

Selecting and Assessing the Family-Friendly Community: Adaptive Strategies of Middle-Class, Dual-Earner Couples

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Abstract: Using a life course perspective, this study analyzes the adaptive strategy of community selection utilized by middle-class dual-earner couples, as well as the perceived family friendliness of their communities. Although many common concerns exist (most paramount being safety, jobs, and housing quality), parents are more apt than nonparents to mention the importance of schools, parks, libraries, and community events. For women, safety and proximity to their spouses' jobs are stronger considerations than they are for men. Although respondents mention many similar family-friendly features, only some matter in predicting their overall positive evaluations of community family friendliness. Community is discussed as being an understudied dimension of work-family policy and research.

Key Words: community, family, family-friendly, life course, work.

Numerous studies in multiple disciplines reveal the ways that workplace policy and family practices compound—and, in some cases curtail—conflicts between work and family roles (Pitt-Catsouphes, Kossek, & Sweet, in press). Only recently have researchers begun to integrate a third institutional arrangement, that of the community context, in the study of work and family experience (e.g., Bowen, Richman, & Bowen, 2000; Michelson, 1985; Swisher, Sweet, & Moen, 2004; Voydanoff, 2001). In this study, we focus on dual-earner couples (now the most common work-family arrangement in the United States) to examine two issues: (a) the types of community features they find attractive and (b) the community features most strongly associated with overall perceptions of a community as “family friendly” (Moen and Roehling, 2005).

We approach the topic from a life course perspective (Elder, 1999; Moen, 2003) that recognizes that families look to communities for different resources at varying stages of the life course (Swisher et al., 2004). It also recognizes that the act of

selecting a community in which to reside may represent a *family adaptive strategy* that occurs in response to current or anticipated stressors in the life course (Bowen et al., 2000). Understanding the family-community interface thus requires an appreciation of the agentic role of working men and women (Sweet & Moen, in press), who select not only employment circumstances but also residential environments based on current and prospective family needs. Bowen et al. (2000) further argue that the social capacity of communities to respond to family needs, as well as infrastructural elements that bolster social capacity, may moderate stress and thus facilitate *family resiliency* to challenging life circumstances. By locating factors that dual-earner couples identify as supportive elements in their communities, the current investigation fits into a larger initiative of understanding how community family-friendliness facilitates working families' adaptations to the potential conflicts and overloads of managing two paid jobs, along with the unpaid “job” of being a family.

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Context

The role community plays in the life of dual-earner, middle-class, working families is, to date, an understudied concern. Much can be learned, though, by considering insights offered by Wilson's theory of the new urban poverty (Wilson, 1987, 1997) and the research it inspired that studies the negative dynamics of concentrated poverty and social disorganization for underprivileged families and youth. The frame for understanding poor urban communities has been in terms of what these environments lack or have lost, including jobs and a stable economic base, quality schools and other public institutions, role models demonstrating the benefits of mainstream routes to success, opportunities for participation in formal and informal community organizations, and a sense of collective efficacy among residents (Booth & Crouter, 2000; Bowen, Bowen, & Ware, 2002; Brooks-Gunn, Duncan, & Aber, 1997; Gephart, 1997; Jencks & Mayer, 1990; Leventhal & Brooks-Gunn, 2000; MacLeod, 1987; Sampson, Morenoff, & Gannon-Rowley, 2002).

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 or of the middle-class, the demographic group that we study in this article. In contrast to the poverty literature, this analysis focuses less on what communities lack than on their capacities to support dual-earner, working families (Bowen et al., 2000). We seek to understand, from the perspective of a community member, what constitutes a "family-friendly community" and the factors of community life that favor selection and positive appraisals. By focusing on the resources communities offer, our analysis advances the understanding of the processes by which communities foster effective integration of families, a need highlighted in some recent publications (e.g., Furstenberg & Hughes, 1997; Mancini, Bowen, & Martin, 2004).

Although the notion of a family-friendly workplace is well established (Glass & Estes, 1997), study of the family-friendly community remains a more ambiguously defined concept (Voydanoff, 2001). One of the first attempts to conceptualize the work-family-community interface is provided by Voydanoff, who outlines community resources that theoretically facilitate work and family functioning. Using the

ecological perspective of Bronfenbrenner (1979), Voydanoff identifies six interrelated concepts, including community social organization, social networks, social capital, volunteering and informal helping, sense of community, and community satisfaction. Bowen et al. (2000) similarly describe the *social capacity* of communities to extend care and control, as well as elements of the physical and institutional infrastructure that enhance or undermine a community's full potential to service its members.

These conceptualizations draw upon the broader social capital literature (Bourdieu, 1977; Coleman, 1988) and recent formulations, applying the concept to the neighborhood or community level. Perhaps best known is the work of Sampson and colleagues on the concept of collective efficacy, which is members' shared sense that a neighborhood or community members can accomplish or realize shared goals (Sampson, Raudenbush, & Earls, 1997; Sampson et al., 1999). Contributing to this sense of efficacy are particular forms of social interaction. Following Coleman, *intergenerational closure* refers to the density and intensity of interconnections between children, parents, and other adults within the community, such as teachers, coaches, and mentors. A second component involves "reciprocated exchanges" of advice, small favors, and so forth, that residents can draw upon for support in times of need. Finally, "informal social control" refers to the degree to which residents keep their eyes on the street, watch out for each other's children, and are willing to intervene to sanction violations of community standards (Sampson et al., 1999).

One wonders if all aspects of social capacity and infrastructure are equally important in shaping perceptions of a community as being family friendly. For example, do working families more often highlight the aspects of volunteering and civic groups or the informal support offered by neighbors, when explaining the ways their community contributes to their family life? Similarly, do descriptions of community resources vary by gender or parental status?

Our life course perspective focuses attention on the interlocking careers of husbands and wives (Bielby & Bielby, 1992; Moen & Sweet, 2004; Pavalko & Elder, 1993), the ebbs and flows of needs of individuals as their biographies unfold across varying life stages (Elder, 1999), as well as the strategic choices individuals make within the confines of scripted roles and socially allocated opportunities (Moen & Roehling, 2005; Shanahan, Elder, & Miech, 1997; Sweet & Moen, in press). We focus

on two concerns central to life course research—gender and parental status—and their associations with community selection and perceptions of community family friendliness.

Although there have been remarkable reconfigurations of gender roles in the past four decades—perhaps most notably women's integration into the paid labor force (Farnsworth-Riche, in press; Moen & Roehling, 2005)—there is a remarkable persistence of preexisting gender divides (Valian, 1998). For dual-earner couples, these divisions exemplify *neotraditional* strategies of managing work and family, arrangements that relegate household and childcare management responsibilities to wives and breadwinner responsibilities to husbands (Mattingly & Bianchi, 2003; Moen & Sweet, 2003; Schor, 1991). When applied to the community-family interface, we anticipate that husbands and wives may have many common expectations of how communities might facilitate the management of work and family demands. At the same time, we expect that the contributions of specific community elements (e.g., availability of daycare, proximity to jobs) to overall perceptions of community family, friendliness may vary by gender.

The life course perspective further suggests that the salience of various features of the community will vary by life stage, wherein differing needs emerge and later dissipate (Bowen et al., 2000; Elder, 1985). Life stage and community contexts are associated significantly with community perceptions. Swisher et al. (2004) found that overall ratings of community family-friendliness are associated strongly with the "life course fit" between working families and their neighbors. For example, parents of young children were more likely to rate their communities as being family friendly if they resided in neighborhoods with greater concentrations of other families with young children. We therefore expect that parenthood itself, in conjunction with gender, will be associated with the identification of community features as being family friendly, as well as the decisions of dual-earner couples to locate in one community versus another.

Method

Sample

The data used in this study are a subset of the Ecology of Careers Study (1998–2001), a survey of

middle-class, dual-earner couples. Sampling occurred in two ways: through employment at 11 major employers in Upstate New York (representing a diverse set of industries, including higher education, utilities, manufacturing, and health care) and through residence in neighborhoods where employees of these companies were concentrated. The community subsample used in this study provides data on a random sample of couples living in 57 block groups within the Rochester Standard Metropolitan Statistical Area (SMSA), Syracuse SMSA, and Tompkins/Cortland Counties (all located in Upstate New York). An average of 26.9 participants per block group is represented.

To generate the community subsample, 2,939 households were contacted, by telephone numbers randomly drawn from a list of all residences within a census block group. With the exception of single employed persons under age 30, to be eligible, participants had to live in married or coupled households with at least one spouse employed. Of the initial 2,939 households contacted, 1,090 were deemed ineligible based on these criteria, 504 refused to participate, and another 325 had non-working phone numbers. The final sample yielded 903 participating households—631 with both partners participating, 255 with one partner from a couple, and 17 nonpartnered participants under age 30. Excluding nonworking numbers and using an estimate of the eligibility status of refusals, a positive response rate of 68% was achieved, with at least one member of each eligible household participating. For more detailed information on sample characteristics and methods, see Moen (2003) and Moen, Sweet, and Townsend (2001). In this study, we limited analyses to opposite-sex dual-earner couples, the most common work-family arrangement in this region, as well as in the United States (Moen, 2003).

As Table 1 shows, the sample tended toward people living in middle-class neighborhoods; most couples lived in their neighborhoods for 10 or more years, and nearly all participants were homeowners. The average age of respondents was mid-40s and, as is the case with most dual-earner couples (Jacobs & Gerson, 1998; Moen & Sweet, 2003; Presser, 2003), wives tended to work shorter hours than their husbands. Most of the couples had children, with an average number of 2.3 children. Readers are cautioned not to generalize findings beyond these demographic groups as perceptions of community

Table 1. *Sample Characteristics (N = 401 couples)*

	Women	Men
Mean personal income (<i>SD</i>)	32,180.73 (21,937.03)	62,470.65 (48,551.5)**
Mean household income (<i>SD</i>)	93,481.89 (57,568.65)	86,793.37 (40,146.03)
Mean age (<i>SD</i>)	45.07 (8.12)	45.45 (8.69)
% with bachelors degree or higher	47.80	60.20**
Mean number of children (<i>SD</i>)	2.26 (1.25)	2.35 (1.33)
Mean number of hours worked per week (<i>SD</i>)	37.75 (15.95)	47.74 (11.85)**
Years lived in current neighborhood (<i>SD</i>)	12.24 (8.87)	10.46 (8.12)*
% in community before first child birth	77.05	74.29
% in community within 5 years of first child birth	94.52	90.20*
% homeowners	95.74	96.00
Mean community family-friendliness (0–100) (<i>SD</i>)	80.50 (15.14)	80.16 (16.12)
<i>n</i>	401	401

Note. Ecology of Careers Study. Data restricted to dual-earner, opposite-sex couples within community sample. Values can vary depending on the source of information, the husband or the wife.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

family-friendliness may vary significantly by socioeconomic status and work status. The limitation presents concerns that we discuss in our concluding comments.

Measurement and Analysis

Perceptions of community family friendliness were assessed using two sets of questions: (a) factors that initially influenced families to move to one community versus another and (b) specific features of their communities that respondents mentioned as contributing to their communities' family friendliness. Because of time considerations when conducting interviews, questions concerning the reason for selecting a community and the perception of the community were administered randomly to a selected husband or wife within each household. In most circumstances, data on both location choices and perceptions of community are available for the couple as the husband or wife collectively would have answered both sets of questions.

To assess factors influencing residential location decisions, participants were asked to rate, on a scale of 0 (*not important*) to 100 (*very important*), the importance of each of the following factors in selecting the community in which they currently reside: (a) being near their job, (b) nearness to a spouse's job, (c) nearness to relatives, (d) reputation of schools, (e) shopping opportunities, (f) recreational opportunities, (g) safety, (h) features of a particular house,

(i) size of town, and (j) taxes. As shown in Table 1, reasons for selecting a community were stated, on average, 10–12 years after couples had moved to these locales. Although we lack a means of testing such a conclusion, we believe these retrospective accounts to be valid; given the impact these choices can have on couples' lives, the rationale is likely remembered in detail. Additionally, we assumed that parenting demands, for many couples, influenced the selection of communities. Although our data offer no direct indication of the extent to which children (or anticipation of them) played such a role, Table 1 indicates that three in four participants lived in their community prior to the birth of the first child, and fully 9 in 10 resided in the community within 5 years of that child's birth. This suggests that establishing long-term community residence and the onset of childrearing responsibilities are strategic selections that affect not only the choice of residential community but also decisions about remaining in them.

Because of our interest in the life course, we tested a variety of life stage categorizations, including differences between younger nonparents (those who might have children in the future) and older nonparents. Unfortunately, we lacked data concerning the intent of younger nonparents to have children in the future, and the limited representation of younger nonparents in this data set limited the extent of analysis possible. Additionally, we examined the impact of parental stages (those with

preschool children, primary school-age children, secondary school children, and adult children in the household). Although some modest differences emerged between these groups, the most striking differences are represented in the findings reported here, between nonparents and parents.

The concept of a family-friendly community, although gaining a foothold in the professional literature, is not firmly integrated into popular discourse. To address this concern, participants were oriented by first being asked to rate, on a 100-point scale, the family-friendliness of their workplace and then to identify the most family-friendly features. They were then asked the same questions about their communities: "On a scale of zero to one hundred, with zero being extremely family-unfriendly and one hundred being extremely family-friendly, how

would you rate your community?" As shown in Table 1, respondents evaluated their communities as being quite family-friendly, registering a mean of 80 on this 100-point scale.

Responses to the open-ended inquiry of what makes a community family-friendly were categorized in accordance to common themes, issues, or statements offered in the qualitative responses to what makes the community family-friendly. Ultimately, 21 common categories were identified and are summarized in Table 2. On the whole, husbands and wives reported similar family-friendly features, chief among these being recreational opportunities, educational opportunities, cultural opportunities, youth-oriented organizations, neighborliness, family-oriented events, community events, churches, daycare, the size/pace of life, neighbors at similar

Table 2. Percentages of Those Reporting, in Response to Open-Ended Inquiry, the Family-Friendly Features of Their Community by Gender and Parental Status

Features	Gender		Parental Status	
	Women (%)	Men (%)	Parents (%)	Nonparents (%)
Recreational opportunities	30	38	34	37
Educational opportunities	23	25	25	20
Cultural opportunities	18	7**	12	14
Youth-oriented organizations	17	14	16	9
Neighborliness	17	17	17	23
Family-oriented activities	13	13	14	9
Community events	11	7	8	14
Churches	11	9	11	3
Daycare	10	5*	8	6
Size/pace of life	8	7	8	3
Similar life stage of neighbors	6	11	8	9
Public safety	4	9	6	14
Shopping and dining	4	3	2	14*
Community organizations	3	4	4	3
Human services	3	3	3	6
Transportation and infrastructure	3	2	3	0
Volunteering opportunities	2	1	2	0
Proximity to family and friends	2	1	2	0
Elder services	2	2	1	6
Taxes/cost of living	2	1	2	0
Health care system	2	1	1	9
Respect for diversity	1	1	1	0
<i>n</i>	184	181	330	35

Note. Ecology of Careers Study. Data restricted to dual-earner, opposite-sex couples in community sample. Tests assess gender differences and parental status differences. Because questions regarding family friendliness were randomly distributed to spouses within couples, sample sizes for men's and women's reports vary.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

life stages, public safety, shopping, and dining. But some gender differences were apparent. Most notably, women were more likely to say that cultural opportunities and daycare opportunities contribute to the family-friendliness of their communities. When comparing parents with nonparents, again we observed a general agreement in the types of family-friendly features their communities possess. The only notable difference is that parents were less inclined than those without children to emphasize shopping and dining opportunities as contributing to the family-friendliness of their community.

Ordinary least squares (OLS) regression models (presented in Table 4) retain these inductively coded categories, but findings are organized to highlight the predictive values for ratings of the family friendliness of various aspects of community infrastructures and social capacity. Models control for indicators of household income (logged), parental status, and work hours. Results are reported separately by gender.

Results

Community Features Influencing Relocation Decisions

Central to the life course perspective is the understanding that people are active agents, making strategic selections, and devising strategies to manage their many roles and responsibilities (Moen & Spencer, in press; Moen & Wethington, 1992). One such adaptive strategy is to select a community that will meet current (and often future) personal and family needs. But choices are made within the context of existing role definitions (e.g., gender roles), resources such as time and money, and relational concerns, such as the impact a residential location will have on one's spouse or children. Also, the life course perspective posits that needs vary as one progresses through the life course, suggesting that parents desire different resources from their communities than do nonparents (Moen & Sweet, 2004; Sweet & Moen, in press). Thus, we expect that both gender and parental status will be strongly related to selections of communities in which to live.

Table 3 presents mean estimates and standard errors, as rated on a 100-point scale, of the importance of safety, schools, housing, jobs, community events, recreation, town size, shopping, proximity

Table 3. General Linear Model Mean Estimates of Importance of Factors in Selecting Current Community of Residence by Gender and Parental Status

	Women				Men				Significance	
	Parents	Nonparents	Parents	Nonparents	Parents	Nonparents	Parents	Nonparents	Gender	Parent
	Rating (SE)	Rank	Rating (SE)	Rank	Rating (SE)	Rank	Rating (SE)	Rank		
Safety	80.9 (1.7)	1	82.0 (3.5)	1	73.8 (1.6)	1	74.9 (3.7)	1	**	**
Reputation of schools	78.1 (2.2)	2	49.4 (4.4)	10	73.3 (2.0)	2	44.5 (4.8)	7		
Features of house	72.1 (2.1)	3	70.9 (4.2)	2	70.3 (1.9)	3	69.1 (4.5)	2		
Near spouse's job	67.2 (2.6)	4	58.8 (5.1)	4	52.7 (2.3)	8	44.4 (5.5)	8	**	**
Parks, libraries, events	67.2 (2.2)	5	55.0 (4.5)	6	57.2 (2.0)	6	45.0 (4.8)	6	**	**
Recreation	62.1 (2.1)	6	56.3 (4.2)	5	56.0 (1.9)	7	50.2 (4.5)	4	**	**
Size of town	60.5 (2.1)	7	52.2 (4.2)	8	58.3 (1.9)	5	50.0 (4.6)	5	**	**
Shopping opportunities	58.3 (2.2)	8	53.0 (4.4)	7	45.2 (2.0)	10	40.0 (4.8)	10	**	**
Near own job	57.8 (2.5)	9	63.7 (5.1)	3	60.2 (2.3)	4	66.1 (5.5)	3		
Near relatives	56.5 (2.6)	10	50.6 (5.3)	9	50.1 (2.4)	9	44.2 (5.7)	9		
Taxes	55.7 (2.3)	11	42.9 (4.6)	11	44.2 (2.1)	11	31.4 (4.9)	11	**	**
<i>n</i>	159		30		195		14			

Note. Ecology of Careers Study. Data restricted to dual-earner, opposite-sex couples in community sample. Ratings of importance are based on a 0–100 scale for each component. Tests assess gender differences and parental status differences. Table sorted by degree of importance reported by women with children.
* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

to relatives, and taxes. To ease interpretation, we formatted the table in rank order (according to the ratings of women who have had children) and included the relative rankings of different community components. Significance tests identify differences observed by gender and parental status, both of which are included in multivariate general linear models.

Although there was some variation among women and men, as well as between parents and nonparents, the top concerns for all groups were safety, housing quality, proximity to the husband's (but not necessarily the wife's) job, recreational opportunities, and availability of parks, libraries, and events. Taxes, shopping opportunities, and town size were of less importance when selecting a community of residence. Note that in these overall rankings, proximity to relatives was among the lowest concerns influencing community selection for all groups. This suggests that many middle-class couples moved to communities proximate to their jobs and try to get into communities that offer safety and infrastructural attractions but were not necessarily embedded within existing social relations outside of the job.

As expected, we found notable overall differences between parents and nonparents, especially in the degree of importance placed upon reputation of schools (the second highest concern of parents is among the least concerns of nonparents). Parents were also more likely to stress the attractive qualities of parks, libraries, and events, as well as the size of the town. Taxes also weighed more heavily in the minds of parents, perhaps indicating the greater financial stress these couples experience relative to their counterparts who have never had children. This is addressed by Warren and Tyagi (2003) when they argue that children increase the incentives for dual-earner couples to locate into neighborhoods that offer more infrastructural support (such as safety and better schools), attractions that are accompanied generally by higher tax rates.

We also observed significant gender differences across a number of variables. One of the most important considerations was whether the community was proximate to employers. Our findings reaffirmed those of previous studies (e.g., Bielby & Bielby, 1992; Pixley & Moen, 2003) that showed that dual-earner couples tend to favor the husband's career when selecting a community of residence. This may create additional strains on a wife's career, either through

her absorbing a longer commute time or by limiting her employment opportunities to a restricted area (Hofmeister, 2002). Proximity to a husband's job was a strong concern, especially for women who have had children. This was less often the case for women who did not have children, who tended to consider the proximity of their own job as being more important than nearness to their husband's jobs.

We conclude, therefore, that the interplay of gender and parenting influenced middle-class, dual-earner couples' strategic decisions of where to take up residence. Women were attracted especially to aspects of the community that facilitate caretaking roles. Men, on the other hand, in addition to other concerns, tended to look toward aspects of the community that facilitated "breadwinner" roles. These relationships were more strongly evident for dual-earner couples who have been engaged in parenting roles.

Feature Salience in Community Family-Friendliness Ratings

Thus far we have demonstrated that parental status and gender shape family adaptive strategies in selecting a community. Additionally, men and women, parents and nonparents, identified similar types of community features as contributing to community family-friendliness. We next assess the degree to which specific features identified are associated with overall ratings of community family-friendliness. The analysis is not aimed at determining whether safety, for example, is more important than educational opportunities (rankings previously summarized in Table 2). Instead, we are trying to understand the factors, identified by these comparatively advantaged families living in comparatively advantaged communities, which predict especially strong family-friendly ratings.

In Table 4, we present OLS models, for women and men separately, of overall family-friendliness ratings (0–100 scale) regressed on the most commonly mentioned community family-friendly features (dummy coded), with controls for parental status, work hours, and log values of household income. Turning first to models for women, as Table 4 shows, after controlling for other factors, women who reported the size of their community as favorable rated their community 10.6 points higher on the family-friendly scale than do those who do not mention this factor. Women who reported

Table 4. OLS Regression Assessing the Salience of Family-Friendly Features With Overall Community Family-Friendliness Rating

	Women		Men	
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>
Community infrastructure				
Size/pace of life	10.68	4.1	-2.60	4.53
Similar life stage of neighbors	10.38	4.18*	8.65	3.8*
Recreational opportunities	6.77	2.37**	3.82	2.61
Cultural opportunities	1.92	2.62	-1.42	4.57
Daycare	2.06	3.33	7.04	5.62
Youth-oriented organizations	2.27	2.7	1.75	3.46
Shopping and dining	1.35	4.97	9.71	7.28
Educational opportunities	0.63	2.43	8.02	2.81**
Transportation	-0.94	6.31	8.84	7.96
Human services	-5.49	5.81	7.08	7.2
Social capacity				
Family events and activities	6.73	3.1*	7.97	3.58*
Neighborliness	6.67	2.91*	6.90	3.26*
Community events	6.02	3.31*	3.53	4.76
Community/neighborhood organizations	6.02	5.56	4.63	6.11
Churches	4.83	3.23	-0.83	4.1
Public safety	1.92	5.01	-0.24	4.3
Person/family characteristics				
Log10 of household income	9.30	5.35	-6.51	6.36
Parent (1)	0.67	4.56	6.54	3.54*
Total work hours	0.00	.06	-0.04	.11
Constant	27.22	26.33	100.54	30.98
<i>R</i> ²	0.17		0.16	
<i>n</i>	182		172	

Note. Ecology of Careers Study. Data restricted to dual-earner, opposite-sex couples in community sample. Family-friendly rating scale 0–100. Family-friendly features were coded from open-ended responses concerning the most family-friendly features of one's community.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

having neighbors at similar life stages as a family-friendly feature rated their communities 10.3 points higher on the family-friendly scale than do those who do not make such mention. Reports of having good neighbors, recreational opportunities, and family-oriented activities are all associated with 6- to 7-point elevations in family-friendly community ratings.

Like the women in the study, men who mentioned having neighbors at similar life stages, neighborliness, and family-oriented events rated their community as significantly more family friendly. But note also that the identification of educational opportunities as a family-friendly feature strongly predicted men's overall ratings; those who identified

this as a feature rated their community 8 points higher in overall family friendliness. Also, fathers rated their community 6 points more family friendly than men who were not fathers, suggesting that having a child increased an awareness of the community resources that facilitate parental roles, child development, or both.

Note that the models offer modest predictive power; the R^2 indicates that only 17% of the variance in community family-friendliness score is predicted by participants' mentions of particular family-friendly features in their communities. To further examine this issue, we also tested for interactions between independent variables and estimated the models separately for a variety of subgroups. We

found no improvements to the models presented here. A different outcome may have been reached had we asked all participants to rate each component of their community listed in Table 4 or had sampled a wider variety of communities and demographic groups. As we discuss below, these are interesting questions to explore in future studies.

Discussion

The life course perspective highlights the diverse and changing needs that emerge as families form and mature. Additionally, it highlights the ways in which family members make strategic choices, based on prevailing cultural templates, available resources, and future goals. As such, community selection should be considered one of many adaptive strategies people pursue while performing their other roles as workers and family members. Communities, the places where working families reside, offer both formal and informal means of integrating working families into webs of support, but they are an understudied dimension of the work-family field of inquiry. Although we did not set out to measure the direct impact of the social capacity of communities to extend assistance and facilitate family functioning for dual-earner, middle-class couples, the couples in our study expressed a variety of resources that they sought to maximize as they strategically selected communities in which to reside and were able to reflect on dimensions of community life that are especially family-friendly.

Because most studies have focused on a deficit model of community (Sampson et al., 2002; Wilson, 1987, 1997), little is known about “the good” community, the type of residential environments contrasted with studies of urban decay. Because our research focused on middle-class families living in communities of their own choosing, we were able to investigate the stable community structures and positive forms of encounter that facilitate family functioning. As a result, this study complements previous research that focused on disadvantaged families living in disadvantaged communities and fits into a larger initiative of understanding the challenges confronting working families and the ways in which communities can buffer work and family strain (Moen & Sweet, 2004; Moen et al., 2001).

The life course perspective posits that needs vary, depending on family structure and roles within

the family, but some community concerns were universal, particularly safety, quality housing, recreational activities, and educational opportunities. Consistent with this perspective, husbands and wives, and parents and nonparents varied considerably in their assessments. Most notably, parents reported selecting communities that favor husband’s breadwinning roles (but less often the wife’s career) and placed greater importance on infrastructure that facilitates childrearing responsibilities. As such, the selection of a community fits within a larger gender regime, ultimately facilitating the reproduction of unequal family divisions of labor and the unbalanced priorities that shape the careers of married men and women.

Our findings indicated that infrastructural considerations (such as size and pace of life, neighbors in similar life stages, recreational opportunities, and educational opportunities) were associated with higher family-friendly ratings. Additionally, aspects of the social capacity of communities (including family events, neighborliness, and community events) predicted favorable community family-friendliness assessments. These observations can help inform social policy concerning the allocation of resources to communities. For instance, efforts to enhance safety and school reputations could help draw middle-class families back to communities they may have abandoned. But current systems of funding education undermine the likelihood of middle-class couples, especially those with children, moving into disadvantaged communities (Kozol, 1991; Marshall & Tucker, 1992; Warren & Tyagi, 2003). Clearly, educational finance reform is a key community-work-family concern. Although location choices involve a variety of considerations, our findings also offer support for Wilson’s (1997) assertion that expansions of economic opportunity and housing incentives could pull some of the middle class (especially nonparents) back into disadvantaged communities and thus increase the social capacities of these environments.

Our findings also indicate the potential need to expand the social capacities of middle-class (as well as other) communities and their effectiveness in responding to the unique needs of dual-earner couples. For instance, we identified that people selected a community in which to live based on considerations of jobs, schools, and housing. Less often did the couples we studied select communities because of proximity to relatives. As a result, many likely face

challenges connecting to social networks outside of the workplace. Those who were later integrated into networks of neighbors (especially those in similar life stages), family activities, and community events were the most likely to offer favorable appraisals of the community-family interface.

How can community and business leaders facilitate the integration of families into communities? We observed that one community in this study had a women's resource center that offered family-centered events, career counseling, and a variety of other services. Organizations such as these may play a vital role in fostering social connections. It would be interesting to study the types of people serviced and assess the impact such centers have on family and community well-being. It is also important to recognize that the workplace, in many respects, is the new community. The men and women in this study have more friends on the job than in their neighborhoods (Moen et al., 2001). But gaining entry into these workplace networks is difficult for trailing spouses, who tend to travel further from their homes to work, whose jobs may not be in line with career aspirations, and who may face difficulties in finding immediate employment. Therefore, it may be fruitful for community and business leaders to respond to the fact that career moves are often dual-career moves and to cultivate responsive approaches that open opportunities for partners who follow their spouses to new jobs and new locales (see Sweet & Moen, 2004).

We conclude here with some reflections on the limitations of our study and directions for future research. The genesis for the analysis reported here was to adapt the perspectives of studies of the new urban poverty to consider their implicit reference point: middle-class dual-earner families living in "good" communities. Accordingly, we sampled participants in neighborhoods surrounded by similar middle-class families. Although this homogenous sample offered advantages for comparisons of gender and parental status, it hindered our ability to examine other inequalities, such as economic and racial inequalities that can occur at both the family and the neighborhood/community level, as well as broader changes across the life course. A next step would involve an integrative study of diverse communities and diverse demographics to further examine the concern of family-environment fit. Beyond economic and racial inequalities, such studies could include examinations of the needs of those transitioning into retirement and beyond, as well as those

managing issues of illness and disability. Additionally, further exploration is warranted into the concentrations of different family structures in neighborhoods and communities and the differences they can make in individual family's lives (see Mancini, Martin, & Bowen, 2003; Swisher et al., 2004). The community needs of couples with a stay-at-home parent may also differ significantly from the dual-earner couples. The needs of same-sex couples and single parents may well be different from those of the opposite-sex couples studied here.

Future research is needed to assess the presence or the absence of community and neighborhood features more systematically and objectively (Raudenbush & Sampson, 1999; Sampson & Raudenbush, 1999). Resilience can be (and should be) measured in other ways, such as work-family balance, satisfaction with family/spouse/jobs, social-psychological well-being, and economic well-being. Therefore, an additional next step is also necessary to examine the extent to which family-friendly communities, and features within these communities, buffer families against specific work-family strains.

The most common type of American work-family arrangement is two people working three jobs, two in the office and one at home (Christensen & Gomory, 1999). These couples face the challenge of adjusting work careers to meet family needs and adjusting family careers to meet work needs across the life course (Moen & Roehling, 2005). Communities hold potential as buffers to these strains, fostering employment prospects, facilitating care, and providing flexibly responsive assistance to short-term and longer-term needs. We suggest a case for studying the role of community not only in the lives of the disadvantaged (who often lack work) but also its role in the lives of the comparatively advantaged, but frequently stressed, dual-earner couples residing in middle-class neighborhoods.

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