

A Research Note On:

HUSBAND/WIFE CONSENSUS ON HOUSING PREFERENCES

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to examine husband/wife consensus and resulting satisfaction regarding specific housing characteristics. During the spring of 1984, questionnaires were used to obtain information from 106 husbands and from their wives. Data were analyzed using the Chi-square statistic. The findings indicate that there is lack of consensus between many husband/wife dyads regarding preferred housing style and exterior/interior space allocation and that when there is a difference in preference, one sex does not consistently obtain his/her preference more than the other. This study also finds that, if the achieved housing characteristic is the same as the preferred housing characteristics, the respondent, whether it be the husband or the wife, tends to be more satisfied with the housing environment.

INTRODUCTION

Rapoport (1980) notes that, given an opportunity, individuals select those environments that suit them. They chose environments congruent with the psychological and social-cultural aspects of their behavior. However, it is common that more than one person resides within the same home. Does the design selected tend to be more supportive of the needs of one the household members than of the others? Is there consensus regarding preferences of housing design and space usage? If there is a difference in preferences, are the preferences of one sex more likely to be met than of the other? If a preference of one person is not met in the actual choice of a feature, is that person's satisfaction level with the feature lower than that of the person's whose preference is met?

This research examines husband/wife consensus regarding specified housing characteristics. It seeks to discover the extent to which preferences have been realized by husbands and wives in their present home. It attempts to discover the association between the attainment of these preferences and the satisfaction of husbands and wives with their present housing characteristics.

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There are several reasons for studying husband/wife consensus regarding characteristics within their housing environment. First, although most studies consider the family/household as a unit, it is acknowledged that housing is important to individuals. Altman (1975) concludes that the environment becomes an extension of a person's being and personality. Lemkau (1976) believes that individuals are shaped by their "near environment"---their home. Cooper (1972) argues that the house is a symbol of self. Reimer (1960) notes that the manner in which space is divided and utilized and the activities for which space is provided convey messages as to the desired family interaction. Second, awareness of differences in individual preferences for imagery and space allocation can help household members communicate their environmental needs to one another. Finally, extension agents and others who work with families making housing decisions would have additional information useful in aiding household members in that process.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

There is a paucity of research investigating husband/wife consensus related to housing. Previous research addresses housing preferences, but in terms of norms (Morris and Winter, 1978; Tremblay and Dillman, 1983) and socio-economic variables rather than differences in preferences between spouses.

Several researchers have studied housing values (Humphries, 1976; McCray and Day, 1977; Ladd, 1972). Beyer (1965) finds that individuals have value orientations that suggest varying types of space allocation within the home. However, the possibility of individuals with differing values occupying the same housing environment has not been addressed.

Park (1982) does acknowledge differences in preferences between spouses in his study of joint decision-making. He finds that there are differences in preferences and that as housing decisions are made, each spouse attempts to enhance his/her own utility while at the same time attempting to minimize conflict. Park characterizes the joint decision-making of husbands and wives as a muddling-through process.

Previous research shows a relationship between attainment of housing preferences and resulting satisfaction. Brink and Johnston (1979) conclude that housing satisfaction is achieved when the consumer judges his/her purchase by the satisfactory presence of the desired features.

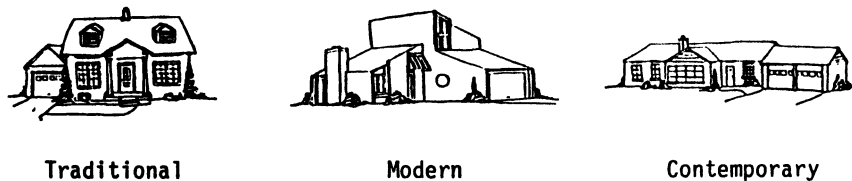
PROCEDURES

Data for this study were collected during the spring of 1984 from 134 couples residing in two Midwestern counties. A ten-page questionnaire was distributed to each husband and each wife. Visits were made to an elementary school activity, three women's clubs, two church circles, a business office and a service club. In each visit, the study was explained, questionnaires were distributed, a return date stated and pick-up procedures confirmed. Husbands and wives were asked to complete the questionnaires separately. Two hundred-twelve questionnaires were returned from 106 husband/wife dyads,

for a response rate of 81.3 percent.

Within the questionnaire, husbands and wives were asked, individually, to indicate their preferences for housing style. They were shown line drawings of three types of housing (See Figure 1) that had been determined by design instructors to represent traditional, contemporary, and modern house styles. Respondents were also asked to indicate their preferences for three outside characteristics of a home. These characteristics were selected to reflect *social interaction/privacy*: 1) When I think about my neighbors (I want to live close to them) OR (I want there to be quite a distance between us); *activities/aesthetics*: 2) If I had to choose between the two, I'd prefer (my yard to be used for activities such as games and vegetable gardening) OR (my yard to be planned for visual enjoyment); and *privacy/prestige*: 3) If I had to choose between the two, I'd prefer (a large back yard) OR (a large front yard). Respondents were asked to indicate the one response for each that most clearly reflected their preference.

Figure 1. House styles



Husbands and wives were also asked, individually, to indicate their preferences for four aspects of interior space allocation. These characteristics were chosen to reflect *formal/informal*: 1) For eating, I prefer (a separate dining room) OR (an eating area in the kitchen), 2) For entertaining, I prefer (a living areas which is an extension of the kitchen and dining area) OR (a separate living room); *interaction/privacy*: 3) I like a kitchen (which is easily accessible to others) OR (which provides privacy from others); and *prestige/family*: 4) I'd like my second bathroom (to be located for the convenience of guests) OR (to be located for the convenience of family use after outdoor activities). Respondents were asked to indicate the one response for each space allocation that most closely represented their preference.

Also, within the questionnaire, respondents were asked to indicate the space arrangement (in terms of each of the above) in their present home. In addition to the response categories noted above, the categories of "neither" or "both" were included when appropriate. After indicating the space allocation in their present

home, each respondent was asked to indicate how satisfied he/she was with that arrangement. Possible responses ranged from "very satisfied" to "very unsatisfied".

For the analyses, both the independent and dependent variables were treated as discrete variables and associations between them analyzed using the Chi-square statistic (SAS Institute, Inc., 1979).

FINDINGS

The largest proportion of the couples have been married 8-15 years (43 percent). Almost one-fourth of the respondents (23 percent) have been married 24 years or more, and slightly less than one-fifth (17 percent) have been married less than seven years. Another 17 percent of the respondents had been married 16-23 years. Approximately three-fourths of the respondents (76 percent) have children living in the home. Couples were distributed throughout the specified income levels with one-fifth (20 percent) indicating incomes of \$20,000 or less. Approximately one-third (29 percent) indicate incomes of \$20,000-29,000. Another one-fifth (19 percent) of the respondents say they earn incomes of \$30,000-39,000 and 17 percent of the respondents state they earn \$40,000 or more. Fifteen percent of the respondents did not disclose their income level. Over one-third (36 percent) of the husbands are clerical/service workers. About one-fifth each are farmers (20 percent), managerial workers (23 percent) and professionals (22 percent). Less than half (44 percent) of the wives are clerical/service workers, while over one-third (36 percent) of the wives are professionals. Thirteen percent of the wives indicate they are in managerial positions and a small proportion (5 percent) say they are housewives.

Consensus of the husband/wife dyads. Husband/wife dyads are analyzed to discover the extent of consensus between those in a couple as to preferred housing style and exterior/interior space allocations (See Table 1).

Lack of consensus or agreement on preferences between husband/wife dyads is found in 16.0-44.3 percent of the couples, depending on the housing characteristic noted. Almost half (44.3 percent) of the husbands have a preference different from that of their wife regarding preferred entertainment arrangement (separate living room as opposed to a living room that is an extension of the dining area and kitchen). Approximately one-third of the husbands have a preference different from their wives regarding desired kitchen arrangement (37.7 percent), preferred house style (36.8 percent), use of the yard (31.1 percent) and preferred proximity to neighbors (30.2 percent). Over one-fourth (26.4 percent) of the husbands differ with their wives concerning the preferred location of the second bath. One-fifth (20.8 percent) of the husbands differ from their wives on the preferred eating arrangement. The smallest proportion of husbands (16 percent) differ from their wives regarding preference of a large back yard. While a majority of husbands are in consensus with their wives regarding preference for housing characteristics, there are a number of couples where the preferences are different.

Table 1. Consensus of husband/wife dyads on preferred housing characteristics.

Housing Characteristics	Preferences	
	Husband/Wife Consensus	Husband/Wife Lack of Consensus
	Percent ^a	
Exterior		
Housing style	63.2	36.8
Proximity to neighbors	69.8	30.2
Yard usage	68.9	31.1
Yard choice	84.0	16.0
Interior		
Eating arrangement	79.3	20.8
Kitchen arrangement	62.3	37.7
Entertainment arrangement	55.7	44.3
Location of second bath	73.6	26.4

^aNumber of husband/wife dyads equal 106

Extent to which husband's and wife's preferences are met by achieved housing characteristics. If the husband and the wife within a dyad differ in their preference for house style and space allocation, whose preference is more likely to be met? To address this question, husbands' and wives' preferences are analyzed to determine whose preference on a housing feature is met through the achieved housing characteristic. Four possibilities are possible. The achieved housing characteristic could meet the preferences of both the husband and the wife; the preference of the husband, but not that of his wife; the preference of the wife, but not her husband; or neither the preference of the husband or the wife. Table 2 shows the extent to which their preferences are met in the actual housing situation.

Preferences of both the husband and the wife are met by actual housing features in 43.4-76.4 percent of the couples, depending on the housing characteristic.

The husband's preference, but not that of his wife, is met by actual housing characteristics in 4.7-18.9 percent of the couples. In about one-fifth of the dyads (18.9 percent), the actual kitchen arrangement and the entertainment arrangement reflects the husband's preference, but not that of his wife. In approximately one-tenth of the homes, proximity to neighbors (13.2 percent), housing style (11.3 percent), eating arrangement (10.4 percent), location of the second bath (9.4 percent) and yard choice (8.5 percent) reflect the preference of the husband, but not that of his wife. In a small proportion of the homes (4.7 percent), the yard usage reflects the preference of the husband, but not that of his wife.

Table 2. Percent of husbands' and wives' preferences met by achieved housing characteristics.

Housing Characteristics	Both husband wife met	Husband met/ wife not met	Wife met/ husband not met	Neither husband wife met
Percent ^a				
Exterior				
Housing style	50.9	11.3	11.3	26.4
Proximity to neighbors	43.4	13.2	17.0	26.4
Yard usage	71.7	4.7	11.3	12.3
Yard choice	64.2	8.5	7.6	19.8
Interior				
Eating arrangement	76.4	10.4	7.6	5.7
Kitchen arrangement	55.7	18.9	17.0	8.5
Entertainment arrangement	50.0	18.9	22.6	8.5
Location of second bath	45.3	9.4	9.4	35.9

^aNumber of husband/wife dyads equal 106

The preference of the wife, but not that of her husband, is met in 7.6-22.6 percent of the couples. Over one-fifth (22.6 percent) of the homes have entertainment arrangements that meet the preference of the wife, but not that of her husband. In 17 percent of the homes, the wife's preference, but not that of her husband, is met for kitchen arrangement and proximity to neighbors. In one-tenth or less of the homes, the wife's preference, but not that of her husband, is met for housing style (11.3 percent), yard usage (11.3 percent), location of second bath (9.4 percent), yard choice (7.6 percent) and eating arrangement (7.6 percent). It is interesting to note that neither the husband's or the wife's preference are met in 5.7-35.9 percent of the homes.

Association between the attainment of preferences and resulting satisfaction with achieved housing characteristics. It was hypothesized that if the achieved housing characteristic and the preferred housing characteristic were the same, as described on the questionnaire, the respondents would tend to be more satisfied with the achieved housing characteristic than if they were not. Husbands' and wives' responses are analyzed separately, using Chi-square analysis. For each specified housing characteristic, if the preference is met, respondents are more likely ($p < .01$) to be satisfied with the achieved housing characteristic. However, it is worth noting that there are individuals whose preference is met by the actual housing condition, but who are dissatisfied with the actual housing characteristic. This indicates that, even if a preference is met, it may not be to the extent desired.

CONCLUSION

The results of this study indicate a consistent association between the meeting of a preference for specified housing characteristics and satisfaction with that housing characteristic. This study finds that the husband may have a different preferences than his wife regarding housing characteristics and, therefore, both sets of preferences cannot be met in total.

In this study, areas where the largest proportion of couples lack consensus are in type of entertainment area, type of kitchen arrangement and housing style. One might anticipate that the wife's preference would dominate regarding kitchen arrangement, or even entertainment arrangement, but this was not the case. In approximately equal proportions of couples, the husband's preference is met and the wife's preference is not met; or the wife's preference is met, but her husband's is not. With housing style, the preference of the wife prevails in some couples and the preference of the husband prevails in other couples. A predominant pattern of one sex obtaining their preference is not indicated. Further investigation is needed to better understand why the wife's preference is met in some instances and the husband's preference is met in other cases. Both the effects of differing husband/wife characteristics and differing housing characteristics need to be investigated.

Further research is needed to identify possible stress that occurs when there is lack of consensus regarding specified housing characteristics deemed important to each of the individuals within a couple. As individual marry at an older age, lack of consensus may become an increasing problem. Each will have had the time and the experience to develop housing environments most conducive to his/her growth and well-being.

It would be well to investigate consensus/lack of consensus regarding housing characteristics among divorced couples. Many factors contribute to divorce. Is one of those factors the need for differing housing environments? It is said that people who laugh at the same things are more compatible. Can the same thing be said for individuals who prefer similar housing environments?

Other questions that need to be addressed include: Are there special problems when individuals of different socio-economic and/or cultural backgrounds marry? Do couples where the spouses have different personality types (such as introvert and extrovert) experience problems of obtaining housing environments that meet the needs of both spouses?

With better understanding of individual differences in preferred housing environments and the importance of these preferences, it is possible that creative ways to design housing can be developed to meet different perceived needs within the same structure.

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