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The Family-Friendly Community and Its Life Course Fit for Dual-Earner Couples

Much is known about family-friendly workplaces. This article examines the less understood family-friendliness of the communities in which dual-earner couples reside. Using data from a representative sample of dual-earner couples (N = 727) in upstate New York, we examine how individual, couple, and neighborhood characteristics are associated with perceptions of community family-friendliness. Using a life course perspective, we find that couples with young children rate their communities more favorably than do other couples. Findings also indicate that for couples with children of their own, living in a neighborhood with many other families with children is associated with higher ratings of family-friendliness. We term this match, between a couple's life stage and their neighborhood's demographic structure, life stage-neighborhood fit.

In seeking to identify institutional arrangements supportive of working families, scholars have

focused on the family-responsiveness of the workplace, and policies such as family leave, flexible scheduling, and telecommuting (Glass & Estes, 1997). Notably absent in work-family research is attention to the community, an equally important context within which couples negotiate work and family demands (Michelson, 1985).

Much of the neighborhood literature has emphasized social dislocations associated with concentrated poverty (Gephart, 1997; Leventhal & Brooks-Gunn, 2000). Though recognizing the benefits of concentrated affluence (e.g., Sampson, Morenoff, & Earls, 1999), few studies have focused on middle-class communities themselves or identified neighborhood characteristics supportive of dual-earner couples. We do so here, with an emphasis on subjective assessments of community family-friendliness.

Drawing upon life course and ecological perspectives (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Elder, 1998; Moen, 2003), we argue that because of the diversity of life course situations, neighborhoods are unlikely to have the same effects on all dual-earner couples. Some couples have young children, others are deeply involved with careers, and still others may be approaching retirement with adult children outside the home. We employ the concept of life stage-neighborhood fit, an extension of the more individually oriented person-environment fit (French, Rodgers, & Cobb, 1974), and hypothesize that perceptions of family-friendliness will depend on the match

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between a couple's life stage and the demographic structure of their neighborhood.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The notion of a family-friendly workplace is fairly well established (Glass & Estes, 1997). By contrast, there is little consensus or evidence as to what constitutes a family-friendly community. In fact, we know of no other studies that have examined precisely this concept. We thus develop hypotheses about features of communities that might facilitate family-friendliness from a selective review of the neighborhood literature.

NEIGHBORHOOD SOCIOECONOMIC AND DEMOGRAPHIC STRUCTURE

Drawing upon Wilson's (1987, 1997) theory of the new urban poverty, more than a decade's worth of research has demonstrated associations between demographic characteristics of neighborhoods and outcomes across the life course (Brooks-Gunn, Duncan, & Aber, 1997; Gephart, 1997; Leventhal & Brooks-Gunn, 2000). Neighborhood socioeconomic status (SES) is a key consideration for neighborhood quality and life chances. Neighborhood SES influences the value of one's housing, the quality of public services and community institutions, and the expectations of one's neighbors, and has been associated with a wide range of outcomes in childhood and adolescence (Gephart; Wilson, 1997). Thus, we expect that couples living in higher SES neighborhoods will perceive their neighborhoods as more family-friendly.

Neighborhood family structure may influence perceived family-friendliness in several ways. Previous research finds that single-parent families in a neighborhood are negatively associated with a variety of outcomes, presumably because of the relative absence of other adults (Gephart, 1997). Married-couple families with children, by contrast, are potential sources of adult supervision, role models, and other children with whom one's children can play. Married-couple households are also likely to be more integrated and involved in their communities (Buckner, 1988; Sampson, 1988), which may create community social capital. Families with children may further create the economic and political clout needed to demand adequate day care, schools, and recreational facilities.

Though we are unaware of previous studies examining the effects of neighborhood differences in women's labor force participation or the presence of dual-earner families, such differences might be expected to influence perceptions of family-friendliness. From one perspective, a high percentage of dual-earner couples may reduce the number of adults in the neighborhood during working hours, thus depleting the stock of informal social control and other positive relationships with adults for neighborhood children. On the other hand, the presence of dual-earners may heighten the demand for quality day care and other services required to negotiate the demands of work and family. Given these potentially competing influences, we do not make hypotheses about an overall effect.

ECOLOGICAL MODELS OF NEIGHBORHOOD INFLUENCE

A common limitation in the literature is the treatment of neighborhoods as having the same blanket effect on all residents, but theorists of the life course and human development have long posited that outcomes are an interactive function of both person and the environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Elder, 1974; Lewin, 1951). Built explicitly upon Lewin's programmatic formula (i.e., $B = f(P, E)$) is the concept of "person-environment fit" (French, Rodgers, & Cobb, 1974). French and colleagues state that "adjustment [is] the goodness of fit between characteristics of the person and properties of the environment" (p. 316). Person-environment fit is present when the abilities and needs of the person are in congruence with the opportunities and resources available in the environment. The person-environment fit model has been particularly useful in studies of vocational choice, occupational stress, and job satisfaction, which examine the consonance between personality factors, skills, and goals, and the characteristics of jobs that people occupy or to which they aspire (Caplan & Van Harrison, 1993; Holland, 1959).

Application of the concept of person-environment fit to neighborhoods is increasing. Kupersmidt, Griesler, DeRosier, Patterson, and Davis (1995), for example, identified person-environment fit as an important model of how neighborhood and individual risk factors interact to produce various developmental outcomes. Sucoff and Upchurch (1998) provided additional support for this model, showing that high-SES neighborhoods

serve as potentiators that maximize the attainments of youth from high-SES families. Though most studies have focused on congruence, diversity and complementarity may be beneficial as well. Kupersmidt et al., for example, found that middle-class neighborhoods played a protective role in reducing aggression among low-income minority youth.

LIFE STAGE-NEIGHBORHOOD FIT

The life course perspective illustrates the importance of examining the social and historical contexts within which lives are embedded, as well as the life stages of families (Elder, 1998; Moen, 2003). The concept of linked lives, for example, stipulates that the influences of historical events and life course transitions are transmitted indirectly through their effects on the social networks of spouses, other family members, and friends (Elder). Life course research on dual-earner couples similarly demonstrates the importance of linked lives within the dyad for understanding the adaptive strategies employed to manage work and family responsibilities (Moen).

The life stage principle directs attention to how the effects of historical events and social time and space vary by an individual's or family's life stage (Elder, 1998; Moen, 2003). Though more individually oriented and not explicitly drawing upon the life course perspective, Eccles and Midgley's (1989) theory of stage-environment fit has been used to identify features of middle-school contexts that are developmentally appropriate to the abilities and needs of early adolescents.

We combine the concepts of stage-environment fit and linked lives to yield life stage-neighborhood fit, a concept representing the degree to which a neighborhood is a good fit for the interests, abilities, and needs of families at varying life stages. The idea could be broadened, of course, to encompass any ecological context. To illustrate the usefulness of life stage-neighborhood fit, we focus strategically on the interactive relationships between a couple's parenting stage (i.e., presence and age of children) and their neighborhood's demographic characteristics.

As we have described, a strong presence of families with children in a neighborhood is likely to be positively associated with perceptions of family-friendliness, but the concept of life stage-neighborhood fit suggests that this effect will be most salient for couples with children of their own. Thus, we hypothesize that couples

with children living in neighborhoods with a higher percentage of families-with-children households will report higher perceptions of family-friendliness. We also expect that similarity of neighbor's incomes to one's own will be associated with higher reports of friendliness. This may reflect concerns about property values or the shared childrearing values of families of similar socioeconomic status. We would not expect similarity of incomes to have the same positive effect in lower income communities. Finally, for the dual-earner couples in our sample, neighborhood differences in women's labor force participation and dual-earner households may be particularly salient. Again, because of the potentially offsetting effects of women's labor force participation, the expected nature of the relationship is not hypothesized.

LIFE STAGE, COMMUNITY ATTACHMENT, AND FAMILY-FRIENDLINESS

From a life course perspective, presence of children in the home, gender, and age are likely to be significant predictors of neighborhood assessments. Among couples without children, the family-friendliness of the neighborhood may seem irrelevant, or of very abstract concern, leading to lower evaluations of family-friendliness regardless of the community and its match to the respondent's own circumstances. In contrast, couples with children are likely to be keenly aware of the ways in which the local community is supportive of families. These expectations are consistent with research in community psychology, which has found perceived sense of community and cohesion to be highest among married persons and couples with children (Buckner, 1988; Sampson, 1988).

Traditional gender norms with regard to work and family roles suggest a heightened awareness of the family-community nexus among women. This awareness is not likely diminished—and may even be exaggerated—for women in dual-earner couples, upon whom the logistics of managing work and family goals and obligations disproportionately fall (Moen, 2003). Thus, we expect assessments of community family-friendliness to be higher among women than men.

Research into the more general concepts of community satisfaction, attachment, and cohesion suggests additional factors likely to be associated with perceived family-friendliness. Length

of residence, presence of friends in the neighborhood, community involvement, home ownership, and age have all been found to be positively associated with assessments of community satisfaction or attachment (Brown, 1993; Buckner, 1988; Filkins, Allen, & Cordes, 2000; Sampson, 1988).

METHOD

Sample

The Cornell Community Study (1999–2000) is a random sample of dual-earner couples in three middle-class communities in upstate New York. The Community Study is an extension of the Cornell Couples and Careers Study, a sample of dual-earner couples employed at seven major companies in upstate New York. Within these companies, the sample primarily included managerial and professional respondents in dual-earner relationships. The Community Study randomly sampled within census block groups with the highest representation of Couples and Careers Study respondents. Fifty-seven block groups within the Rochester SMSA, Syracuse SMSA, and Tompkins/Cortland Counties are included, with an average of 26.9 respondents per block group.

Overall, 2,939 households were contacted, with telephone numbers randomly drawn from a list of all residences. Eligible respondents lived in married or coupled households with at least one respondent employed. One exception was single, employed persons under age 30. Of the initial 2,939 households contacted, 1,090 were deemed ineligible based on these criteria, 504 refused to participate, and another 325 had nonworking phone numbers. The final sample yielded 873 participating households: 631 with both partners participating, 255 with one partner from a couple, and 17 nonpartnered respondents under age 30. Excluding nonworking numbers and using an estimate of the eligibility status of refusals yields a response rate of about 68% of eligible households with at least one member participating.

Data were collected from respondents via telephone interviews averaging an hour in length. Because of time considerations, questions relating to perceptions of community were limited to a module randomly given to about half of respondents ($n = 761$), either the respondent or his or her

spouse/partner. Excluding 5 respondents (0.7%) from same-sex couples and other cases with missing data (3.4% on household income, 0.4% on home ownership) yields a final analysis sample of 727 individuals.

Individual-Level Variables

The study of the family-friendly community is a somewhat novel enterprise. To orient respondents to the issue, they were first asked a series of questions about the family-friendliness of their workplaces. They were then asked the same series of questions about their communities. Of most importance to this analysis are respondents' assessments of the overall family-friendliness of their communities on a scale of 0 (*extremely family-unfriendly*) to 100 (*extremely family-friendly*).

Dichotomous variables indicate the gender and parenting stage of respondents. Parenting stage is differentiated by age of the youngest child, including no children, infant to preschool (under age 6), elementary school (6–12), junior high through high school (13–18), adult child (≥ 18) in the household, and adult child outside the household. In some analyses, categories are collapsed into young (ages 0–12) versus older (≥ 13) children.

Individual covariates include own age, logged family income, and years of schooling beyond high school. Community attachment measures include membership in any voluntary associations (coded 1 if a *member*, 0 *otherwise*), number of years lived in present neighborhood, percentage of friends who live in the neighborhood (of total nominated friends at work and in the neighborhood), and home ownership (1 if a *homeowner*, 0 if *renting*). Work hours are the total reported number of hours worked per week. Negative affect is measured by a five-item scale of respondents' reports of feelings during the past month of sadness, restlessness, nervousness, being in good spirits (reverse coded), and that everything is an effort (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.63$).

To partly control for the neighborhood selection process, we use reports from respondents' partners ($N = 731$) about the importance of various factors in selecting the neighborhoods in which they live. Partners report on a scale of 0 (*not important*) to 100 (*very important*) the importance of each of the following factors: being near a new job, being near a spouse's job, being near relatives, reputation of schools, shopping opportunities, recreational opportunities, safety, features of a particular house, size of town,

and taxes. Descriptive statistics for individual-level variables are presented in Table 1.

Community and Neighborhood Measures

How respondents subjectively define their communities when reporting on family-friendliness is unknown. Thus, we treat community in two ways: (a) as the three larger communities of upstate New York, and (b) as the smaller neighborhoods in which they live. Because of the considerable heterogeneity of the larger communities, we place primary emphasis in our analyses on the smaller neighborhood units. Consistent with the original sampling strategy, neighborhoods are operationalized as the census block groups in which respondents were living at the time of the survey. Though not as ideal as socially defined neighborhoods, census boundaries facilitate comparisons to the literature and are typically found to be good approximations of more subjective definitions (Coulton, Korbin, Chan, & Su, 1997). Data from the 1990 census are used to quantify the socioeconomic and demographic structure of neighborhoods. We believe that use of 1990 data is appropriate because respondents' assessments of family-friendliness likely reflect their accumulated experiences in the community. The long tenure of respondents in their

present homes (mean of 11.7 years) reinforces this point.

We began by considering a wide range of census measures related to our concepts of interest. To reduce the information, a factor analysis with varimax rotation was performed, yielding five orthogonal dimensions (see Table 2). Scales were created for each dimension by averaging the standardized scores of items with highest loadings.

Two dimensions of neighborhood SES, reflecting the concepts of concentrated affluence and poverty, are differentiated (see columns 1 and 2). Given the strong correlation between poverty and affluence, however, our analyses include the single construct of high-SES neighbors. High SES is positively associated with the percentages of adults with college degrees and employed in managerial or professional occupations, and negatively with adults with less than a high school diploma. Being born in New York is discarded because of lack of a theoretical connection to the other items.

Column 3 clearly suggests a dimension of married families with children. It is indicated by the percentages of households that are married with children, persons ages 0 to 11, and inversely by persons ages 65 to 74. The factor analysis also

TABLE 1
DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS FOR INDIVIDUAL/COUPLE-LEVEL VARIABLES

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1. Age	1.00											
2. Gender (<i>woman</i> = 1)	-0.07	1.00										
3. Number of children	-0.27	0.09	1.00									
4. Household income (logged)	0.10	0.04	0.05	1.00								
5. Years of education beyond H.S.	0.04	-0.10	0.02	0.27	1.00							
6. Work hours	-0.04	-0.22	0.06	0.14	0.13	1.00						
7. Years in present house	0.58	0.04	0.00	0.03	-0.07	-0.07	1.00					
8. Percent of friends who are neighbors	0.02	0.00	0.07	0.07	0.01	0.06	0.07	1.00				
9. Member of an organization	0.02	0.01	0.13	0.12	0.15	0.22	0.03	0.01	1.00			
10. Homeowner	0.29	0.04	0.15	0.15	0.02	0.09	0.23	0.12	0.15	1.00		
11. Negative affect	-0.13	-0.05	-0.01	-0.11	0.00	-0.04	-0.10	-0.01	-0.06	-0.14	1.00	
12. Community family-friendliness	-0.12	0.01	0.14	0.08	0.11	0.05	-0.14	0.10	0.11	0.06	-0.05	1.00
<i>M</i>	44.32	0.52	1.51	4.89	2.97	40.20	11.66	23.33	0.80	0.93	1.97	78.68
<i>SD</i>	0.92	0.50	1.22	0.21	2.77	16.13	9.28	35.65	0.34	0.26	0.51	16.75
Min	21	0	0	3.84	0	0	0.08	0	0	0	1	0
Max	79	1	6	5.84	12	80	45	100	1	1	4.2	100

Note: *N* = 727 for all variables. Correlations of 0.08 are significant at the *p* < .05 level.

TABLE 2
FACTOR ANALYSIS OF 1990 CENSUS BLOCK GROUP CHARACTERISTICS

Census Variables	(1)	(2)	Factors (3)	(4)	(5)
Socioeconomic Status					
Adults with college degree or more	0.94				
Adults with less than a high school degree	-0.80				
Adults in professional/managerial occupations	0.92				
Families with incomes 75K or above	0.69				
Persons receiving public assistance		0.74			
Children below poverty line		0.85			
Household Structure and Age					
Households headed by single female parent		0.83			
Households married with children			0.76		
Persons ages 0 to 5			0.82		
Persons ages 6 to 11			0.88		
Persons ages 65 to 74			-0.89		
Labor Force Participation (LFP)					
Women's LFP			0.57	0.36	
LFP of women with children under age 6				0.87	
Children under age 6 with both parents working				0.85	
LFP of women with children ages 6 to 17				0.85	
Children ages 6 to 17 with both parents working				0.78	
Stability					
Occupied units with homeowner					0.70
Persons living in the same house in 1985					0.75
Persons born in same state	-0.84				

Note: Figures are factor scores from varimax rotation pattern. Variables refer to the percentage of block group residents or housing units falling into a given category. $N = 57$ census block groups.

reveals that it is important to distinguish whether women in the labor force have children because this loads strongly with the percentage of dual-earner families in the neighborhood (see column 4). Finally, column 5 represents a dimension of neighborhood stability. It is represented by the rate of home ownership in the block group and the residential stability of neighbors (i.e., the percentage in the same house in 1985).

Hierarchical Modeling Strategy

Hierarchical linear models (HLM) are used to handle the nested nature of the sample and to test hypothesized interactions between individual and neighborhood characteristics (Bryk & Raudenbush, 1992). With only one member of the couple assessing his or her community, we have two levels with individuals nested within neighborhoods. At level one:

$$FF_{ij} = \beta_{0j} + \beta_{1j}Life\ Stage_{ij} + \dots + \beta_{kj} X_{kij} + r_{ij} \quad (1)$$

within-neighborhood variation in perceived family-friendliness (FF_{ij}) is modeled as a function of a level-one intercept (β_{0j}), individual-level independent variables (X_k) such as life stage, gender, and community attachment, and an error term (r_{ij}) capturing the unique disturbance for individual i living in neighborhood j . Variations in perceived family-friendliness across neighborhoods are captured at level two by

$$\beta_{0j} = \gamma_{00} + \gamma_{01} Families_j + \gamma_{02} W_{2j} + \dots + \gamma_{0S} W_{Sj} + u_{0j} \quad (2)$$

where perceived friendliness in neighborhood j (β_{0j}) is a product of a level-two intercept (γ_{00}), level-two independent variables (W_S) such as presence of

families with children in the neighborhood, and an error term unique to neighborhood j (μ_j).

Most important to our concept of life stage-neighborhood fit is the ability of HLM to handle interactions between individual and neighborhood characteristics (Bryk & Raudenbush, 1992). This is done by allowing the slope coefficients from level one to vary at level two as a function of neighborhood characteristics. In the equation

$$\beta_{1j} = \gamma_{10} + \gamma_{11}Families_j + u_{1j} \quad (3)$$

the effect of life stage on family-friendliness (β_{1j}) is allowed to vary across neighborhoods and is influenced by neighborhood characteristics such as the presence of other families with children in neighborhood j .

RESULTS

Overall Ratings of Community Family-Friendliness

Before considering the interplay between couple and neighborhood characteristics, we begin by simply examining how overall ratings of community family-friendliness vary by gender and parenting stage (see Figure 1). A fairly clear pattern is observed across the life course. Highest ratings, for both men and women, are found for those with young children ages 0 to 12. Ratings are lower for parents with adolescent children, for

those with adult children living at home, and among parents whose children have left home.

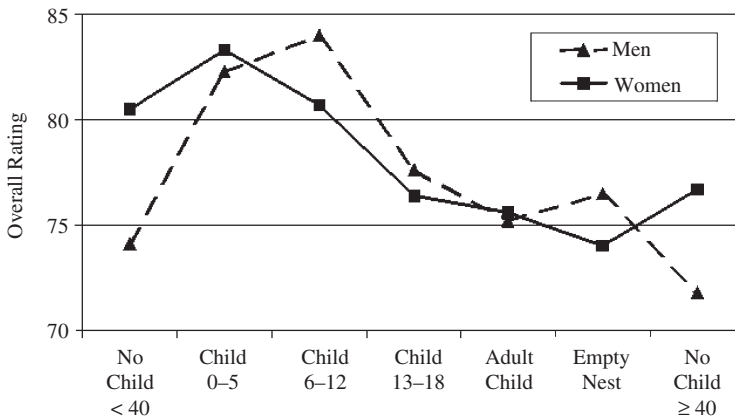
Gender differences are most pronounced among couples without children. Men without children rate their communities the least family-friendly of all, whereas the ratings of women without children vary by age. Women under 40 who may still anticipate having children in the future rate their communities nearly as high as do women with young children. Women aged 40 and over without children, in contrast, rate their communities considerably lower.

Multilevel Models of Community Family-Friendliness

Results from the hierarchical linear regression models are presented in Table 3. For ease of interpretation, variables are mean-centered prior to estimation (Bryk & Raudenbush, 1992).

We begin with individual-level factors associated with perceived family-friendliness in column 1. Overall, respondents rate their communities rather favorably, as indicated by the intercept of 77.5 (on a 0 to 100 scale). Because of centering, the intercept represents the average rating of family-friendliness across all neighborhoods, adjusting for neighborhood compositional differences across the individual-level covariates.

FIGURE 1
FAMILY-FRIENDLY RATINGS BY PARENTING STAGE



Note: Cornell Community Study, 1999–2000. $N = 727$ respondents. Respondent’s age is indicated for couples with no children. For couples with children, child’s age is indicated.

TABLE 3
MULTILEVEL MODELS OF PERCEIVED COMMUNITY FAMILY-FRIENDLINESS

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Individual-Level Variables				
Intercept	77.53*** (0.92)	77.60*** (0.92)	77.46*** (0.92)	77.57*** (0.92)
Women with young children	5.32* (2.07)	5.15* (2.08)	5.51** (2.07)	5.30** (2.08)
Women with older children	0.76 (2.41)	0.83 (2.42)	1.17 (2.42)	1.07 (2.41)
Women with no children	1.33 (2.05)	1.30 (2.06)	1.83 (2.06)	1.47 (2.06)
Men with young children	6.40** (2.10)	6.38** (2.10)	6.53** (2.09)	6.18** (2.11)
Men with older children	0.47 (2.50)	0.52 (2.51)	1.29 (2.61)	0.55 (2.52)
Men with no children	—	—	—	—
Age	-0.04 (0.08)	-0.08 (0.09)	-0.08 (0.09)	-0.08 (0.09)
Household income (logged)	3.64 (3.11)	2.13 (3.24)	3.80 (3.46)	4.04 (3.46)
Years of education beyond high school	0.45† (0.23)	0.30 (0.24)	0.39 (0.24)	0.38 (0.24)
Years in present neighborhood	-0.17* (0.08)	-0.14 (0.08)	-0.14 (0.08)	-0.14† (0.08)
Percent of friends who are neighbors	0.04* (0.02)	0.04** (0.02)	0.05** (0.02)	0.04* (0.02)
Participates in an organization	3.17† (1.90)	2.88 (1.91)	3.05 (1.90)	2.74 (1.91)
Homeowner	3.16 (2.60)	3.46 (2.64)	4.27 (2.64)	4.17 (2.65)
Work hours	-0.01 (0.04)	0.00 (0.04)	0.01 (0.04)	0.00 (0.04)
Negative affect	-1.44 (1.20)	-1.47 (1.20)	-1.26 (1.20)	-1.34 (1.21)
Community 1		2.29 (1.77)	2.42 (1.77)	2.69 (1.78)
Community 2		1.40 (1.46)	1.27 (1.47)	1.75 (1.47)
Community 3		—	—	—
Neighborhood-Level Variables				
High-SES neighbors		2.02** (0.71)	1.73* (0.72)	1.83* (0.72)
Families with children		0.44 (0.63)	0.36 (0.63)	0.46 (0.63)
Dual-earners with young children		-0.22 (0.76)	-0.23 (0.76)	-0.12 (0.76)
Stability		-0.57 (0.88)	-0.67 (0.88)	-0.79 (0.89)

TABLE 3 CONTINUED

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Life Course Fit Interactions				
Neighborhood families *			4.24*	
Women with young children			(1.66)	
Neighborhood families *			4.49*	
Women with older children			(2.12)	
Neighborhood families *			3.68*	
Women with no children			(1.87)	
Neighborhood families *			3.48*	
Men with young children			(1.74)	
Neighborhood families *			2.06	
Men with older children			(2.51)	
Neighborhood dual-earners *				-2.94
Women with young children				(2.12)
Neighborhood dual-earners *				-3.98
Women with older children				(2.68)
Neighborhood dual-earners *				-3.33
Women with no children				(2.53)
Neighborhood dual-earners *				-0.71
Men with young children				(2.30)
Neighborhood dual-earners *				-3.77
Men with older children				(2.95)
Neighbors with similar incomes			0.10*	0.09 [†]
			(0.05)	(0.05)
-2 Log likelihood	6090.7	6071.5	6048.5	5634.5
Percent of variation explained ^a	6.2	6.6	7.5	7.0

Note: N = 727 individuals in 57 census block groups.

^aPercent of between-neighborhood variation is not reported because of lack of significant variation.

[†]p < .10. *p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001 (two-tailed tests).

The first five slope coefficients represent differences in family-friendly ratings between each parenting-stage subgroup and the excluded group of men without children. As expected, parents with young children tend to view their communities as the most family-friendly. Women and men with young children rate their communities 5.3 and 6.4 points higher, respectively, than do men without children. The pattern of results in this and other analyses is unchanged when using alternative excluded groups.

It was also expected that the more connected one is to the neighborhood, the more highly one would rate his or her community's family-friendliness. Results only partly confirm these expectations. Unexpectedly, the longer respondents have lived in the neighborhood, the less favorably they rate their communities. Geographic mobility is typically thought to undermine one's integration in the neighborhood, and thus perceptions of the community (Sampson, 1988). More recent research, however, has emphasized the contingent effects of geographical

mobility (Ross, Reynolds, & Geis, 2000; Tucker, Marx, & Long, 1998). A lack of mobility in upstate New York, which has not enjoyed economic growth in recent years, may signal an inability to pursue opportunities elsewhere. More consistent with expectations is that having a large percentage of friends in the neighborhood is significantly associated with higher ratings of family-friendliness.

Neighborhood and Life Course Fit Effects

A common preliminary question in HLM is the degree to which the outcome varies across neighborhoods, as assessed by the intraclass correlation (ICC). In the present case, there is little variation in perceived family-friendliness between neighborhoods (a statistically insignificant 2%). Some might conclude from an insignificant ICC that a hierarchical analysis is not required. But if one is interested in variation due to interactions between individual and neighborhood characteristics, which is captured in the within-neighborhood component

of the ICC (Cook, Shagle, & Degirmencioglu, 1997), hierarchical models remain appropriate.

Despite a primary interest in cross-level interactions, we did hypothesize that neighborhood socioeconomic status might predict some variation in family-friendliness across neighborhoods. A random intercepts model of direct neighborhood effects tests this hypothesis and is presented in column 2 of Table 3. The significance of high-SES neighbors is suggestive of such an effect, though the small change in total explained variation (from 6.2% to 6.6%) and lack of significant neighborhood variation in family-friendliness leads us to regard this finding cautiously.

Columns 3 and 4 represent the heart of our analysis, with the addition of coefficients for interactions between parenting stage and neighborhood characteristics. Column 3 tests the hypothesis that a strong presence of families with children in the neighborhood would be perceived as most beneficial to family-friendliness by couples with children of their own. The significance of these interactions, in the expected positive direction, supports our expectations for men and women with young children, as well as for women with older children. Women without children also appear to note the family-friendly benefits of families with children in the neighborhood.

Model 3 also tests whether similarity of neighbors' incomes to one's own is associated with enhanced ratings of family-friendliness. The positive significance of the coefficient again suggests that this is the case. The larger the percentage of neighbors in the same income bracket as one's own, the higher the perceptions of family-friendliness. It should be noted again, however, that the household incomes in our sample are rather high, and that a different effect might be observed in a primarily low-income community.

Model 4 addresses our speculation that a large presence of dual-earner couples with young children in the neighborhood might undermine perceptions of family-friendliness. Little support for such an effect is found.

In a final analysis replicating the models in Table 3 (not shown), we included a variable combining partners' reports of the importance of various reasons in selecting their current neighborhoods. Though this variable is unlikely to fully capture unobserved selection processes, it is not found to be significantly associated with perceptions of family-friendliness, nor does its inclusion change the substance or statistical significance of reported relationships.

CONCLUSION

This analysis has examined individual and neighborhood factors associated with dual-earner couples' perceptions of community family-friendliness. Moreover, it is the first to apply the concept of life stage-neighborhood fit to the lives of dual-earner couples. Most notable, perhaps, is the finding that presence of families with children in a neighborhood is associated with higher perceptions of family-friendliness primarily among couples with children of their own.

The importance of neighbors of similar life stages resonates with the family-friendly workplace literature, in which larger organizations with a strong presence of women employees are more likely to offer family-responsive policies (Glass & Estes, 1997). A critical mass may thus be required before workplaces and neighborhoods respond. Our research may have implications for neighborhood research as well. For example, one demographic feature of neighborhoods found to facilitate social organization is racial and ethnic homogeneity (e.g., Sampson & Groves, 1989). Our findings suggest that homogeneity of life stage is a factor to consider in future research as well. An important related issue, however, concerns definitions of "fit," which tend to privilege homogeneity over heterogeneity. This is not a necessary theoretical conclusion because fit may also be enhanced by complementarities created by a diversity of life stages, socioeconomic statuses, and cultures. For example, among poor single-parent families, research has shown intergenerational ties and extended families (i.e., age heterogeneity) to be important sources of childrearing and social support (Burton, 1990).

Several methodological limitations dictate caution when generalizing from our findings. Perhaps most limiting is that the sample is composed primarily of dual-earner, White middle-class couples. Several of the relationships we have observed would likely not generalize to other communities, particularly those of lower socioeconomic status. Future research should apply the concepts of the family-friendly community and life stage-neighborhood fit to nationally representative samples.

We also caution that the cross-sectional nature of our design and the possibility of unobserved selection limit strong interpretations. For instance, our findings of the benefits of life stage-neighborhood fit may partly reflect the ability of our middle-class sample to select the neighborhoods in which they live. We have tried

to account for this by controlling for socioeconomic variables associated with residential mobility (Logan, Alba, McNulty, & Fisher, 1996) and factors that respondents reported as being important in the selection of their present communities. Yet the issue remains.

The term family-friendly community is of recent invention, and may be quite unfamiliar to respondents. Another difficulty is that our measure may be conflating objective characteristics of neighborhoods with the salience of such characteristics to respondents. Future research into the subjective meanings of community family-friendliness for couples of varying life stages would help to resolve these issues.

A further necessary step is to examine whether life stage-neighborhood fit and subjective reports of community family-friendliness objectively improve the ability of dual-earner couples to negotiate work and family demands. As is true of the neighborhood literature more generally, it will be critical to identify precisely what it is about family-friendly communities and neighborhoods that assists dual-earner couples. Is it the quality of schools, day care, and other community services? Is it the availability of recreational activities or avenues for informal community participation? Or is it a more general sense of collective efficacy among residents that they can collectively realize goals and manage problems (Sampson et al., 1999)?

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