

THE USE OF THEORY IN HOUSING RESEARCH

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Abstract

Theory plays an essential role in research, and its use may be an indicator of the maturity of a discipline. Quantifying the use of theory in housing research may provide indicators of the state of the discipline. This study analyzed the use of explicit theories in housing research as published by Housing and Society from 1974-2003. Objectives were to quantify the use of theory in housing research, describe how theory has been used, and examine the use of theory in housing research over time. Results revealed that the vast majority of housing research acknowledged explicit theory or theories, but that few used the theories to directly design the study or to interpret findings. New theory was seldom proposed. Patterns of increased use of theory over time were not evident.

Introduction

It is widely recognized that theory plays an essential role in research. Functions of theory may include describing, explaining, predicting, advancing knowledge, providing order, and developing and/or guiding research (Bubolz, 1991). Touliatos and Compton (1988, p. 12) stated that “the maturity of an academic discipline is generally gauged by the extent to which it has developed a solid foundation for the construction of theories.”

An earlier study (Steggell, Binder, Davidson, Vega, Hutton, & Rodecap, 2003) found that 73% of housing research articles published in *Housing and Society*, *Environment and Behavior*, and *Family and Consumer Sciences Research Journal* mentioned a theoretical basis. However, few of the articles identified direct testing of a theory or proposed theory as an outcome of the study. The purpose of this study was to examine more closely the use of theory in housing research.

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Specific objectives were to (a) quantify the use of theory in housing research, (b) examine how theories have been used, and (c) determine how use of theory has changed over time. In this study, *explicit* theory is examined; that is, theory that has been plainly and specifically identified by the authors of the research articles under study.

Implicit in this study is a positivistic approach to research and theory development. The researchers recognize that this approach is only one of several ways of conducting social science. Based on the literature, it is postulated that increasing the use of explicit theory is necessary for the growth of the housing discipline. Therefore, the research objectives are oriented to the measurement of the use of theory over time.

“Theory is developed by being and acting in the world” (Chin & Kramer, 1995, p. 21) and is a natural outcome of human thought processes. It follows that theory is present in all research, even if a recognized theory has not been named. Although it is not absolutely necessary that there be an acknowledged theory attached to every act of scholarship, abstract theoretical development is essential to advance the discipline (Meleis, 1997; Nagasawa, Kaiser, & Hutton, 1989).

Review of Literature

Definitions of Theory

There are many definitions of theory within and across disciplines (Hamilton, 1997). Adding to the confusion, there are numerous related terms such as assertion, axiom, conceptual framework, description, maxim, model, postulate, prediction, proposition, system, theoretical model, and typology. Although these terms have specific and often divergent meanings, they are sometimes used as synonyms for theory (Dubin, 1978; Kinloch, 1977; Silva, 1977).

In her comprehensive discourse on theory, Pedersen (in press) considered 37 definitions of theory and identified four definitional components. The first component was defined structure. For example, phrases such as set of statements, systems of concepts, cluster of hypotheses, structure of ideas, or body of suppositions were often included in definitions of theory. The second component was the goals and/or functions of theory. More than one function was included in most of the definitions, such as explanation, description, classification, prediction, and organization. The third component was the elements of theory. Examples of elements were assertions, assumptions, concepts, ideas, hypotheses, and equations. The fourth component of theory was a definition of the relationship between theory development and research. The research-theory relationship was included or implied in some of the definitions and referenced inductive theory development, deductive theory development, and/or an ongoing theory development process.

Role of Theory in Research

The relationship of theory to research has been widely discussed and multiple definitions of theory abound. However, there is general agreement that theory is essential to systematically organize and synthesize information, discover relationships among variables, and guide the discovery of new facts to move research forward (Creswell, 2003; Touliatos & Compton, 1988). Without theory-based research, a discipline chaotically moves in all directions with lack of purpose (Mitchell & Jolley, 1992). The relationship of theory to research methods has been likened to a roadmap to driving. “Without it, all roads look the same, you can never tell for sure where you are, you waste a lot of time making wrong turns and getting lost, and when you get where you’re going, you may not know it” (Guy, Edgley, Arafat, & Allen, 1987, p. 64).

On the other hand, researchers’ loyalty to one particular theoretical perspective to the exclusion of competing theories may actually limit the growth of a discipline. While a theory “allows us to explain and predict behavior, it also dictates which and whose behaviors are worthy of study and which should be excluded from study” (Lennon & Burns, 2000, p. 221). Theories provide guidance, but researchers must carefully examine paradigm commitments and assumptions regarding the relevant unit of analysis, variables, and other research decisions (Hamilton, 1993).

Theory development can take place through deduction or induction. In deduction, the researcher moves from the general to the specific, from theory to fact. In the deductive process, the researcher begins with a theoretical formulation from which are developed testable hypotheses. The hypotheses are tested to discover whether the facts support or refute the theory. In contrast, in induction, the researcher moves from the specific to the general, from fact to theory. In the inductive process, the researcher discovers what the facts are and then arranges those facts into patterns that move toward a theory (Guy et al., 1987). Grounded theory comes from the inductive process. Theory emerges from systematic observation and description. The theory is grounded in the sense that it was generated from data “rather than having arisen from speculation, philosophizing, or some other abstract source” (Guy et al., 1987, p. 73).

Both quantitative and qualitative research methods rely on theory. As explained by Creswell (2003), deductive theory is often used in quantitative studies. “The researcher advances a theory, collects data to test it, and reflects on the confirmation or disconfirmation of the theory by the results. The theory becomes a framework for the entire study” (p. 125). In qualitative studies, “the inquirer may generate a theory during a study and place it at the end of a project, such as in grounded theory. In other qualitative studies, it comes at the beginning and provides a lens that shapes what is looked at and the questions asked” (p. 199).

Study of Theory

The study of theory has been approached from numerous dimensions and within many disciplines. Studies of theory often focus on individual theorists, core concepts, intellectual histories, and, particularly in the social sciences, are approached in the context of schools of thought (Mullins, 1973, as cited in Wells & Picou, 1981). In sociology, several descriptions of theory have been provided within a sociology of science model, but few have empirically identified, defined, and collected data on the topic (Wells & Picou, 1981).

In more general reviews of housing research (McCullers, 1984; McCullough, 1959; McFadden & Makela, 1991; Weber, 1992; Weber, McCray, & Day, 1986), authors often discussed the importance of theory in regards to research and the advancement of the discipline. Articles focused on specific theories used in housing research and the ways in which theories were used have also appeared. For example, in their historical perspective on housing research, Weber et al. (1986) identified theories that had been used in housing research from 1950 to 1985. Baille and Day (1988) updated the review and provided an outline of the concepts of the theories and how they had been used in housing research from 1950 to 1985. Steggell et al. (2003) continued the work with an examination of theories used in housing research from 1989 through 1999. McFadden and Makela (1991) provided a similar review specific to models for retirement housing.

Weber's (1992) review of the American Association of Housing Educators (AAHE) journals, proceedings, and refereed conference papers from 1965 to 1991 included an analysis of the use of theory. She found that theoretical frameworks were obvious in about one third of the studies reviewed. Of the studies incorporating theories, 64% were based on models from Morris and Winter's theory of housing adjustment (see Morris & Winter, 1978). Distant second and third rankings were neighborhood change theory and adoption/diffusion theory.

Weber et al. (1986) reported that the use of theory in housing increased greatly between the 1950s and 1980s. They found that in the 1950s, less than 25% of housing research publications contributed to the development of theory, but by the 1980s the number had increased to nearly 80%. However, in a review of housing research published between 1989 and 1999, Steggell et al. (2003) found that only 73% of the 115 articles examined mentioned a theoretical basis for their studies. Further, few demonstrated direct testing of a theory or proposed theory as an outcome of the study. Of the 84 articles citing theory, nearly 23% (19 citations) mentioned Morris and Winter's theory of housing adjustment. Person-environment congruence theory was a distant second at 6% (5 citations), with 42 additional theories cited from 1 to 4 times each.

Method

Sampling

Academic journals are “major repositories of the cognitive structure of a discipline” (Wells & Picou, 1981, p. 80). This study employed quantitative content analysis techniques to examine the use of theory in research articles appearing in *Housing and Society* from 1974 to 2003. *Housing and Society* was selected both for its focus on housing and for the diversity and fragmentation of the housing field that is mirrored in its contents (Tremblay, 1982). The journal was founded in 1974 and was known as *Housing Educators Journal* until 1978. For this study, all articles published in the journal were first categorized as either “research” or “non-research.” Only research articles were used for the study, thereby excluding notes, book reviews, and position papers. From the research articles, a systematic sampling method was used. Selection of every third research article yielded a total of 117 articles, averaging about four articles per year.

Data Collection

Development of the instrument was guided by seminal work in sociology by Wells and Picou (1981) that used content analysis to study the use of theory in sociology research. For the present study, seven variables measured the extent to which theory was used in research design. Seven additional variables were used to measure the extent to which theory was used in interpreting research findings. In addition, information on authors’ affiliation, source of data, data population, data analysis, and topic and purpose of the study were collected.

Although the presence of theory in all research is recognized, for this study “use of theory” was defined as the use of explicit, named theories. The presence of explicit theory was recorded when any theory reviewed by Steggell et al. (2003), McFadden and Makela (1991), or Baille and Day (1988) was named in the articles, or when the researchers explicitly discussed a developing theory. “Theory” was identified in the broadest sense, including paradigm, conceptual framework, typology, and model as applied by the authors of the articles under review.

The variables used to measure the use of theory in the design of the research were statements recorded as “true” or “false.” For convenience these “Design” variables were labeled D1 through D7. The variables were:

- D1: one or multiple theories mentioned in the introduction or literature review
- D2: one or multiple theories mentioned relative to research design
- D3: specific theory or theories named and a clear relationship between variables or methods identified in research design
- D4: specific theory or theories named and author explicitly showed how it was used to select variables or method in research design
- D5: specific theory or theories named and used to develop testable hypotheses
- D6: new theory proposed
- D7: new theory proposed and implemented in the research design

The variables used to measure the extent to which theory was used in interpreting research findings were also statements recorded as “true” or “false.” For convenience these “Research Outcome” variables were labeled RO1 through RO7. The variables were:

RO1: one or multiple theories mentioned in the discussion

RO2: specific theory or theories used to interpret findings

RO3: results used to support or refute specific theory or theories

RO4: results used to suggest further testing of this or other theory

RO5: suggestion for specific use of the theory in subsequent research

RO6: modification or extension of theory suggested as a result of the study

RO7: new theory proposed

Additional variables included the following:

- *first author's affiliation*: university research/education/extension, business or trade, non-university educator, or government/nonprofit
- *data source*: unique to the project, shared/cooperative/regional, or unrelated collector
- *data population*: specific group (university class, nursing home, members of an organization, etc.), city/county/state, regional, or national
- *data analysis*: descriptive, inferential, or qualitative
- *research topic*: housing decisions, attitudes/preferences/satisfaction, housing markets, social interaction, self-perception/well-being/motivation, or environmental issues

Four coders independently reviewed and recorded data for the articles under examination. Minimum acceptable intercoder reliability of the instrument was initially set at 85% as recommended by Lombard, Snyder-Duch, and Bracken (2002). Coder training through four pilot studies resulted in a final intercoder reliability of 93%. Validity was established through adherence to the research model developed by Wells and Picou (1981) and by peer review of the instrument.

Results

Description of Sampled Articles

The vast majority (90.6%) of the “first author” of the articles under examination were university researchers. Over half (56.4%) were from home economics-related disciplines (under various names), while authors from psychology/sociology represented 9.4%. University researchers from economics/business (4.3%), urban/regional planning (2.6%), and architecture (1.7%) were also represented as were agencies of the federal government (2.6%) and secondary schools (1.8%).

Topics addressed in the articles under examination were grouped by category. As shown in Table 1, the largest category (35.0%) concerned research on attitudes, preferences, and satisfaction of housing. Housing decisions represented 22.2% of the articles while housing markets, including affordability, housing development, and the economy, represented 17.9%. Additional topic categories were self-perception, well-being, and motivation (7.6%), environmental issues (6.8%), social interaction (5.1%), and other (5.1%).

Table 1. Topics of Housing Research Articles ($N = 117$)

	<i>n</i>	Percent*
Attitudes, preferences, satisfaction	41	35.0
Housing decisions	26	22.2
Housing markets	21	17.9
Self-perception, well-being, motivation	9	7.6
Environmental issues	8	6.8
Social interaction	6	5.1
Other	6	5.1

*Does not equal 100% due to rounding

Data were collected specifically for the study being reported in 57.4% of the articles, while 18.9% used shared data such as those for Agriculture Experiment Station Regional Projects. Data collected for other purposes such as the U.S. Census and the American Housing Survey were used in 15.5% of the articles. The researchers were unable to determine the source of data for 8.1% of the articles.

Sample data were collected from city, county, or state populations in 51.9% of the studies. Regional data were used in 19.4% of the articles, while data collected from defined populations such as university classes, nursing homes, and members of a specific profession or organization were used in 17.7% of the studies. National data were used in 10.8% of the articles. Data were analyzed using inferential statistics in 74.8% of the articles, while 16.1% reported only descriptive statistics. Qualitative analysis was used in 8.7% of the studies.

Use of Theory in Research Design

Seven variables were used to record specific uses of explicit theory in the design of the study under examination. These variables are numbered D1 through D7 (Table 2). Each of the variables was a statement recorded as “true” or “false.” A large majority of the studies mentioned one or more theories in the introduction or review of literature (D1 = 78.6%). Articles containing statements such as “theory X was used to guide the study” were coded as using explicit theory relative to the research design (D2). Fewer than half (46.2%) made such statements. When it was apparent that the theory or theories had been implemented in the research

design, such as the choice of study population, variables, or other methodology, variable D3 was scored true. Although the present researchers recognize that this variable may be somewhat subjective, this variable was found to be true in 33.3% of the articles.

When the authors explicitly named a theory and described how it was used to select variables or other methodology the variable D4 was scored true. This was found in 22.2% of the articles. Specific theory or theories were named and actually used to develop testable hypotheses (D5) in 19.7% of the articles. New theory was proposed as part of the research design (D6) in 7.6% of the articles. (Theory proposed as an outcome of the study will be reported later.) New theory was proposed and implemented in the research design (D7) in only 6 of the 117 articles (5.1%). Twelve percent of the articles examined made no mention of theory at all in the introduction, review of literature, or methodology of the study. On the other hand, six articles (5.0%) included all seven of the variables measured.

Table 2. Use of Explicit Theory in Research Design ($N = 117$)

	<i>n</i>	Percent
D1 One or multiple theories mentioned in introduction or literature review	92	78.6
D2 One or multiple theories mentioned relative to research design	54	46.2
D3 Specific theory or theories named and a clear relationship between variables or method identified in research design	39	33.3
D4 Specific theory or theories named and author explicitly showed how used to select variables or method in research design	26	22.2
D5 Specific theory or theories named and used to develop testable hypotheses	23	19.7
D6 New theory proposed	9	7.6
D7 New theory proposed and implemented in research design	6	5.1

Use of Theory in Research Outcome

In deductive theory development, theory is part of both the design and outcome of a study. Design in that theory may guide choice of subject, testable hypotheses, and other methodology, and outcome in that theory is supported or refuted by the findings. In inductive theory development, the theory—or at least the beginnings of a theory—is an expected outcome.

In this study variables related to the use of theory in research outcomes are numbered RO1 through RO7 (Table 3). It was found that 44.4% of the articles mentioned one or more theories in the discussion of findings (RO1) and that 33.3% named a specific theory or theories to interpret findings (RO2). The results were used to support or refute a specific theory or theories (RO3) in 24.8% of the articles, and 19.7% used the results to suggest further testing of the named theory or other related theories (RO4) in subsequent research. Suggestions for the specific use of the theory in subsequent research (RO5) were made in 13.8% of the articles.

Suggestions for the modification of the theory or extensions of the theory (RO6) were made in only 6.8% of the articles. New theory was developed (RO7) in 6.0% of the articles. There were 40 articles (34.1%) which made no mention of theory in findings, conclusions, nor recommendations. However, seven articles (6.0%) included all of the theory in research outcome variables that were measured.

Table 3. Use of Explicit Theory in Research Outcome ($N = 117$)

	<i>n</i>	Percent
RO1 One or multiple theories mentioned in the discussion	52	44.4
RO2 Specific theory or theories used to interpret findings	39	33.3
RO3 Results used to support or refute specific theory or theories	29	24.8
RO4 Results used to suggest further testing of this or other theory	23	19.7
RO5 Suggestion for specific use of the theory in subsequent research	16	13.8
RO6 Modification or extension of theory suggested as a result of the study	8	6.8
RO7 New theory proposed	7	6.0

Overall five articles (4.3%) scored “true” on every one of the 14 variables (D1–D7 and RO1–RO7) while 11 (9.4%) articles scored “false” on each of the 14 variables. In other words only a small number of articles completely ignored explicit theory.

In order to examine the relationship between the use of theory in research design with the use of theory in research outcomes, two variables were created by summing the number of true statements in the D series and in the RO series. The computed variable “design score” is the sum of D1 through D7 for each article. The computed variable “outcome score” is the sum of RO1 through RO7. Correlation and regression procedures were used to examine the relationship between the design score and outcome score. The Pearson correlation coefficient was .568, indicating a moderately strong relationship between the use of theory in research design and the use of theory in research outcomes. The R^2 was .323, suggesting that 32% of the use of theory in research outcomes can be predicted by the use of theory in the research design ($p = .000$, $SE = 1.43$).

Changing Use of Theory over Time

Theory in research design. The development of theory in an academic discipline may be a measure of its maturity (Touliatos & Compton, 1988). To examine changes over time in the use of theory in housing research design, frequencies were first plotted for each of the theory in research design variables (D1–D7). Results are reported in 4-year blocks from 1974 through 2003 in Table 4.

Table 4. Use of Theory in Research Design over Time

	1974 to 1977 <i>n</i> = 12	1978 to 1981 <i>n</i> = 16	1982 to 1985 <i>n</i> = 15	1986 to 1989 <i>n</i> = 16	1990 to 1993 <i>n</i> = 23	1994 to 1997 <i>n</i> = 15	1998 to 2003 <i>n</i> = 12
	Percent						
D1 One or multiple theories mentioned in introduction or literature review	66.6	81.1	93.3	93.8	95.7	93.3	50.0
D2 One or multiple theories mentioned relative to research design	75.0	37.5	46.7	62.5	93.5	66.7	16.7
D3 Specific theory or theories named and a clear relationship between variables or method identified in research design	41.7	37.5	26.7	37.5	30.4	53.3	25.0
D4 Specific theory or theories named and author explicitly showed how used to select variables or method in research design	33.3	25.0	20.0	12.5	26.1	26.7	25.0
D5 Specific theory or theories named and used to develop testable hypotheses	41.7	18.8	26.7	18.8	21.7	13.3	16.7
D6 New theory proposed	0	0	20.0	25.0	4.3	6.7	0
D7 New theory proposed and implemented in research design	8.3	0	0	12.5	4.3	6.7	0

To examine the question “How has the use of theory in research design changed over time?” the relationship between year of publication with the theory in design variables was examined in two ways. First, each of the D series variables was considered separately. These variables (D1–D7) were coded as “true” or “false.” Because these are dichotomous dependent variables, logistic regression was used to examine the relationships. Results revealed extremely low R^2 s (less than .01) and no statistically significant relationships at or below the .05 level between publication year and each of the seven variables, suggesting that the use of theory in research design has not progressed in a linear fashion.

The second way the relationship between year of publication with the theory in design variables was examined was by using the computed design score variable. A sum of the D variables was regressed against year of publication. Again, the relationship was extremely weak ($r = .074$, $R^2 = .005$) and yielded no significant result ($p = .45$). A scatter plot was created for further examination but no patterns were evident.

Theory in research outcomes. To examine changes over time in the use of theory in housing research outcomes, frequencies were plotted on each of the theory in research outcomes variables (RO1–RO7). Results are reported in 4-year blocks from 1974 through 2003 in Table 5.

Table 5. Use of Theory in Research Outcome over Time

		1974 to 1977 <i>n</i> = 12	1978 to 1981 <i>n</i> = 16	1982 to 1985 <i>n</i> = 15	1986 to 1989 <i>n</i> = 16	1990 to 1993 <i>n</i> = 23	1994 to 1997 <i>n</i> = 15	1998 to 2003 <i>n</i> = 12
		Percent						
RO1	One or multiple theories mentioned in the discussion	41.7	37.5	33.3	62.5	60.9	46.7	41.7
RO2	Specific theory or theories used to interpret findings	16.7	37.5	13.3	75.0	39.1	40.0	16.6
RO3	Results used to support or refute specific theory or theories	25.0	12.5	6.7	50.0	39.1	26.7	16.7
RO4	Results used to suggest further testing of this or other theory	25.0	12.5	6.7	25.0	30.4	26.7	16.7
RO5	Suggestion for specific use of the theory in subsequent research	16.7	6.3	0	25.0	26.1	6.7	16.7
RO6	Modification or extension of theory suggested as a result of the study	8.3	0	6.7	12.5	8.7	0	16.7
RO7	New theory developed	8.3	0	6.7	12.5	8.7	0	8.3

To examine the question “How has the use of theory in research outcomes changed over time?” the relationship between year of publication with the theory in outcome variables was examined in two ways. First, each of the RO series variables (RO1–RO7) was considered separately. These variables were also coded as “true” or “false” and tested using logistic regression. Results revealed very low R^2 s (less than .01) and no statistically significant relationships in any of the seven variables.

The second analysis examined the relationship between a computed outcome score and year of publication. The sum of the RO variables was regressed against year of publication. Again, results were weak ($r = .136$; $R^2 = .019$) and yielded no significant result ($p = .16$). A scatter plot was created to assess the possibility of non-linear patterns but none were evident.

Summary of Results

The purpose of this study was to systematically investigate the use of theory in housing research. There were three objectives: (a) to quantify the use of theory in housing research, (b) to examine how theory has been used, and (c) to determine how the use of theory has changed over time. Understanding the current state of the use of theory in the study of housing is vital to systematically organize existing knowledge and further develop theories. By acknowledging the state of the use of theory, the results reported in this article can prompt researchers not only to organize and develop new theories, but also to use theory in designing research and in interpreting outcomes.

This study found that less than half of the investigators explicitly used theories in their research, although the majority mentioned theories in some section of their research articles. Corroborated with the findings from other studies (such as Steggell et al., 2003), it seems that in the study of housing, middle range and micro theories are most likely to be used. Some of these theories may only be implied in assumptions or statements. Researchers may use “a series of hypotheses, ‘if... then’ logical statements, or visual models” as theories or theoretical perspectives (Creswell, 2003, p. 121). Regardless of form, it is important to use theory explicitly to enhance and clarify understanding, and to contribute to the further development of theories. The present study brings to researchers’ attention the need to use theories in a more explicit way.

Considerable variation was found in the way theories are used in both research design and in interpreting research outcomes. For the use of theory in research design, the greatest percentage (78.6%) was found in the mention of one or more theories in the introduction and literature review sections. This percentage dropped to less than half for the use of statements such as “theory X was used to guide the study.” Furthermore, only a third of the articles implemented a theory or theories in the research design. Less than one quarter of the articles explicitly named a theory or theories and described how theory was used to select variables. New theory was proposed in very few articles, with even fewer implementing new theory in the research design.

The use of explicit theory in research outcomes was even less frequent. Less than half of the articles mentioned one or more theories in the discussion section and a third used a specific theory to interpret the results. About a quarter of the articles used the results to support or reject a theory, while few specified use of the theory in subsequent research, suggested a modification of an existing theory, or suggested a new theory to be developed. There were no statistically significant changes in the use of theory over time.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Use of theory in the design of a research study is associated with deductive theory development. Researchers who are taking a deductive approach to theory development may use theory in the research design (before data are collected) and in the interpretation of results (after data are collected). Researchers who are taking an inductive approach to theory development may use or propose theory principally in the interpretation of results. Although no attempt was made to assign “deductive” or “inductive” labels to the articles, if both of these statements are correct we would expect to find that the majority of research studies would use theory in the interpretation of findings. However, we found that articles using explicit theory in the interpretation of findings were also more likely to use explicit theory in the design of the research. This may suggest that most housing research that develops theory uses a deductive approach. It may also suggest that researchers who are comfortable, familiar, or knowledgeable with theory are more likely to use it extensively, while others are not.

When research with tangible, concrete findings is pushed to abstract levels, knowledge can “become cumulative, ordered, structured, and indicative of what needs to be discovered” (Nagasawa et al., 1989, p. 23). Cumulative knowledge is more than the accumulation of facts and empirical relations. Scholars must “organize findings systematically and create theory to explain these findings or existing facts” (p. 24).

While almost 80% of the articles mentioned theory in the introduction and literature review sections, less than half actually used theories either in designing research or in interpreting and discussing outcomes. This difference is noteworthy. Perhaps researchers, while acknowledging the importance of theory, do not have enough experience in linking theories to research. In addition, since scholarly journals encourage the use of theory, it may be that reviewers tend to reject articles that do not mention any theories but accept articles that mention theories even when a specific theory is not actually applied.

Another explanation of why researchers did not actually use theories in designing studies and/or discussing findings could be the fact that housing is an applied discipline. This has several implications. First, researchers are more likely to use middle range and micro theories than grand theories. Also, many of the theories pertaining to housing are adapted from other disciplines. Researchers may consider micro theories as being implicit; therefore, they do not clearly articulate their theoretical perspectives. Adopting and adapting theories from other disciplines requires a broad knowledge base as well as a good understanding of the theory adaptation process. This can be challenging.

Researchers in applied disciplines may not be as accustomed to use abstract ideas as researchers in theoretically oriented disciplines. In housing, some researchers may focus on specific problems such as creating universal designs

or creating and evaluating policies for affordable housing. A focus on a specific problem may not compel the researcher to see the “big picture” and thereby lead to overlooking the presence and the need of theory.

A possible contributor to the limited use of theory may be that in housing, one theory seems to predominate. Steggell et al. (2003) found that of 84 articles that cited theory in the housing research under examination, nearly 23% were citations of Morris and Winter’s theory of housing adjustment. No other theory was cited more than five times, while most were cited only once or twice. Theoretical consensus in any discipline can lead to implicit inclusion of the dominant theoretical perspective without its explicit acknowledgement.

A consensus is a necessary correlate to the cumulative progress of theory development and of knowledge, but it does not represent a sufficient condition to achieve meaningful results. “It is possible for a discipline to be characterized by a high degree of consensus and a corresponding lack of cumulative knowledge” (Wells & Picou, 1981, p. 47). In addition, it is important to be cautious of limiting the theoretical focus in housing research.

Researchers’ loyalty to a particular theoretical perspective within an area of study, to the exclusion of competing theories, can limit the growth and theoretical development within that area Although adopting a particular theoretical perspective allows us to explain and predict behavior, it also dictates which and whose behaviors are worthy of study and which and whose behaviors should be excluded from study. (Lennon & Burns, 2000, p. 221)

In this study it is acknowledged that theory is just one component of the structure of knowledge. A consideration of other components such as methodology would allow a broader view of the housing field’s cognitive structure. In specific applications, finding relationships among theories and methods would reflect the broader epistemology of the field and would be an important addition to housing research. The present study, focused on theory alone, precludes a consideration of how theory is initiated, reformulated, and clarified by methodology.

A limitation of this study is that systematic sampling was used. Although this method may be viewed as random selection, the possibility exists that the sample did not accurately represent all research articles published in *Housing and Society* during the time period under consideration. In this case only one third of the articles identified as research articles were selected for examination. Different results may emerge from a more complete review of articles in *Housing and Society* or from a review of housing research published elsewhere.

The use of published articles as data is well established. However, it must be recognized that editors and reviewers serve as gatekeepers who may filter the research and their concomitant theories and methodologies. This is particularly important in this case where only one journal was used to represent housing research. Further study should include additional data sources.

Housing research has a need for theory. There is too much information and numerous disconnected pieces of empirical research which, in effect, become counter-productive. “An important role of theory is to subsume much data in easily remembered and used formats” (Rapoport, 2001, p. 145). We encourage researchers, editors, and reviewers to use and explicitly acknowledge diverse theories in housing research as we move forward in our knowledge and understanding of housing-related issues.

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