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Monash University
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Reid, B.

Multi-Own-Your-Own Unit Residential Complexes

REVIEWED BY

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On the day the "Enterprise" visited Hobart one of a party of American tourists looked down on the ship from a mountain lookout and at the same time saw the "Casino". She asked if it was a "condominium". To her it was no surprise that such a large O.Y.O. complex should be situated in a small city. However, the connection for me after reading this study by Foddy and Reid is with that of gambling. Taking the plunge on an O.Y.O. situated in a residential complex is a gamble where many people, if they do not completely lose their bet, do not come out quite even. The study could easily have been (and more appropriately) called "It's alright if you haven't got you own house" (p.11) or "Living in a goldfish bowl" (p.41) because this is the impression with which we are left. The authors — somewhat ingenuously — warn us at the beginning that those opposed to the development of O.Y.O. unit housing "Will find much to build their case upon". At the same time they are continually taking the neutral stance by reminding us that there is another side to the story.

FACILE VIEW

Those who share the developers' facile view will discover that putting people together (as close as propriety and council regulations will allow) and repeating the magic word "Community" does not give people a sense of togetherness.

Perhaps it is because the authors are aiming at that old fashioned "value-free" approach that the study appears as, at the same time, both interesting and aggravating. Their ingenuousness shines through numerous times when they suggest, ever so cautiously, that O.Y.O. units are not necessarily more problematic than "traditional" housing on the quarter-acre block. This does seem to be avoiding a necessary critique which could have provided material for a situation in Australia where there is a shameful absence of housing reform.

O.Y.O. — NO CASTLE

What we are faced with in this study is the impression that when he lives in an O.Y.O. unit the Australian's home is not his castle. This is very apparent in the rules with which such dwellings are hedged about relating to maintenance, payment of dues, use of "private" space, and the extent to which residents have rights regarding on-site facilities. (One can imagine the mutual dismay when one resident was not allowed to let a dog use the swimming pool). If the problems are little different from those of traditional housing they are certainly more concentrated (this the authors acknowledge) and it would appear that for many people the O.Y.O. solution is one of last resort — "any port in a storm". It would also appear that the O.Y.O. resident has less legal redress than the quarter acre owner.

INTERPRETATION

Despite the feeling that more could have been offered by way of interpretation and critique it does seem that a major hypothesis has been offered relating to O.Y.O. units:

> "The larger the multi-O.Y.O. unit complex, the more facilities the complex will be likely to have and the less interest the residents will be likely to have in the surrounding community."
>
> (p. 88)

But the authors go on to say that there is a case for multi-O.Y.O. units being small. This seems a little odd when in fact the smaller complexes appear to have the larger problems relating to lack of privacy (both from residents and others) and the perennial problems of maintenance, cars, children, parties and pets. Naivete appears again when the authors suggest "It seems that elderly people and children do not mix well." (37) Not surprisingly the elderly want peace and quiet and wish "to keep to themselves" more than the young. Nevertheless, it is obvious that "privacy" was an important issue for the majority of those interviewed.

IMPORTANT

While this study is important for what it can say to developers and those involved in housing policy and planning — even without an adequate critique — as well as prospective tenants (the latter will be least likely to read it and the developers would be sure to keep the information out of their prospectuses) there are weaknesses.

AUTHOR'S RECOMMENDATION

The major one relates to the authors' recommendation that complexes should be designed for particular "types of people". Housing Departments throughout Australia have done this for a long time with quite devastating results. It is one thing to suggest there is a problem of mixing people with different backgrounds and /or values; it is another when they suggest segregation of "types" — even if for the best of motives.

This is not the main problem. While it seems feasible to suggest that the interests of the potential buyers should be kept in mind so that the complexes **might** work better, the study does not account for the change of residents and needs over time. It is true the authors are concerned about the residents being saved unnecessary expense for facilities they never use such as swimming pools and children's playgrounds. However, if we take the elderly as an example, these pe ple, by being segregated — e.g. Elderly People's Homes as the paradigm — are more easily socialized into the life of "old age".

This in itself is a problem the authors have not considered.

EXPLOITATIVE MARKET

If we read between the lines it can be seen that those who provide O.Y.O. housing do not do so for altruistic reasons. Therefore they are part of the exploitative market forces which prevent many families from finding suitable accommodation at a suitable price. The study is as important for what it **does not** say about the housing market in Australia as for what it **does** say about O.Y.O. units. By concentrating on this specialized area it points to the difficulties faced by many people who cannot afford, or are not able, through health or age, to be involved in the normal housing market. In that sense we will not be surprised to know that owning your own is for many people a transitional status. The study points to the victims of the profit motive where the developers' "fast buck" is more important than the residents' overall comfort — both inside and outside the unit. Above all, it points to the exploitations our society tolerates in the essential area of shelter. But for those things we need to read between the lines.

CHILD CARE AND MANAGEMENT

by Patricia Edge
London: Faber & Faber, 1976.
$7.15

REVIEWED BY

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As a complete comprehensive quide to child care and management from birth to adolescence this book fails. Some of the topics included in the book are well covered, the author presenting existing schools of thought.

The list of chapters and subheadings would lead me to believe that all possible questions would be answered. Some glaring omissions include fathers as family members involved in child care and management, sex education for the adolescent, the single parent family and divorce.

OBJECTION

One objection I felt in reading the book is that the author tended to "talk at" mothers, telling them what the proper thing is to do, but giving less consideration to the child developing as a person in his own right. Tasks of the developing child at various ages are often termed "behavioural difficulties" rather than normal stages of development.

BAD HABITS

Such terms as "bad habits" (bed wetting, masturbation etc.) and phrases such as "mistakes that mothers have made earlier" would seem to me to shake the confidence of many mothers.

Some ideas I considered outdated, for instance, the author suggests that potty-training on infants of a few months old may be useful in forming habits of cleanliness. In actuality it is mother who is trained. Toilet training as a task for the 18 month to three year old to mother is not mentioned as a separate entity.

The author's coverage of immunizations, their need and scheduling, of common childhood illnesses, and on first aid measures is adequate and I feel sure would be quite useful to mothers.

As an extra guide book in child rearing for mothers and as a possible source for discussion topics at mothers' groups this book could serve a useful purpose.