

# Use of Residential Space by Blue and White Collar Families

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*In a study designed to determine differences in room use between blue-collar families and white-collar families, one hundred homemakers in Hendricks County, Indiana, were interviewed concerning the activities that occurred in their homes between the 5-6 p.m. hour. No significant differences were found in total room use for the various activities participated in. Also, no significant differences between blue- and white-collar families were found in the use of individual rooms, except in the living room. Blue-collar families showed significantly more leisure activities occurring in the living room than white-collar families.*

## **Introduction**

The design of residential dwellings to fit the needs of the different socio-economic classes of families should be based on studies involving their use of living spaces. Considerable literature exists concerning occupational differences and attitudes among blue-collar and white-collar workers and their families. Raven (1967) feels that attitudes are one of the main determinants of house usage, and different occupational groups do have differing

attitudes. He found that adults and children of working class families do not value education as highly as white-collar families, and that blue-collar families tend to place a greater emphasis on sociability. Little investigation has been done, however, on how these attitudes are reflected in the use of the home.

Morris and Winter (1976) in a study testing the proposition that blue-collar household heads have different standards and aspirations for home ownership and the single-family dwelling than those with white-collar occupations, concluded that differences could not be attributed to differences in norms between the two classes. Instead they were due to differences in original housing conditions and the operation of constraints that kept some from conforming to the norms.

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It is possible that activity patterns of home use in some segments of society are different from those in other segments. Living patterns may reasonably be affected by differing hours of employment, leisure preferences, family history, peer pressures, and intensity of physical work activity. Popenoe (1973) found that three main variables account for most residential differentiation; namely, stage of life cycle, ethnicity, and social class. Residential differentiation in his study included 1) communication, 2) social control, 3) sense of security and ease, 4) collective identity and sense of place, 5) socialization of children, and 6) organizational history.

A study of 1667 families in the District of Columbia reports that the working class, middle class, and professional class differ in the total number of activities engaged in particularly on weekdays, but also on weekends (Hammer and Chapin, 1972). The working class participated in a mean of 6.26 activities per family member, the middle class 7.17, and the professional 7.82 on weekdays. On weekends, the working class participated in a mean of 5.87 activities, the middle class 6.64, and the professional 7.11. During weekdays, each class participated in more obligatory activities than discretionary. During weekends the number of discretionary activities increased and the obligatory activities decreased.

Recent theories concerning residential choices suggest that families may choose their dwellings partially in accordance with their expectations in the allocation of weekday and weekend time. Major activities are often governed by family structure and wife's work status (Michelson, 1973). One study found the responsibility within the family significantly related to social stratification of three status groups. Responsibility of the wife decreased as status increased. (Olson, 1960).

In a study of families with above average incomes, it was found that kitchen-dining areas were used primarily for communal activities involving cooperative effort such as studying by children under parental supervision, as well as for food preparation and dining. The living rooms

were spaces in which family members relaxed with other family members or guests, in addition to reading or watching television in social context without having to socialize. Recreation rooms were primarily the habitat of children. Bedrooms were private spaces used for private or individual activities such as studying and dressing (Black, 1968).

A study of the use of farm houses revealed the greatest part of family activities occurring in the kitchen-living areas, and very little activity in the dining area (Nolan, 1953).

Blue-collar families have been studied as to their leisure activity preferences (Gans, 1965; Gordon and Anderson, 1964; Komarovsky, 1964; Suttles, 1968). The most popular activities among women were watching TV, playing with children, having family and friends over, gardening, swimming, shopping, and attending church. Popular among men were watching TV, playing with children, swimming, smoking, visiting with relatives and friends, eating out, planning home improvements, gardening, and having a drink in the tavern.

White-collar families' activities were compared with those of blue-collar families (Clark, 1956; Komarovsky, 1964; Russman, 1954; White, 1955). Results were that white-collar family members find the following activities more attractive than blue-collar family members: reading books and periodicals; attending lectures, concerts, movies, and sports events; and going to card parties.

Residential space use can be conceptualized in a variety of levels. Human activity analysis at the most micro level places emphasis on personal behavior—the individual acting in response to felt needs in the context of a defined environment of other individuals, institutions, conditions, and physical surroundings. Group behavior or family behavior is the next level of micro-behavior (Chapin, 1974).

Other analyses are based on the view that living patterns are defined as the arrangements of activities, locations, and performers into a design

for action which keeps the family functioning in a satisfactory manner (Smith, Lynch, and Downer, 1969).

Another conception is related to a framework for studying activity patterns in which family activities are characterized in terms of the dimensions of time (recurrence and sequence of the amount of time spent on a particular act); participants (identified with respect to social and biological position in the family; space (area and location); and equipment and material (Magrabi, Paolucci, Heifner, 1967). One suggestion by Magrabi was to use this framework to compare families' similar activities, taking a set time for observation, and then establishing similarities or differences between families.

In an earlier pilot study concerning the reliability of a research instrument in providing adequate data from both blue-collar families and white-collar families, it appeared that blue-collar families might be using their living spaces for activities in different ways and in varying intensity than the white-collar families (Inman, 1972). This led to the present study that was designed to compare residential space use by both family types.

The present study incorporates a conceptual framework similar to the Magrabi suggestion. The objective was to examine the use of the home by both blue-collar and white-collar families to determine if use differences do exist. For the purposes of this study, blue-collar families included household heads employed not only in occupations classified in the U.S. Census as blue-collar (craftsmen, operatives, and non-farm laborers), but also in occupations classified as service industries and farm labor. The combination includes 49.4% of the work force. White-collar workers (professionals, managers, salesworkers, and clerical workers) constitute the remaining 50.6%.

### **Methodology**

The present research involved interviews with white-collar and blue-collar families concerning their use of residential living space. The sample

consisted of 100 members of randomly selected extension homemaker's clubs in Hendricks County, Indiana. All were from two or more person households and had been home the time period of 5-6 p.m. on the day of the interview. Fifty were from blue-collar families and fifty were from white-collar families. All stages of the family life cycle were represented in the study.

The schedule form used to collect the data was an adaptation of one used and tested in activities by Hull (1969), Inman (1972), and Kimura (1970). The group interview technique for data collection was selected, having been tested for reliability in 1970 by Hull and later verified by Inman (1972), as it is the most economical means for data collection of this type. Respondents were assured that the information they contributed would remain anonymous.

The participants were asked to record all family activities and the location of these within the dwelling unit that occurred on the day of the interview between 5 and 6 p.m.. This time period is one of the two hours of the day found to be most active in the residential dwelling (Inman, 1972).

The data were coded into nine major activity categories, which were subdivided into minor categories as follows: (1) food oriented activities—food preparation, serving, clean-up, meals and snacks, (2) house care—cleaning and laundry, (3) business oriented activities—studying homework, writing letters, budgeting, (4) child care, (5) personal care—grooming, dressing, bathing, exercises, toilet care, (6) leisure activities—quiet, moderate, active, and entertaining of guests, (7) rest—nap and sleep, and (8) miscellaneous—conservation, pet care, plant care and others, (9) yard activities.

To facilitate derivation of intensity of room use and frequency of various types of activities within areas of the dwelling, the number of times a given activity was performed by each family member was recorded by five minute intervals over the test hour.

In order that the differences in total number of family members at home in each occupational group did not create differences in variation,

counts for each activity within a location were divided by the total of counts for all activities within all locations per family. These mean proportions were then tested in analyses of variance and t-tests to see if differences existed between blue-collar and white-collar families.

### Results

Household size varied slightly between the blue-collar and white-collar families. Mean number of family members was 4.2 for the blue-collar families, which was significantly higher than the mean of 3.6 for white-collar families. The mean educational level of the head was significantly higher for white-collar families, but there were no significant differences between the groups for income and labor force participation of the wife (Table 1).

Although the families varied in number of family members, there was not a significant difference in the average number of family members at home in each of the two family types tested. Dwelling sizes were comparable except for when there was a family room. The only room that was not in every home situation tested was the family room. Homes containing family rooms were reported by 37% of the blue-collar families and 42% of the white-collar families, but the difference was not significant. During the time period chosen for the interviews, the laundry, basement, recreation room, and garage or carport were not used enough

**Table 1. Characteristics of the Sample**

| Socio-economic Class  | Household Size (Mean) | Mean Income | Educational Level | Percent with Working Wife |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|-------------|-------------------|---------------------------|
| Blue-Collar Families  | 4.2                   | \$12,548    | 12.8              | 7.7%                      |
| White-Collar Families | 3.6                   | \$12,760    | 14.7              | 10.0%                     |
| t values              | 3.218                 | .3300       | 5.246             | .3938                     |

to include in the reported findings. Only areas within the dwelling were included.

In comparisons of frequency of room use for various activities during the hour between 5 and 6 p.m., no significant differences were found between the two occupational groups ( $t=1.28$ ). The mean number of activities per location for blue-collar families was 2.33, while the mean for white-collar families was 2.12.

Differences in the use of individual rooms for specific activities for the two occupational classes was not significant except for leisure activities in the living room. In a frequency count of various types of leisure activities in the living room, blue-collar families were observed 102 times in these activities (50 families, 210 persons) and white-collar families were observed 54 times (50 families, 179 persons).

During the 5-6 p.m. hour, most of the blue-collar workers had arrived home and activity was at a peak, which is shown by the intensity of living room use especially for leisure activities. Even though the majority of family members were present, house care was still going on in the living room area. Guests had even dropped in at some homes. In the white-collar homes some of the household heads were still at work and other family members were still away from the premises.

The dining room was used specifically for eating at this time of day by both family types and at approximately the same frequency. However, in the kitchen, meals and snacks were observed more frequently in the blue-collar homes.

Interaction through conversation was more frequent at this hour in white-collar homes, while interaction in leisure activities was more frequent in blue-collar homes.

The fact that blue-collar workers often do more physically oriented labor than white-collar workers may be the explanation for the greater usage of the bathroom for bathing at this hour. The extra grooming recorded in white-collar families may be due to the wives preparation for their husbands' arrival home.

Three of the husbands in blue-collar families

napped at this hour. The amount of studying by children in bedrooms was comparable between the two groups; however, more blue-collar children studied in the living room than white-collar children.

In this study in Hendricks County, Indiana, which compared the use of residential living space by blue-collar families and by white-collar families, it was observed that the two family-types used their spaces the same way for some activities and differently for others at the 5-6 p.m. hour. However, the differences were not significant except for the use of the living room for leisure activities. The results of this small study imply that similar design criteria may be appropriate for blue-collar and white-collar families.

#### **Limitations of the Study and Implications for Further Research**

The study of blue-collar and white-collar families' use of space was limited by its small sample size, by the fact that it was conducted in a single Indiana county, and by the limitation of having data concerning only the 5-6 p.m. hour of a typical weekday. These limitations were necessary for control over the sample for statistical evaluation. The sample size was limited by research funds available.

It would be of interest to study other time periods during weekdays as well as weekends to see if significant differences occur in specific activity/locations. For any valid conclusions concerning the use of dwelling space, a regional study of the United States should be conducted including all socio-economic class, stages of the family life cycle and hours of the day.

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