

Housing Preferences in Louisville: A Feminist Critique of the Suburban Environment

Mae G. Banner
Catherine White Berheide
Fay Ross Greckel

This paper examines recent patterns of demand for houses in the Louisville, Kentucky, metropolitan area and considers the policy implications of the findings. The paper focuses on the housing preferences of 362 home buyers and addresses three questions. First, what are the housing preferences (such as type of neighborhood, cost, distance from job and services) of home purchasers? Second, do housing preferences differ by family type (such as married couples or single adults)? Third, what are the implications of these preferences for government officials, private builders, urban planners, and others who will be determining future housing options? The findings indicate that housing preferences associated with children, wife's employment, and proximity to family and friends do differ significantly by family type. We conclude with the recommendation that housing policies be changed to better meet the housing preferences of various family types.

Mae G. Banner is Assistant Professor of Society at Skidmore College, Saratoga Springs, New York.

Catherine White Berheide is Assistant Professor of Society at Skidmore College, Saratoga Springs, New York.

Fay Ross Greckel is Professor of Business and Economics at Indiana University Southeast, New Albany, Indiana.

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The increasing pressures upon housing policy makers to conserve energy, to maintain open space, and to reduce housing costs for families are beginning to converge with the demands feminists have been making since the 1973 conference on "Planning, Women, and Change" sponsored by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (Hapgood and Getzels, 1974). The conference recommended that housing decisions made by government officials and private builders be altered to provide housing and neighborhoods that are serviceable for women, particularly for employed women with children. Hayden (1980) notes that suburbs have come under attack by

sociologists and others since the 1960's on energy and aesthetic grounds, but that, initially at least, only feminists have been concerned about the social and emotional stress women faced as they tried to live and work in houses and neighborhoods designed under the assumption of a traditional gender-based division of labor and with increasing distances between job and home. Now, the different lines of criticism are converging; that which benefits a majority of women is beginning to be seen as generally beneficial for society on economic and environmental grounds.

For instance, Godfield (1976), suggests that the United States may soon reach the limits of suburban growth because, among other reasons, more women are employed outside the home, fertility rates are declining, average household size is lower, and the absolute number of households is increasing. All of these trends are occurring while the costs of transportation and housing are soaring. As criticism of suburban sprawl becomes more prevalent in the 1980's, feminist criticism of the suburban environment will reinforce economic constraints and environmental concerns, and will have an important influence upon housing and planning in an economy of increasing housing costs, decreasing availability of prime land, and limited and expensive energy resources.

This paper joins other recent work (e.g., Keller, 1981) in attempting to rectify the past imbalance in the literature on urban and suburban communities by recognizing women's, as well as men's, housing desires. In this paper we examine recent patterns of demand for houses in the Louisville, Kentucky, metropolitan area and consider the policy implications of our findings. Our study focuses on the housing preferences of various types of families and addresses three questions. First, what are the housing preferences (such as size of house, location, distance from family and friends) of recent home buyers? Second, do housing preferences differ by family type (such as two-earner or single-parent family)? Third, what are the implications of these preferences for

government officials, private builders, urban planners and others who will be determining future housing options?

Two trends in particular have encouraged the recent outpouring of information about women and housing. Both are implicated in the growing strains between traditionally designed housing and neighborhoods, and the realities of women's lives. First, women are increasingly in the paid labor force. The Statistical Abstract of the United States (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1979:xxiv) reports that the labor force participation rate of women with husband present and with children under 18 grew from 27.6 percent in 1960 to 50.2 percent in 1978. Second, single-parent families are increasing. As of 1970, they were 10 percent of all families, most of them headed by women; by 1979 the single parent families headed by women constituted 17 percent of all families, a growth of 81 percent over the decade (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1980:3).¹ Both trends are expected to continue.

Feminist scholars (e.g., Fava, 1980; Hayden, 1980) have argued that conventional suburban homes and neighborhoods have always served women badly, whether they were full-time homemakers or employed outside the home; now, with the increase in women in the labor force and the increase in female-headed families, the inadequacies of suburban housing for most women are more clearly revealed. As the trends toward paid work and single parenthood for women continue, the pressure to change the design of houses and neighborhoods will increase.

Of course, many policy makers have not yet recognized the problems that suburban living increasingly imposes on women. President Carter's Commission for a National Agenda for the '80's, in its report released December, 1980, recommended a "reorientation of Federal urban policy" to encourage the migration of people toward jobs in the Sun Belt. One of their supporting arguments for this recommendation was that "Urban and suburban 'sprawl' may have some virtues. Low density development permits better

housing for millions of Americans and does not necessarily waste energy or natural resources” (New York Times, 1981). We question the basis of the claim that urban and suburban ‘sprawl’ is “better” housing. Is low density really better for women — increasingly employed for pay, usually solely responsible for domestic labor as well, and with a growing number responsible for raising children alone — who must accomplish this triple responsibility in homes and neighborhoods which, because of inadequate services and low density, hinder their efforts to perform their many roles?

Popenoe (1979:262), in his comparison between Levittown and a Swedish planned suburb, says “It is hard to escape the conclusion that urban sprawl is an urban development designed by and for men, especially middle class men,” because its maintenance depends on direct access to auto transportation. We know from previous studies that women are about twice as likely as men to lack access to a car, or to get it only to do chores for other people (Fava, 1980).

Popenoe cites two categories of deprivation that affect women in suburbs. The first is deprivation of access, illustrated by lack of access to cars, which leads directly to lack of access to services even for those who can afford the services and even when the services are provided somewhere in the area near one’s house. Popenoe (1979:264) says, comparing Levittown and Valingby, “While the Swedish working women, with excellent public transportation, have access to a large job market and abundant public facilities and services, the American suburban working women, with the virtual absence of public transportation, find their job prospects limited, and their automobile access unreliable.” The second category is environmental deprivation, or limited stimuli within the “local environment of the pedestrian, the main environment for those with limited access” (Popenoe, 1979:264).

According to Roistacher and Young (1980:S220-S221), “Three household types — the single woman, the two earner family, and the household headed by a divorced woman — will

shape the economy of cities by their impact . . . on the demand for housing, tenure choice (owning or renting) and particularly on choice of residential locations.” They point out that, in these emerging types of families, women’s housing preferences will have to be considered along with those of other family members, and that women are likely to prefer high-density city housing to low-density, service-poor suburban housing because of their need to accomplish multiple tasks within severe time constraints.

Studies of divorced women raising children while holding full-time jobs confirm this preference for high-density urban neighborhoods, even when such neighborhoods are not completely safe from violence. For example, Brown (1978) found that divorced mothers in Boston considered run-down, inner-city neighborhoods “good” because they provided precisely the services and social support the women needed, from jobs and child care to social acceptance of single-parent families. These studies suggest that women with moderate and low incomes prefer urban to suburban neighborhoods for themselves and their children.

In their book, *The Suburban Environment and Women*, Donald N. Rothblatt, D. J. Carr, and Jo Sprague (1979) studied the effects of attributes of the suburban environment in eight upper middle class areas around San Jose, California, upon women’s evaluations of their housing environment, community services, social patterns and psychological well-being. All the women in their sample were mothers of grade school-aged children. The authors conclude that environmental variables — notably density, distance to city center, distance to work, and features of the design and the site plan — have the greatest impact on women’s satisfaction with their housing and their community services; these variables have a moderate effect on social patterns of group activity, friendship, and a feeling of belonging as well.

For our purposes the most striking finding in the San Jose study is that higher-density environments were associated with higher levels of satisfaction for all categories of mothers: married

and unmarried, employed and full-time homemakers. The authors (1979:133) state, "It appears that higher density housing areas not only work better for unmarried women than do single-family neighborhoods, but are also more rewarding environments for married women with small children." Likewise, older neighborhoods are preferred over newer suburban developments, even when the maintenance of the older houses is harder. Older neighborhoods have a social identity and provide women with the psychic and social support of community services and friendships.

In evaluating the San Jose study, it is important to note that all eight neighborhoods studied were upper middle class in income. The high-density neighborhoods in the San Jose study contained multi-family dwelling units, usually condominiums with planned community services, recreation and play space for children included in the costs. All categories of women preferred this type of housing to low-density single family neighborhoods because it was easier to maintain and gave more value for its cost, but it was particularly desirable for employed mothers of small children whose husbands were not present.

The finding in the San Jose study that higher densities are preferred by every category of women is particularly compelling in view of the fact that the authors had initially hypothesized that, for married women, high density would be negatively related to the women's satisfaction with housing environment and with social patterns. However, married and unmarried women alike evaluated higher-density housing more favorably than low-density single family housing; thus the authors have confirmed a pattern long recognized by feminists but not anticipated in their own expectations.

Where the environment is inhospitable in terms of lack of services, but potentially tolerable because of higher density, some women have worked out ad hoc solutions to the problem of limited services. Rosalie Genovese (1980) provides an interesting account of women's ingenuity

and persistence in overcoming environmental obstacles in her study of a women's informal support system in a Rochester, New York, suburban townhouse complex. The townhouses were moderately priced. The occupations of the husbands were mainly professional, technical or managerial. Genovese found that the women had developed cooperative baby-sitting and snack services, shared car transportation for shopping trips, and set up group buying practices, bartering of services, and social events. They also exchanged services such as sewing and hairdressing for cash payments. Finally, they provided essential social support for those women whose husbands traveled constantly, and they were able to draw newcomers to the development into their informal network which did not dissolve when its original members moved away. Genovese (1980:S254) notes, that the network made no status distinctions among the women despite differences in background, that it satisfied the women's needs for a variety of services with little money changing hands, and that it met the women's expressive needs through friendship and social support. She does point out to urban planners and policy makers, however, that they would do well to build women's capacity for creating and maintaining support networks by designing housing and neighborhoods that provide settings conducive to neighboring, and by including women in policy making at the planning stage.

A collection of articles edited by Wekerle, Peterson, and Morley (1980) underscores the need to include women in planning housing and neighborhood policy. Studies in this collection document the price women pay for inadequate housing design and non-supportive neighborhoods, and also describe and evaluate innovative solutions to women's housing problems, such as a design for housing for single-parent families.

Thus the literature on housing discusses a wide variety of housing preferences. This paper addresses some of those preferences, particularly ones which relate to the location of housing rather

than the design of housing. (See Hayden, 1980, for some innovative suggestions concerning housing designs which meet women's needs.)

Research Methods and Characteristics of the Sample

The data presented in this paper were generated by a study of home buyers in Jefferson County, Kentucky, the county containing Louisville and some of the surrounding suburban area. The data collection method used in this research consisted of a self-administered questionnaire mailed to 962 home buyers randomly selected from lists, published in the Louisville *Courier-Journal*, of the 8,339 persons who purchased houses in Jefferson County between April 1978 and April 1979.² Of the 397 questionnaires returned, 362 could be included in the sample.³ The response rate of 41 percent is slightly lower than average for mailed questionnaires even though a second wave of mailings was done to raise the response rate.⁴

The demographic characteristics of the respondents are presented in Table 1. Fifty-four percent of the respondents were male; 47 percent were female.⁵ The respondents mean age was 32. Eighty-two percent of the respondents were currently married. Forty-three percent of the households surveyed had no children present in the home, either because the children were grown and gone or because the couples had no children. For the total sample, the mean number of children per household was one. For households with children, the mean number of children per family was two. Fifty-two percent of the sample households were nuclear families consisting of husband, wife, and at least one child currently living at home. Thirty-three percent (120) of the households consisted of a married, or unmarried, couple with no children currently living in the home; 5 percent were single parents living with at least one child; and 10 percent were single adults living alone. Of the 183 nuclear families, 54 percent were two-earner families. Of the 120 married couples, 71 percent were two-earner couples.

Table 1. — Background Characteristics of Jefferson County Sample (N=362).

	percent
Respondent's Sex	
Male	54
Female	47
	(n=361)
Race of Male Adult	
White	97
Nonwhite	3
	(n=314)
Race of Female Adult	
White	94
Nonwhite	6
	(n=329)
Respondent's Marital Status	
Married	82
Never Married	7
Divorced	6
Separated	1
Widowed	2
Living Together	2
	(n=352)
Number of Children Present	
0	43
1	23
2	24
3	8
4	2
5	1
6	*
7	*
	(n=362)
Family Type	
Nuclear Family	52
Married Couple	33
Single Parent	5
Single Adult	10
	(n=362)
Employment Status of Male Adult	
Not Employed	4
Part Time	4
Full Time	92
	(n=310)

Employment Status of Female Adult	
Not Employed	30
Part Time	14
Full Time	56
	(n=323)

Income of Male Adult	
Under \$5,000	2
\$5,001-\$10,000	7
\$10,001-\$15,000	22
\$15,001-\$20,000	26
\$20,001-\$25,000	18
\$25,001-\$30,000	10
\$30,001-\$40,000	10
Over \$40,000	6
	(n=292)

Income of Female Adult	
Under \$5,000	15
\$5,001-\$10,000	36
\$10,001-\$15,000	32
\$15,001-\$20,000	12
\$20,001-\$25,000	4
\$25,001-\$30,000	1
\$30,001-\$40,000	*
Over \$40,000	*
	(n=229)

Total Household Income	
Under \$10,000	4
\$10,001-\$15,000	11
\$15,001-\$20,000	18
\$20,001-\$25,000	18
\$25,001-\$30,000	17
\$30,001-\$40,000	20
\$40,001-\$50,000	7
Over \$50,000	4
	(n=342)

Education of Male Adult	
Finished Grade School	1
Some High School	6
Finished High School	19
Some College	23
Finished College	25
Some Graduate School	8
Finished Graduate School	19
	(n=322)

Education of Female Adult	
Finished Grade School	1
Some High School	5
Finished High School	28
Some College	28

Finished College	20
Some Graduate School	7
Finished Graduate School	12
	(n=333)

Occupation of Male Adult	
Male-Dominated Professional and Technical	18
Other Professional and Technical	9
Managerial	27
Sales or Service	14
Craftworker	12
Operative or Laborer	20
	(n=278)

Occupation of Female Adult	
Female-Dominated Professional and Technical	18
Other Professional and Technical	9
Managerial	8
Clerical	18
Other	16
Homemaker	32
	(n=292)

*Less than 0.5%

Ninety-two percent of the male adults and 56 percent of the female adults in the households surveyed were employed full time. Twenty-seven percent of the male respondents had managerial jobs, whereas only 8 percent of the females did. Eighteen percent of the women held clerical jobs, and another 18 percent held jobs in the traditionally female professions such as nursing and non-college teaching. On the average, males earned between \$15,001 and \$20,000; females earned between \$5,001 and \$10,000. The average household income was between \$20,001 and \$25,000. Thus women contributed between one-fourth and one-third to the two-earner family income, which is comparable to current national figures. The typical male in the sample had graduated from college; the typical female had finished some years of college. Ninety-seven percent of the adult men and 94 percent of the adult women in the sample households were white.

The mean number of rooms per house in this sample was nine.⁶ While 16 percent of the houses were newly built when purchased, the median age of the houses was fourteen years. The median purchase price was \$44,000. Twenty-one percent of the respondents bought the house because they were moving into the Louisville area. Forty-four percent were buying their first home. For the 56 percent who had owned a house previously, the mean number of years they lived in their last home was six. The mean number of automobiles per household was two, implying that most of these families had adequate transportation readily available.

The characteristics of the sample are comparable with the 1976 Annual Housing Survey (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1978) data on recent movers in Louisville, suggesting that self-selection was not a serious problem. The 1976 Annual Housing Survey reported that the median income for recent movers in Louisville was \$17,000, and the median home value was \$30,300. Although our sample's median income (\$22,176) and median home value (\$44,000) were higher, much of the differences may be attributed to inflationary increases in incomes and home prices. Even though the demographic characteristics of our sample were similar to those of the population of the United States, caution should be exercised in generalizing beyond house purchasers in Jefferson County to those in the United States as a whole.

Housing Preferences

This paper examines the housing preferences (such as size of lot, setting, quality of municipal services) of house purchasers in the Louisville metropolitan area. New family types which have been growing in numbers (e.g., single-parent, two-earner) may have different housing demands than those of the traditional nuclear family with a male breadwinner and female homemaker to which the housing market traditionally has been directed. Thus, the data are analyzed to determine whether the housing preferences differ by

family type, an analysis which should help policy makers meet the housing desires of the families of the future.

Table 2 shows how important respondents felt each of twenty-four reasons was for deciding to buy the particular house they purchased.⁷ The price of the house was rated as a very important

Table 2. — Importance of Reasons for Home Purchase Decisions (N=362) “How Important Were Each of the Following Reasons for Buying *This* House?”

Reason	Very	Somewhat	Not	n
		percent	At All	
The Price	65	33	2	(n=353)
Good Neighborhood	60	36	4	(n=331)
Attractive Setting	41	52	7	(n=335)
More Room	51	31	18	(n=328)
Close to Shopping Areas	20	62	18	(n=339)
Good Municipal Services	24	53	23	(n=334)
Suburban Location	28	47	25	(n=301)
Good Schools	36	33	32	(n=260)
Close to Husband's Job	18	43	39	(n=275)
Close to Children's Schools	25	34	41	(n=225)
More Land	31	26	43	(n=310)
Availability of Federally Guaranteed Mortgage	30	25	44	(n=178)
Easy Access to Public Transportation	18	34	48	(n=301)
Close to Wife's Job	16	36	48	(n=220)
Close to Playgrounds and Parks	14	37	49	(n=246)
Close to Family	13	36	51	(n=268)
Close to Friends	11	38	51	(n=275)
Rural Location	16	31	53	(n=193)
Close to Downtown Louisville	12	33	55	(n=273)
Low Taxes	8	35	57	(n=277)
Close to Children's Activities	11	31	58	(n=209)
Availability of Child Care	12	22	66	(n=201)
Smaller House	7	6	87	(n=166)
Less Land	3	5	91	(n=186)

reason by 65 percent of the families; indeed 33 percent indicated that price was the single *most* important reason for buying the house they bought. While the importance of price did not differ significantly by family type (see Table 3), the analysis of variance in Table 4 indicates that the purchase price did vary significantly.

The mean purchase price for nuclear families was \$52,530. Nuclear families tended to have higher family incomes ($r=.14$, $p<.01$, $N=342$) with which to purchase more expensive homes. Another explanation for why nuclear families bought more expensive houses was that they had children present. The more children in a household, the more rooms were in the home purchased ($r=.27$, $p<.01$, $N=359$); as expected, nuclear families typically bought houses with more rooms ($r=.23$, $p<.01$, $N=359$).

In contrast to nuclear families, single parents purchased less expensive houses ($\bar{X}=\$34,545$). Single-parent families, although they included children as did the nuclear families, were more likely to be female headed and have a lower total family income ($r=-.15$, $p<.01$, $N=342$). Thus they were less able to afford a larger home, even though they might have wanted one because of the presence of children.

Single adults also purchased less expensive houses ($\bar{X}=\$36,641$). In contrast to single parents, though, the probable reason for the lower cost was that single adults were more likely to buy a house with fewer rooms ($r=-.21$, $p<.01$, $N=359$). However, the data did indicate that single adults also had lower family incomes ($r=-.23$, $p<.01$, $N=342$), so they, too, have restricted resources with which to buy a house.

In addition, households containing an employed wife purchased less expensive houses ($r=-.24$, $p<.01$, $N=285$). A closer examination of this counter-intuitive result showed that homes under \$54,999 tended to be purchased by families containing an employed female, while homes over \$55,000 were more likely to be purchased by families containing a full-time homemaker. The most expensive houses were likely to have been

bought by households in which the male was the sole breadwinner. In this sample, as in the U.S. population as a whole, the more money a man earned, the less likely his wife was to work outside the home ($r=-.30$, $p<.01$, $N=267$). There was a strong correlation between husband's income and the purchase price of the house ($r=.72$, $p<.01$, $N=289$) — stronger, in fact, than the correlation between total family income and price ($r=.63$, $p<.01$, $N=337$). The wife's income was unrelated to the purchase price of the house ($r=.05$, $N=227$). This result indicates that the families (and perhaps lenders and real estate agents as well) still consider the wife as the secondary wage earner whose income is to be viewed as temporary.

More room was a very important reason for choosing the house purchased in 51 percent of the cases. In fact, 21 percent of the respondents said it was the *most* important reason for their choice of home. According to Table 3, buying a house with more room was likely to be more important for nuclear families and families with more children, and less important for married couples and single adults. More room appeared to refer to more space but not necessarily a larger number of rooms, because 74 percent of the respondents preferred larger rooms rather than more rooms (all other things, including price, being equal).

For 60 percent of the respondents, the location of the house in a "good" neighborhood was a very important reason for purchasing the particular home they did. Fifteen percent felt that it was the *most* important reason. Factor analysis of the housing preference variables (see Berheide, Banner and Greckel, 1981) reveals that a "good" neighborhood is related to an attractive setting ($r=.30$, $p<.01$, $N=319$), a suburban location ($r=.29$, $p<.01$, $N=287$), and good schools ($r=.44$, $p<.01$, $N=254$).

Price, more room, and good neighborhoods were the only reasons cited as the most important reason by more than 10 percent of the sample. Price and more room together accounted for over half the responses concerning the single most

Table 3. — Correlations Between Family Characteristics and Housing Preferences (N=362)

	Nuclear Family	Married Couple	Single Parent	Single Adult	Number of Children	Employed Wife
The Price	.10	-.10	.11	-.08	.08	.01
Availability of Federally Guaranteed Mortgages	.07	-.14	.16	-.02	.09	.18
Low Taxes	.07	-.07	.08	-.06	.04	.03
More Room	.19*	-.14*	.08	-.17*	.20*	-.01
More Land	.03	.09	-.06	-.15*	.01	-.00
Smaller House	.06	-.04	-.09	.02	-.01	-.06
Less Land	-.03	.01	-.00	.03	.00	-.06
Attractive Setting	.11	-.05	-.10	-.03	.13*	-.04
Rural Location	.22*	-.09	-.04	-.21*	.13	.10
Close to Downtown Louisville	-.09	.02	-.01	.14	-.03	-.03
Suburban Location	.14*	-.13	.03	-.06	.15*	-.15*
Close to Husband's Job	-.00	-.00	.00	.02	.04	-.07
Close to Wife's Job	-.13	.06	.05	.11	-.03	.30*
Close to Family	-.07	-.12	.15*	.19*	-.03	.00
Close to Friends	-.04	-.07	-.01	.19*	-.07	.07
Good Neighborhood	.12	-.08	-.07	-.01	.07	-.11
Good Schools	.43*	-.38*	-.01	-.19*	.38*	-.12
Availability of Child Care	.19*	-.18*	.03	-.10	.14	.11
Close to Children's Schools	.27*	-.31*	.12	-.14	.29*	-.13
Close to Playgrounds and Parks	.17*	-.18*	.02	-.02	.10	.04
Close to Children's Activities	.23*	-.24*	.05	-.08	.29*	-.14
Close to Shopping Areas	.18*	-.13*	-.03	-.08	.18*	-.07
Easy Access to Public Transportation	-.01	-.01	.03	.01	.05	.04
Good Municipal Services	.03	-.00	-.02	-.02	.04	.03

The family characteristic variables (with the exception of number of children) were coded 0=No, 1=Yes. Housing Preference variables were coded 1=Not At All Important, 2=Somewhat Important, 3=Very Important. The first four categories in Table 3 are mutually exclusive family types; however, because Number of Children and Employed Wife refer to characteristics that are present in more than one family type, each family is represented in more than one column.

* $p < .01$

important reason for the choice of house. Many respondents wanted all three attributes: a house with more room, located in a good neighborhood, at the right price.

As shown in Table 2, these three reasons — price, good neighborhood and more room — were regarded by at least 50 percent of the households as very important reasons for purchasing their particular home. Respondents did indicate that other reasons — sometimes reasons which they considered very important although others considered them only somewhat important — influenced their choice of a house. These reasons included the respondents' preferences for an attractive setting, proximity to shopping areas, good municipal services, suburban location, good schools, proximity to husband's job, and proximity to children's schools.

Buyers obviously attempted to optimize the number and variety of objectives met by the particular house they ultimately chose. Although access to jobs, good schools, and municipal services can well be combined with attractive settings in suburban locations, thus allowing home buyers to meet more than just one or two of their desires at a price they can afford, the housing market at best provides a rather imperfect and sluggish vehicle for accommodating some of these demands. Housing purchases that entail a sacrifice of certain objectives are not likely to give clear signals to home builders and developers as to the strength of demand for various housing options that are not readily available in the market. Additionally, realization of some of the objectives requires appropriate governmental responses. Such responses may well be a long time in coming given the current political climate.

Table 3 reveals the associations between family type and housing preferences. Nuclear families were more likely to have chosen a house for its rural or suburban location. (Remember that the respondents chose a "rural" location within Jefferson County, which is the core county of the Louisville SMSA.) The virtues of rural and/or suburban life have often been extolled as the best

environment for raising children. It would appear, then, that this traditional American family type is the type most likely to view the old-fashioned virtues of a rural or suburban location as most important. Furthermore, the greater the number of children a family had, the more likely it was to regard an attractive setting and a suburban location as very important reasons for the decision to purchase a particular house. Once again, parents appeared to be greatly concerned with finding the "right" place within which to raise their children.

In contrast, single adults did not express a preference for a rural location, nor did they attach great importance to buying a house with more land. Instead, they wanted a location close to family and friends, perhaps to avoid isolation since they do live alone. In addition, they showed a preference, although non-significant, for a near downtown location, presumably to be close to jobs and/or leisure activities. Single parents were also concerned with buying a house near family. The support which family can provide, such as child care, may be crucial for the single parent with limited financial resources.

Table 3 shows that a set of child-related housing preferences was significantly associated with family type. Quality of schools was likely to be a more important reason for purchasing the house for nuclear families and families with more children. It was likely to be less important for married couples and single persons. Availability of child care was unimportant in the choices made by married couples, but was important in those made by nuclear families.

Similarly, buying a house close to children's schools tended to be regarded as important in the decisions of nuclear families, and families with more children, but tended to be regarded as not at all important by married couples. Nuclear families and families with more children considered choosing a house close to children's activities — such as music lessons, YMCA, and Little League — as more important, while for married couples, choosing a house close to children's activities tended to be regarded as not at all important.

Married couples also were likely to feel that choosing a house close to playgrounds and parks was rather unimportant while nuclear families felt it was important. The presence or absence of children significantly changed people's housing demands. Families with children want houses with more room, located in neighborhoods with good schools and conveniently situated activities for children, including playgrounds and parks. Unfortunately, Table 3 suggests that, while single parents share these preferences with nuclear families (they have the same pattern of positive correlation coefficients), many of the former have to forgo good schools and nearby parks in favor of the more pressing need for housing consistent with their lower incomes.

Nuclear families and families with larger numbers of children were also more likely to rate closeness to shopping areas as more important than did other family types. For example, married couples considered this reason unimportant. That shopping has become a very time-consuming household activity is demonstrated in Vanek's (1974) time series data and in Walker and Woods' (1976) time use study of household work. The reason for nuclear families' preference for closeness to shopping areas may be that more shopping must be done when children are present in the household. Another explanation may be that the adults want to save time in travelling to stores because the presence of children makes so many other demands on their time. Or, a third reason may be that shopping becomes more difficult when children must be dealt with — either by bringing them along or by leaving them in someone else's care — so that parents seek any means of reducing the burden of shopping.

Households with employed wives differed significantly from households with full-time homemakers by preferring to buy houses close to the wife's job and by viewing a suburban location as unimportant. These two results may be related to each other to the degree that women's jobs are not located in the suburbs. For families with an employed wife, proximity to her job appeared almost

Table 4. — Analysis of Variance for Purchase Price of House (in dollars) by Family Type

Group	Mean	S.D.	N
Entire Sample	\$47,808.82	\$24,638.06	352
Nuclear Family	\$52,529.59	\$27,493.30	181
Married Couple	\$45,921.19	\$21,098.54	118
Single Adult	\$36,641.18	\$18,366.75	34
Single Parent	\$34,544.74	\$ 9,856.22	19

	Sum of Squares	Sum of Squares	Mean Squares
Between (df=3)	12,037,286,681.28	4,012,428,893.76	
Within (df=348)	201,031,657,254.45	577,677,176.02	
Total (df=351)	213,068,943,935.72		
F Ratio=6.95 (p<.01)			

*p<.01

as likely to be an important reason for the decision to buy a particular house as proximity to the husband's job. Fifty-two percent of the respondents said that proximity to the wife's job was at least somewhat important in the choice to buy the house they purchased; similarly, 61 percent responded that buying a house close to the husband's job was at least somewhat important in the decision. This result should not be interpreted to mean that families moved because of the woman's job, nor that proximity to the woman's place of employment took precedence over proximity to the man's, although this may have occurred in some instances. Rather, it suggests that families with more than one employed adult take the location of both jobs into account in deciding where to buy a house.

In sum, three major preferences were expressed by respondents: more room, a good neighborhood, and the "right" price. Other factors, such as nearness to downtown Louisville, attractive setting, suburban location, proximity to job and to services, were expressed by many respondents as at least somewhat important reasons for their choice of a house. Nuclear families and families with more children expressed preferences related to children: more room, attractive setting, rural location, suburban location, good close schools, availability of child care, close shopping areas, close playgrounds and parks, and close children's activities. Married couples indicated that such factors were unimportant to them. Single parents were concerned with proximity to family, a factor which appears to help make the demands of single parenting easier. Single adults were not interested in larger houses or plots of land, good schools, or a rural location. They did choose a location near family and friends. As persons living alone, singles did not need a lot of room or land, but they did need to ensure social contact. Households with employed wives felt living close to the wife's job was more important and a suburban location was not at all important.

Discussion and Conclusions

For the families we surveyed, some important housing preferences were consistent across family types, while other preferences differed from one family type to another. All types of families indicated a demand for a house selling at what each family viewed as a good price, in a good neighborhood, where good municipal services were available. For the majority of households with an employed male present, closeness to his job was of some importance, regardless of family type. Similarly, for the 52 percent of households who attached importance to having easy access to public transportation, family type was irrelevant.

It is not surprising that the importance of most of these variables cuts across family types. Given

the huge impact of housing costs on family budgets, nearly all home buyers will attach considerable significance to price. Real estate agents can testify to the widespread interest in the quality of the neighborhood. The only real surprise on this list is the concern about accessible public transportation, despite the apparent adequacy of car ownership among the families in our sample.

The finding of "no difference" among family types regarding important environmental factors is consistent with the results of the Rothblatt, Carr, and Sprague study (1979) on the effects of the suburban environment on women, all of whom were mothers of school-age children, in the San Jose area. They (1979:165) conclude that ". . . either older inlying neighborhoods of single-family homes or new, outlying, planned, higher-density residential areas provide more satisfying housing for women than conventional suburban developments, or new low-density areas of single-family homes built in small, less planned increments near the edge of the metropolitan area." Remember that this finding applied to married and unmarried mothers, whether full-time homemakers or employed women, and that it referred to satisfaction with housing itself, community services, and social patterns of group participation. Our findings are a little broader, since they also apply to men, single adults and married couples without children.

The preferences that did vary among family types might be divided into three categories: those that are primarily child-related; those that seem related to the presence of an employed woman in the household; and other preference variables relating to the special characteristics of that type of family unit. Since sociologists have observed that the presence of children in the home has a great impact on many aspects of family life, it is to be expected that there will be significant differences in housing preferences between households containing children and those without children. Thus, nuclear families and families with larger numbers of children shared preferences for houses that had more room, suburban

locations, good schools, and were close to children's schools, children's activities, and shopping areas. Nuclear families also preferred a rural location, available child care, and close playgrounds and parks. The more children a family had, the more important an attractive setting was. There are indications that single parents would also have preferred homes with those attributes but that other constraints on their time and on their income took precedence in their home-buying decisions. As expected, the married couples and single adults in the sample tended to consider these child-related factors as "not at all important" in their choice of a house. Single adults also considered more land as "not at all important."

Some of the family types represented in the sample expressed housing preferences which relate to their special needs. For instance, both single parents and single adults tended to choose a home because it was near their family. Single adults also sought to buy homes which were near their friends, while employed women in all types of households looked for homes near their jobs. It should be emphasized that these types of families sought housing in which their special needs could be met, but at the same time they were seeking to meet the major preferences for a good price and a good neighborhood which they shared with other family types.

Both sets of preferences — those shared across family types and those which differed by family type — could be far better addressed by housing policy makers and home builders. An increasing number of scholars have shown that the low-density, single-family suburban environment does not serve the needs of such non-traditional family types as the single-parent family, the two-earner family, and the single person who lives alone (Brown, 1978; Popenoe, 1979, Lopata; 1980). Feminist scholars have argued that even the traditional nuclear family, for which the suburban environment was designed, is ill-served there (for a more detailed discussion of this literature, see Berheide and Banner, 1981). Stamp

(1980) reminds us that the family types we discuss in this research are not permanently fixed in any case; that is, the full-time homemaker may add paid employment to her domestic responsibilities, the woman who is part of a nuclear family may become a single parent, or a childless woman may become a parent. At that point, says Stamp (1980:191), ". . . she can no longer accept detachment from a community that is involved with children. She cannot simply choose a high-rise apartment that is close to work and offers adult recreational amenities, nor a retreat in the country, accepting a long commute to work."

In our sample, nuclear families with children and full-time homemakers showed the most consistent preference for a suburban location and were the most likely to be able to find and purchase suburban homes with the quality and proximity of schools, children's activities, and shopping that they desired. Thus these traditional families seemed to believe that the Louisville suburbs met their needs rather well.

As feminists and others have argued, the suburbs seemed less suited to our other family types. Suburban location was "not at all important" for one-fourth of our respondents, particularly married couples without children and households containing an employed wife. Single adults generally rejected rural locations, were somewhat indifferent about the suburbs, and appeared to prefer near-downtown housing. Single parents expressed no significant preference for a particular type of location. Their income and time constraints appeared to dominate their housing choice. In purchasing affordable homes close to their families, they had to forego other locational advantages, including those that nuclear families were able to choose. Of the various family types in our sample, single parents, nearly all of whom are women, appear least able to satisfy their housing needs amongst the single-family home choices now available.

The private suppliers of rental housing have already recognized and begun to cater to the special demands of certain non-traditional family

types, such as young singles and married couples without children — especially those who are fairly affluent. Private homes, however, continue to be built with only the traditional family in mind. The special needs of two-earner families and particularly of single-parent families have been largely ignored in both rental and owner-occupied housing provisions. Because of the more limited incomes of single-parent families, government policy makers should carefully consider whether current housing policies that focus on less affluent families adequately address the needs of single-parent families many of whom would like to own homes.

Roistacher and Young (1980) report that new data show families with children are moving from the city to the suburbs no faster than families without children. They (1980:S224) state that, as the presence of children no longer automatically propels families to the suburbs, “cities have much to gain from increasing their attractiveness to families with children.” Taking a slightly different approach, Hayden (1980) provides a detailed plan for turning a low-density suburban block inside out, as it were, by converting some single-family dwellings to multiple-family use, grouping several back yards to provide adequate shared space for recreation and gardening, and converting garages into neighborhood service centers which could house jointly-owned tools and appliances. She (1980:S181) says that “women desire, not an end to private life altogether, but community services to support the private household.”

The set of policy recommendations for improving suburban neighborhoods so that they will serve the needs of both traditional and non-traditional family types is beginning to be quite familiar to scholars in this field. It includes recommendations for improved public transportation to make jobs and services more accessible, especially for women; higher-density developments which would promote diversity of family types and provide greater social support to people coping with multiple responsibilities for family care and jobs; changed zoning laws and building codes to permit higher-density use of suburban

land; and more opportunities for sharing household work, both within and among families. We concur with these recommendations because our respondents indicated that they wanted proximity to jobs and services, and access to transportation, as well as the more general preference for a “good neighborhood.” In fact, “good neighborhood,” for many of our respondents, was related to such factors as proximity to good schools, shopping areas and municipal services.

In conclusion, the similarity of certain housing preferences expressed by all the family types in our study, and the lengthy list of preferences which were deemed at least somewhat important by a majority of the respondents, remind us that home buyers are trying to optimize a number of preferences as they choose a house. If good neighborhoods with attractive settings, good schools and the necessary services were available in the cities near men’s and women’s jobs, then two-earner families with children should be more willing to live there. If higher-density developments with a variety of services for adults, activities for children, and access to public transportation were provided in the suburbs at affordable prices, then single parents and married couples who might be considering parenthood should be more willing to live there.

As Rothblatt, Carr and Sprague (1979:173-174) point out, suburbs are becoming more like both small towns and cities. As people work in suburbs, these become more like small towns; as non-traditional families move to suburbs, they become more city-like in their diversity. And as these changes occur the number of non-traditional families interested in home ownership increases. Therefore, housing policy makers and housing suppliers should find it in their interest to attempt to meet the variety of housing preferences indicated by non-traditional families, as well as the better-recognized preferences of traditional families. With sufficient attention to these preferences, home builders would find willing buyers, even in suburban neighborhoods, among both traditional and non-traditional families.

Notes

1. Men who are single parents may experience many of the same problems women do, although, typically, their incomes are higher.
2. The sample was drawn from lists of real estate transactions published in the Louisville *Courier-Journal* between July, 1978, and April, 1979. Since the lists are published after the fact, the real estate purchases actually took place between April, 1978, and April, 1979.
3. The other 35 respondents had not purchased a house for personal use but rather a house which they were renting to tenants or some other form of real estate, such as a business or an apartment complex. We tried to delete obvious non-house purchasers from the published lists, but were not successful in eliminating all of them. Therefore the list of 8,339 real estate purchasers included some persons who had purchased something other than a personal residence. These people were excluded from the sample if they returned a questionnaire.
4. Self-selection did not appear to be a serious problem because the completed sample (N=362) drew from each postal zip code in Jefferson County in proportion to its representation in the total sample (N=962) and in the total population, that is the published lists (N=8,339). In all but three of the 26 zip codes in Jefferson County, the difference between the percentage of cases in the zip code for the completed sample and the percentage of cases in the zip code for the total population was less than two percentage points. Thus, the respondents and non-respondents were drawn equally from each area of the country.
5. The respondents themselves determined which member of the household would fill out the questionnaire when more than one adult was present.
6. Each bathroom, including half baths, and each finished room in the basement or attic was counted as one room.
7. These reasons were generated through a search of the previous literature and through suggestions from people who pretested the survey instrument.

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