction (Figure 11).

These results tend to confirm those of previous studies (for example, Francescato et al., 1979), which also underscore the importance of management and safety in residents' satisfaction. What is interesting to note, however, is that management and safety issues aside, it appears that the housing perceptions of different groups of single-parent residents do vary, even if only slightly. In addition, depending upon the residents' own family backgrounds—whether single-parent family, blended family, or traditional two-parent family—before they became parents themselves, residents tend to experience their housing environment differently. Finally, the finding that no items were signifi-
(n=22)

Figure 10: Statistically Significant Bivariate Correlations for Parents Raised in a Two-Parent Family

cantly correlated with residential satisfaction for both those single parents who had never been married and those parents who had been raised in two-parent families is highly unusual compared to the results from previous studies.

Unfortunately, the relatively small sample sizes, particularly once the data were subdivided into various subgroups, did not permit the testing of the conceptual model of residential satisfaction. This is a logical next step to pursue in this avenue of research.

(n=41)

Figure 11: Statistically Significant Bivariate Correlations for Parents Raised in a Blended Household or Other Arrangement

STUDY TWO

BACKGROUND

Study II builds upon the research conducted in Study I with the inclusion of a larger sample size, thus allowing the conceptual model of residential satisfaction to be tested for two-parent versus one-parent families, as well as for various subgroups of single-parent families.
In 1986, the University of Illinois Housing Research and Development Program conducted two separate but related studies that again relied primarily on residents surveys about their housing environments. The two clients were the St. Louis Housing Authority and the Housing Authority of Champaign County, Illinois. As in the case of the Peoria project, the primary purpose of both studies was again pragmatic—to produce recommendations for these clients about how facilities could be improved. In both cases, these objectives were fulfilled and are summarized in two reports (Selby et al., 1987; Weidemann et al., 1988).

However, because a large number of residents at the sites studied are single parents with children, the data sets provided an opportunity to address some of the same conceptual issues as in Study I and to test a conceptual model of residential satisfaction.

SITE DESCRIPTIONS

Fourteen low-income family housing sites were studied: five in Champaign County and nine in St. Louis. These included three high-rise and 10 low-rise housing projects, as well as a set of single-family, prefabricated residences scattered about the community. The year of completion of these housing developments ranged from 1942 (Carr Square in St. Louis) to 1974 (scattered sites in Champaign County).

METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

Sample

In Champaign County, surveys were mailed to all 259 occupied family units; 139 were returned for a response rate of 53.9%. In St. Louis, surveys were mailed to all residents at four smaller sites (Kingsbury Terrace, LaSalle Park, McMillian Manor, and Town XV); a sample ranging from approximately 35% to 60% of the residents were mailed surveys at the remain-

ing seven larger sites. In St. Louis, 395 surveys were returned from family residents for an average return rate of 40.1% from the family sites.

A total of 528 families is represented in both these data sets, 133 in Champaign County and 395 in St. Louis. This analysis, however, focused exclusively on a subgroup of 348 families with children under age 18 living at home. Of this group, 312 are single-parent families; 96 in Champaign County and 216 in St. Louis. Figures 12 to 15 provide a more detailed breakdown of the demographic characteristics of the sample.

Data Collection

Two survey instruments were developed, again based on a core set of original survey items that have been used at more than 100 housing sites in the United States and abroad (Weidemann & Anderson, 1985). The same index of residential satisfaction as in prior studies and in Study I was used. Both surveys cover those issues addressed in various conceptual models of residential satisfaction, including residents’ perceptions of their friends and neighbors, the inside of their home, management, safety and security, their building, open lawn areas, play areas, seating areas, parking, maintenance, convenience and access to the community, satisfaction with specific features of the housing development, and suggested improvements. Again, many issues were measured through the use of several related questions (see original surveys in Selby et al., 1987; Weidemann et al., 1988). In addition, a few items were added to distinguish two-parent from single-parent families and to later subdivide the data into various subgroups of single-parent families.

After they had been pretested and revised accordingly, surveys were sent out to residents at each set of sites. The Champaign County survey was 22 pages, while the St. Louis survey was 20 pages in length. Surveys and accompanying cover letters were mailed directly to each household, along with self-addressed, stamped return envelopes.
Data Analysis

Because the two sets of surveys were related but different, the data sets from Champaign County and from St. Louis were analyzed separately. Factor analytic procedures had been previously used to develop the indices that might be potential predictors of residential satisfaction for each data set (Selby et al., 1987; Weidemann et al., 1988). Several tests were performed on the data. The data were then subdivided four different ways for analysis (Figures 12 to 15).

First, for both the Champaign and St. Louis data sets, the data were partitioned into two samples: single- and two-parent families with children under age 18 living at home. In Champaign, the sample of two-parent families with children at home was too small (n = 6) for analysis. As a result, only the single-parent families in Champaign (n = 96) and both the single- (n = 216) and two-parent families (n = 36) in the St. Louis samples were examined.

Second, the data from the single-parent families at both the Champaign and St. Louis housing sites were divided into four groups based on residents' marital status, examining those who were never married, separated, divorced, and widowed. Third, the same data were divided into three groups according to the age of their children, looking at parents of preschoolers, young school age, and teenagers. Fourth, the same single-parent data were divided into three groups according to family size, examining those families with one child, two to three children, and

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Champaign County Sites</th>
<th>St Louis Sites</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Two-parent families</td>
<td>**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One-parent families</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* With children under age 18 at home
** Not included; too small for analysis

Figure 12: Study II: Sample Breakdown by One- and Two-Parent Families*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Champaign County Sites</th>
<th>St Louis Sites</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Single, never married</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Separated</td>
<td>**</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>**</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Widowed</td>
<td>**</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Single parents with children under age 18 at home
** Not included; too small for analysis

Figure 13: Study II: Sample Breakdown by Marital Status*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Champaign County Sites</th>
<th>St Louis Sites</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-schoolers</td>
<td>**</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young school-age children</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teenagers</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Single parents with children under age 18 at home
** Not included; too small for analysis

Figure 14: Study II: Sample Breakdown by Age of Children*
four or more children. It should be noted that these analyses were of different partitions of the same data—that is, those from the single-parent families—and that these were nonindependent analyses. Sample sizes for all were insufficient for a completely crossed design.

A stepwise regression analysis was used to predict the index of residential satisfaction for each sample partition. All indices which had been previously derived from the Champaign and St. Louis data sets, were used as potential predictors in the regression analyses. It should be noted, however, that the indices used in the Champaign County data set were similar but not equivalent to those in the St. Louis data set. Figure 16 shows the indices that emerged from the prior factor analyses of the two data sets (Selby et al., 1987; Weidemann et al., 1988).

**RESULTS**

Findings indicate that the indices that were found to predict residential satisfaction for low-income married parents and for single parents differ (Figure 17). Let us first examine which

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**Table:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Family Size</th>
<th>Champaign County Sites</th>
<th>St Louis Sites</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 child only</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-3 children</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 or more children</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Single parents with children under age 18 at home

Figure 15: Study II: Sample Breakdown by Family Size

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**Table:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th># of Survey Items in Each Index Derived from Factor Analysis *</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Champaign County Sites</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Site Appearance</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintenance</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safety (overall)</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safety of Building</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safety of Site</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children's Safety</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequency of Crime</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Living Behavior</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neighbors</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Neighbors</td>
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<tr>
<td>Similar Neighbors</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative Neighbors</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inside Storage Space</td>
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<tr>
<td>Interior Unit Comfort</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interior Space</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Recreational Facilities</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Services</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miscellaneous (outside home, trash, speed of drivers, outdoor seating)</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miscellaneous (having visitors, speed of police response)</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Importance of changes</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfaction with Physical Environment</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Access</td>
<td>7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parking</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outdoor Benches</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yard Space</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ease of Access to Mail and Management</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bus Stops</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Marital Status</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Age of Children</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Number of Children</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Items derived from original factor analysis (Selby et al., 1987, Weidemann et al., 1988)

**Figure 16:** Number of Items in Each Index Used to Measure Conceptual Issues
### SINGLE PARENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHAMPAIGN</th>
<th>(n = 96, R^2 = .53)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Index</strong></td>
<td>Beta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Site appearance</td>
<td>.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management</td>
<td>.22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ST. LOUIS</th>
<th>(n = 216, R^2 = .72)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Index</strong></td>
<td>Beta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Site appearance</td>
<td>.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management</td>
<td>.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Similar</td>
<td>.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintenance</td>
<td>.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yards</td>
<td>.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interior space</td>
<td>.13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Based on stepwise regression analyses, using factor analysis derived indices as predictors of the four-item index of residential satisfaction.

### MARRIED PARENTS

#### CHAMPAIGN
(n = 60, R^2 = .52)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Index</th>
<th>Beta</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Site appearance</td>
<td>.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evicting bad neighbors</td>
<td>.24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### ST. LOUIS
(n = 66, R^2 = .71)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Index</th>
<th>Beta</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bonding</td>
<td>.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interior space</td>
<td>.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintenance</td>
<td>.24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### ST. LOUIS
(n = 66, R^2 = .59)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Index</th>
<th>Beta</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Site appearance</td>
<td>.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Similar neighbors</td>
<td>.31</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### ST. LOUIS
(n = 46, R^2 = .70)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Index</th>
<th>Beta</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Site appearance</td>
<td>.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintenance</td>
<td>.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Similar neighbors</td>
<td>.27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### ST. LOUIS
(n = 46, R^2 = .58)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Index</th>
<th>Beta</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Management</td>
<td>.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community access</td>
<td>.25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Based on stepwise regression analyses, using factor analysis derived indices as predictors of the four-item index of residential satisfaction.

Figure 18: Predictors of Residential Satisfaction for Single Parents* (Data Broken Down by Differing Marital Status)

Subgroup, perceptions of (1) site appearance (the appearance of buildings and grounds) and (2) housing management staff are two of the strongest predictors of residential satisfaction (Figure 17).

Predictors of residential satisfaction differ widely for particular subgroups of single parents. Let us next examine single parents of different marital status (Figure 18). Site appearance and perceptions of neighbors emerged as common predictors of residential satisfaction for almost all these subgroups. Perceptions of maintenance is an important predictor for both unwed and divorced parents, but interestingly enough, not for widowed or separated parents. Access to the community is a significant predictor of satisfaction for widows, but not for other groups.

Single parents with children of different ages experience different predictors of residential satisfaction (Figure 19). Again, site appearance and management are two of the most common
**Predictors of Residential Satisfaction for Single Parents**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Preschool</th>
<th>Young School Age</th>
<th>Teens</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>St. Louis</td>
<td>(n = 56, R = .72)</td>
<td><strong>CHAMPAIGN</strong> (n = 49, R = .47)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Index</td>
<td>Beta</td>
<td>Index</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management</td>
<td>.72</td>
<td>Site appearance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benches</td>
<td>.59</td>
<td>Site appearance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safety</td>
<td>-.30</td>
<td>Management</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| St. Louis | (n = 124, R = .73) | **ST. LOUIS** (n = 67, R = .80) |
| Index     | Beta              | Index | Beta              |
| Site appearance | .39 | Site appearance | .55 |
| Maintenance | .25        | Management | .32 |
| Similar neighbors | .21     | Site appearance | .27 |
| Yard      | .16              | Similar neighbors | .25 |
| Interior space | .16  | Interior space | .17 |

- Based on stepwise regression analyses, using factor analysis derived indices as predictors of the four-item index of residential satisfaction.

**Figure 19:** Predictors of Residential Satisfaction for Single Parents* (Data Broken Down by Parents with Children of Different Ages)

Predictors of satisfaction. In fact, management is the only predictor for parents of preschoolers. The greatest number of predictors are for parents of teenagers.

Single parents with families of different sizes experience residential satisfaction in different ways (Figure 20). For this subgroup, site appearance is the strongest predictor of satisfaction for parents with only one child. It is a significant predictor for larger families as well.

**DISCUSSION (STUDIES I AND II)**

Both studies are limited in their own ways. The sample size in exploratory Study I is relatively small, especially after it is broken down into subgroups, some of which are simply too small for analysis. Because of its small sample size, results from Study I are less generalizable than those from Study II. Furthermore, in both studies, all residents sampled are low-income and most are black, further limiting the interpretations of the results to other populations. How do middle- or upper-class single parents...
perceive their housing environments? How do children of single-parent families experience their homes? These questions and others were not addressed here, and are left for future research.

Nonetheless, a few key findings should be highlighted. First, the findings about low-income single parents as a whole derived from Study II are somewhat similar to the findings obtained from previous studies of low-income families. The importance of site appearance and management as significant predictors of residential satisfaction found in Study II have been found elsewhere (Francescato et al., 1979). A probable reason for the comparable results is that so many low-income housing environments studied previously are largely composed of single-parent families.

Second, interestingly enough, in Study I, childcare is not a significant correlate of residential satisfaction for low-income unwed mothers. Childcare does enter the picture, however, for separated and divorced parents, where it is a significant correlate of residential satisfaction. Perhaps childcare relates to the satisfaction of divorced or separated parents especially because this group at one time may have had ex-spouses assisting with childcare, but no longer. At first glance, one might presume that those who have never been married may now be more self-sufficient and not as bothered by lack of on-site childcare. However, closer examination of some of the data from Study I reported elsewhere (Anthony & Westover, 1987) reveals that this is not the case. In fact, unwed mothers are more likely to rely on family members, usually their own mothers, as well as grandparents or other children, to help take care of their children. Separated or divorced mothers, however, tend to rely more on friends, neighbors, or paid babysitters. Paying for and arranging for childcare creates an additional complication in the lives of these individuals, a problem more acutely felt for this group than for other single parents. Hence, the cost and inconvenience of childcare may help explain why it is related to the level of residential satisfaction for this group.

Third, the housing perceptions of various subgroups of low-income single parents—be they by marital status or prior family background as in Study I—or marital status, age of children, or family size as in Study II—differ in several ways from one another. Low-income single parents are by no means a monolithic group. Significant variations among single parents must be taken into account in any theoretical or applied context. Hence, depending upon the situation, it is possible that each may require different kinds of physical, managerial, and policy solutions.

CONCLUSIONS

Research about the housing needs of single-parent families is just beginning to emerge, and as a result, scholars new to this area may be tempted to view this user group as a monolith, with its own set of needs distinct from others. However, just as research on the housing needs of the elderly and the disabled has pointed out, user groups have wide variations among themselves and cannot be viewed in a uniform way.

For example, researchers have recently classified the elderly into such terms as “the young old” and the “old old,” two distinct sets of age groups with different sets of physical limitations and environmental needs. Undoubtedly, wide variations also occur within each of these groups. Among physically disabled adults, as well, those who are severely disabled generally have different kinds of housing requirements from those with only mild disabilities (Anderson et al., 1988). A wheelchair-bound individual will experience the housing environment very differently from that of a person requiring a walker or a cane, or a person who is blind.

This research has demonstrated that low-income single parents who have never been married have a somewhat different set of housing perceptions from those who are widowed, separated, or divorced. Similarly, depending upon the age of their children and the size of their families, low-income single parents view their housing environment in a variety of ways. These types of findings can be both of theoretical value to researchers and practical assistance to planners, designers, administrators, and managers of low-income housing developments.
The two studies presented here have provided a glimpse into the housing perceptions and needs of some low-income single parents. Subsequent research needs to concentrate on the further development and refinement of some of the theoretical models presented earlier (Wapner, 1981; Francescato et al., 1979). It also needs to be broadened to include other income and racial groups, because the problems of single-parent family life often transcend economic class and racial distinctions.

The dynamics of the single-parent family are extremely complex and can neither be easily understood nor simply measured. Ideally, a multilevel, multivariable framework is needed to examine their housing perceptions and needs (Hetherington et al., 1978). The perceptions of both parents (custodial and noncustodial) and children need attention (Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1989). In some contexts, relationships to school and work settings may also require study.

Both the physical description of the housing environment (for example, the type and size of the dwelling unit, number of rooms, number of people per bedroom, amount and type of household possessions, and so on) as well as residents' perceptions of that environment need to be scrutinized.

The temporal dimension is also paramount. If it were possible, examining the housing environment before, during, and after transition to single-parent family status would provide an even more solid theoretical foundation for research. Similarly, long-term versus short-term perceptions need to be considered. Perceptions immediately after transition will likely differ from those several years later (Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980; Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1989).

One of the authors' subsequent work has begun to follow some of these directions. One study currently underway (Anthony, 1989; Bergman, 1989) is examining how middle-income parents, both custodial and noncustodial, and children experience their home environments before, during, and after a divorce. Both objective characteristics of the housing environment—inside and outside—and perceived characteristics are being measured. An attempt is being made to compare objective features of homes with the way residents—both single parents and their children—perceive them, and to ascertain which specific physical features relate to residential satisfaction, reduction of stress, and adjustment to life as a single-parent family.

The research presented here is just a beginning, and much more is needed. A careful study of the specific housing perceptions and needs of not only single-parent families but also unrelated adults, two-career families, and adult children living at home could well prove to be fruitful ground for researchers, environmental designers, and policy makers.

NOTES

1. Two sites in St. Louis, Carr Square and Clinton-Peabody, housed a combination of elderly and family residents. Only data from the family residents were examined in this study.
2. The exact number of occupied family units at the St. Louis sites to whom surveys were mailed was not available.

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