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## Individual and Contextual Factors Associated with Community Building in Apartment Complexes

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in Apartment Complexes**

**Abstract**

Although a large portion of American society is housed in rental units, much of the literature on sense of community has focused on homeowners and their role in community development activities within neighborhoods. Much less attention has been paid to the circumstances under which renters become engaged in local communities. In particular, the potential for rental apartment complexes to serve as locations for engagement and the promotion of sense of community has not been examined. As an initial step, this study explored the factors associated with apartment complex managers facilitating community building activities within their complexes. This exploratory study found that managers do have a role to play in building a sense of community among residents, are currently facilitating engagement, and place importance on such activities. Results also indicated that the support provided by the management company may be a key variable in whether such interest is turned into action. Thus, property managers represent a stakeholder that could be involved in efforts to promote sense of community within rental apartment complexes. This study provides a glimpse into community engagement of renters and examines the possibilities for practitioners to work with apartment complexes, managers, and management companies in promoting sense of community among renters.

**Introduction**

Community building has been defined as ‘any identifiable set of activities pursued by a community in order to increase community social capacity’ (Mattessich, Monsey, & Roy, 2004, p.11). It is the act of enhancing the social fabric of an area through increasing resident interaction and sense of community so that locations collectively develop not just connections with one another but social norms and values to create a community (Jason, 1997). There are many ways to think about community building but one central theme prevails. Successful community building works to create an environment where neighbors “rely on each other”, work together, and feel connected to each other

(McNeely, 1999 p.742). Community building can be focused on increasing resident interaction, neighboring, sense of community, collective efficacy, social cohesion, pro-social norms, informal social control, community organizing, and so on. Examples of how to build a sense of community and neighbor interaction include resident initiated activities, recreational opportunities, a resident organization, informal neighboring, social activities, and clubs (Zaff & Devlin, 1998). In all, community building helps residents claim responsibility for the outcomes of their community (McNeely, 1999).

As a field of work and study, community psychology provides an appropriate place for

discussions of sense of community and community building. It is the field of community psychology that deals with collectively working together to facilitate social action and promote social justice (Society for Community Research and Action, n.d.) with sense of community as a cornerstone of the field (Sarason, 1974). Community building often comes down to social justice issues. While engagement of residents and community building can be seen as pervasive and important concepts, a subpopulation is often left out of the mix. Many resident engagement efforts are directed toward homeowner populations, leaving renters stranded on the sidelines. It is the responsibility of practitioners to help remedy this injustice and engage all residents in improving their quality of life regardless of housing tenure. This exploratory study takes a first step in analyzing how community building with renters can be facilitated by property managers and apartment complexes as venues for engagement.

### *Renters as a Constituency*

Increasing proportions of the U.S. population are housed in high density rental apartment complexes. Based on 2013 American Community Survey data, approximately 35% of households rent, equating to 33% of residents (National Multi-Housing Council, n.d. b). Out of all renter occupied units, 17% have 20 or more units (American Housing Survey, 2013). Although rental housing and apartment complexes specifically are becoming fixtures in many neighborhoods, the community building literature says little about whether these apartment complexes might be communities in and of themselves. Creating a sense of community in such complexes might contribute to the well-being of such residents. It might also foster their

capacity to engage with their surrounding community in civic engagement activities.

Implicit negative perceptions of renters and rental housing might contribute to the lack of focus on this issue. Over the course of American history there has been a negative stereotype of renters, with the view that property, the “American Dream,” was the “true measure of a man” (Barreto, Marks, & Woods, 2007; Dreier, 1982; Kreuckeberg, 1999; Rohe & Watson, 2008). Owning property meant that you were hard-working and industrious and that you had achieved freedom and independence, and were deserving of policies and practices that promoted homeownership (Rohe & Watson, 2008; Goetz, 2007). This means that renting is often seen as the opposite of these highly held values. It is viewed as a temporary situation reserved for certain points in the life cycle while homeownership is perceived as the housing situation that everyone should strive to achieve. “The stigma of not owning property and its association with being poor, transient, politically suspect, and different persists in contemporary society, in community politics, in real estate markets, and in our tax structures” (Krueckeberg, 1999, p.26). Similarly, negative perceptions of multi-family housing in general include: renters are less desirable neighbors; renters overburden the infrastructure; higher density development creates more traffic problems (Obrinsky & Stein, 2007); rental units decrease the resale value of single family homes (National Multi-Housing Council, n.d.; Perin, 1988; 1977). Thus, there is a need for research that examines the presence of community building within apartment complexes, and its potential for empowering individuals and promoting prosocial behaviors (e.g., broader civic engagement efforts.) This study begins to put focus back

on the renter population to better understand how their engagement as residents is enabled and encouraged.

## *Community Building in Apartment Complexes and the Role of Property Managers*

Interest in the impact of community building and increased social capital outside of traditional owner-occupied residential housing has been seen in work on low-income public housing (Kuo, Sullivan, Coley, & Brunson, 1998; Saegert, Winkel, & Schwartz, 2002), mixed income Hope VI communities (Chaskin & Joseph, 2011; Graves, 2010) housing cooperatives (Saegert & Winkel, 1996), and student housing (Foth, 2004). However, there has been a lack of focus on apartment complexes for renter populations. Within the rental property management industry, some professionals have argued that increased community building could be a way of improving the attractiveness of facilities in ways that might increase recruitment and reduce turnover. Schindler (1994), for example, encouraged property managers to embrace community watches within apartment complexes as a way to reduce the effects of crime on turnover, resident injuries, and vandalism. Babka (2008) argued that “creating opportunities for shared experiences, helping residents grow roots by promoting social gatherings and other business networking opportunities, (and) promoting events held on site that draw on common interests you have identified” can help build a sense of community. Researchers have found that the use of community spaces and the offering of and participation in community programs were both correlated with resident satisfaction (Cho & Lee, 2011). To date, however, there has been a gap in systematic empirical examination of community building

activities within apartment complexes, or the factors that might promote such activities.

Property managers represent a leadership role within rental apartment complexes that could support or discourage community building activities. Traditionally, community building is a grassroots effort, initiated by residents who want to better their own lives and their neighborhood. However, in the instance of apartment complexes, property managers might be enlisted as allies to promote the community building process by facilitating activities that help to build resident relationships. Conversely, they could also view such activities as inconsistent with their roles, or feel threatened by demands from tenants empowered by community building activities (Graves, 2010). This study examined the circumstances under which property managers report being more or less likely to engage in community building activities. It should be noted that the purpose of this study was not to measure resident engagement in community building activities or examine the outcomes of such activities. It was to analyze the role that property managers play in community building and the current state of affairs within rental apartment complexes.

### **Description of Study**

The aim of this exploratory study was to begin an investigation of the incidence of community building in apartment complexes, how it fits into the role of property managers, and what factors influence property managers who facilitate community building activities. As for the factors associated with community building, researchers examined the following individual and contextual predictors: (1) perceptions they have of renters, (2) the personal experiences they have with community building, (3) the

importance they place on community building, and (4) the organizational support they receive from the management company.

*Negative stereotype of renters.* Property managers' willingness to attempt community building could be shaped by their views of the interest and capacity of renters to engage in their rental community. Negative stereotypes of renters prevalent in American society could discourage property managers' actions.

*Personal experiences with community building.* Property managers' experiences with community building in their own neighborhoods would seem plausibly linked to their attitude toward community building in other contexts. Past experiences with community building in their own neighborhood might create a familiarity with neighboring, sense of community, and their subsequent positive outcomes. These experiences may also reduce some of the barriers to understanding the impact of community building and the process of implementation.

*Importance placed on community building.* To what extent do apartment property managers view community building as an integral part of their work? An examination of several apartment property manager handbooks indicates that managers have a variety of duties, of which potential community building activities (e.g., welcoming new residents, promoting social activities) represent only a small part (Banner, 1992; Taylor, 2002). One of the aims of this study was to determine whether the importance property managers place on community building affects the actual community building activities they facilitate.

*Organizational support.* Organizational support or constraint has the potential of

affecting the level of performance and goal commitment of employees. Greater organizational support and resources have been associated with improvement in a variety of employee behaviors (Peters & O'Connor, 1980; Peters, O'Connor, & Rudolf, 1980; Alpkan, Bulut, Gunday, Ulusoy, & Kilic, 2010). Thus, it seems quite plausible that property managers' community building behaviors would be influenced by the perceived support they receive from the property management company for community building activities.

## Methods

### *Sampling Frame / Procedures*

Online apartment search engines (Apartments.com, Apartmentguide.com, Forrent.com, and Move.com) were used to develop the sampling frame for the study. In the spring of 2010, a search of these databases for North Carolina apartment complexes yielded a list of approximately 1,234 unique apartment complexes across the state. A random sample of 800 was pulled from this sampling frame, providing addresses of apartment complex property management offices. It should be noted that there could have been potential for bias in the sampling frame because it is not an exhaustive list of all apartment complexes in the state. These websites serve as marketing tools, so those complexes with the resources to devote to such tools were included, potentially used by larger apartment complexes with more amenities including community building and potentially more monetary resources for community building activities.

Letters describing the confidential, internet survey were sent to property managers at the apartment complex addresses identified

through the search engines. The letter provided links to the survey and an informed consent form. Two follow-up letters, a follow-up phone call, and a door prize drawing for respondents (i.e., two \$100 gift certificates) were used to increase response rate. There were 133 respondents out of the 800 sampled who completed surveys, yielding a response rate of approximately 17%.

Data available for apartment complexes varied by web site, but four variables were commonly available to allow comparison between respondents and non-respondents: maximum rent, minimum rent, maximum apartment square footage, and minimum apartment square footage. The differences between these groups on the first three variables were not significant. However, the mean minimum rental price for respondents and non-respondents differed significantly (i.e., 605.58 and 630.82 respectively), but the effect size ( $\eta^2$ ) of completing the survey was extremely small at .005. From the available data, no clear pattern of respondent bias was detected in the sample.

### *Respondents*

Descriptive analyses of the demographic variables obtained from the on-line survey revealed the following about the property manager respondents: the average age was approximately 37 years old, 88% were female, about half made \$59,000 or less, the majority of respondents were Caucasian (89%), and the average length of time they had been in the industry is about 10 years. About 33% rented vs. owned their own residence, and 21% lived in an apartment on the apartment complex site itself. As for information about the complexes themselves, respondents reported the following: the average rent was \$756, the average

apartment size was 974 sq ft, the average age of the complexes was 17 years old, the average household income of tenants was approximately \$38,371, the average number of apartments in the complexes was 256, and the average length of tenant stay was almost three years.

### *Measures*

#### Community Building in apartment complexes.

Respondents were asked to indicate whether they had ever done (i.e., yes / no) any of 19 activities related to community building in apartment complexes (see Appendix A). These items were developed by the authors. The total of yes responses was used as the dependent variable in the study. A set of relatively comparable items were developed, yielding a scale with a Cronbach's alpha of .82. Respondents were also asked to indicate the number of times they had engaged in each activity within the past year. However, as described in more detail later, this variable was not used due to missing data.

Perception of renters. Respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement (1=strongly disagree, 4=strongly agree) with 12 items that characterized renters' behaviors (e.g., they care about their neighbors in the complex; they move a lot so are not attached to the community of people in the complex). Respondents were asked to think about renters in general not necessarily the renters in their current complex. These items were developed by the authors using Perin (1977; 1988) and Krueckeberg's (1999) descriptions of statements of professionals working in housing, planning, and real estate industries. An Exploratory Factor Analysis (i.e., EFA) produced a single 8 item factor with a Cronbach's alpha of  $\alpha=.875$ . Items were scored so that higher overall scores

represent more positive perceptions of renters.

Personal experience with community building. Respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement (1=strongly disagree, 4=strongly agree) with nine items that measured the extent to which property managers feel a sense of community and interact with their neighbors in their own neighborhoods. Items measuring personal experiences were taken from Buckner (1988), Peterson, Speer, and McMillan (2008), and one was developed by the researcher. An EFA produced a single 9 item factor with a Cronbach's alpha of  $\alpha=.875$ .

Importance of community building in property manager role. Respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement (1=strongly disagree, 4=strongly agree) with 9 items that measured the extent to which community building fits into their roles as managers, how essential it is for their job, and how important sense of community and neighbor interaction are for apartment residents. An EFA produced a strong 7 item factor with a Cronbach's alpha of  $\alpha=.884$ , and a weak, second factor with 2 highly loading items. The average of the 7 items in the first factor was used to construct an Importance of Community Building scale for this study.

Organizational support for community building. Respondents were asked to indicate the degree to which (1=not at all, 4=to a great extent) they were provided with resources for community building from their management company, such as money, time, buy-in from management, network of other professionals, authority over decision making, staff support, training, and management policies for community building. The authors developed 8 items based upon Peters and O'Connor's (1980) dimensions of

situational resource variables. An EFA produced a single 8 item factor with a Cronbach's alpha of  $\alpha=.893$ .

Covariates. A variety of covariates were analyzed in the regression model. These included average rent, age of complex, average income of residents, number of apartments, and length of time in property management industry. Each was measured with open-ended questions.

Analyses The relationship between independent variables and the dependent variable were computed using a linear regression in SPSS. Covariates were entered into the model first followed by the predictor variables in the second step.

## Results

### *Community Building Measurement*

Respondents were asked the degree to which they had engaged in a variety of community building activities during the course of their careers as property managers, as well as in the past 12 months. There was minimal missing data in the variable used as the major outcome in this study, i.e., community building activities over the course of their careers. However, the assessment of community building activities over the last 12 months was not used due to excessive missing data. Many managers left items for this question blank, and it was difficult to determine whether not answering should be coded as 0 or missing. Other respondents listed responses such as 'quite a lot', which could not be translated into a numerical response

Among those with complete data ( $n=83$ ), though, the correlation was  $r=.97$  between lifetime and 12 month indices of community building. This suggests that the lifetime index

may be a reasonable proxy for more recent community building activity in this specific sample.

*Incidence of Community Building and Relevance to Apartment Complexes*

Overall, property managers facilitate a variety of community building activities. Out of 19 activities listed (see Appendix A), on average, the respondents indicated that they had ever done about 12 of those activities. The majority of activities (15 out of 19) had over 50% of respondents indicating that they had done those activities. The most frequently selected items were: publicize information about the complex (94%), organize informal get-togethers to allow residents to get to know each other (91%, and try to mediate conflicts among residents (91%). The least

frequently selected activities were: set up exchanges for residents (18%), organize ongoing programs for residents (22%), and provide activities specifically for youth (29%).

Most property managers indicated that these activities were consistent with their roles. Over 86% of property managers agreed that community building makes sense for their complex and over 82% agreed that they plan on instituting community building initiatives in the future. They also put importance on community building within their complexes. Table 1 illustrates the percentage of respondents who agree and disagree with each of the statements measuring importance. Results indicate that community building is important for property managers and is part of their role.

Items	Valid Percent	
	Agree	Disagree
Community building fits into my role as a property manager.	97.7	2.3
If residents came to me and wanted to enhance the complex in some way, I would likely be involved with those activities.	97.0	3.1
Community building is important to my role as a property manager.	98.5	1.6
I think of this complex as a community.	97.7	2.4
Community building takes away from necessary parts of my job.	12.3	87.7
Community building conflicts with my essential duties as a property manager.	8.5	91.6
Community building is a part of my job that I enjoy.	96.9	3.1
It is one of the goals to build a sense of community in this complex.	96.9	3.1
It is important for residents to interact with one another.	95.4	4.6

*Table 1. Level of importance given to community building*

Participants were also given the opportunity to provide an example of their efforts to build community over the past year. Eighty-three percent of the respondents gave examples of community building at their complex. These examples included activities such as socials, holiday parties, potlucks and food available in the clubhouse, yard sales, community crime watch, fundraising for charity, pool or pizza parties, and providing garden space. These examples fell in line with the categories of activities measured for the community building measure.

### *Correlates of Community Building*

The correlations among variables are listed in Table 2. As expected, the predictor variables are modestly correlated with one another. Out of the four main predictor variables (i.e. importance, perception of renters, personal experiences with community building, and organizational support) only importance that property managers place on community building and the organizational support provided by the management company were significantly correlated with the dependent variable of community building ( $r=.35$  and  $r=.52$ , respectively). Of the covariates, two (i.e., age of complex, number of apartments) were significantly associated with community building. These were included in subsequent regression analyses, while the covariates with non-significant relationships with community building were excluded [i.e., average rent, income of residents, and length of time (of property manager) in industry].

Among the variables to be used in the regression analyses, there was significant skew and kurtosis for importance of community building and number of apartments (i.e.,  $p<.01$ ). The variables were transformed to normalize their distributions, and entered into regression analyses predicting the dependent variable. The pattern of results were similar for the transformed vs. untransformed version of the Importance of Community Building variable, so the untransformed version was retained in the regression analyses employed to test the study's hypotheses. The transformed variable (i.e.  $\log_{10}$  of number of apartments) was retained in the regression equations because the pattern of results between the transformed and untransformed versions was different.

### *Predictors of Community Building*

One of the aims of this study was to understand what factors influence property managers' facilitation of community building activities for their residents. Table 3 represents the results of the regression analysis. The covariates were entered into the regression model first. These included Average Rent, Age of Complex, and Number of Apartments ( $\log_{10}$ ). Together, these variables accounted for an Adjusted  $R^2$  of 11.9% ( $p<.001$ ). The addition of the independent variables (i.e., Perception of Renters, Importance of Community Building, Personal Experience with Community Building, and

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Community Building	1									
2. Importance	.353**	1								
3. Perception	.103	.264**	1							
4. Personal Experience	.134	.240**	.242**	1						
5. Organizational Support	.524**	.314**	.084	.186*	1					
6. Rent	.189*	.125	.092	.000	.229**	1				
7. Age of Complex	-	.230**	-.135	.037	.011	-.148	.460**	1		
8. Income of Residents	.101	.044	.061	.124	.214*	.718**	.401**	-	1	
9. Length of Time in Industry	.158	.008	.030	.169	.125	.044	-.035	.046	-	1
10. Number of Apartments	.214*	.094	-.104	.090	.152	.047	-.150	.151	.018	-

\*p< .05, \*\*p< .01 Note: N for each of the variables ranged from 99 (income of residents) to 133 (community building).

Table 2. Correlations between predictors

Organizational Support) resulted in a significant R2 increment (p<.001), and an overall adjusted R2 of 29.7% (p<.001). In this second step of the model, only organizational support and number of apartments accounted for a significant amount of variance in community building. Greater community building activity by managers was modestly (but significantly) associated with larger apartment complexes (t=2.199, p=.03), and more strongly with perceived organizational support (t=4.853,

p<.001). In the end, organizational support accounted for 17% of the variance in community building activities (sri2=.174).

### Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine the following questions:

1. Are property managers facilitating community building in their complexes?

Variable	Model 1	Model 2
	Beta	Beta
Average Rent	.079	-.017
Age of Complex	-.163	-.137
Number of Apartments (log10)	.262**	.180*
Perception of Renters		.028
Personal Experience		.000
Importance		.121
Organizational Support		.412**
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	.119**	.297**
R <sup>2</sup>	.142**	.339**
Δ R <sup>2</sup>	.142**	.197**

\*p< .05, \*\*p< .01

Table 3. Regression Analysis for Community Building Variables

2. Are their personal experiences with community building related to the facilitation of community building in the properties they manage (including the following factors)?
  - a. the importance they place on community building in their work role,
  - b. their general perceptions of renters, and
  - c. the organizational support provided by the management company

Community building is perceived as both relevant and important to the role and practices of the managers. This has potential implications for how practitioners work with managers as allies to foster resident engagement. Practitioners could provide training and support that might be lacking from the management company to assist managers in their community building endeavors. The apartment complexes may provide a venue to reach renters and help break through the stereotype of disengaged and uncaring renter populations.

*Importance and Relevance to Apartment Complexes*

Facilitation of community building by apartment property managers is reported as prevalent. Out of the 19 community building activities listed in the survey, , respondents had engaged in 12 of them on average.

*Predictors of Community Building*

Contrary to expectations, perception of renters was not significantly associated with managers' community building activities. This hypothesized relationship was based on the assumption that a negative stereotype of

renters would influence community building activities. While this initial premise could be incorrect, there are other explanations. The range of perceptions toward renters may have been restricted (i.e., fewer negative ratings) because: (a) 33% of respondents were renters themselves; and (b) a sample bias toward respondents positively viewing working with renters.

Personal experience with community building was also not significantly associated with community building in apartment complexes. This hypothesized relationship was based on the assumption that a manager's experience of sense of community in his/her own neighborhood could influence what the manager thought was possible in his/her work context. This finding could be due to measurement limitations. While the personal experiences measure assessed sense of community and neighbor interaction within their own home neighborhood, the community building measure asked about the leadership roles that managers play in community building in their work context. Perhaps more explicit items assessing the active role in community building played by managers in their neighborhood would have been more strongly related to similar behaviors at work.

While property managers do place importance on community building, it was not significantly associated with facilitation of community building activities. This could be due to limited variance in the importance variable. The majority of managers agreed with statements concerning the value they place on community building and how it fits into their role as managers. Little variance in community building can be explained by this factor, however.

When entered into the regression analyses the number of apartment units accounted for a significant amount of variance in community building. Complexes with a higher number of units were associated with a higher level of community building reported by the manager. Larger apartment complexes tend to have more places for community building (e.g., clubhouse, pool, recreation center, computers) perhaps making it easier to accomplish some community building activities.

### *Organizational Support*

In general, property managers perceive management companies as supportive of community building and supplying the needed resources to implement it (e.g., funding, time to devote to these activities, buy-in from the management company, authority to make decisions, and so on). The positive association between perceived organizational support and community building indicates the potential importance of the organizational context (i.e., management company) when instituting community building. Organizational support had the strongest bivariate and multivariate relationship with community building. This finding sheds light on a potential avenue for practice. Since organizational support was a significant factor, practitioners would be well advised to begin working with management companies to help them find the resources to support community building within their complexes.

### *Strengths and Limitations of Study*

This study has several strengths. First, it attempted to create a measure of community building for apartment complexes. A measure was developed for this study by taking various community building handbooks,

guides, steps, and tips and paring them down to major activities or themes. The resulting measure showed moderate internal consistency, despite the use of dichotomous items.

Second, the study brings the focus on rental settings, which have received little attention in the social science literature regarding their characteristics as a community (Capek & Gilderbloom, 1992). Property managers are also an often forgotten population of inquiry. This study is an attempt to begin the conversation with property managers about their role as leaders within renter communities. While some research has found that property managers may dissuade interaction in order to increase profitability in mixed income communities (Graves, 2010), this study found that at least some property managers state an interest in increasing social interaction.

There are several potential measurement limitations in this study. One limitation is the use of a lifetime composite for community building (necessitated by missing data on the one year measure), and the temporal relationship between the predictor variables and community building. Organizational support is assessed with regard to the current context in which the property manager is located, but reports of lifetime community building could theoretically refer to property manager activities in previous settings.

There are also limitations with sampling in this study. First, there could have been potential for biases in the sampling frame because it is not an exhaustive list of all apartment complexes in the state. The databases from which the sample was drawn are marketing tools, so that smaller complexes with fewer resources to devote to marketing may have been excluded.

Response bias at the respondent level is another potential limitation, given that the response rate was approximately 17%. The managers who responded to the survey may be people who are especially interested in the topic, potentially creating an overestimation of community building and an underestimation of the variance in community building by property managers.

### *Implications for Practice*

Given both the strengths and limitations of this study, there are several implications for future practice. This was a first step in the development of a measure of community building in apartment complexes. However, further refinement is needed. Practitioners have a role in working with both property managers and apartment residents to develop an accurate picture of community building in apartment complexes. Sense of community in an apartment complex may mean something very different for managers than for residents and practitioners can play a role in understanding those nuances.

Second, there should be examination of residents' participation in community building activities in apartment complexes, and the degree to which this is associated with expected outcomes (e.g., greater sense of community, greater engagement with the broader neighborhood community, and so on). For instance, researchers have found that resident involvement in small community events facilitated by a local nonprofit agency was associated with enhanced personal and community outcomes such as self-efficacy and neighborhood cohesion (Molitor, Rossi, Branton, & Field, 2011). While there is the assumption that participation in community building activities in apartment complexes will lead to such desired outcomes, this is by no means assured.

Finally, there should be additional work that looks at potential interventions that might change the degree of sense of community in apartment complexes. There needs to be further work with property managers concerning their community building, organizational support provided to them, and barriers to community building in order to inform practice. Because of the significant effect of organizational support, future research could examine this variable more in depth with management companies and property managers to further illuminate its effects on implementing community building activities. It remains to be seen whether interventions to alter the availability of property managers' organizational support will ultimately result in positive outcomes for residents. Participants were given the opportunity to list their top three barriers to community building. The most frequently mentioned by managers were a lack of time (for both staff and residents), money, and resident participation. Other barriers included: a lack of space such as a clubhouse or community building, having a diverse community, not having support from the management company, and high turnover. From this preliminary analysis it seems that there are particular barriers that could be influenced by the management company such as the managers' workload, money, and space. Many of the property managers indicated that a barrier to community building is a lack of participation among residents. Future research could focus also on the participation of residents by examining barriers and mechanisms to enhance participation in community building.

## Conclusion

One of the major gaps in the community building research is community building in

apartment complexes and rental properties in general. Although renters make up a large and growing population in American society, they are often a forgotten class of social actors. This study attempted to fill those gaps by examining community building in apartment complexes and making the claim that renters deserve the same community experiences as homeowners in traditional neighborhoods. The purpose of this study was to evaluate the relationship among individual characteristics of the property managers, the contextual environment of the management, and community building endeavors. Results found that only the contextual factor of organizational support was related to community building. This finding allows for future work with property managers and management companies to alleviate constraints on community building endeavors. Further development of community building within apartment complexes will help to equate rental housing with owner-occupied neighborhoods and enhance the quality of life for the renters.

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**Appendix A: Community Building Scale and Importance of Community Building Scales**

**Community Building**

**Have you ever done the following? Response options: yes, no**

1. Provide space for residents to have meetings
2. Help residents with a community watch
3. Publicize information about activities in the complex
4. Publicize information about residents (e.g. a resident has furniture they would like to donate to someone, a resident can provide guitar lessons to other residents; celebrating resident achievements)
5. Organize informal get-togethers to allow residents to get to know each other (e.g. pizza parties, pool parties)
6. Provide residents with information about local resources such as Laundromats, leisure activities, social services, etc.
7. Organize special events (e.g. donation drives, yard sales, movie nights)
8. Support ways to welcome all new residents (e.g. welcome kits/bags/baskets, welcome committee, new neighbor activities)
9. Organize ongoing programs for residents (e.g. classes, workshops, book clubs)
10. Organize holiday activities
11. Survey residents about their needs or concerns
12. Try to mediate conflicts among residents
13. Provide a forum for residents to air their concerns about the complex
14. Bring people together to solve common problems in the complex
15. Maintain public spaces for interaction such as a garden, bench, etc. so that people are likely to use them
16. Set up exchanges for the residents (e.g. recipes, plants, tools)
17. Provide activities specifically for youth (e.g. mentoring, tutoring, carnivals)
18. Provide entertainment resources (e.g. video rentals, games, books)
19. Talk with residents and encourage them to be involved in the complex