

Equity and Respect Issues Related to Manufactured Homeowners in Mobile Home Rental Parks

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Abstract

This survey research study examined equity and respect issues in mobile home rental parks. A random sample for this investigation included 895 manufactured homeowners residing in the state of California. Data were extracted through completion of a self-administered questionnaire. T-tests were employed to determine the existence of differences between gender responses. T-test results did not reflect any gender differences in subject responses to questionnaire items identified as addressing issues of equity and respect. Both male and female manufactured homeowners appeared dissatisfied with statements identified as equity and respect issues in mobile home rental parks. Analysis of survey items identified as addressing issues of equity and respect revealed that the most frequently selected response was **strong disagreement**. For example, 28.6% of the survey respondents did not perceive their park owners to be fair in dealing with them.

Introduction

Although much of the manufactured home literature reflects varied interests in this unique mode of living, the author found no empirical studies conducted that address how manufactured homeowners, both male and female, view their park owners in various issues that reflect prosocial organizational behavior of equity and respect. Equity addresses general principles of fairness and impartiality, while respect involves individuals being considered valuable ends in themselves. Such perceptions may or may not represent the actual performance of rental park owners. Nevertheless, perceptions are recognized in this study to be possible indicators of manufactured homeowner satisfaction in mobile home rental parks.

Perceptions represent a process through which individuals receive and interpret information about their environment. According to Robbins (1993), people's behavior is based on their perceptions of what reality is, not reality itself. Since perceptions ultimately serve to guide our actions, the data derived from this study could be used by mobile home rental park owners to enhance the satisfaction of day-to-day living in their respective parks.

Background

People have chosen to live in manufactured homes in parks for various reasons: a community style of living, efficiency (space well utilized), low maintenance, and affordability. Moore and Crocker (1979) documented that the homeowners in their study were satisfied with their new houses regardless of whether the houses were built in factory manufactured housing or on location. Their research effort involved comparisons of demographic characteristics and housing satisfactions of 64 homeowners living in a suburban neighborhood containing single-family detached dwellings of similar cost, size, age, and appearance. Thirty-two homeowners lived in manufactured houses that were assembled in the same factory and moved to one of two adjacent subdivisions, while the remaining half of the study sample consisted of randomly selected homeowners who lived in conventionally built units. All respondents who were interviewed resided in new houses of similar cost, size, and appearance.

In 1987, a nationwide manufactured home survey was conducted by National Family Opinion Inc. (NFO), an independent market research firm on behalf of the Foremost Group

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of Insurance Companies. Since there is no countrywide list of all existing mobile homeowners available for sampling, a panel was utilized as opposed to a random sample of mobile homeowners. Questionnaires were mailed to over 23,000 households in manufactured homes across the United States. Specifically, California data from this study revealed the following information relating to 1,521 manufactured home households with respect to their satisfaction with mobile home living: 69% were very satisfied, and 23% were somewhat satisfied. In other words, 92% of the California respondents (approximately 1,399 mobile home households) reflected a positive living experience in their housing mode. In spite of these positive reports, however, phrases such as "captured clients" (California Report and Transcript of Hearing on Mobile Home Park Leases, 1986) occasionally have surfaced throughout such housing communities in the United States. Vivert (1988) comments on "mounting grievances, escalating rent increases, harassment by park managers and prevailing uncorrected conditions in mobile home communities" (p. 5).

Perhaps efficiency, minimal upkeep, and economics are not the only indicators to be acknowledged when measuring manufactured homeowner satisfaction in rental parks. Respect, for example, may need to be examined since it is a higher order need. For the vast majority of U.S. consumers, lower-order physiological needs have been satisfied by our higher standard of living (Scott, Warsaw, & Taylor, p. 132). Simply put, the American consumer expects more and expresses dissatisfaction when services, for example, are not rendered in an impartial, respectful manner. It also may be that a comparison of male and female manufactured homeowners could possibly reveal differences in perceptions regarding their respective treatment by park owners.

While organizations such as the Western Mobile Home Association of Park Owners are to be commended for capturing the spirit of the ethical concerns of equity and respect in their Code of Ethics, it now seems timely to address the extent to which the spirit of that code is perceived as being practiced.

Since approximately 6,688,000 individuals live in mobile homes/trailers (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1987) throughout the United States, many of whom live in mobile home parks, it is useful to know if issues relating to respect and equity are important to manufactured homeowners residing in mobile home rental parks. Specifically, does gender make a difference in how the study respondents replied to questions relating to equity and respect? In other words, would it matter more to a female homeowner as opposed to a male homeowner whether or not a park owner listens to their respective mobile park living suggestions and concerns?

Objectives

The first objective was to develop functions believed to be related to equity and respect that represent levels of agreement/disagreement among respondent statements. Another objective of this study was to infer the extent of relationships between male and female answers in their view of park owners identified through application of a Principal Components Analysis to be related to equity and/or respect. This type of analysis clusters variables into principal components.

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were generated for investigation. They represent the items found in Cluster I, following a Principal Components Analysis on all the statements contained in Part II of the survey. They are the functions believed to be related to issues of equity and respect.

- H¹ Men and women respond the same to the statement: My park owner is fair in his dealings with me.
- H² Men and women respond the same to the statement: My park owner treats park residents with respect.
- H³ Men and women respond the same to the statement: My park owner is open to suggestions offered by homeowners about the quality of park living.
- H⁴ Men and women respond the same to the statement: My park owner listens to homeowner complaints.

- H⁵ Men and women respond the same to the statement: My park owner explains rent increase amounts to be charged during the life of the lease at the time the lease is signed.

Methodology

A random sample included 970 manufactured homeowners, who represent a little under 1% of the total Golden State Mobile homeowners League (GSMOL) Membership. This sample list was then double-checked for possible duplication of respondent names. As a result, a sample of 895 respondents was ultimately generated. Membership in the Golden State Mobile homeowners League Association is open to all manufactured homeowners in the state of California. Even mobile home park owners can be members of the GSMOL. This population was selected because it was thought to contain a representative cross section of manufactured homeowners throughout California. According to the California Department of Housing and Community Development, mobile home spaces as of August 14, 1989 were approximately 375,110.

Table 1. Selected background characteristics of respondents.

Characteristic	Number	Percent
Years in Park		
less than 5	174	28.3
6 to 10	179	29.5
16 to 20	81	13.2
11 to 15	148	24.1
21 to 25	13	2.1
26 or more	13	2.1
Age (Years)		
less than 30	2	.3
31 to 40	11	1.8
41 to 50	30	4.9
51 to 60	73	11.9
61 to 70	228	37.2
over 70	269	43.9
Gender		
Male	345	57.7
Female	197	32.9
Manufactured Home Size		
single wide	106	17.3
double wide	433	70.5
two-story	3	.5
triple wide	52	8.5
other (w/ addition to single wide)	20	3.3
1988 Base Rent Increase		
once	522	85.6
twice	32	5.3
never	35	5.7
other	2	.3
Garbage Pickup		
twice a week	204	33.2
once a week	363	59.1
once every two weeks	0	0
once a month	1	.2
other (dispose of themselves)	46	7.5
Maintenance of "Common Areas"		
weekly	308	52.1
twice a month	108	18.3
other	175	29.6

In order to enhance the number of questionnaire returns, an announcement of this study appeared in the May, 1989 issue of the *Californian*, a GSMOL publication:

...a research professor from a New York University is checking out California's mobile home living. The four-page survey sheets, printed on mint green paper with a cover letter from Murphy, plus an addressed return envelope will be arriving this week in the mail of random-selected resident representatives. Recipient cooperation to complete the sheets and return them to Murphy is strongly urged by the League. (pp. 1, 11)

Within two to three days after the *Californian* mailing, the survey was also mailed out. All questionnaires were mailed first class in the period of May 6 to May 8, 1989. Upon completing the self-administered questionnaire, the respondents were instructed to seal the questionnaire and return it in the self-addressed, stamped envelope therein provided.

The questionnaire format presented questions/statements to be addressed in two parts. The first part (Part I) represented manufactured homeowner background information (example: age of respondent). Frequencies were used to describe demographic characteristics of the sample (See Table I).

The second part presented various statements dealing with perceptions of how manufactured homeowners view their respective park owners. The questions in Part II of the survey were based on the California Mobile Park Owner's Alliance Code of Ethics, which reflects commitment to: well-maintained common areas and park services, enforcement of rules and regulations in an equitable and forthright manner, mutual respect, and receptivity to constructive suggestions. In addition, conversations with dozens of manufactured homeowners provided additional considerations to be addressed such as pass-throughs. Pass-throughs represent the passing of certain increases or decreases in basic operating expenses to manufactured homeowners. The questions ultimately generated attempted to measure the perceptions of respondents relating to respect and equity in the process of their daily mobile home park living.

Data were tabulated and reported by the researcher. Of the 895 questionnaires mailed, ten were returned (forwarding address unknown) and seven respondents indicated that their rental parks no longer were rental parks (now resident owned). Of the remaining 878 questionnaires, a total of 615 surveys were completed and returned for a usable return rate of 70%.

Analysis

Respondents indicated one of nine levels of response. These response levels ranged from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree." A "does not apply" category was also provided in the event respondents felt that a statement was not applicable to their particular living circumstance. SYSTAT (Wilkinson, 1988) was used to compute the various statistical analyses utilized in this study. Specific data analyses are discussed in terms of the study's two objectives:

Objective 1

Before functions related to equity and respect were generated, frequencies were generated on the opinion questions found in Part II of the survey. The 14 statements in this section were presented on a ten point scale, from **strongly agree** to **strongly disagree**, with a **does not apply** category included as well in Table 2. **Strongly agree** is 1 on this scale, with **strongly disagree** being 9. The **does not apply** is 10 on the scale.

An effort was then made to determine the efficacy of the equity/respect statements on the survey through utilization of a Principal Components Analysis. In other words: Did the respondents view the statements in Part II of the survey as issues of either respect or equity as the research intended? The researcher considered some statements more straightforward than others:

--Direct Statement:

My park owner is fair in his dealing with me.

Table 2. The extreme for this table are: 1 is "Strongly Agree," and 9 is "Strongly Disagree." The descriptor for the Value of 10 is "Does not Apply."
 TABLE OF PERCENTAGES FOR LEVELS OF AGREEMENT/DISAGREEMENT (AD) FOR QUESTIONS IN PART II OF SURVEY

QUESTIONS	Mean Response										
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
1. Your park's Exercise/Recreation Room is kept in working order.	23.0	7.6	8.5	4.7	20.2	3.6	4.6	2.7	9.9	14.5	2.7
2. Your Pool is kept in working order.	28.2	9.5	7.7	4.9	21.3	4.3	4.7	3.5	7.1	8.4	2.6
3. If you had a complaint with your park owner during the last six months, it was handled to your satisfaction.	10.6	4.3	4.9	2.2	10.7	2.7	6.3	3.0	32.7	20.4	3.0
4. My park owner is fair in his dealing with me.	17.5	5.8	5.4	3.2	18.5	4.1	8.2	4.9	28.6	3.0	3.0
5. My park owner would give park residents the first opportunity to buy the park if he/she were selling the park.	14.5	3.3	2.7	1.7	15.5	2.7	3.6	3.6	30.4	16.1	3.1
6. My park owner initiates pass-throughs without the vote of homeowners (e.g. road improvements within park).	40.0	3.2	4.9	1.1	9.2	0.8	1.0	1.6	19.7	16.1	3.4
7. My park owner does share utility discounts obtained from use of Master Utility Systems with homeowners in the park.	10.4	1.9	0.6	1.3	8.0	0.8	3.0	2.1	48.7	18.1	3.0
8. My park owner should make a reasonable profit	47.6	8.2	6.8	3.6	23.0	1.3	1.1	0.6	4.1	3.0	2.2
9. My park owner explains rent increase amounts to be charged during the life of the lease at the time the lease is signed.	17.0	2.7	4.9	1.7	10.1	1.0	2.4	2.4	28.6	27.0	3.3
10. My park owner treats park's residents with respect.	18.6	5.1	6.3	3.2	19.0	4.1	4.4	3.6	32.0	2.2	3.0
11. My park owner is open to suggestions offered by homeowners about the quality of park living.	14.8	3.3	5.2	3.9	13.9	3.6	6.5	6.6	38.0	3.0	3.0
12. My park owner listens to homeowner complaints.	15.0	4.6	7.0	3.8	5.3	5.1	6.9	6.5	32.2	2.5	3.0
13. My park owner maintains park facilities and grounds according to park rules and regulations.	21.8	7.1	7.7	2.8	20.5	4.1	6.5	4.9	22.7	1.4	3.0
14. My park owner told me that the park's land always would be used as a mobile home park site when I moved in.	17.4	2.2	1.4	1.6	9.2	0.8	2.4	0.5	34.7	25.7	3.4

**** Numbers may not total 100 percent due to rounding/missing responses
 ***** A value of 10 for "Does Not Apply" was not included in the analysis.

--Indirect Statement:

My park owner is open to suggestions offered by homeowners about the quality of park living.

In Components Analysis, the original variables in Part II (questions 1-23) were transformed into a new set of linear combinations; i.e. three principal components. The particular statistical analysis applied was Varimax (Kaiser, 1960). Varimax is considered "rigid" in the sense that the orthogonality (uncorrelatedness) of the components is maintained for the rotated factors (Stevens, 1986). This rotation essentially cleans up the factors; i.e. application of the Varimax tends to load high on a smaller number of variables and low or very low on the other variables. In this statistical analysis, the higher the loading factor number is, the greater the load is against the variable. Therefore, there is a greater likelihood that the variable is in the cluster. As a result of the Varimax utilization on the 23 variables, three clusters of principal components were derived: (1) respect and equity, (2) financial and, (3) maintenance. The following loadings (correlations with the underlying factors) were acknowledged in each of the three clusters.

Cluster 1: Respect and Equity

1. My park owner is fair in his dealing with me. Loading = .61.
2. My park owner treats me with respect. Loading = .72.
3. My park owner is open to suggestions offered by homeowners about the quality of park living. Loading = .78
4. My park owner listens to homeowner complaints. Loading = .72.
5. My park owner explains rent increase amounts to be charged during the life of the lease at the time the lease is signed. Loading = .65.

Cluster II: Financial Issues

1. My park owner initiates pass-throughs (example: road improvements within the park) without the vote of homeowners. Loading = .78.
2. My park owner does share utility discounts obtained from the use of Master Utility Systems with homeowners in the park. Loading = .63.
3. My park owner should make a reasonable profit. Loading = .63.

Cluster II: Maintenance

1. Your park exercise/recreation room is kept in working order. Loading = .73.
2. Your pool is kept in working order. Loading = .74.
3. My park owner told me that the park's land would always be used as a mobile home park site when I moved in. Loading = .69.

While the investigator considered equity and respect to be two separate issues, the survey respondents obviously did not. Rather than two separate issues, respondents acknowledged these components as one area of survey address (Cluster I).

Objective 2

T-tests were employed to determine the existence of differences between gender responses to questions identified in Cluster I. For the t-test analyses, a probability of .05 or less was used to denote a significant relationship (See Table 3).

Results

First of all, it is interesting to note chronologically that the age group of 50 years or older represented approximately 93% of the study sample. Within this group approximately 81% of the respondents are over 60 and almost 43% of them are over 70 years of age.

In analyzing the items identified in Cluster I as addressing issues of equity and respect, the most frequently selected response was **strong disagreement**. Apparently these survey respondents did not perceive their park owners: (1) to be fair in dealing with them; 28.6% of survey respondents; (2) to explain rent increase amounts to be charged, 28.6% of survey

Table 3. T-test of the difference in the mean value of opinion questions in part II of the survey according to gender.

Concept	Gender	No.	Mean	S.D.	F Ratio	P Ratio	*Sign Level
My PO is fair in dealing with me.	M	352	5.57	3.03	.04	.97	NS
	F	205	5.58	3.12			
My PO explains rent increase amount to be charged during life of lease at time lease is signed.	M	344	6.71	3.53	.05	.96	NS
	F	204	6.73	3.44			
My PO treats park residents w/ respect.	M	352	5.5	3.13	.44	.66	NS
	F	202	5.63	3.12			
My PO is open to suggestions offered by HO about quality of park living.	M	352	6.03	3.07	1.51	.13	NS
	F	206	6.44	3.09			
My PO listens to HO complaints.	M	351	5.74	3.02	.81	.42	NS
	F	205	5.96	3.11			

Note: Park Owners (PO)
Homeowners (HO)

**** Level of Significance for this study is <.05.

respondents; (3) to treat them with respect, 32% of survey respondent; (4) to be open to suggestions offered by homeowners about the quality of park living, 38% of survey respondents; and (5) to listen to homeowner complaints, 32% of survey respondents. As one reflects on these items and extracts verbs from them, words such as **fair, explains, treats with respect, open, and listens** provide insights into manufactured homeowners living expectations in mobile home rental parks. Additionally, the only open-ended question in the study also substantiated perceived feelings of dissatisfaction with the management/owners of their respective parks.

The open-ended question asked was: "If you could change anything in your park, what would it be?" Although 615 surveys were returned, only 16% of the Study's 615 respondents (227 respondents) acknowledged this question. Answers to this revealed that 44% of those who chose to address this statement (101 respondents out of 227 respondents) expressed dissatisfaction with the management/owner of their respective mobile home rental parks.

Independent t-tests were performed on five hypothetical statements identified by the researcher for investigation in this study. They indicate no evidence that differences in gender results in different responses to items in Cluster I. A statistical procedure was used to group items. The researcher identified these items as "equity" and "respect." None of the p values implied significant interaction (<.05) in this study: $H_1 = .97$; $H_2 = .96$; $H_3 = .66$; $H_4 = .13$; and $H_5 = .41$. These analyses suggest that female manufactured homeowners responded the same way as male manufactured homeowners did on the five statements under statistical investigation. Apparently, both male and female manufactured homeowners are dissatisfied with park owner treatment on issues relating to equity and respect.

Conclusions

This investigation represents a first study effort to investigate manufactured homeowners' perceptions of their park owners in areas of respect and equity. Although the sample was limited to the population of GSMOL members in California, it nevertheless indicates that gaps exist in various activities/relationships of day-to-day park living. Furthermore, the study gives credence to male and female study respondents being considered one group (Cluster I) in their address of the ethical issues of equity and respect. It appears to be the human condition, rather than a gender issue, to expect equity and respect in the business of mobile

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home rental park living. Of course, we live in an interactive world and perhaps perceptions differ because people are treated differently, not just because they expect the same treatment.

While this sample represents members of the GSMOL who could have had an "ax to grind," survey responses indicate that respondents did not simply record all responses in the negative. Statistical ranges indicate that varying ranges of opinions/perceptions were recorded.

This study lends support to the need for further investigation in this special industry niche. Perhaps future studies could comparatively address perceptions on issues relating to equity and respect of female manufactured homeowners with children as compared to male manufactured homeowners with children or minority manufactured homeowners versus those manufactured homeowners who are white and living in mobile home rental parks. Of course, homeowners with pets versus those without pets could be yet another area of comparative interest to analyze.

It is recommended that additional research efforts into this unique housing/service industry utilize a statewide manufactured homeowner rental park sample as opposed to gathering subjects from a homeowners' association.

Further research efforts into prosocial behavior such as equity and respect in the manufactured housing industry could provide the catalyst needed to spur the owners of rental parks to improve quality-of-life services indicated in the Park Owners Code of Ethics. In the January 1993 issue of the *WMA REPORTER*, the importance of resident relations was emphasized:

...there is one basic rule that never changes: need to communicate with our residents and treat them as customers. (p. 18)

When such statements are not only read but practiced by all park owners, perhaps, the saying, "a man's home is his castle" will become a reality to all those homeowners, regardless of their gender, who live in mobile home rental parks. Perhaps, then, the term, "captured clients" will fade into oblivion.

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