

Fall 8-2013

# The Role of Children in a Mixed-Socioeconomic Community Development Model: A Quantitative Study of Grand Rapids, Michigan Housing Projects

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THE ROLE OF CHILDREN IN A MIXED-SOCIOECONOMIC COMMUNITY  
DEVELOPMENT MODEL: A QUANTITATIVE STUDY  
OF GRAND RAPIDS, MICHIGAN  
HOUSING PROJECTS

Phillip R. Dawson

65 Pages

August 2013

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HOUSING PROJECTS

PHILLIP R. DAWSON

A Thesis Submitted in Partial  
Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of

MASTER OF SCIENCE

Department of Politics and Government

ILLINOIS STATE UNIVERSITY

2013

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HOUSING PROJECTS

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I would like to express my most sincere gratitude to the chair of my thesis committee, Dr. Michaelene Cox, for her guidance and extensive efforts. Dr. Cox worked closely with me from the beginning of this project before there was even a project on which to work. I also would like to thank the additional members of my thesis committee, Dr. Frank Beck and Dr. Kam Shapiro, whose patience through the unorthodox timing of this project was undeserved but overwhelmingly appreciated. Beverly Beyer of the Stevenson Center for Applied Community and Economic Development deserves a special level of gratitude, for without her words of support and encouragement, this project never could have begun.

The burden of field research could not have been completed without the help of Alyssa Curran who not only eased the load, but spent countless hours listening to my incomprehensible rants throughout this project. I would also like to show my appreciation to Felicia Clay and the staff of the Grand Rapids Housing Commission for their hard work and commitment to their community.

I wish to thank my wife, Maggie, my Love and my partner in spreading joy to all those in need everywhere in the world.

Finally, I wish to dedicate this research to all children everywhere simply because they matter.

P.R.D.

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CHAPTER I  
INTRODUCTION AND RESEARCH PLAN

Statement of the Problem

Successfully using social capital as a tool for poverty alleviation in low-income neighborhoods has increasingly become the topic of many research papers. Research has identified a number of community features that facilitate social capital in neighborhoods such as playgrounds, parks, and community centers (Cheung 2011; Curley 2010b; Galster 2007; Offer and Schneider 2007; Schlee, Mullis Shriner 2008; Vieno, Nation, Perkins, Pastore and Santinello 2010; Winkworth, McArthur, Layton and Thompson 2010). Many community features inherently involve child-based activities such as socializing with friends at playgrounds. Therefore, child-based activities are indirectly linked to public housing programs; however, much of the related literature does not focus on children. This study analyzes the relationship between parental social capital and child-based activities in public housing programs, particularly mixed-socioeconomic programs.

Mixed-socioeconomic programs have been identified as a solution to large concentrations of poverty within neighborhoods. Concentrations of poverty create problems for low-income families by denying access to jobs, education, safe environments, and social capital (Baum-Snow et al. 2008; Curley 2010a; McClure 2008; United States General Accounting Office 2003). Rather than assisting families where they currently live, public housing agencies adopted programs that relocate low-income families out of concentrations of poverty and into

middle-income neighborhoods. Relocated families have the potential to interact with middle-income families, increasing their access to new resource networks that could help them escape poverty. Unfortunately, some mixed-socioeconomic programs lack the mechanisms that encourage social integration. Fear, lack of trust, lack of confidence in local authorities, and social isolation are deterrents to social integration between low- and middle-income families (Galster 2007; Gans 2008; McClure 2008). Housing programs designed to alleviate poverty should consider obstacles to social integration.

Barriers such as fear and lack of trust that prevent parents from building strong social ties are not solely based on parental characteristics, but also by child-based characteristics. For example, parental perceptions of child safety have a greater impact on levels of social integration than actual crime rates (Kimbrow and Schachter 2011). It is likely that low perceptions of neighborhood safety discourage parents from leaving their children alone and prevent parental social integration. Alternatively, child-based social activities such as sports, scouting, and other social interests provide opportunities for parents to socialize with other parents while they attend activities. In this respect, children can be seen as both tools and hindrances to mixed-socioeconomic programs.

The success of mixed-socioeconomic programs depends on the ability of the entire family to effectively socialize with neighbors and develop social connections. The mechanisms by which families accomplish successful social integration have yet to be fully understood. However, growing research shows that parental indicators of social capital could be correlated with their child's social interactions (Cheung 2011; Offer and Schneider 2007; Schlee, Mullis Shriner 2008; Vieno, Nation, Perkins, Pastore and Santinello 2010; Winkworth, McArthur, Layton and Thompson 2010). Parental perceptions of neighborhood support and safety, community involvement, and social interacting are likely to increase when children are well-integrated in

neighborhoods. One of the missing components from mix-socioeconomic programming could be efforts to successfully assist both parents and children in social integration. This study analyzes the parent/child relationship and provides evidence suggesting that a greater focus in public housing programming should be placed on children.

### Purpose of Study and Guiding Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to provide evidence that demonstrates the relationship between parental social capital and child-based activities. While related literature suggests that there is a relationship between parental social capital and child-based activities, there is not a clear understanding of the role of children in facilitating or hindering parental social capital. Current research has yet to explore the potential of child-based activities being a significant factor in building parental social capital and being utilized as a tool for poverty alleviation. Literature also suggests which child-based activities could have a positive or negative impact on parental social capital such as safety and volunteerism. Using findings from this study, future research will be able to target child-based activities and parental-based social capital indicators which could identify tools for alleviating poverty.

This study attempts to answer the primary question, do children have a role in facilitating parental social capital in mixed-socioeconomic neighborhoods? To answer this question in the affirmative, findings should first demonstrate significant correlations between parental indicators of social capital and child-based social activities. Second, findings should indicate what that role is; e.g. are child-based activities a function of parental social capital or is parental social capital a function of child-based activities, or both? Also, findings should point to what components of child-based-activities are more significant than others. Finally, if parental social capital is a function of child-based activities, are said activities a tool to facilitating social

capital or a hindrance, or both? To demonstrate the role of children in facilitating parental social capital, this study not only seeks evidence that the role of children matters, but also to further understand what that role is.

Quantitative data is used to determine the relationship between parental social capital and child-based social components. Variables for this study are indicators of parental social capital such as perceptions of trust and social behavior, and child social behavior and parental perceptions of child-based activities. Bivariate correlations help determine if there is a significant relationship between parental and child-based variables, the strength of the relationship, and whether it is positive or negative. This study is informative in nature in that it will help guide future research which wishes to isolate specific variables in the parent/child relationship.

#### Significance of the Study

A wealth of literature analyzes housing programs that relocate low-income families to middle-income neighborhoods (Baum-Snow et al. 2008; Curley 2010a; Curly 2010b; McClure 2008). While most of the literature identifies structural strengths and weaknesses in housing programming, they do little to offer new solutions such as focusing on children. This study identifies children as a significant role in parental social capital in public housing projects and begins to fill a gap that previous literature has ignored.

From 1993 until 2001, the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) spent approximately \$4.5 billion on the HOPE VI program alone (United States General Accounting Office 2003). Since that time, HUD has attempted to correct some of the mistakes that were made with relocating families (Curley 2010a; Reese, Deverteuil and Thach 2010). Housing programs are a costly endeavor, not only because of financial burden, but

also due to repercussions that can be detrimental to unprepared, low-income families. It is the responsibility of practitioners to make the best decisions based on the literature and it is the duty of researchers to provide the best literature on the subject.

### Definition of Terms

Researchers and practitioners of social capital and housing programs use a variety of jargon. For clarification, the following is a brief list of words commonly used and their meaning as it relates to this study.

*Mixed-socioeconomic neighborhoods* – A clear definition of mixed-socioeconomic neighborhoods is hard to find largely because there is little research on the subject. The closest definitions available refer to “mixed-income neighborhoods” and focus strictly on balances of income within a neighborhood to define the terms. Public housing programs in the United States focus on additional socioeconomic balances other than income. Therefore, the mixed-income neighborhood concept does not completely capture the purpose of this study. For this study, mixed-socioeconomic neighborhoods refers to communities that are intentionally designed by housing planners with the intent of having positive economic output through a balance of residents based on socioeconomic characteristics such as employment, race, age, and disability.

*Housing agencies* – The United States Department for Housing and Urban Development (HUD) works with a number of state-based and region-based agencies such as the Michigan State Housing Development Authority (MSHDA) and the Grand Rapids Housing Commission (GRHC) to delegate local public housing needs. Agencies vary in size and are referred to by different names. For simplicity, this study refers to housing agencies as all organizations that

work with federal- and state-run programs to provide public housing via programs designated by HUD.

*Low Income Housing Tax Credits (LIHTC)* – Tax credits that are issued by HUD for housing developers under the stipulation that development projects will have a specific amount of low-income units, usually 80%. LIHTC creates neighborhoods that have a level of diversity which is common in mixed-socioeconomic programs.

*HOPE VI* – Housing voucher program designed by HUD in order to revitalize depressed housing projects. Through this program, low-income families receive housing vouchers to move out of concentrations of poverty and into middle-income neighborhoods, essentially creating mixed-communities.

*Neighborhood resources* – This study refers to resources as capital that can readily be exchanged between neighbors such as borrowing a computer or a lawnmower (i.e. physical capital) or knowing someone that can fix cars (i.e. human capital). Social capital theory argues that individuals and families with poor social networks have less access to such resources. Having access to few resources is related to high levels of poverty.

## Methodology

In order to determine if there may be a relationship between parental social capital and child-based activities in public housing, surveys were designed and administered to parents and nonparents of mixed-socioeconomic neighborhoods. Participants for this study are residents of two neighborhoods in Grand Rapids, Michigan, Campau Commons and Creston Plaza. Both neighborhoods are served by the Grand Rapids Housing Commission, a regional housing agency that works with the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development. Residents were divided by parental and non-parental status and asked to fill out separate surveys. The

surveying instruments ask identical questions except that parents are asked to respond to additional questions regarding their children. The survey instruments were designed to gather data about social capital indicators such as interpersonal trust, confidence in government officials, and volunteer and participation rates. Researchers attempted to gather data from all 192 housing units in the two neighborhoods. Surveys were delivered to households using the drop-off/pick-up method where researchers knock on doors and engage residents face-to-face and ask them to fill out the survey. Completed surveys are picked up at a later time.

After collection, survey responses were analyzed to determine frequencies and relations. Parental frequencies were evaluated with nonparent frequencies to identify differences between the two groups. For example, frequencies determine if one group does one action more or less often than the other group. Frequencies were also evaluated with demographic indicators such as marital status and nominal variables such as membership in community organizations to determine themes and patterns. Parental and child-based variables were analyzed using the Pearson's correlation coefficient to determine positive or negative bivariate relationships. For example, the rate at which a child volunteers is positively correlated with the rate at which parents socialize with neighbors of other races. Analysis of the surveys will suggest support for the role of children in building parental social capital and suggest what variables may be most significant to that role.

#### Limitations

The existing literature on parental social capital and child-based social components is inadequate to guide targeted research. The potential for specific child-based activities to have an impact on parental social connections has yet to be researched thoroughly. This study is investigative in nature as it attempts to identify unknown variables which have not been

studied. Therefore, significant correlations are identified in this study; however, causation is speculative. Future research will be able to design surveying instruments that target specific variables based on the findings from this study and determine causation.

Due to the size of the City of Grand Rapids and the Grand Rapids Housing Commission, only two neighborhoods fit the profile needed for this study. This study is limited by the population size and the singularity of the service provider. Future research will be able to utilize a larger population, multiple cities, and multiple housing agencies.

This study is purposely delimited in that it focuses specifically on low-income families that are recipients of housing assistance. The purpose of this study is to grow the literature that guides housing agencies wishing to utilize mixed-socioeconomic programming that assists low-income families. This study may not be applicable to middle- or high-income neighborhoods or low-income families that do not receive housing assistance.

Although there are clear limitations to this study, it is not designed to be the final answer regarding the role of children in facilitating parental social capital. Rather, this study should provide evidence that supports the existence of that role and encourage future researchers to pursue a greater understanding of how children can impact and be impacted by parental social capital. The following chapter explores literature related to the gaps in mixed-socioeconomic housing programs. Additional literature helps present the case of why the relationship between children and parental social capital should be examined more thoroughly.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE

#### Summary of Literature Review

More and more, affordable housing programs have adopted mixed-socioeconomic models to help alleviate poverty in concentrated urban centers. Research demonstrates that while housing programs have the potential to be a useful tool in facilitating social capital for low-income families, successes are inconsistent. A number of barriers have been identified that prevent families from effectively integrating into their neighborhoods. Conversely, opportunities have been identified that help build social connections. Many of these barriers and opportunities are relevant to children. Although it is well-known that families and communities have a profound impact on children, there is little discussion about the impact that children have on their families and communities. Parents could be either less or more restricted in engaging in activities that create social connections based on the behavior and perceptions that they share with their children. For example, it is likely that parents that worry about their children are less likely to bond with their neighbors than those that have highly participatory children. Housing agencies that struggle to facilitate social capital with mixed-socioeconomic programs should consider children as a significant role in either preventing their parents from building social capital or facilitating it and rethink their policy accordingly.

This chapter is divided into three sections. First, it provides insight into the goals and failures of affordable housing programs that adopt mixed-socioeconomic models. Federally

funded programs from the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) such as Low Income Housing Tax Credits (LIHTC) and HOPE VI focus on programs that de-concentrate poverty (Popkin et al. 2004). HUD, being the largest funder of housing programs in the United States, sets the standard for many state-based housing agencies. Local housing agencies, such as the Grand Rapids Housing Commission, adopt the mission of federal programs but have trouble designing neighborhoods for low-income families that provide poverty alleviation tools (Baum-Snow et al. 2008; Curley 2010a; McClure 2008; United States General Accounting Office 2003).

Next, this chapter examines evidence demonstrating that the lack of social capital amongst low-income families leads to ineffective housing programs. While housing agencies attempt to design neighborhoods that provide arenas for building social connections, barriers still exist such as discrimination (Galster 2007; McClure 2008), challenges to neighborhood integration (Curley 2010a; Reese, Deverteuil and Thach 2010), and poor perceptions of neighborhood safety (Kruger et al. 2007). Additionally, housing agencies cannot account for the fact that most social bonds take time to form and require mechanisms that encourage residents to interact (Clampet-Lundquist 2004). Housing agencies are ill-equipped to provide mechanisms that facilitate social capital and need additional research to guide planning that will help obtain their goals.

Finally, this chapter builds the case for the relationship between parental social capital and childhood development. Research demonstrates that children require a certain level of community integration for healthy development, most of which is facilitated by parents (Janus and Offord 2007); however, little is known about the reciprocal effect that child-based activities have on building or hindering parental social capital. Children that partake in projects and events outside of the home are more likely to provide opportunities for parents to build social

connections. On the other hand, reclusive children are more likely to require additional attention at home and could prevent parents from engaging their communities. Strong social connections require consistent and regular interaction with neighbors (Son and Lin 2008) and children are likely to both provide and prevent parents with additional opportunities to socialize. As the literature suggests, children are both beneficiaries of parental social capital and also facilitators of it.

### Affordable Housing Programs and Poverty Alleviation

Traditional low-income housing projects were designed to provide homes for those that could not otherwise afford them. Housing projects did little to alleviate poverty and often times exacerbated social problems and restricted upward mobility for low-income families (Gans 2008; Van Kempen 1997). More recently, housing agencies have been adopting mixed-socioeconomic models which design neighborhoods for both low- and middle-income families (Popkin et al. 2004). Proponents of this model argue that mixed-neighborhoods allow low-income families to access middle-income resources such as help finding employment, quality childcare, and recreational opportunities at community parks. Social capital theory suggests that families with stronger resource networks are more likely to be better off economically and therefore, mixed-neighborhoods are beneficial to alleviating poverty.

Housing agencies guided by federally-funded programs argue that relocating low-income families has a greater chance of raising the quality of life of those families than serving families in impoverished areas. By bringing low-income families into closer approximation with middle-income families, the former will benefit in two ways. First, by living in a middle-income neighborhood, low-income families will have access to amenities which are considered rare areas of concentrated poverty, such as safe neighborhood parks, clean streets,

lower levels of crime, and higher levels of community and economic development programs (Andersson et al. 2007; Baum-Snow and Marion 2008; McClure 2008). Concentrations of low-income households negatively affect residents by means of a decline in local amenities. Second, living in a middle-income neighborhood can give low-income families superior employment opportunities through social networking (Andersson et al. 2007; Galster 2007; Kleinhans 2009). In practical application, a low-income roofer may not find high paying work through social connections within a low-income neighborhood; however, a low-income roofer in a middle-income neighborhood may find additional work opportunities through connecting with friends and families of neighbors. Additionally, low-income residents in middle-income neighborhoods procuring employment may have greater access to higher-quality job postings by socializing with those who have higher-quality jobs. Access to both amenities and employment opportunities is advantageous to low-income families and will assist in raising the quality of life.

Communities in general also benefit from introducing a higher population of low-income families. Studies show that a diverse income-base in a neighborhood provides advantages in economic development and a higher quality of life. Economic development is affected greater by income diversity than traditional development factors such as education, household tenure, or median income levels (Andersson et al. 2007; Rodriguez-Pose and Tselios 2010).

Neighborhoods with a mix of low-, middle-, and high- income families are more likely to achieve economic goals such as lower unemployment than those with higher aggregate levels of education, longer household tenure, or higher average income levels. Equal distributions of educational attainment amongst residents also facilitate economic development greater than overall higher levels of educational attainment (Rodriguez-Pose et al. 2010). Diverse social networks are more significant than strong social networks in respects to socioeconomic development (Curley 2010a). Various goods and services are provided by people with various

incomes and educational attainment. Homogeneous social networks lack additional goods and services which come from diversity. Strong community networks tie similar families closer together, but homogeneous communities are likely to lack economic opportunities that can present themselves in diverse social networks.

Concentrations of similar income levels have the potential for creating strong networks (Kleinhans 2004; Li and Wu 2006); however, they have a negative impact on overall development and movement. In concentrations of high-income, there is little room to elevate socioeconomic status and little need. On the other hand, concentrations of poverty restrict upward mobility and deny families access to quality goods and services (Gans 2008; Van Kempen 1997). Low-income families living in low-income neighborhoods may build strong networks with other low-income families, but these networks only provide basic survival skills and not opportunities to a higher quality of life. Affordable housing programs adopt mixed-socioeconomic programs to move people away from low-income neighborhoods.

Throughout the United States, mixed-socioeconomic development programs have varying levels of success and failure. The largest funder of these programs is the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). Tools that HUD programs use to promote mixed-neighborhoods are low income housing tax credits (LIHTC), Section 8 vouchers, and various forms of subsidized housing. Housing programs provide assistance to low-income families that wish to rent or purchase a home in a neighborhood that would otherwise be unaffordable. While programs have been successful in moving families away from concentrations of poverty, they fall short in achieving goals of poverty reduction (Baum-Snow et al. 2008; Curley 2010a; McClure 2008; United States General Accounting Office 2003). Research shows that family self-sufficiency, employment, job networks, earnings, and welfare generally remain unchanged and in some cases there is a noticeable decline in economic stability (Curley

2010a; United States General Accounting Office 2003). Mixed-socioeconomic housing programs are no better than traditional housing projects at elevating socioeconomic status (McClure 2008). There are still barriers to realizing the potential of utilizing affordable housing as an effective tool to alleviating poverty.

### Obstacles to Social Integration

One of the greatest challenges of mixed-socioeconomic housing programs is that there is no universal mechanism that housing agencies can apply to encourage social integration. External mechanisms such as public services, institutional resources, job-housing spatial relations, parks, grocery stores, libraries, and social services are hit-or-miss in creating an appropriate environment in which neighbors will interact (Curley 2010b; Galster 2007). For example, some neighborhoods may utilize local parks and have community picnics or sporting events that bring neighbors together. Social integration occurs and residents build connections. Unfortunately, research shows that neighborhood components that encourage socializing have various results in different neighborhoods. While HUD and its associated organizations take great care in designing neighborhoods that physically mix low-income and middle-income families, there is no guarantee that they will mix socially.

Intentionally designing neighborhoods that simply create a physical environment for socializing is likely ill-founded. Housing and neighborhood composition do not cause families to be poor (Mustard and Andersson 2005) and are unlikely to be the cure. Physical neighborhoods are not capable of impoverishing families (Gans 2008). For housing programs to be successful, program designers need to look beyond the physical aspects of neighborhoods and houses. There is no strong relation between housing mix and social mix (Kleinhan 2004; Mustard et al. 2005). Proximity to one's neighbor is not a strong enough mechanism to encourage association

(Curley 2010a; 2010b). There needs to be a greater mechanism that facilitates social capital. If mixed-socioeconomic programs are unable to encourage social integration, it is unlikely that they will succeed in alleviating poverty.

Alongside the lack of appropriate mechanisms for social integration there are multiple barriers to building connections. Two demographic-based deterrents to social integration are language and ethnicity. Low-income families are more likely to associate with families that speak the same language (Mustard et al. 2005). Language can prevent low-income families from associating with middle- or high-income families. Families of a particular ethnicity are more likely to associate with other families of the same ethnicity (Mustard et al. 2005). Families that are unable or unwilling to connect to families of different language and ethnic backgrounds are likely to miss out on positive social connections. As with concentrations of income levels, similar socio-demographics are likely to build strong connections but not connections that provide opportunities to a higher quality of life.

Another obstacle to social integration is exclusion. Some middle-income families do not want low-income families in their neighborhoods (Galster 2007; McClure 2008). Low-income families are associated with poverty-related issues such as lowered property values, crime, and diminished amenities (Gans 2008). While housing programs are trying to disconnect stigmas from low-income families, they often are carried with them to middle-income neighborhoods. Middle-income residents often prefer to ignore their low-income neighbors rather than reaching out to them (Reese et al. 2010). Resentment towards low-income families discourages social integration and could lead to isolation amongst those families.

Some structural factors do not discourage social integration directly, but render it inaccessible or unnecessary such as administration, technology, and existing social networks. Administratively speaking, there is a lack of housing placement counselors within affordable

housing programs. In some programs in the United States, counselors encourage and assist new families to get involved in the neighborhood; however, these are few and far between. Some programs are administered at the federal level which places potential counseling and coordinating contacts outside of families' access points (McClure 2008). Advances in technology and communication allow families to be less bound to their immediate neighborhood and therefore make social integration within the neighborhood less necessary (Curley 2010b). Low-income families can make connections outside of their neighborhood using online social networking. Existing connections with family and friends are also more important to residents than integrating with new neighbors (Solomon 2006). Families are capable of preserving bonds to existing social networks or even creating new networks without going outside of the home. Neighborhood social integration is not accessible, nor a requirement or preference for many families. The idea of mixed-socioeconomic programs becomes futile.

Failed mixed-socioeconomic programs can cause families to be worse off than before their relocation into middle-income neighborhoods. Families that are unable to integrate into new neighborhoods have trouble taking advantage of the amenities and employment opportunities for which they were relocated. In every community, families look for neighbors that can help them overcome challenges such as watching their children or helping them fix their car. Relocations can break up existing social networks and disrupt survival strategies, leaving families unprepared to deal with new obstacles (Curley 2010a; Reese, Deverteuil and Thach 2010). Additional challenges can come from a lack of neighborhood resources such as inadequate public transportation (Curley 2010a). Low-income families in low-income neighborhoods often times become dependent on a certain set of resources within that neighborhood. Relocations can also increase the cost of living for low-income families that move into a middle-income neighborhood. Middle-income neighborhoods are equipped with goods

and services that are more costly than what is typically found in low-income neighborhoods (Curley 2010a, Li and Wu 2006). Relocations disconnect families from that to which they are accustomed and leave them without survival tools.

Social programs create winners and losers. In mixed-socioeconomic programs, the winners are low-income families that integrate into middle-income neighborhoods, find gainful employment and elevate their socioeconomic status (Baum-Snow et al. 2008). The losers are those that find little or no enjoyment within their new neighborhoods, struggle to keep up with middle-income families, and in extreme cases have to relocate back to the low-income neighborhood and concentration of poverty from which they tried to escape (Li et al. 2006). There are clear gaps in mixed-socioeconomic programs. Applying social capital theory requires housing agencies to design programs that do more than provide physical spaces in which parents can interact. In order to maximize the winners, programs need to focus on neighborhood social components.

### Children and Social Integration

The case for the relationship between children and parental social capital in mixed-socioeconomic housing programs begins with understanding that children are victims of failed housing programs. Using educational attainment as an indicator of success, there is a wealth of literature that demonstrates the impact that neighborhoods have on childhood development (Emig 2000; Graue 2006; Janus and Offord 2007; Pianta 2002). This section first establishes the relationship between child success and neighborhood integration. Next, this section discusses how failed child integration can have a negative impact on parental social capital (Curley 2010a; Curley 2010b; Galster, Andersson and Musterd 2010; Kimbro and Schachter 2011; Kleinhaus 2004). Finally, this section suggests that children can be a precursor

to building parental social connections (Townsend 2002). When housing programs fail, not only do children suffer, but they cause additional suffering to their parents. Housing programs could do more than prevent failures. Evidence suggests that child-based activities can be utilized as a tool for success. Focusing on the needs of children can build parental social capital and help alleviate poverty.

In situations in which families have trouble integrating into new neighborhoods, children are negatively impacted due to their need for specialized skills and experiences. Critics of housing programs often focus on the disrupting component of relocating families; however, moving low-income children into a middle-income neighborhood has little or no effect on educational attainment (Sastry and Pebley 2010). Educational success is dependent on more than just comprehension skills (Janus and Offord 2007). Communication skills, physical health, mental well-being, and behavioral competencies play a large role in educational attainment (Emig 2000; Graue 2006; Pianta 2002). Children that fail to integrate into neighborhoods lack chances for quality interactions in which specialized skills are refined such as volunteering, playing sports, and attending community functions. Neighborhoods with low levels of social capital are correlated with low levels of quality interactions (Cushon, Vu, Janzen and Muhajarine 2011). Therefore, communities that do not foster social connections can negatively impact the rate at which children succeed in school. Public housing programs that relocate families should consider the social integration needs of children.

Failed housing programs not only negatively impact child-based integration, but impact parents through child-based relationships. Parental perception of schools affects the levels of engagement that parents have within their community (Curley 2010b). When children are successful in school and take part in extra-curricular activities, parents are more likely to engage in school activities and have greater confidence in the school itself. It is intuitive that

relationships between children and neighborhoods will be reflective of the relationship between parents and neighborhoods; however, it is important to remember that this works both ways. Children have their own opportunities to integrate into communities through activities such as sports and scouting. Research suggests that the rate at which children successfully take advantage of integration opportunities may impact parental relationships within neighborhoods (Curley 2010a). If children are negatively impacted by housing programs, it is likely that attempts at building parental social capital will suffer.

Child safety plays a key role in building parental social capital. Integration becomes difficult for parents that worry about their children's safety. Parents uncomfortable with leaving their children alone in the neighborhood spend more time watching them and less time socializing with neighbors (Curley 2010a). For parents, safety of their children is more important than social integration (Kleinhans 2004). If a parent's child is not well-integrated into the neighborhood, it is unlikely that the parent will feel comfortable when the child leaves the house. In turn, if the parent's perception of the neighborhood is negative, it is unlikely that the parent will integrate well or encourage the child to integrate. Actual crime rates have less impact on mothers' level of fear for their own children than perceptions of neighborhood efficacy and social support (Kimbrow and Schachter 2011). Parents that feel that their children are secure and safe in the neighborhood are more likely to socialize with their neighbors, spend more time at work (Galster, Andersson and Musterd 2010) and engage in opportunities that facilitate social connections.

Research demonstrates thoroughly that children are impacted by their environment. It also suggests that parental social capital is impacted through their children. The bulk of the literature regarding children discusses the negative relationships between housing programs and facilitating social capital. There is little discussion about the potential for children to have a

positive role in building social connections. One argument demonstrates the positive relationship between having children and owning a home (Townsend 2002). Homeowners typically engage their communities more often than renters (Dietz and Haurin 2003). It is likely that there are a number of reasons why homeowners take a greater part in their community; however, if having children encourages parents toward homeownership, this could be indicative that children indirectly motivate families to become more involved in their community. The nature of social capital presents another argument. Social networks need to be continuous in order to be effective (Son and Lin 2008). For example, if a low-income individual builds a connection with one of their neighbors that has a computer and is allowed to use the computer to search for a job, at the end of the day, the computer remains the property of the neighbor. Much of the social capital literature refers to resources that require spontaneous or one-time interactions such as fixing a car or helping out in case of an emergency (Manturuk, Linblad and Quercia 2010; Van Der Gaag and Snijders 2004). Children provide opportunities for social integration that require continuous interactions between parents such as school-based activities. Building social capital not only requires a mechanism that encourages initial interaction, but also motivation for continuous connections. Children could be both the mechanism and the motivation that facilitates parental social capital in mixed-socioeconomic housing programs.

The literature suggests that children are both a hindrance to social integration and a method for encouraging it. Well-integrated children, e.g. those with access to resources such as volunteer opportunities and after-school programs, perform better at school and encourage their parents to participate in additional child-based activities. At the same time, poorly integrated children may decrease parental perceptions of safety and have a negative impact on parental social connections. Children have additional opportunities aside from parental-based

opportunities to take part in sports, extracurricular activities, and school functions that have components which encourage social integration. Housing agencies that design neighborhood programs in order to alleviate poverty are unlikely to focus on children as a tool or hindrance to facilitating social capital; however, these programs require a positive social component if they are to be successful at assisting low-income families. If mixed-socioeconomic housing programs focus on the role of children, they will have a greater chance for success at building social capital. The following chapter outlines methodologies for exploring the child/parent relationship based on the literature.

## CHAPTER III

### RESEARCH DESIGN

#### The Problem and the Theory

Social capital theory can help explain how mixed-socioeconomic housing programs reduce poverty. Building social capital can focus on either community or individual levels of networks. The primary target of mixed-socioeconomic models is families and individuals. This study focuses on individual levels of social capital defined as an “individual’s collection of social network connections that are potential locations for exchange relationships” (Manturuk, Lindblad, and Quercia 2010:474). In other words, physical and human capital is transferred through social networks. Residents in neighborhoods can exchange different forms of capital such as technical skills, money, or household goods through social connections. Housing agencies that adopt mixed-socioeconomic programs assume that middle-income neighborhoods have additional forms of capital that can be obtained from middle-income families such as helping a neighbor find a job or fix their computer. Therefore, moving low-income families from low-income neighborhoods to middle-income neighborhoods could potentially increase access to various forms of capital.

This study argues that building parental social capital is a function of children’s relationships within communities. Consistent with the literature, this study focuses on social capital components that are affected by children’s relationship, such as isolation (Winkworth et

al. 2010), perceptions of neighborhood safety (Vieno et al. 2010), parental involvement in children's activity (Schlee et al. 2008), perceptions of social support, and community acceptance (Offer and Schneider 2007; Cheung 2011). Parents that worry about the safety of their children are likely to spend more time at home and thereby can feel isolated and less engaged with their neighbors. Parents that need assistance raising their children are likely to be more sensitive to levels of social support than nonparents. Parents are also more likely to be sensitive with their perceptions of support in their neighborhood. For example, parents that have last-minute changes in scheduling may need to quickly find a babysitter and depend on a neighbor for help whereas nonparents may not have much need to reach out to their community. Individuals that demonstrate higher rates of social capital are more likely to have greater access to socially and economically beneficial resources. For example, individuals that socialize frequently are more likely to encounter other individuals that have resources such as a computer that can help them find a job. Measuring the rate at which individuals socialize can help predict the rate at which low-income families can move out of poverty.

### Measuring Social Capital

Social capital indicators related to neighborhood-based individual components are frequent social exchanges with neighbors, interpersonal trust, confidence in government officials, and volunteer and participation rates (Kleinhans 2004; Manturuk, Linblad and Quercia 2010; Svendsen 2010; Vieno et al. 2010; Winkworth et al. 2010). This study attempts to determine if children have a role on parental social capital, therefore parent-based indicators of social capital such as participation rates and neighborhood perceptions were analyzed with child-based indicators of social capital. Variables were categorized into behavior, participation, and perception. Behavior variables include indicators such as rates of socializing, volunteering,

and participation in politics. Participation variables include indicators such as memberships in community organizations and participation in local politics. Perception variables include indicators such as feelings of safety, trust in authority figures, and levels of confidence in political officials.

An additional tool for analyzing social capital is a resource generator (Manturuk, Linblad and Quercia 2010; Van Der Gaag and Snijders 2004). Resource generators measures the transfer of social capital by quantifying the rate of neighborhood resources such as knowing someone that could help you move or knowing someone that can fix computers. Higher levels of neighborhood resources indicate higher rates of social capital.

Research often uses social- and economic-based indicators to analyze levels of social capital such as household tenure (Manturuk, Lindblad and Quercia 2010), age (Middleton, Murie and Groves 2005), and gender (Vieno et al. 2010). Residents with longer tenures may be more invested in their neighborhood and therefore encouraged to develop social connections. Parents are more likely to allow older children to leave the house giving them additional opportunity to build their own social networks. Higher perceptions of safety are correlated with parents that have sons rather than daughters. Parents are more likely to be protective of their daughters and therefore more withdrawn from their community. Additional demographics consistent with social capital literature such as marital status, ethnicity, and employment status are also relevant to this study and recorded.

#### Data Collection

Data for this project was collected from neighborhoods served by the Grand Rapids Housing Commission in Grand Rapids, Michigan (GRHC). The GRHC provides housing assistance for low-income families, individuals with disabilities, and senior citizens. Although they serve

over 4,000 Michigan residents, only two neighborhoods fit the profile needed for this study, Campau Commons and Creston Plaza. Both neighborhoods serve low-income families and have a mixture of parents and nonparents households. The GRHC is primarily funded by the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development. Participants for this study are both parents and nonparents of various age, race, and sex.

Consistent with social capital research in housing programs, this study utilizes surveying instruments to collect data, one for parents (Appendix A) and one for nonparents (Appendix B). Surveys are used to determine the rate of individual and aggregate levels of social capital. Participants are asked to indicate levels of social capital by responding to various questions about the aforementioned indicators. Behavior and perception variables are ordinal and survey questions are structured using a Likert scale. For example, participants respond to behavior-based questions such as “How often do you volunteer?” by indicating between “1” for “Never” and “5” for “Frequently.” Participation-based questions are nominal. Resource generator questions ask participants to indicate “Yes” or “No” to questions such as “Are you a member of a community organization?” See Appendixes A and B for all survey questions.

This study employed the “drop-off/pick-up” method for distributing surveys. In this method, researchers go door-to-door and meet face-to-face with the population they are researching. Residents are asked to participate in the study and those that agree are handed the survey instrument. When completed, the instrument can be left on the resident’s front door and picked up later by the researcher. Experience shows this method to have a higher participation rate than email surveying and is quicker to execute than one-on-one interviewing.

For three weeks, the researcher and a volunteer dropped off surveys at each household in both neighborhoods. Campau Commons has 92 units and Creston Plaza has 100. After agreeing to participate in the survey, residents were then asked if they have children under the

age of 16 living in the house. Throughout this study, participants with children in the house are considered “parents” and those without are considered “nonparents.” Residents were asked to complete a different survey depending on whether they are a parent or nonparent. The two surveys have identical questions relating to social capital indicators but the parent survey has additional questions about their children.

Prior to distributing surveys, a pilot survey was distributed and collected from twenty residents in a similar neighborhood. Data from pilot surveys is not counted towards the data analysis and findings, but was analyzed in the same manner intended for the actual surveys to be certain that questions are clear and will provide accurate data. No changes were made to the final survey but the pilot surveys gave the researcher an opportunity to practice soliciting neighborhoods.

#### Data Analysis

After collection, the two neighborhoods were analyzed to determine if there were any significant differences in the responses. Both neighborhoods presented similar responses and therefore could be analyzed as one sample. Survey responses were analyzed to determine frequencies of dependent variables such as parental volunteer rates and compared to non-parental volunteer rates. Parental frequencies were evaluated with nonparent frequencies to determine themes and patterns. Frequencies were also evaluated with demographic indicators such as marital status and nominal variables such as membership in community organizations to determine themes and patterns. Likert Scale responses for frequencies of ordinal variables such as, “How often do you volunteer?” were averaged and analyzed. For example, on a scale from 1 to 5 (1 being never, 5 being frequently) the average partnered parent indicated that their volunteer rate is 3.6 while the average single parent responded 3.1. Higher

frequencies of volunteer rates suggest higher levels of social capital. In the partnered/single parent example, partnered parents are likely to have higher levels of social capital than single parents.

Dependent variables, or parental-based social capital indicators, were analyzed with independent variables, or child-based social capital indicators to determine correlations. Correlations help determine if there is a possible relationship between two variables. This study attempts to determine if parental-based indicators are related to child-based indicators. Likert-scale responses to variables were analyzed using the Pearson's  $r$  correlation coefficient to determine relationships between variables. As a rule of thumb and consistent to similar research, coefficients from +0.200 to +0.299 show a weak and positive relationship, from +0.300 to +0.399 show a moderate and positive relationship, from +0.400 to +0.699 show a strong and positive relationship, and coefficients above +0.700 show a very strong and positive relationship. Inversely, negative coefficients of the same magnitude show a negative relationship. Two-tailed  $t$ -tests analyses were performed on variables that demonstrate a weak to very strong Pearson's  $r$  correlation to determine if the relationship is significant at 95% ( $p \leq 0.05$ ) or if the relationship is very significant at 99% ( $p \leq 0.01$ ). The following chapter discusses frequencies that demonstrate themes and correlations that demonstrate at least moderate and significant relationships.

## CHAPTER IV

### FINDINGS

#### Summary of Findings

Findings for this study help demonstrate the relationship between children and parental social capital in mixed-socioeconomic neighborhoods. Findings rely on the surveys that were distributed to housing projects in Grand Rapids, Michigan. The two neighborhoods (Campau Commons and Creston Plaza) selected for this study were relatively homogenous in that they do not demonstrate significant differences with respect to demographics, perceptions, behavior, or resources. The Grand Rapids Housing Commission operates both neighborhoods and applies the same policies and standards to residents.

Two surveys were distributed to residents for parents or nonparents. The population size for this study is 192 households, 100 units at Creston Plaza and 92 at Campau Commons; however on average, roughly 15 to 20 units total are unoccupied at any given time making the actual population size for this study around 172 – 177 households. A total of 47 households responded to the surveying instrument, 34 parents and 13 nonparents. The average age of parents was 34 years and the average age of nonparents was 44 years. The majority of respondents were female, 85% of parents and 69% of nonparents. The average household tenure for parents was 39 months and for nonparents was 45 months. Parents that responded were more likely to be in a committed relationship (47%) than nonparents (15%).

## Demographic Data

The neighborhoods sampled for this study were relatively homogeneous and only demonstrate a few significant correlations between demographics and parental social capital indicators. For example, there is a significant, positive correlation between the age of the child and the likelihood that a parent will attend workshops or classes (0.27), and attend cultural events (0.25).

When analyzing parental and non-parental data separately, household tenure demonstrates a significant relationship in parental perception and behavior. Nonparents show a strong negative correlation (-0.510) with household tenure and feelings that neighbors would take advantage of them. They also show a strong negative correlation with both attending workshops (-0.558) and attending cultural events (-0.618). Parents demonstrate no correlation with household tenure and feelings that neighbors would take advantage of them (0.117), attending workshops (0.015) and attending cultural events (0.057). Nonparents are likely to feel less taken advantage of overtime and are less likely to attend workshops and events over time while parents do not demonstrate a significant change.

Single- and partnered-parent status has the greatest variance with indicators of behavior, perception, and available resources among demographic variables. Table 1 shows that almost exclusively, partnered parents indicate a higher frequency of participation such as higher frequencies of volunteering and attending child- and community-based events. Partnered parents are likely to have more free time to attend events and volunteer than single parents as partnered parents can share childrearing duties.

Table 1 – Partnered and Single Parental Behavior

	Partnered	Single
Initiate conversations	3.7	3.3
Community volunteer	3.1	2.7
Attend workshops	2.9	2.6
Attend cultural events	3.1	2.9
Attend school activities	4.4	4.1
Attend activities outside of school	3.4	3.5
Socialize with parents	3.4	3.5
Volunteer at school	3.6	3.1
Interact with people of different races	4.5	4.3
Ask parenting advice	2.3	2.8

Average responses of parental behavior on a 1-5 Likert Scale when asked "How often do you do the following?"

When asked questions about how they feel about their neighborhood, partnered parents also indicate a more positive perception than single parents such as higher levels of feeling that people help each other and lower levels of isolation. See Table 2.

Table 2 – Partnered and Single Parental Perceptions

	Partnered	Single
People help each other	3.3	2.9
Person to talk to about problem	3.7	3.5
Trust in state government	2.8	2.9
Take advantaged of you	2.5	2.5
Comfortable socializing outside of income level	4.1	4.3
Confidence in the local government and authorities	3.0	3.0
Contribution to neighborhood	3.3	2.8
Isolation in neighborhood	2.1	2.8

Average responses of parental perceptions on a 1-5 Likert Scale when asked, "Do you feel (that)...?"

Partnered parents indicate that they have a higher level of access to neighborhood resources such as if they know anyone in their neighborhood that could help them with a computer problem or help them fix their car. See Table 3.

Table 3 – Partnered and Single Parental Resources

Neighborhood Resource	Partnered (Percentage)	Single (Percentage)
Help moving	43.8	25.0
Bring food or medicine	56.3	43.8
Computer problem	50.0	31.3
Media contact	12.5	18.8
Lend money	18.8	6.3
Fix your car	56.3	25.0
Food advice	43.8	37.5
Politically active	18.8	18.8
Find a job	43.8	31.3
Watch children	56.3	50.0

Rate at which parents respond “Yes” to having access to resources

#### Membership and Participation Rates

Social capital theory research often analyzes membership rates of community organization and participation in politics as indicators of social connections. This study focused on determining if child behavior or parental perceptions of child-based activities are related to membership and participation rates. Patterns are noticeable when analyzing child behavior with rates of parental involvement with local politics and formal organizations such as community organizations and parent-teacher organizations. Parents whose children socialize more frequently are slightly less likely to be active in local politics and formal organizations. Almost exclusively, parents that are more likely to participate in formal organizations and local politics have children that are more likely to participate in school activities, non-school activities, and volunteer. See Table 4. Only parents that are non-members of community organizations are slightly more likely to have children who participate in school activities. Additionally, parents that are involved in local politics (political) and formal organizations are slightly more likely to

have children that are comfortable socializing with children from different socioeconomic statuses and races.

Table 4 – Parental Participation and Child Behavior

	Child Behavior				
	Socializes with Friends	Participates in School	Participates Outside School	Socializes with Other Races	Volunteers
Community Non-member	3.9	3.4	3.5	4.7	3.8
PTA Member Non-member	4.6	3.4	3.2	4.6	3.5
Political Non-political	4.3	3.8	3.7	4.8	3.9
	4.4	3.3	3.1	4.6	3.4
	4.2	3.9	3.5	4.8	3.9
	4.4	3.3	3.2	4.6	3.5

Average responses of parental participation rates compared to child behavior on a 1 to 5 Likert Scale

Parental perceptions of child-based social components demonstrate a number of patterns when comparing parental involvement with formal organizations and local politics. Parents that worry more about their child’s involvement with criminals, bad influences, and/or drugs are more likely to be involved in formal organizations and local politics. Parents that feel that their child has access to appropriate activities are less likely to be involved in formal organizations and local politics. See Table 5.

Table 5 – Parental Participation and Parent Perception of Child Activities

	Parent/Child Perception				Overall Safety
	Walk Home	Criminals	Good School	Activities	
Community Non-member	2.8	4.3	4.6	3.7	3.5
PTA Member Non-member	2.9	3.1	4.1	4.3	3.8
Political Non-political	3.2	4.0	4.2	4.0	3.7
	2.7	3.2	4.3	4.1	3.7
	3.0	3.7	3.9	3.8	3.5
	2.8	3.4	4.3	4.1	3.7

Average responses of parental membership and participation rates compared to perception of child activities on a 1 to 5 Likert Scale

Parents are more likely to participate in local politics and formal organizations than non-parents. Thirty-one percent of parents indicate that they are a member of a community organization (non-school related) while only twenty-three percent of nonparents indicate organizational membership. Twenty-five percent of parents indicate that they participate in local politics while only fifteen percent of nonparents indicate local political participation.

#### Parental Behavior

Parental behavior such as high volunteer rates and frequent attendance of community functions can be indicative of strong social ties. This study focused on determining if child behavior and parental perceptions of child-based activities are related to parental social capital indicators. Table 6 shows Pearson’s correlations between variables of child behavior and parental behavior. There is a significant, positive correlation between the frequency at which children participate in activities outside of school such as scouting and the frequencies that parents attend those activities and volunteer at their child’s school. There are a number of

significant, positive correlations between the frequency at which children volunteer and the behavior of parents such as the frequency at which parents initiate conversations with their neighbors, volunteer, attend their child’s activities, socialize with other parents, and interact with people of other races. The frequency at which children socialize with their friends and the frequency at which children participate in school activities do not demonstrate significant correlations with parental behavior.

Table 6 – Parental Behavior and Child Behavior

Parental Behavior	Child Behavior		
	Participates Outside School	Socializes with Other Races	Volunteers
Initiate conversations	0.255	0.153	0.454
Community volunteer	0.173	0.177	0.341**
Attend workshops	0.014	0.086	0.078
Attend cultural events	-0.056	-0.330*	0.089
Attend school activities	0.122	-0.006	0.658**
Attend activities outside of school	0.519**	-0.075	0.493
Socialize with parents	0.298	-0.112	0.558*
Volunteer at school	0.401	0.018	0.474
Interact with people of different races	-0.073	0.351**	0.636**
Ask parenting advice	0.111	0.008	0.201

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

\* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Consistent with the literature, parental perception of child safety is related to a number of social capital indicators. Table 7 shows Pearson’s correlations between variables of parental behavior and parental perception of child behavior. There is a significant, negative correlation between the parental perceptions of safety when their child walks home from school and the rate at which they ask parenting advice. There is also a significant and negative correlation between the rate at which parents volunteer in their community and parental perceptions of child safety. There is also a significant and negative correlations between the rate at which parents ask other parents for advice and parental perceptions of child safety. There are no

significant correlations between parental behavior and parental perception of criminals, child’s school, or child’s access to appropriate activities. Parental ability to build social connections is likely dependent on various perceptions of child safety.

Table 7 – Parental Behavior and Parental Perception of Child Behavior

Parental Behavior	Parental Perception of Child Behavior	
	Walk Home	Overall Safety
Initiate conversations	0.060	0.015
Community volunteer	0.003	-0.355*
Attend workshops	0.022	-0.121
Attend cultural events	0.012	-0.25
Attend school activities	0.011	0.04
Attend activities outside of school	0.054	-0.298
Socialize with parents	-0.062	-0.174
Volunteer at school	-0.122	-0.280
Interact with people of different races	0.046	0.066
Ask parenting advice	-0.653*	-0.381**

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

\* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

#### Parental Perception

Parental community perceptions are likely to have an impact on parent’s ability to integrate into their neighborhood and in turn build social connections. This study focused on determining if child behavior and child-based activities are related to parental community perceptions. There is a notable pattern between the frequency at which children socialize with their friends and the positive perception that parents have in their community including a strong correlation with the level of confidence parents have with local government. Parents that feel their neighbors will take advantage of them have children that demonstrate a pattern of less interaction including a strong, negative correlation with the frequency at which they socialize

with other races. See Table 8. A lower lack of trust (feelings of being taken advantaged of) can be a hindrance to building social connections.

Table 8 - Parental Community Perception and Child Behavior

Parental Community Perception	Child Behavior		
	Socializes with Friends	Socializes with Other Races	Volunteers
People help each other	0.108	0.208	0.185
Person to talk to about problem	0.348**	0.181	0.264
Trust in state government	0.223**	0.141	-0.037
Take advantaged	-0.240**	-0.408*	-0.153
Comfortable socializing outside of income level	0.382*	0.172	0.247
Confidence in the local authorities	0.440**	0.126	-0.059
Contribution to neighborhood	-0.234	-0.029	0.239
Isolation in neighborhood	-0.081	0.197	-0.199

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

\* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

As expected, parental community perceptions are related to parental perceptions of child behavior. Table 9 shows that there is a strong, positive correlation between the parental trust in government and feelings of overall safety for their child. Additionally, parents that demonstrate a negative perception of child behavior such as attending a good school also demonstrate feelings that their neighbors would take advantage of them. As with parental behavior, parental perception of child safety is related to parental community perceptions. Negative community perceptions are likely to discourage parents from forming social connections.

Table 9 – Parental Community Perception and Parental Perception of Child Behavior

Parental Community Perception	Parental Perception of Child Behavior		
	Walk Home	Good School	Overall Safety
People help each other	-0.271*	-0.109	-0.039
Person to talk to about problem	0.03	0.243	0.077
Trust in state government	0.085	0.121	0.548**
Take advantaged	-0.357*	-0.437*	-0.203**
Comfortable socializing outside of income level	-0.13	0.139	0.229
Confidence in the local authorities	0.16	0.181	0.381**
Contribution to neighborhood	0.026	0.032	0.12
Isolation in neighborhood	-0.105	-0.327	-0.108

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

\* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

#### Parent and Nonparent Variances

The primary purpose of this study is to help determine if children play a role in facilitating or hindering parental social capital in the specified neighborhoods. If the thesis is true, there should be a noticeable difference between parent and nonparent levels of social capital. Table 10 shows that parents demonstrate a higher frequency than nonparents of involvement in their community including initiating conversations, volunteering, and interacting with those from different backgrounds. Nonparents demonstrate a higher rate of attendance to workshops, classes, and cultural events.

Table 10 – Parent/Nonparent Behavior

Parental Behavior	Parent	Nonparent
Initiate conversations	3.5	3.2
Community volunteer	2.9	2.8
Attend workshops	2.8	3.2
Attend cultural events	3.0	3.2
Interact with people of different races	4.4	3.6

Average frequency of parental behavior using a 1 to 5 Likert scale

Parents show a higher rate of comfort than nonparents with their neighborhood including their perception of helping each other, and interacting with their neighbors. Additionally, they demonstrate lower feelings of isolation. However, parents feel that their neighbors are more likely to take advantage. See Table 11.

Table 11 – Parent/Nonparent Perceptions

Parental Perceptions	Parent	Nonparent
People help each other	3.1	3.0
Person to talk to about problem	3.6	3.2
Take advantaged	2.5	2.1
Comfortable socializing outside of income level	4.2	4.1
Confidence in the local authorities	3.0	3.1
Contribution to neighborhood	3.0	2.7
Isolation in neighborhood	2.4	2.5

Average frequency of parental perceptions using a 1 to 5 Likert scale

CHAPTER V  
ANALYSIS OF THE DATA

The Problem and the Hypothesis

Building social capital in mixed-socioeconomic neighborhoods presents a number of challenges. An appropriate method to solving neighborhood-based issues related to social capital must start with identifying key components of the issue. Then, understanding how key components impact social capital. Finally, practitioners must figure out how to use components as assets in building social capital. This chapter first shows evidence that children have a role in building parental social connections by identifying differences between parents and nonparents. Differences are related to social capital indicators such as behavior, participation, perception, and resources. Next, this chapter discusses what the child's role most likely is. Child-based components that play a role in parental social capital such as volunteering rates are identified. Finally, it is important to note that children are both a hindrance and a facilitator of parental social capital. For example, this chapter discusses how negative parental perceptions of child-based activities can impede parental success at building social capital. The purpose of this study is not to simply identify issues related to building social capital, but to hopefully guide future research in determining successful methods of building social capital in mixed-socioeconomic neighborhoods.

## The Case for Children

If children have a role in the way that parents build or do not build social capital, there should be clear differences in social capital indicators between parents and nonparents regardless of current socioeconomic levels. Neighborhoods in this study are designed for low- and middle-income residents and therefore a socioeconomic cross-sectional analysis will always produce similar aggregate data. Social capital indicators demonstrate the differences between parents and nonparents without having to track positive economic outcomes over time. Parents and nonparents alike find themselves in similar situations (i.e. low-income housing programs) but the methods in which they enter and leave those situations will be different. This study demonstrates clear differences in the way in which parents and nonparents build social capital and differences in the levels of social capital between parents and nonparents.

Although parents and nonparents indicate almost the same level of overall access to neighborhood resources, the specific resources that parents require are different. All things being equal, if children can both facilitate and impede social capital, it is not surprising that parents and nonparents generally demonstrate similar levels of resources. Parents may be hindered by their children in some respects but if the need arises, they could learn to take advantage of social opportunities presented by their child such as meeting parents at child-based events like soccer games. Conversely, children may facilitate high levels of social capital in one area which give parents the comfort to ignore other methods of facilitating social capital. Parents seek out different resources based on the needs of their families and over time would likely gain skills in how to access them.

The similarity in overall neighborhood resources only shows that the two groups have equal potential of achieving similar outcomes; however, parents still demonstrate different levels of social capital indicators than nonparents. As the literature suggests, parents indicate

higher rates of membership in community-based (non-school) organizations than their counterparts (Curley 2010a). It is likely that parents have increased exposure to membership opportunities than nonparents. Children present additional options for organizational membership such as joining 4-H or other youth development organizations. Aside from exposure, parents also have awareness for their child's safety. As a result, parents demonstrate a greater interest in their community's safety and are more likely to join programs such as neighborhood watch groups. Children offer more avenues and reasons for parents to be members in organizations and therefore obligate parents to build social capital through these organizations.

Parents demonstrate higher levels of social capital than nonparents with greater participation in local politics. Their increased interest may be a result of the content of the political agenda. For example, schools that depend on revenue from local taxes often have school-related political ballots. Parents may be interested in local politics for the sake of their child's school funding. As the literature suggests, parents are more concerned with their child's safety than their own needs (Kimbrow and Schachter 2011; Kleinhans 2004). Children could also present parents with additional political interests such as anti-drug use campaigns or government-based childcare programs. It is likely that nonparents have interest in similar agendas and additional interests that parents do not have, but parents in this study are more politically active than nonparents.

While children may have a positive impact on parental membership and participation, they may prevent parents from adapting to their neighborhood over time. The neighborhoods in this study indicate that nonparents are less likely to feel isolated the longer they live in their home whereas parents' feelings of isolation are not correlated with household tenure. It is clear that social connections take time to form and nonparents demonstrate that they are more likely

to build these connections. Parents could be stagnant in their relationship building over time as they immediately have access to child-based social connections such as school programs that do not change over time. They could have a higher level of social capital from the beginning, but may not increase that level after living in their neighborhood for years to come. Feelings of isolation can inhibit the ability to form social connections (Winkworth et al. 2010). While children have some positive benefits to social integration, they may inhibit parents from additional access to resources beyond child-based ones.

There are clear indications that parents perceive their neighborhoods differently and behave differently than nonparents. Similar research suggests that parents are impacted by child-based perceptions (Offer and Schneider 2007; Cheung 2011). Parents in this study demonstrate that they are more likely than nonparents to reach out to their neighbors as in initiating conversations and socializing with all races and classes. Children could influence their parents to be more outgoing through school- or youth-based activities which provide opportunities for increased parental socializing. When they do encounter other parents at social child-based activities, parents could be encouraged to reach out to other parents for guidance on child-related issues. Parents also indicate that they have a more positive impression of their neighborhood than nonparents as in increased feelings of helping each other. Indications of increased socializing and positive perceptions help parents facilitate social capital greater than nonparents.

An interesting finding indicates that child participation in nonschool-based social activities such as scouting and music are positively correlated with parental social capital while school based social activities such as sports and plays are not. It is likely that parental participation is required more at nonschool activities than school activities. School activities may coincide with time in which children are already at school. Therefore, children would not be

dependent on their parent for transportation. Additionally, school activities typically have teachers and coaches that are provided by the school thereby negating the need for parental participation. Whereas in scouting or music lessons, parents are more likely required to transport their children and serve as den mothers. Nonschool-based activities are likely to provide additional social opportunities for parents out of necessity.

It is possible that there are antecedent variables impacting parents that are unrelated to children. There are multiple differences in parent and nonparent social capital indicators and it is difficult to determine which variables impact parents. The argument could be made that individuals that are well-equipped at building social capital are more likely to have children. Thereby, the variable impacting parental social capital is exogenous from the parent/child relationship. However, nonparents in this study are classified as residents that do not currently have young children in the house. Many of these residents once had young children living with them. Residents that have children that have moved out of the home demonstrate the same perceptions and behavior as residents that have no children. When the child left the house, so did the child-based opportunities to build social capital.

#### The Role of Children

From the findings of this study there are a number of important themes that demonstrate that not only do children have a role in facilitating or hindering parental social capital but there is evidence that shows what that role is. For example, evidence suggests that children likely play a greater role in hindering single parents than partnered parents. Without a partner to help raise their children, single parents have less time to participate in additional activities. Partnered parents in this study (married parents or those with a partner) demonstrate a greater ability to build social capital than single parents. Partnered parents have greater access

to resources, volunteer and participate more often, and have a more positive perception of their neighborhood. Partnered parents are also more likely to socialize with their neighbors. Higher levels of engagement could explain the greater access to neighborhood resources. A lower level of neighborhood interactions would result in lower levels of social connections and access to additional resources. Partnered parents that have a higher level of neighborhood interactions know more people that can help them with financial-based problems such as fixing a car or a computer or finding a job. They also know more people that can help them with personal issues such as taking care of them when they are sick or watching their children. Single parents have less access to potential social-building opportunities and are likely to struggle with problems in which partnered parents have assistance.

Some neighborhood resources may be used more or less depending on whether the parent is partnered or single; however, there is indication that single parents use resources more often when they have the access. Although partnered parents reach out to other parents less often when they have a problem, they feel that there are more people with whom they can speak if they have a problem. Partnered parents also feel less isolated in their neighborhood. Therefore, there is evidence that partnered parents are more integrated in their communities but perhaps have less of a need to reach out to other parents and therefore do it less frequently.

Surprisingly, child demographics in this study do not show a significant role in facilitating or hindering parental social capital. Previous literature suggests that child's age and sex would have an impact on parental perceptions (Middleton, Murie and Groves 2005; Vieno et al. 2010). This study showed no relation to sex of the child and parental levels of social capital. There is a slight positive correlation between child's age and parents' frequency of attending social events which could suggest that parents are more likely to leave older children at home alone.

However, there are no other significant correlations to child demographics to support that child's age has a significant impact on parental social capital. As previous literature suggests, demographics such as crime rates (and in this case age) are less important to building social connections than perceptions of safety (Kimbrow and Schachter 2011). This study suggests that child demographics (age and sex) in the neighborhoods studied are unlikely to play a major role in facilitating or hindering parental social capital.

There is a cyclical nature between building resources and neighborhood perceptions wherein those that have a positive perception of their neighborhood will engage their neighbors more often. In turn, neighborhood engagement increases access to resources, relieving individual burdens, and improving neighborhood perceptions. This study demonstrates that having children can impact the cyclical role between resources and perceptions through analyzing partnered parents and single parents separately. Partnered parents in this study are more optimistic about their neighborhood than single parents; e.g. partnered parents are more likely to feel that their neighbors will help them. They also indicate that they have more resources and are more engaged than single parents. Children are the likely hindrance that prevents single parents from having as much time as partnered parents to engage their neighbors. While evidence suggests that children help facilitate parental social capital, there are situations in which they can hinder social connections. Whether a tool or a hindrance for building, children play a role in parental social capital.

#### Tool or Hindrance

Children help facilitate social capital in certain cases whereas in some families they limit their parents from creating social connections. Evidence shows that children can either facilitate or hinder social capital depending on the needs of families. Child behavior demonstrates a

number of significant and strong correlations with parental behavior, particularly rates at which children volunteer. Additionally, the rate at which children socialize with their friends demonstrates a number of correlations with parental community perception. Finally, evidence suggests that perceptions of child safety play a role in building parental social capital. Each of these components may be either a tool or a hindrance to facilitating parental social capital, but the evidence show that children play a role.

Parents that have children who are more involved in their community are also more likely to be involved in community-based organizations, school organizations, and local politics. Parents that are more likely to be involved are also more likely to worry about their children. The relationship between parental involvement and their children's activities could work in either or both directions. If the parent is more involved in the community they may be likely to encourage their own child to be involved in the community. In turn, if the child gets involved in the community and the parent is aware of additional activities through the child's involvement, the parent may become more involved. If the parent worries about their child they may be more interested in taking action in the community and influence policies to protect the child. In turn, if the parent is more involved in the community they may be privy to unsafe factors in the community and worry more about their children. In either case there is a strong relationship to the behavior of the child and the behavior of the parent and a strong relationship between the perception a parent has on the child's activities and the parent's behavior.

The rate at which children socialize with other children of different races may be an outcome or a cause to building social networks. Children that socialize with children of different races have parents that socialize with other parents of different races. Parents that have children that socialize with other races are also more likely to be members of community organizations and participate in politics. Additionally, parents that have children with a higher

rate of socializing with other races are less likely to feel as if their neighbors will take advantaged of them. The literature suggests that discrimination is one of the main obstacles that prevents neighbor from creating social networks (Galster 2007; McClure 2008). A fortuitous finding is that children may play a key role in breaking down barriers of discrimination.

Parental perception of their child's safety is an important component of building social capital (Kimbrow and Schachter 2011). Parents in this study with a positive sense of safety for their children have more trust and greater confidence in the government and local officials. Additionally, parents with a positive sense of safety for their children feel that their neighbors are less likely to take advantage of them. The lack of safety is likely to encourage parents to be more involved with community organizations and politics. If safety is a precursor for social integration for parents, then the perception that parents have of their child's safety is likely to impact their own social capital.

Positive child perceptions and behaviors are likely both the result and the cause of increased levels of parental social capital. On one hand, parents that participate frequently in community activities are likely to take their children to such events, encouraging their child to be engaged in their community. On the other hand, children that socialize with their friends more provide opportunities for their parents to socialize with other parents (e.g. at child soccer games). Children can also be either a tool or a hindrance to building social capital. Parents that have the opportunity to socialize more often because their children socialize often are likely to increase their access to neighborhood resources. In turn, parents that worry about the safety of their children are likely to be more withdrawn from their neighborhood and miss out on the positive experience. For better or for worse, children either impact or are impacted by the social interactions of their parents.

## Summary of Analysis

There are a number of ways in which children fit into the equation of building parental social capital. Parents and nonparents show different rates and methods of accessing social capital which indicate that children could impact parental behavior and perception. Children could impact the rate at which parents join community organizations and participate in local politics. Children also could influence parental levels of isolation and how well they integrate in their neighborhood. Even though single parents appear to need it more, they have less access to opportunities in which they could build social capital. Additionally, parents and children tend to follow the same behavioral patterns. For instance, active parents have active children. The rate at which children socialize in their neighborhoods relates to the comfort level of the parent. Child safety is also an important component to the equation of building parental social capital. These relationships demonstrate that children may play a role in either facilitating or hindering parental social capital.

Another way of thinking about the relationship between social connections, perceptions of neighbors and authority figures, and safety strategies is by thinking of each parent as having a certain set of survival skills specific to their family and to their neighborhood. Many of the parents that commented on surveys noted that taking the survey made them think about their neighborhood in a different way. Some parents are proud of their skills at interacting with their community and others felt that they could increase their social connections. Partaking in the survey gave parents the opportunity to evaluate their performance at enduring the hardships of being a part of a low-income housing program. Participants immediately recognize the value of building social capital and many relate it directly to their own family in a detailed manner. Parents demonstrate that they are proud that they excel in neighborhood integration and note that their children do as well. Other parents identify that the safety of their child causes them to

be more on guard and withdrawn from their community. Evidence demonstrates that child behavior patterns are probably both a cause and an effect of parental social capital and that it will be different for each family. As parents in this study seek the resources they need and to sharpen their survival skills, they are clearly impacting and being impacted by their children along the way.

CHAPTER VI  
CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

Conclusion

This study asks if children play a role in how parents build social capital in mixed-socioeconomic communities in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Findings indicate that in some instances parents demonstrate higher levels of social capital than nonparents. Parents are more likely to be active within their neighborhoods than nonparents even if they are less likely to attend special events. Parents also demonstrate a more positive attitude towards their community than nonparents. Additionally, findings indicate that many, but not all, dimensions of parental social capital are related to child-based social activities. Child safety, volunteer rates, and levels of socializing are all significantly related to parental indicators of social capital. Findings also demonstrate that parents that are married or have a partner are more likely to have strong levels of social capital than single parents.

There are multiple cases in which children are likely to have a role in how parents build social capital. First, parents have more opportunities to mix socially because of their children's social activities. Second, parental concern for their child safety encourages parents to trust local officials, join community organizations, and be more cautious of their neighbors. The former case most likely has a reciprocal effect where highly active parents have highly active children. For example, parents that volunteer are likely to take their children with them. Conversely, children that socialize, volunteer, and play sports are likely to require their parent's participation

allowing additional opportunities for parental social integration. Child-based activities are often either caused by parental social connections or encourage them.

Indicators of trust in local officials, participation in community organizations, and levels of neighborhood engagement do not alone explain how child safety can be related to parental social capital. Parents that have negative perceptions of their community are likely to feel unsafe regardless of whether or not they feel their children are safe. Safety and neighborhood engagement is most likely a reciprocal effect similar to parent social integration and child social integration. Parents with strong social connections are likely to feel their children are safer and parents that feel their children are safer are more likely to engage their neighbors and build social connections. Reciprocity is also likely between indicators of trust in local officials and child safety. Parents that trust the local police will feel that their children are safe and parents that feel their children are safe are likely to trust local officials. The relationships between overall child safety and levels of neighborhood engagement or overall child safety and trust in local officials is positively correlated and therefore the reciprocal effect can easily be seen; however, levels of participations with community organizations and local politics are negatively correlated with parents that worry about criminals. It is possible that parents highly involved with politics and community organizations are privy to information about criminals that other parents are not which causes them to worry more about their children. In this case, the child is being impacted by parental levels of integration. It is also likely that parents worry about their children and are encouraged to take action in their community. In this case, parental social capital is being impacted by their children.

There are multiple findings in this study that are to be expected if child-based activities are an important piece of the parental social capital puzzle. First if children play a role in facilitating parental social capital, findings should demonstrate different levels of social capital

between parents and nonparents. Parents appear to be more engaged in their neighborhood and are more likely to build social connections than nonparents. Second if children can facilitate parental social capital, findings should also suggest child-based situations that hinder social capital. For example, findings demonstrate different levels of social capital between partnered parents and single parents. Partnered parents appear to have more time to build social connections than single parents. Finally if child-based activities can have an impact on parental social capital, findings should demonstrate relationships between significant social capital indicators and child-based activities. Child behaviors such as volunteer rates and frequencies of socializing are correlated with parental behavior and perceptions demonstrating that children could have an impact on parental social capital.

While findings are specific to the neighborhoods studied, building social capital in mixed-socioeconomic communities requires the same elements as in standard neighborhoods. Parents require repeated interactions with neighbors to successfully build strong social connections (Son and Linn 2008). Perceptions of safety (Vieno et al. 2010), social support, and community acceptance (Offer and Schneider 2007; Cheung 2011) are precursors to building social capital. Findings show that children are involved in each of these elements as they relate to their parents success or failure. Additionally, children require other social components for successful educational attainment (Janus and Offord 2007). Children are more likely to succeed in school when they are well-integrated into their communities (Emig 2000; Graue 2006; Pianta 2002). Future research focusing on public housing and building social capital should consider the role of children.

## Limitations

The neighborhoods for this study were restricted in that they needed to fit the mixed-socioeconomic model. Restrictions caused the size of the population studied to be too small to provide generalizations and findings are limited to the Grand Rapids community. The size of the population also limited the number of married, nonparent participants. Findings indicate that marital status is significant to this research. Unfortunately, as this was an unexpected finding, this study could not thoroughly explore the impact of marital status.

While literature suggests that children could impact parental social capital, it does not indicate what that role is or which variables are significant. This study measured a large variety of indicators in order to explore which parent- and child-based variables are significant. Depth of findings is limited to identifying what indicators are relevant in the parent/child relationship but only provides speculation on how they are relevant. Without knowing which variables are relevant, this study is limited by not exploring antecedent variables that could cause desired outcomes. This study is also limited by the ability to analyze only bivariate correlations and not analysis that will support causation. Future studies can compensate for limitations to this study.

## Recommendations for Future Research

There are several recommendations for future research. Some of the limitations outlined in the previous section could be minimized or eliminated. A larger population size would allow for additional variables to be tested such as marital status. Future research should target specific variables such as child safety and volunteer rates and parental behavior and perceptions. Regression analyses would help determine causation beyond correlations and ordinary least squares would help determine direction of perceived reciprocal variables. Data triangulation and qualitative data would provide additional legitimacy to future findings.

Future research on children and parental social capital in public housing programs should be able to accurately determine more than just what the role of children is in mixed-socioeconomic communities. It should also determine how that role impacts parental social capital and how housing agencies can implement policy that will foster strong social connections. Future research should guide practitioners to making smart decisions that affect the world's greatest resource, children. Children are likely to impact and be impacted by their parent's access to networks, and perhaps, could be a strong mechanism that encourages social integration.

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## APPENDIX A

### SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE ADMINISTERED TO ALL PARENTS

1. On a scale from 1 to 5, please rank how often you do the following:
  - a) Initiate conversations with your neighbors.
  - b) Volunteer at community organizations, church groups or neighborhood events.
  - c) Attend workshops, classes or lessons to improve your skills, knowledge or abilities.
  - d) Attend cultural, musical or artistic events in your community.
  - e) Attend your child's school activities (such as sports, plays and clubs).
  - f) Attend your child's activities outside of school (such as scouting, church functions or music lessons).
  - g) Socialize with other parents.
  - h) Volunteer at your child's school.
  - i) Interact with people of races and backgrounds different from your own.
  - j) Ask advice about parenting from other parents.
2. Are you a member of a community organization?
3. Are you a member of your child's parent-teacher association (PTA) or other similar organization?
4. Do you participate in local politics?
5. On a scale from 1 to 5, please rank the following:
  - a) My child socializes with his or her friends.
    - a. Oldest child under 16 years
    - b. Second oldest under 16 years
    - c. Third oldest under 16 years

- b) Participates in school activities (such as sports, plays or clubs).
  - a. Oldest child under 16 years
  - b. Second oldest under 16 years
  - c. Third oldest under 16 years
- c) Participates in activities outside of school (such as scouting, church functions or music lessons).
  - a. Oldest child under 16 years
  - b. Second oldest under 16 years
  - c. Third oldest under 16 years
- d) Interacts with other children of races and backgrounds different from their own.
  - a. Oldest child under 16 years
  - b. Second oldest under 16 years
  - c. Third oldest under 16 years
- e) Participates in volunteer opportunities such as community functions, school functions and/or church functions.
  - a. Oldest child under 16 years
  - b. Second oldest under 16 years
  - c. Third oldest under 16 years

On a scale from 1 to 5, please rank the following:

- 6. This is a neighborhood where people help each other.
- 7. There is at least one person in this neighborhood that I can talk to when I have a problem.
- 8. I trust my state government to make smart decisions on behalf of myself and my children.
- 9. My neighbors would take advantage of me if they had the opportunity.
- 10. I feel comfortable socializing with people outside of my income level.
- 11. I have confidence in the local government and authorities (e.g. police department and city councils).
- 12. I use my skills and talents to contribute to my neighborhood.
- 13. I feel isolated in my neighborhood.

On a scale from 1 to 5, please rank the following:

14. My child is safe to walk home from school.
  - a) Oldest child under 16 years
  - b) Second oldest under 16 years
  - c) Third oldest under 16 years
15. When my child leaves the home, I worry about criminals, bad influences and/or drugs.
  - a) Oldest child under 16 years
  - b) Second oldest under 16 years
  - c) Third oldest under 16 years
16. My child attends a good school.
  - a) Oldest child under 16 years
  - b) Second oldest under 16 years
  - c) Third oldest under 16 years
17. My child has access to activities that are appropriate for his or her interests.
  - a) Oldest child under 16 years
  - b) Second oldest under 16 years
  - c) Third oldest under 16 years
18. Overall, my child is safe in my neighborhood.
  - a) Oldest child under 16 years
  - b) Second oldest under 16 years
  - c) Third oldest under 16 years

#### Neighborhood Resources

If necessary, do you know someone in your neighborhood that:

19. Could help you move?
20. Would bring you food or medicine if you are sick?
21. Can help you with a computer problem?
22. Has a contact with the media?
23. Would lend you \$500 if you needed it?
24. Could help you fix your car?
25. Gives good advice about handling stress?
26. Is politically active?
27. Could help you find a job?

28. Would watch your children when you are not at home?

## APPENDIX B

### SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE ADMINISTERED TO ALL NONPARENTS

1. On a scale from 1 to 5, please rank how often you do the following:
    - k) Initiate conversations with your neighbors.
    - l) Volunteer at community organizations, church groups or neighborhood events.
    - m) Attend workshops, classes or lessons to improve your skills, knowledge or abilities.
    - n) Attend cultural, musical or artistic events in your community.
    - o) Interact with people of races and backgrounds different from your own.
  6. Are you a member of a community organization?
  7. Do you participate in local politics?
- On a scale from 1 to 5, please rank the following:
8. This is a neighborhood where people help each other.
  9. There is at least one person in this neighborhood that I can talk to when I have a problem.
  10. My neighbors would take advantage of me if they had the opportunity.
  11. I feel comfortable socializing with people outside of my income level.
  12. I have confidence in the local government and authorities (e.g. police department and city councils).
  13. I use my skills and talents to contribute to my neighborhood.
  14. I feel isolated in my neighborhood.

## Neighborhood Resources

If necessary, do you know someone in your neighborhood that:

15. Could help you move?
16. Would bring you food or medicine if you are sick?
17. Can help you with a computer problem?
18. Has a contact with the media?
19. Would lend you \$500 if you needed it?
20. Could help you fix your car?
21. Gives good advice about handling stress?
22. Is politically active?
23. Could help you find a job?