

PERCEPTIVE BOUNDARIES: A PROPOSED SOCIOPSYCHOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK FOR HOUSING ADEQUACY

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Abstract

This preliminary study examines the conceptual links among variables employed in Housing Adjustment Theory (Morris and Winter, 1975) and Housing Values (Cutler, 1947; Beyer, Mackesey, and Montgomery, 1955). Two variables--the perception of adequate housing and sociopsychological housing congruence--are added to the five fundamental, sociopsychological aspects cited from previous studies. The framework for a new model is proposed with these new variables. By adding the perceptual boundaries embodied in the new variables to the established models, the new paradigm may offer solutions to inconsistencies in the body of housing research by including the personal value system of the individual or family involved in housing adjustment and adaptation.

Introduction

Housing preferences and housing satisfaction of individuals and families have been studied extensively over the past several decades. Major objectives of these efforts have been to identify specific characteristics of the housing environment associated with the sociopsychological needs of individuals and families. Specific attention has been given to identifying spatial and cultural norms for housing and in determining how, or if, these norms influence housing preferences and housing satisfaction. A review of studies in these areas was undertaken in an effort to identify factors associated with housing adequacy from a sociopsychological perspective and to understand the role of these factors in the housing-decision process.

The objectives of this paper are to 1) present a general overview of theoretical works in the sociopsychology of housing, 2) identify other studies contributing to the body of knowledge, 3) show how these works may be integrated, 4) discuss limitations associated with the integration, and 5) propose a theoretical framework that has the potential of differentiating among the myriad factors. Procedures used in conducting the literature review and in classifying and categorizing variables are reported in Weber, McCray, and Day (1987).

Existing Conceptual Models

Housing preferences and housing satisfaction are frequently considered in the context of sociopsychological requirements of the housing environment. Two theoretical models, Housing Adjustment Theory (Morris and Winter, 1975) and Housing Values (Cutler, 1947; Beyer, Macksey, and Montgomery, 1955) have been frequently used as frameworks for hypothesis testing. Housing Adjustment Theory (HAT) presents a conceptual framework for understanding housing-adjustment behaviors. The family is viewed as evaluating their housing in terms of cultural and family norms. Housing-adjustment behaviors such as residential mobility, residential adaptation, and family adaptation are responses to housing deficits created when current housing does not satisfy individual or family needs that are based on prevailing housing norms.

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Empirical data supports the usefulness of HAT in understanding housing preferences and satisfactions. Specifically, housing norms represent the cultural standards against which housing conditions are judged. There are set standards for space, tenure, dwelling type, quality, and neighborhood and location (Morris and Winter, 1978).

Cutler (1947) introduced the concept that housing values represent the transformation of important personal values to the housing environment. Beyer, MacKeseey, and Montgomery (1955) later developed house plans that attempted to translate these housing values into the design of a more livable shelter. The major assumption on which the works of both Cutler (1947) and Beyer, et al. (1955) were based is that houses would be more livable if designed to accommodate sociopsychological or "human" needs. Stoekeler and Hasagawa (1974) extended the conceptual base of these works by suggesting that individuals have an operative value system related to unspecified situations. Housing values then actuate this value system in a specific situation that is related to housing. Based on these studies, several categories of housing values have been identified that seem to cluster together. These value clusters include economy, family, personal, and social (Beyer, et al., 1955).

Concepts from housing-adjustment and housing-values models are vital in understanding the individual and family motivations that influence housing preferences and housing satisfaction. The literature, however, suggests that additional factors may be important as well. Variables such as cultural background, neighborhood quality, income, race, family size and structure, etc. are frequently studied in the context of these model-based concepts. Many such studies explored relationships in terms of housing-adjustment behaviors. For example, Rossi (1955) suggested that residential mobility is the process of maintaining equilibrium when lifecycle changes dictate a change in housing needs. In this sense, the potential of disequilibrium or dissatisfaction is increased when changes occur in specific attributes of the family such as its stage in the family lifecycle (Inman, 1981). The concept of constraints to specific adjustment alternatives has also been considered in studies of housing preferences and satisfactions (Foote, Abu-Lughod, Foley and Winnick, 1960; and Lindamood and Hanna, 1979).

Based on these studies it seems logical to consider the combined effects of family, housing, and neighborhood variables on a household's evaluation of its housing situation. The authors of this paper propose a conceptual model with the potential to clarify the interrelationships and interactions of these myriad concepts. Empirical testing of this model should add to our knowledge of the interface between man and environment.

Literature Review

A summary of selected findings from housing preferences and housing-satisfaction research is presented in Tables 1 through 4. The studies reviewed were designed to identify housing and nonhousing factors related to preferences and to satisfaction with specific housing components. A major selection criterion was the degree to which the findings established linkages among variables. Greninger (1973), McKown (1975), Meadows (1970), and McCray and Day (1977) found that satisfaction with present housing is influenced by factors other than characteristics of the dwelling unit. Previous residence, income, length of current residency, mobility, education, employment, and stage in the family lifecycle were found to influence both preferences and satisfactions. Other variables that influenced resident satisfaction were standard of living (Gamble, 1977), socioeconomic homogeneity (Fish, 1974), and percent of owner-occupied units per area (Field, 1975).

Campbell, Converse, and Rogers (1976) studied broad categories of satisfaction by demographic variables. Their analysis showed that in reports of housing satisfaction, age exhibited the strongest influence. These authors also found older persons to be more satisfied and, in fact, found a parallel between housing satisfaction and age. They concluded by questioning whether these differences are truly age related or related to other factors influenced by age.

Table 1. Summary of major findings in the field of housing preferences.

Finding	Source
Preferences of cultural subgroups approximate those of other Americans.	Montgomery and McCabe, 1973; Goss and Day, 1984; McCray and Day, 1977; and Stewart, 1973.
Blacks may have different preferences for housing characteristics than do Whites.	McKinsey and Lane, 1983.
User perceptions are important in defining satisfaction with residential exteriors.	Stoekeler, 1980.
Housing preferences of Blacks and Whites are similar; differences in housing conditions are due to discrimination.	Hanna and Lindamood, 1978.
Income constraints impact actual housing but preferences for structure and tenure type do not differ by income.	Morris, Winter, and Oward, 1984; and Guy and Pol, 1983.
Future spatial preferences are related to past spatial experiences.	Eidit, 1972.
Housing preferences differ by family type and characteristics.	Banner, Barhaide, and Greckel, 1982; and Dillman, Tremblay, and Dillman, 1979.
Primary contributors to housing preferences and expectations for ownership were expected income and expected children.	Rees, 1976.
Housing preferences influence housing satisfaction.	Dagwell, 1974.

Table 2. Summary of major findings in the field of space norms and housing needs.

Finding	Source
Crowding has direct impact on desire to move.	Bresler, 1975.
Normative housing deficits are predictors of propensity to move.	Morris, Crull, and Winter, 1978.
Housing needs differ by family type and structure.	Smith, 1973.
Social activities influence housing needs.	Downer, 1989.

Table 3. Summary of major findings in the field of housing satisfaction.

Findings	Source
Overall satisfaction with various features influence a desire to alter features or housing.	Heide, 1971; Morris, Crull, and Winter, 1978; and Lauener, 1977.
Satisfaction is influenced by life cycle and other characteristics of families.	Bilderback, 1972; Meadows, 1970; Rogers and Nikkel, 1979; White, 1969; Yearns, 1972; and McKown, 1975.
Housing satisfaction is related to aspirations, expectations, and housing improvements.	Brink and Johnston, 1979; and Goss and Day, 1984.
Design and nondesign factors influenced user satisfaction.	Case and Schlagel, 1980; Courville, 1977; Dagnore, Feldman, Hilton, Love, and Schearer, 1979; McCray, 1975; Gortus, 1970; and Teitzel, 1968.
Attributes of housing are more important than characteristics of consumers in predicting housing satisfaction.	Eubank, 1982; and Field, 1975.
Satisfaction with specific dwelling features is direct predictor of house/neighborhood satisfaction.	Windley and Scheidt, 1983.
Housing satisfaction contributes to overall life satisfaction.	Peck and Stewart, 1985; and Tucker, 1989.
Residential satisfaction is related to characteristics of the neighborhood.	Fish, 1973; Peck and Stewart, 1985; and Prentice, 1977.
Residents' satisfaction with alternative structure types (except mobile homes) does not differ from satisfaction with conventional.	Lam, 1985.
Satisfaction in rental housing decreased if residents placed importance upon housing features not present or not adequate, or if residents considered rental housing as temporary.	Jarosz, 1978.
Housing satisfaction is influenced by past housing experiences, i.e. size, type, and location of former residence.	White, 1989.
No significant differences in homeowner satisfaction with manufactured or conventional houses.	Moore, 1979; and Moore and Crocker, 1979.
Housing quality is related to housing satisfaction.	Yearns, 1972; Harris, 1976; and Tucker, 1989.

Table 4. Summary of major findings in the field of culture and cultural norms.

Finding	Source
Cultural norms in housing related to technology, economics, religion, politics, and social life of man.	Selkurt, 1973; Bush, 1975; and Campbell, 1975.
Cultural differences exist in preferences for certain housing characteristics.	Kinsey and Lane, 1975.
Cultural norms for housing among subgroups in America tend to merge consistently with some image of a "typical" American home.	Montgomery and McCabe, 1973; Goss and Day, 1984; and McCray, 1975.
Cultural differences exist in stated needs for privacy.	Stewart, 1973.

Studies of housing aspirations, housing preferences, and housing satisfactions among cultural subgroups in the U.S. (Goss and Day, 1984; Montgomery and McCabe, 1973; McCray and Day, 1977; Hanna and Lindamood, 1979; Owstany, 1966; Stewart, 1973; and Rees, 1976) suggest that the housing aspirations and preferences of various subgroups are consistent with some image of the "typical American home." In contrast, Kinsey and Lane (1983) and Stewart (1973) found evidence of cultural differences in housing preferences for certain housing characteristics.

Other differences in findings were noted as well. Kinsey and Lane (1983) suggest that black households and white households have different preferences for housing characteristics. Hanna and Lindamood (1979) report similar preferences for the two groups, yet note that differences in housing conditions may be due to discrimination. Early studies of race-related housing issues suggest that racial prejudice limits the housing possibilities that would be available to minorities if ability-to-pay was the only criterion (Downs, 1973). Taeuber and Taeuber (1972) studied neighborhood residential segregation and noted the influence of discrimination on the evolution of black neighborhoods. Although these studies reflect attitudes of the early 1970s, the works of Lindamood and Hanna (1979) and Flaming and Griffith (1990) suggest that racial factors continue to play a role in housing acquisition. Again, statistical models that clarify relationships between race and housing acquisition need to be developed.

Inconsistent findings are also noted in the arena of satisfaction with specific housing forms. Differences are noted in both definition of the satisfaction variable and in findings from comparative studies.

Moore (1976), and Moore and Crocker (1979), reported no differences in homeowner satisfaction with manufactured and conventional housing. More recently, however, Lam (1985) found that residents of mobile homes were less satisfied with their housing than were residents of conventional or other alternative housing types. Although the fit between these results is not readily apparent, the discrepancy may be related in part to the absence of a conceptual base that encompasses all of the variables. In addition, many of the findings were generated using descriptive statistics and analytical procedures that do not measure the simultaneous effects of multiple variables.

Need for Integration of Concepts

Housing Adjustment Theory and Housing Values (HV) models are unquestionably important in understanding sociopsychological aspects of housing. Both are frequently cited in studies of housing preferences and satisfaction and are frequently used as conceptual models for studying a multitude of other housing-related issues. Yet, no conceptual model indicates how and to what extent the two models overlap. Moreover, existing models fail to address definitively the interface between housing preferences and satisfaction, nor have they addressed the roles these play in the housing-decision process. For example, at what point in the decision process are housing preferences most important? And, how do families resolve incongruence between housing preferences and housing characteristics? The three deficit responses in HAT would suggest three alternative modes of action: 1) residential mobility, 2) residential adaptation, and 3) family adaptation. The literature on housing values suggests that adapting to a housing deficit may not remove the deficit if the adaptation is in conflict with the family's established values. Conversely, if economic or other limitations restrict residential mobility and adaptation options, how does the individual or family reconcile the deficit? Clarity is needed regarding these relationships.

A second area of concern is in defining and measuring housing satisfaction. In prior studies, housing satisfaction has sometimes been measured by a single question such as, "How satisfied are you with your housing?" In other instances, satisfaction with specific attributes of the house and neighborhood are rated and the ratings are then combined into a composite housing-satisfaction score. Intrinsic within these measurement systems are conceptual differences in the definition of housing satisfaction. Generally, studies that quantify responses from a single question conceptualize satisfaction as a measure of utility as defined by Duesenburry (1949). In this sense, satisfaction represents an overall assessment of the level of contentment or fulfillment received from the housing environment. On the other extreme, housing satisfaction is defined as a composite assessment of the utility of specific housing attributes. Depending on the level of quality and completeness in the measurement scheme, the sum of the parts may not equal the whole for composite-score systems. However, when a single measure is used the averaging of a plurality of factors may result in a loss of specificity regarding housing satisfaction. Conceptually, both the single-measure and the composite-measure systems for defining satisfaction have limitations when employed separately. Given these concerns, the authors devised a conceptual base with the potential to clarify these measurement and operational differences.

Proposed Framework

McCullers (1984) suggests that the exploration of conceptual linkages in research may be accomplished by either deductive or inductive approaches. The deductive approach employs hypotheses that are formally derived from theory. The inductive approach produces theory from the predisposition of existing data. Because this effort is based on a review of existing findings, the inductive approach is used to explore plausible relationships.

The proposed framework represents a preliminary step in exploring interactions and relationships among the variables used in studying sociopsychological aspects of housing. The ideas presented are not new but are offered in an organizational structure that appears useful in pulling together and clarifying existing knowledge. A major objective in examining the sociopsychological aspects of housing is to gain a general view of the relationship between the housing milieu and an overall sense of well-being. Primarily, five variables or categories of variables have been studied in the past: 1) housing satisfactions, 2) housing preferences, 3) housing characteristics, 4) family characteristics, and 5) neighborhood characteristics including services and location. The proposed perceptible boundaries framework includes these five and two additional variables: 6) perception of adequate housing and 7) sociopsychological housing congruence.

The following definitions were actuated for the model:

Perception of adequate housing--a composite image of all elements in the housing environment necessary to support minimally acceptable standards of living. These images are influenced by cultural background, housing norms, housing values, and prior experiences with various housing features and forms.

Sociopsychological housing congruence--The overall fit between the housing environment and its ability to support individual and family needs, activities, and other requirements.

Housing satisfaction--the contentment experienced by an individual or family relative to specific elements in the housing environment.

Housing preferences--specific quantitative and qualitative characteristics or elements desired in the housing environment.

Housing characteristics--the combination of features, forms, and amenities that combine to shape the micro-housing environment. Included are the array of distinguishing traits peculiar to a specific housing unit. This includes its structure; type and condition; the number; size and shape of rooms; and other interior and exterior spatial divisions.

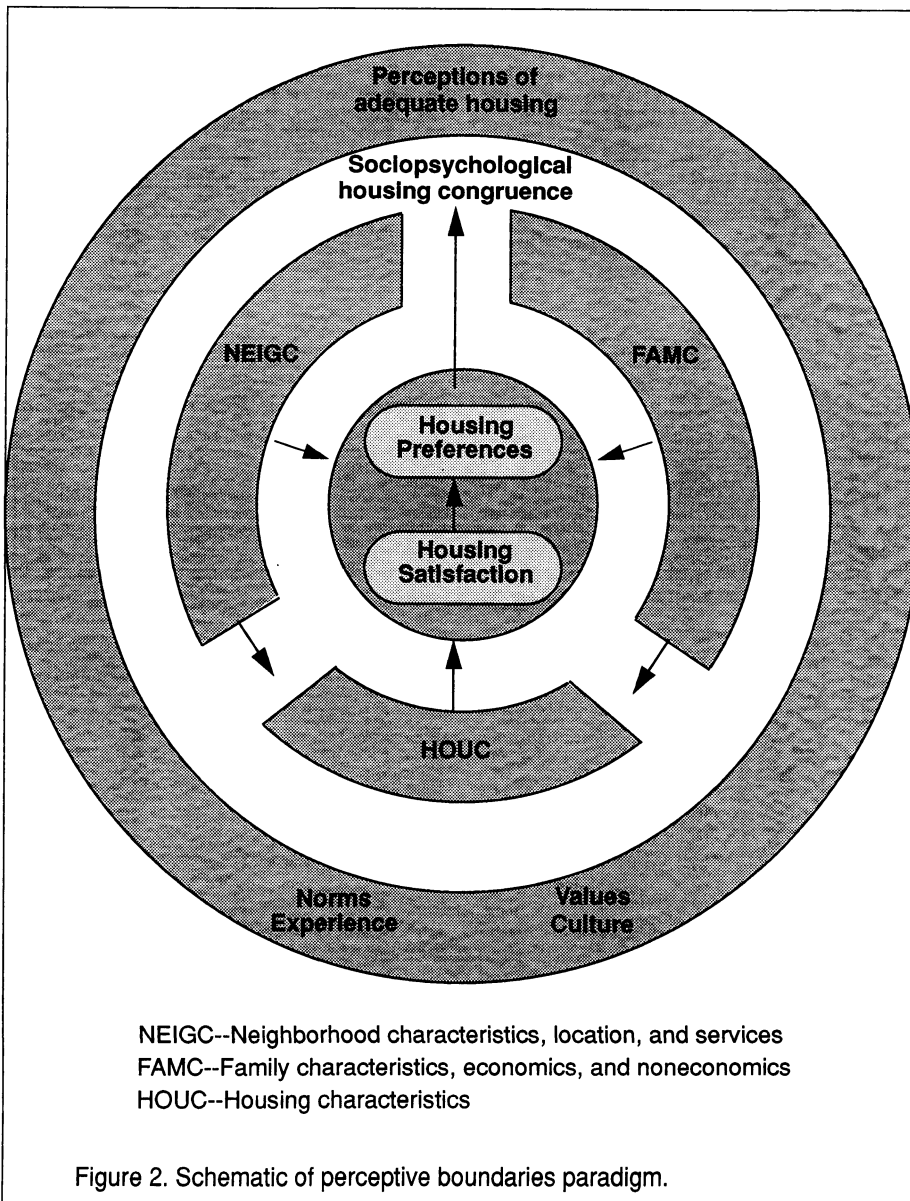
Neighborhood characteristics--the combination of distinguishing traits peculiar to the macro-environment of a housing unit. Included are locational characteristics, plus community services and amenities that have locality reference.

Family characteristics--income, wealth, and demographic traits peculiar to a family unit. These characteristics include age, family type and composition, and stage in the family lifecycle.

Figure 2 presents a schematic diagram of the proposed framework. Perceptions of adequate housing form boundaries around the multiple variables that influence the equilibrium or congruence between the housing unit and sociopsychological requirements supported by the housing environment. Housing preferences and housing satisfaction are intervening variables that represent the consumers' evaluation of present and desired housing attributes. At another level of influence are specific characteristics of the family unit, the housing unit, and the surrounding neighborhood that influence housing preferences and housing satisfaction. Indirectly, sociopsychological housing congruence is an intervening variable at this level.

This proposed framework considers housing adequacy from a sociopsychological perspective. By conceptualizing perception of adequate housing as a composite of all variables that define desired housing, the proposed framework is useful in clarifying the area of co-existence between HAT and HV models. This composite view also accommodates the influence of culture and life experiences in the housing-decision process.

The appropriateness of adding the two new factors is supported by the widely accepted economic concept of Utility Theory and is consistent with both housing-adjustment and housing-values models. The psychological interpretation of Utility Theory suggests that the usefulness a consumer receives from a product depends not on his consumption level, but on the relationship of consumption level to the average of other consumption standards to which he is directly exposed. (Duesenburry, 1949). In the framework of the proposed model, this average-consumption standard is defined as one's perception of adequate housing, with adequate housing as the minimal level of utility a specific consumer seeks from his housing. In the housing-adjustment model, perceptions of adequate housing may be viewed as the combination of space, tenure, or cultural background, and other housing norms. In terms of the housing-values model, the implementation of one's personal value system in a housing discrepancy helps form the composite image of what housing "ought to be."



The sociopsychological housing-congruence variable is included in an effort to resolve the problem of inconsistent measurement and definition of housing satisfaction. In this sense, the congruence variable is perceived as overall utility (the composite measure) and housing satisfaction is viewed as the assessment of specific housing characteristics (the single measure).

In the proposed paradigm, sociopsychological housing congruence is the desired result and represents maximal utility of the housing environment. In this sense sociopsychological housing congruence parallels the "general sense of well-being" related to the housing-environment domain as discussed by Campbell, et al. (1976). Sociopsychological housing congruence may be viewed as the major recipient variable in the model because it appears to be either directly or indirectly influenced by all other variables. Perception of adequate housing is the major donor variable because it appears to influence sociopsychological housing congruence and all other variables in the proposed model.

According to McCullers (1984), formal theory is a tentative explanation of some process or event. When theory is induced from data, the initial relevance of the theoretical explanation is determined by how precisely the essential features of the explanation relate to each other and the data. Because a theory offers a tentative explanation, its long-term relevance is determined by how precisely the model allows integration of new data. Therefore, theory development is not static; new observations and explanations replace old ones (McCullers, 1984). The linchpin for this mechanism is that some explanation exist as a basis for hypothesis testing and replication.

If the perceptive boundaries paradigm can withstand the rigor of extensive hypothesis testing, differences in response behaviors to deficit-housing situations may be partly explained by differences in perceptions of adequacy. In essence, the tolerance level of housing deficiencies among specific individuals and families may vary because of the differences in life experiences, values, and cultural background have formed different perceptions of housing adequacy. Questions regarding the interface of housing preference, housing satisfactions, and specific housing and family characteristics appear to be resolved as well.

Summary and Conclusions

This study attempts to organize results from prior studies on the sociopsychological aspects of housing. It was limited to identifying conceptual linkages from existing findings as a preliminary step in developing a theoretical framework from which sociopsychological aspects of housing can be studied and clarified. The proposed model also integrates a psychological interpretation of the widely used economic model of Utility Theory.

Clearly, many of the questions raised in this paper remain unanswered. Identifying linkages from findings generated by unrelated studies using different statistical procedures, sampling frames, and respondent groups certainly has limitations. The application of multi-variate statistical procedures from a single data base is required to empirically test the overall model. The hypothetical relationships presented are offered only as a proposed framework for hypothesis testing.

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