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A review of:

BEYOND THE AMERICAN HOUSING DREAM. ACCOMMODATION TO THE 1980'S. by K.R. Tremblay and D.A. Dillman. Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1983.

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Beyond the American Dream makes an important contribution to the understanding of reported housing preferences and the underlying reasons for the existence of those preferences. The theoretical perspective utilized is functionalism. The basic premise is that, within a society, norms (rules, guidelines) exist as a result of socialization. These norms prescribe the appropriate housing and are supported by rewards and sanctions. However, views differ, in that some observers hold that the housing norms are internalized among all segments of the American population, while others hold that the housing norms are not equally internalized. Therefore, two approaches, first, the role of norms; and second; the influence of personal characteristics, are utilized to explain why people prefer to live in one housing situation as opposed to another.

To acheive their objectives, the authors conducted an extensive review of the relevant literature and analyzed the results of a mail survey received from 2801 Washington State households. From the findings it was concluded that it is possible to accurately predict housing preferences based on knowledge of norms. It should be noted that the housing preferences measured were limited to tenure and structure type; and that the norms identified from previous research and sanctions were limited to appropriate tenure (home ownership), structure type (single family home), construction method (conventional) and control of space (private outside space).

The second conclusion was if the most preferred housing situation were not attainable, the second preference would be similar in terms of the number and kinds of housing norms satisfied by the first preference. In other words, while most people prefer owning a single family home, those who have as their first preference other structure and tenure types, do not have as their second preference single family ownership (which meets the largest number of norms), but housing alternatives that meet norms similar to those met by the first preference.

Third, bivariate analyses of the Washington State data suggest that personal characteristics, particularly, current structure type, household size, age, income and education have some influence (not large) on housing . preferences and should be considered in further research and policy decision making.

Fourth, the authors attempted to discover which of the personal characteristics have the greatest impact on housing preferences. The findings from the multivariate analyses need to be read with a certain degree of caution. The authors did not address the likely problem of

multicollinearity among the variables. If multicollinearity exits, more than one variable is explaining the same variation in the dependent variable, thus, it is not possible to determine the relative importance of variables. In addition, previous research provides little guidance for suggesting the order in which the independent variables should be placed in the equation. The authors noted that the variables with the smallest correlation coefficients were entered in the equation first. However, this was a somewhat arbitrary decision, as the rank order of the size of the correlation coefficient varied from one type of housing preference to another.

The authors concluded that ownership of a conventional single family detached home is the preferred housing situation by an overwhelming majority; that housing preferences can be partially explained by a consideration of four housing norms; and that personal characteristics of respondents influence housing preferences to some extent. Another caution: at times the authors generalize their findings to the American population, when, in fact, their sample, and the samples of the studies they reported, were localized and taken at different times.

This book would be excellent for graduate students and others to use as a guide for addressing a research problem. The problem and relevant theory are clearly identified; previous research findings are skillfully assessed and organized in relation to a particular research goal; the inclusion of the variables was justified; the questionnaire is worthy of emulation; the procedures are clearly outlined; the findings are well organized and clearly presented; potential problems are noted and addressed; the recapitulation and discussion effectively summarized the main points, the bibliography is excellent. Overall, the authors skillfully report a complex analysis. In addition to providing a good format for research studies, the book identifies housing concerns, presents thought provoking ideas, and raises a number of important questions.

The authors note the need to conduct a national survey on housing preferences to discover if there are geographical biases. It is conceivable that the preferences of residents in Washington State, a relatively rural state, may be different from those in some urban areas of the East where row houses predominate. The authors note the need to identify other housing norms and their relative importance. This endeavor seems particularly important and perhaps needs to be expanded beyond the sociological perspective. Exactly what are the basic underlying reasons for the preference for ownership of the single family dwelling? It is possible that basic psychological, social and economic needs have been best met by the design and location of single family homes, and thus have contributed to the strength of the present norm. If multi-family housing and/or non-conventially constructed housing, could be designed and located (in desirable areas) to accomodate basic needs such as safety, security, acoustical and visual privacy, self-esteem, control over exterior/interior space; and this accomplishment (if possible) communicated to housing consumers, these housing alternatives might become a more viable alternative for people, particularly in the presence of economic constraints. Then, if housing consumers have successful experiences living in such housing, it may become the preferred. Very different policy recommendations would result if research indicated this were the case.