

Book Notes

Morris, Earl W. and Mary Winter. *Housing, Family, and Society*. (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1978.) paperback, 278 pp., index, \$10.95.

This well-written, original book belongs in the personal library of every serious student of housing. Morris and Winter develop a framework for analyzing a wide variety of housing issues. The framework is sociological, dealing with the ways in which households and society attempt to maintain equilibrium and strive for satisfaction through various mechanisms. Although some parts of the book are rather abstract, it should be very useful because of the insights it will provide into family decision-making, programs and policies at the local, state, and federal levels, and various types of housing education.

The back cover states that the book "is primarily for undergraduate courses that deal with the social aspects of housing, but is suitable for graduate courses if supplemented with substantial readings." The book can be used for an advanced level undergraduate housing course, as no prior specialized knowledge is needed. Undergraduate students, however, would have to be well-motivated to digest some of the abstract sections. It will probably be used more commonly in graduate courses. It could be used along with Chester Hartman's *Housing and Social Policy* for a course on social problems of housing. Used with journal articles, the book would provide an excellent background for a housing professional. (Note: back issues of *Housing Educators Journal* are available for sale.)

The chapter titles give some idea of the topics covered:

1. The Study of Housing
2. Cultural Norms and the Evaluation of Housing
3. The Family and Its Housing
4. Housing Adjustment and Adaptation
5. Space Norms
6. Norms for Tenure and Structure Types
7. Quality, Expenditure, and Neighborhood Norms
8. Residential Dissatisfaction
9. Residential Mobility
10. Residential Alterations and Additions
11. Housing of the Elderly and Disabled
12. Economic Constraints
13. Racial-Ethnic and Sexual Constraints
14. Structural and Normative Adaptation
15. Housing and Subcultures
16. Housing as a Social Problem
17. Housing Policy Considerations

The 25 illustrations (graphs, flow charts, etc.) and 14 tables are clear and helpful. There are definitions at the end of each chapter, and in the useful index, the page number of the definition of a term is printed in boldface. The book has a reference list at the end of the book containing about 450 entries. The extraordinary productivity of the authors is shown by the references to approximately three dozen articles, theses, and papers by the authors and their students. Many of the concepts in the book were developed from research conducted by the authors or their students.

At the beginning of each chapter there are short quotes from diverse sources such as Carl Sandburg and William Shakespeare. These little selections are stimulating, especially the sentence from Mark Twain in the chapter on space norms:

It would have been foolish to stand upon our dignity in a place where there was hardly room to stand upon our feet.

It would be tempting to refrain from any criticism of such an excellent product of ten person-years of labor. The comments below are intended merely as helpful criticisms.

The book has relatively few typographical errors, and apparently only one of any consequence. In Figure 17 on page 223 the vertical axis is labeled "Housing Quality," but it should have been labeled "Percentage of Income Spent on Housing," as it is correctly stated in a paragraph on the page. On page 199 "rarely" is spelled "rearely" which might send some persons to search obscure sociological texts to see if the word was a piece of jargon that they had failed to acquire. The title "A Raisin in the Sun" is misspelled on page 249. It would be nice if the same number of pages of *Housing Educators Journal* had as few errors as this book.

The concept of housing deficits is very useful, but the arithmetic tends to be confusing in a few places. A deficit is defined as "a deviation above or below a limit characteristic of a specific organism or social system in the relevant environment." For instance, in the United States, a family living in an apartment would have a negative structure deficit in terms of the social norm of a conventional detached single family home. If the family shared that norm, it would also have a negative personal structure deficit. The rare family living in a single family home but having a personal norm of an apartment would have a positive personal structure deficit but a zero social structure deficit.

Now to this reviewer and to a reviewer of an article in *Housing Educators Journal* which used the deficit terminology, a negative deficit should

mean a surplus, and a positive deficit should mean having less of something than is desirable. Morris and Winter, however, have the signs of structure, tenure, quality, and space deficit variables be negative when they are undesirable in terms of social norms, and zero when the actual condition meets or exceeds the norms. In their discussion of bedroom deficits on page 103, they define the bedroom deficit as "the number of bedrooms a family has minus the number needed; specifically having too few or too many bedrooms." On page 13, however, they use the bedroom deficit as an example of a Type III deficit, "where a shortage of bedrooms was undesirable but having many bedrooms was desirable." A Type III deficit has a negative value if the actual condition is less than the norm, and equals zero if the actual condition equals or exceeds the norm. Research by this reviewer shows that satisfaction with the number of rooms increases linearly with the gap between the actual number of bedrooms and the normative number of bedrooms, throughout a range from having three fewer bedrooms than needed to having three more bedrooms than needed.

Some of the comments on economic analysis are not valid for the more recent economic research. Contrary to Morris and Winter, many economists no longer assume that all housing units and households are identical. Nor is it true that economists assume that resources are not extremely limited. Economists always assume that resources are limited. In some theoretical models, it is assumed that all households have sufficient resources for survival, but this assumption is necessary only to establish the technical efficiency and glory of a perfectly competitive market economy with no government.

The above criticisms are relatively trivial. Morris and Winter's *Housing, Family, and Society* should be used for courses, and it should be read by all housing professionals who have already completed their formal education.

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