

HOUSING AND LEISURE IN A PLANNED COMMUNITY

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The planned community of Reston, Virginia, provides a setting in which recreation opportunities are equally accessible to residents of detached homes, townhouses, and apartments. Two issues are investigated: (1) the use of the home as a primary locale of leisure, and, (2) whether residents of different kinds of housing have different leisure patterns. Implications for both leisure research and for housing research and design are suggested.

When leisure is defined inclusively as activity that is chosen rather than required, various kinds of informal activity and personal interaction are significant elements of adult leisure patterns (Kelly, 1975a). Family conversation, play with children, and marital intimacy far outrank sports, cultural enterprises, and community participation in importance to adults (Kelly, 1977). As a result, the most common locale for leisure would appear to be the home.

However, just how the home is used and adapted for leisure by various household members remains more of a mystery than would be anticipated when the relative magnitude of the housing investment is considered. Sociologists in particular have given considerable attention to voluntary organizations, which are peripheral to most adults, and very little to the home as the

locale and limiting context of interaction that is quite central to most adults. Unfortunately, cooperation between those interested in housing from family, management, and design perspectives and social scientists in traditional disciplines has been infrequent.²

In a study of leisure in a planned community, Reston, Virginia, one of the aims was to examine relationships between housing and adult leisure. Research in two other communities had found significant correlations between living in a detached home or apartment and styles of leisure. In general, adults living in detached homes were more likely to engage in interpersonal activities and to be responding to perceived role expectations than those in apartments (Kelly, 1975b). Apartment dwellers, on the other hand, were more likely to choose active sports and to value

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²This report is intended as a research note with the focus on the housing aspects of a larger study that is being reported elsewhere. Details on the methods, sample, and on leisure choices and roles may be obtained from the author at the University of Illinois, Institute for Child Behavior and Development 53, 51 Gerty Drive, Champaign, Illinois 61820. Background on the relation of sociological research to housing and design may be found in Gutman (1972) and Zeisel (1975).

their activities for the satisfaction intrinsic to doing them.

The problem, however, was that the size of the samples and the large proportion of adults in detached homes in conventional communities did not permit disentangling housing type from place in the family life cycle. Since having children living at home was the most significant predictive variable for leisure patterns (Kelly, 1974), the question of the importance of housing was left moot. Further, Michelson's Toronto research found that the cycle of housing preferences was at least in part a product of changes in family composition (Michelson, 1973).

Reston provided an unusual opportunity to separate life cycle from housing type. In a sample of 215 adults, 22 percent lived in detached houses, 49 percent in clustered townhouses, and 29 percent in rental or condominium apartments. Since (unlike conventional communities) recreation facilities are planned to be within walking distance of all Reston housing clusters, the type of housing did not produce different access to such amenities.

Two issues in the relationship of housing to adult leisure were addressed:

1. Where does leisure valued by adults take place? Is the home the most common locale and where in the home does leisure activity take place?

2. Is housing a determinant of leisure for adults? When housing type is not confounded with family life cycle and with differences in access to recreation opportunities, do detached-home dwellers differ from townhouse and apartment residents in their leisure patterns?

Research Design

As one part of the New Town Leisure study funded by the National Institute of Mental Health, the investigator, a sociologist then residing in Reston, began an exploration of housing and leisure. The study included participant observation of various groups, organizations, and locales

of leisure and considerable informal probing. The survey part of the research was designed to continue and extend the interview studies of a Western and a Midwest pair of communities (Kelly, 1975b, 1977).

The sample was drawn randomly from a community directory of households and was reasonably representative of this young, highly educated, suburban population of government-oriented technicians, professionals, and middle-management bureaucrats. Commuting for most of between 1 and 1½ hours each way severely limits weekday time at home. The community was just over 10 years old in 1975 with 26,000 residents. When completed, Reston is to house 80,000 persons.

From check lists of 88 kinds of activities that could be leisure, each respondent was to select three familial-community and three cultural-recreation activities that he or she would least want to give up. For each of those activities, an activity summary was completed that examined where, when, with whom, and why the activity was chosen and done. Perceived social constraints and satisfactions were examined and reasons for selection ranked.

Background information included age, sex, family status, place in the family life cycle, occupation, education, housing type and value, religion, and a ranking of general value priorities.

For each activity self-report information was sought on whether the activity generally took place at home, away from home, or both; in what setting if away from home; in what room(s) if at home, with whom the activity was usually done; and to what extent the activity had to be scheduled. The information on location in the home provided for multiple use of rooms and for the use of several rooms for the same activity. Information on the number and kinds of rooms in each dwelling was also provided by the respondents. The data were analysed employing two and three-variable contingency tables with measures of significance and association. In all, information was secured on over 1200 activities

valued by 215 adults.

Findings on Leisure and Housing

The two questions that may be answered in preliminary form by the data and analysis are: (1) Where does adult leisure take place? and, (2) Is housing a determinant of leisure participation patterns?

1. First, to what extent is the home the locale of leisure important to adults living in a New Town?

Analysis of the activities for which this information was recorded demonstrates that the home, indeed, is the chief local of adult leisure with 69 percent of the activities usually done at home or both at home and away.

The breakdown of places away from home for leisure indicates a wide distribution both near the home and distant depending on the activity. On the other hand, home-located activities tend to be either familial or done alone such as reading for pleasure and watching television.

A slight tendency was found for adults with children at home to engage in more leisure at home than in earlier family cycle states as shown

TABLE 1
LEISURE LOCALES AND THE FAMILY LIFE CYCLE
(N=1221)

Family Life Cycle	Usual Location of Leisure Activities		
	At home	Both at home and away	Away from home
Never married	21% (24)	36% (40)	43% (48)
Pre-parental	26% (50)	47% (89)	27% (51)
Parental: children at home	33% (205)	37% (235)	30% (187)
Launching	24% (30)	39% (48)	37% (45)
Post-parental	37% (44)	38% (45)	25% (29)
Broken	26% (11)	35% (19)	29% (12)
	30% (364)	39% (479)	31% (377)

in Table 1.

Second, where in the home do leisure activities take place?

Unfortunately, the self-report data are less complete on this question. Further, coding proved to be something of a problem due to the use of several rooms for the same activity. Most of the 754 activities for which in-home information was recorded take place in more than one room. The coding was done using the most common combinations and giving priority to combinations that included the bedroom or special recreation areas or rooms. The proportions that follow suggest considerable adaptation of space to needs for privacy in adult leisure (Table 2).

TABLE 2

USUAL ROOM LOCATIONS OF ADULT LEISURE
(N=1217)

Usually in the:	kitchen	1%	(13)
	living room	6%	(74)
	family room or den	5%	(62)
	bedroom	6%	(68)
	dining room	0%	(6)
Combination of:	kitchen, living room, den, etc.	6%	(77)
	bedroom plus other rooms	19%	
	yard, patio, and other places	5%	(60)
	other combinations	14%	
Away from home or missing information		38%	

If there is any surprise, it would probably be the infrequency of primary use of "special recreation areas" such as family rooms, patios, and dens. The more combinations of bedroom, living room, kitchen, and other multiple-use rooms reflects the informal and ongoing nature of much adult leisure. It consists heavily of conversation, affection, play with children, and other interaction that moves around the home rather than being fixed by particular equipment or space requirements.

2. Is housing a determinant of adult leisure participation?

The four types of housing—detached homes, townhouses, garden apartments, and conventional apartments—with neighborhood recreation

facilities more or less equally accessible to all were distinguished by the respondents and checked by those delivering and picking up the questionnaires. Housing type was then cross-tabulated with type of leisure distinguished by form and also by association, location, frequency, rank of importance, perceived role constraint, and usual schedule.

No significant relationship was found between housing type and any of the variables defining or locating the activities. Neither the kinds of activities valued nor why they were valued were differentiated by the type of housing of the participants.

One finding did suggest that those with the fewest rooms were more likely to adapt those rooms to multiple leisure use. Apartment dwellers used their bedrooms for several kinds of leisure in the usual absence of a den or family room. Households with fewer rooms tend to make multiple use of the rooms they have, especially the bedroom.

All other relationships between housing and leisure patterns disappeared when place in the family cycle was a control variable. For example, adults who are not yet parents are more likely to engage in leisure away from home. They are also more commonly apartment dwellers. On the other hand, those who are parents stay home for more leisure and have more space to use at home. They have generally graduated to townhouses or detached homes in the interrelated housing and family cycles.

The concept of progression in housing proposed by Michelson (1973) is supported in this New Town study. When financially possible, the addition or subtraction of children living at home calls for changes in housing provisions. Preparental or retirement couples are most often in apartments and parental families in townhouses or detached homes. Post-parental but preretirement households tend to locate in townhouses. The family "career" would appear to be the independent variable for both housing type and for leisure orientations and styles. Parents are dispropor-

tionately engaged in leisure with family role expectations central to the decision to participate (Kelly, 1977), but the determining factor is the presence of children rather than having moved from an apartment. Those who are still in apartments due to lower income levels demonstrate the same shift to family-oriented leisure.

Implications for Leisure Research

Four implications are evident from this exploratory study:

(1) The home is the most common single location of adult leisure. Therefore, leisure research that continues to focus on activity at special sites away from home distorts the overall leisure patterns of adults.

(2) Whether an activity is done at home or away is significantly related to the form of the activity and its meaning to the participant. However, where the activity takes place in the home differentiates only those activities that require privacy from those that are communal.

(3) Period in the family life cycle rather than housing type is the principal influence on leisure styles as had been previously suggested (Kelly, 1974).

(4) Type of housing is at least partly dependent on family needs and size combined with income and community housing opportunities in the kind of "career" proposed from the Toronto studies (Michelson, 1973).

In general, in-home leisure requires greater attention than it has received in the past from both family and leisure sociologists.

Implications for Housing Research

(1) The previously-examined relationship of housing and the family cycle is supported and may be presumed to be a basis for further research. However, care should be exercised not to presume that housing is an independent variable without examining possible confounding

relationships.

(2) The home is a major leisure context, but not necessarily in space designed for leisure. How space is adapted by individuals and families for changing needs would include study of both household maintenance tasks and leisure.

(3) The tentative nature of this exploration calls for considerable further research on the specification of where and with whom in the home various kinds of leisure develop. It may be that housing type and interior space are more determinative of leisure interaction than could be found in this study. Various methods of reporting and observation may be combined to gather critical data on in-home adaptation for leisure.

Implications for Housing Design

Although the rather simple self-report method of ascertaining where in the home various leisure activities generally take place did not yield clear results in which great confidence may be placed, two tendencies were found with implications for design.

(1) The extent to which rooms seem to be used for purposes other than those for which they are primarily designed merits consideration. This may suggest that maximum flexibility should be sought for housing design, especially in design apartments, so that residents may make their own adaptations. To what extent is it possible to design for such multiple use by providing both flexible space and privacy? The apartment with limited space may have to trade sound and space privacy for some everyday activity for openness and flexibility for entertaining and communal activity. The priorities of the household for

leisure alone, in small groups, or larger groups may require trade-off, in partitioning and floor lay-out when flexibility and adaptation reach outside limits.

(2) Interpersonal leisure in the home requires both meeting-space and separation. Design may hinder or facilitate leisure interaction on the one hand and leisure separation on the other. The limits of adaptation are reached when, for example, meal preparation is fully separated from all other space. An activity that could be in part "leisurely" may be segregated into a less-fulfilling required task. Although much more needs to be known about in-home space considerations, leisure interaction and separation should be considerations for any design.

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