

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE VALUES OF HUSBANDS AND WIVES
AND THEIR DECISION TO PURCHASE LIVING SPACE

by

Denise Korpan Koss

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ABSTRACT

Interviews were conducted with 51 couples who had recently purchased living spaces in Winnipeg. It was hypothesized that the ranking of values which are guiding principles of life would be similar to the ranking of values which are guiding principles in the selection of living space; a husband and wife in a couple would have similar values; a husband and wife in a couple would list the same design features as important; design features ranked as most important would be present in the living space; and design features present in the living space would be related to living space values.

Findings of the study only support the first two hypotheses. Value hierarchies remained similar regardless of the situation. A husband and wife in a couple tended to rank values similarly but did not consider the same design features as important. Design features present in the living space were not necessarily those ranked as most important. Living space values did not seem to be related to design features present in the living space even when variables such as final decision-maker, income, downpayment, influence from family and friends, availability of housing, and consumer debt were partialled out.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Social psychologist, Milton Rokeach (1973: p. ix) wrote:

It is difficult for me to conceive of any problem social scientists might be interested in that would not deeply implicate human values.

Researchers and teachers in home economics seem to agree with this statement. Their writings show a long and continuing recognition of the importance of human values. Careful reading of the Proceedings of the Lake Placid Conferences (1899-1908) indicates "the unmistakable concern of the early home economists with the values and goals which underlie managerial decisions" (Gross, Crandall, and Knoll, 1973, p. 666). In 1955, a working Conference on Home Management dealt exclusively with the interrelationships of values and decision-making. At that conference, William McKee (1955, p. 8) cited Clyde Kluckhohn as characterizing the value problem "as easily the most significant intellectual problem of our time". McKee (1955, p. 8) describes the process of valuing as "one of the distinguishing characteristics of the human species". Paolucci and O'Brien (1960) suggest that "management is...a conscious mediation of a value system". Deacon and Firebaugh (1975, p. 140) believe that "values provide the underlying meanings that give continuity to all decisions and actions".

Although the belief that values are important in all forms of human endeavour is widely accepted, values are intangible and often unknown. They grow from a person's experiences and since each individual has different experiences, it can be expected that people will hold different values. However, the process of valuing is believed to be the same for everyone (Raths, Harmin, and Simon, 1966,

p. 28). Raths et al (1966, p. 30) have suggested criteria which describe the process of valuing. These include:

- Choosing: 1. freely
- 2. from alternatives
- 3. after thoughtful consideration of the consequences of each alternative
- Prizing: 4. cherishing, being happy with the choice
- 5. willing to affirm the choice publicly
- Acting: 6. doing something with the choice
- 7. repeatedly, in some pattern of life.

If something satisfies all seven of the criteria, then it can be called a value. Thus, values seem to manifest themselves concretely in the way people talk and in the way people act. Rescher (1969) thinks this manifestation is especially apparent in the pattern of expenditures of time, effort, and choices in the marketplace.

Of the many choices made in the marketplace by the family, none is probably quite so major as the one involving the purchase of living space. The living space represents a great expense to the family--approximately 16.1 percent of income is spent on principal, interest, and tax according to an urban family expenditure survey (Statistics Canada, 1975, p. 10). It represents the hub of the family's private world, the place to retreat and refresh from the stresses of our modern society (Montgomery, 1974, p. 10). It is also expected that the living space will provide a healthy and stimulating life that will contribute to the development of the family, the community, and the nation (Beyer, 1960, p. 644).

Montgomery (1974, p. 10) has observed that families are not doing too well in establishing some kind of satisfactory relationship between their own basic needs and their housing. How can this relationship be improved? It has been suggested that knowledge of what people

value will permit more satisfactory planning and designing of houses and ultimately, selection of living space which will better accommodate all the family's needs (Beyer, 1959, 1960, 1965; Beyer, Mackesey, and Montgomery, 1955; Carll, 1973; Cutler, 1947; Meeks, 1969; Obst, 1963). This research will attempt to examine whether a relationship exists between people's values and their decision to purchase living space. In this day of housing shortages and rapidly escalating costs, families are often limited in their housing choices. Hopefully this study will provide planners, architects, interior designers, home economists, sociologists, economists, builders, developers and marketers with a better understanding of what people look for in "good" housing. Perhaps then, even in a situation of limited choice, the decision to purchase will result in a satisfactory relationship between family needs and their housing.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE AND STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

Literature pertinent to the question, "What is the relationship of values to the decision to purchase living space?" may be subdivided into three categories: a) studies concerned with the decision-making process, b) literature pertaining to the concept of design and design features, and c) research concerning values and their relationship to housing. This chapter discusses the research in each category and reports the objectives, research questions, and hypotheses identified for this study.

Studies of the Decision-Making Process

Regardless of the specific nature of the problem, decision-making in any sphere usually follows the same basic process. What changes are the particular values, goals, resources, demands upon resources, and quantity and quality of interactions that take place during the process (Schlater, 1967, p. 95).

Analysis of the decision-making process by economists, home economists, psychologists, sociologists, administrators, business executives, and mathematicians has revealed certain findings which are relevant in a study of housing:

1. Decisions can be classified into certain types (Brim, Glass, Lavin, and Goodman, 1962; Diesing, 1962; Plonk, 1968). A decision such as the one involved in the purchase of living space is classified as a major or "central decision" since it is a crucial decision in the life of the decision-maker that leads to a chain of many minor but related decisions called "satellite decisions" (Plonk, 1968, p. 790).

2. The decision-making process can be thought of as consisting

of certain "normative" steps (Brim et al, 1962; Gross et al, 1973; Schomaker and Thorpe, 1963). Halliday (1964) questions this finding in regard to family decision-making. She feels that not enough research has been done to indicate how families approach either the important central decisions, or the little day-to-day decisions. She suggests that the decision-making process may be influenced by the importance of the decision as perceived by the decision-maker. In order to eliminate any uncertainty about the steps of the decision-making process, this study concerned itself with only one step, the final selection among all alternatives.

3. There is no perfectly rational decision-making (Brim et al, 1962; Emory and Niland, 1968), since human beings do not consider all possible courses of actions and objectives are not always stated explicitly. This finding has important implications in this study since even a careful consideration of family needs and values may not result in satisfactory housing.

Selection of living space, as well as being classified as a "central decision", is often considered a joint decision (Gallogly, 1973, p. 18), since it usually involves participation of both spouses and sometimes other household members or non-household members. The process of joint decision-making of husbands and wives has received a considerable amount of study. Sociologists and psychologists are concerned with the roles played by husbands and wives in joint decision-making and the dependence of these roles on various psychological and socio-economic factors (Blood and Wolfe, 1960; Kenkel, 1961; Mack, 1970; Safilios-Rothschild, 1969; Strodtbeck, 1951). Marketing and advertising researchers are concerned with determining which spouse

has the dominant influence in various types of decisions in order that marketing and advertising strategy can be oriented accordingly (Davis, 1970; 1971; Ferber and Lee, 1974; Sharp and Mott, 1956).

In many studies concerned with determining patterns of decision-making, information has been obtained only from the wife (Blood and Wolfe, 1960; Burchinal and Bauder, 1965; Davis, 1971; Wolgast, 1964). There is evidence now that responses of husbands and wives differ, although these differences may be obscured in aggregate analyses (Davis, 1970; Davis and Rigaux, 1974; Granbois and Willet, 1970; McCann, 1960; Scanzoni, 1965; Wilkening and Bharadwaj, 1967). Most studies of husband-wife decision-making report that agreement between husbands and wives concerning relative influence in decision-making is seldom much higher than 50 percent (Davis, 1971; Munsinger, Weber, and Hansen, 1975; Wilkening and Morrison, 1963).

As well as determining extent of agreement in decision-making between husbands and wives, Davis and Rigaux (1974, p. 51) also addressed themselves to the question, "Do marital roles in consumer decision-making differ by phase of the process?" They found that marital roles did vary throughout the three phases of the decision process. The phase of information search was characterized by more role specialization than either the phase of problem recognition or the final decision phase. This would suggest that in research about joint decision behaviour, each phase of the process must be considered separately.

A model of the decision-making process was used by Gallogly (1973) to study how families made housing decisions to locate in a planned community. She found that most families moved because they

needed more space. Desires for home ownership and financial concerns motivated another significantly large group. In their search for a house, respondents most often considered housing space and lay-out, the physical neighbourhood, and cost. The physical appearance of the neighbourhood appeared to be related to husband's occupation, being less important to craftsmen and labourers. The extent to which families value recreational facilities appeared to be related to prior place of residence, husband's age, wife's age and stage of family life cycle. Social climate seemed more important to former renters than to former owners, as did the cost of housing. Wife's age also appeared to correlate with social climate. Expanding families and families in child-rearing life cycle stages were the most interested in locating near good schools. There were no correlations between the family's decision to move to a planned community and house size and lay-out, nearness to shopping, nearness to family and friends, yard, modern equipment, and quality of public services (Gallogly, 1973).

The Concept of Design and Design Features

Design, whether it be good or poor, is an important component of housing. Dean (1953, p. 132) has hypothesized that certain aspects of housing design are crucial to family life. The most important of these appear to be: the location of the dwelling unit, the orientation of dwelling units to each other, the compatibility of the design to the performance of living functions either within the dwelling space or outside the home, and the way in which the design relates to the interaction of family members among themselves and significant others. Together, they all seem to work to modify the number and kind of social

environments to which family members are exposed.

Several studies have also shown that a relationship exists between design and expressed housing satisfaction. Teitzel (1966) found that in her study with homemakers whose houses were in the \$13,000 to \$20,000 price range, dissatisfaction occurred most often with kitchen storage, noise, and privacy. Wives studied by Peterson (1968) indicated satisfaction with their living space if the home was free from bothersome noise, allowed privacy, and was sufficiently large with enough bedrooms. In a study of 186 homemakers under age 65 who had children under the age of 18 living at home, Yearn's (1972, p. 146) found that respondents' satisfaction with present housing were not independent of housing attributes. Atkins (1973) found that the satisfaction expressed by families in public housing was significantly related to the extent that the housing design met their needs. Household size proved a major variable in relation to housing satisfaction in a study done by McKown (1975, p. 13). Families with five or more household members were more dissatisfied with the design of their present dwellings than four person families. Research conducted by Clare Cooper (1975) at Easter Hill Village, a low-income housing project, is cited as further evidence that a relationship exists between design and housing satisfaction. Design features such as a fenced back yard and private front yard, row houses instead of high-rise apartment buildings, and porches led to increased resident satisfaction while the size of the kitchen, insufficient soundproofing, and an inadequate play area for children were some of the reasons given for resident dissatisfaction.

Research on Values and Housing

In 1947, Virginia Cutler conducted one of the first value studies related to housing. She contended that if an individual has some insight concerning the relative importance to him of the fundamental values in housing, he will be able to direct his efforts more intelligently in seeking home satisfactions. Ten values were selected for study: beauty, comfort, convenience, location, health, personal interests, privacy, safety, friendship activities, and economy. Each individual aged 10 years or over from a sample of 50 families filled out the home values test which consisted of three parts: the rank ordering of values, paired-comparison of values, and feelings about the home presently lived in. The results suggested that a sizable group of people are not able to state off-hand what housing values are of real importance to them. They needed to go through a careful weighing procedure, as in the use of paired-comparisons, in order to make trustworthy decisions. This was particularly evident in the value "economy". Paying the bills was of small consideration on the verbalized ranking, but when weighted against other values money became more important. In conclusion, Cutler (1947, p. 74) suggested that "if a home was so arranged that it makes adequate provision for the three values most important to an individual, he would feel well satisfied with the home. Conversely, if the home failed to provide what those values require, he would be dissatisfied with it".

Beyer, Mackesey, and Montgomery (1955) attempted to identify the fundamental human values reflected in patterns of living. Approximately 1,000 families were interviewed. On the basis of the findings,

the subjects were divided into four value groups. The "economy" value group emphasized the economic uses of goods and services, while the "family" value group felt the health and well-being of the family to be most important. Personal enjoyment, aesthetics, and self-expression were desired by the "personal" value group, whereas the "prestige" group viewed their house in terms of its effect on the family's social standing (Beyer, Mackesey, and Montgomery, 1955, pp. 3-6).

Beyer continued this work in 1959. He tested nine values--economy, family centrism, physical health, aesthetics, leisure, equality, freedom, mental health, and social prestige--on a sample consisting of both rural and urban homemakers. He found little differences in the value orientations of the rural and urban groups. However, his results did indicate a division of the respondents into two "natural" groupings. The first group highly valued family centrism, equality, economy, and physical health. They tended to have two characteristics in common; that is, they had adjusted to the reality of living as a group and they were generally less sensitive to matters of the material world. On the other hand, there were the individuals oriented towards freedom, mental health, aesthetics, prestige, and leisure. These people were more individualistic and generally expressed a high degree of sensitivity to the material world (Beyer, 1959, pp. 16-17).

In measuring values with the forced-answer technique, Beyer (1959, p. 18) found family centrism and equality to be dominant, with physical health, and economy ranking next in importance. Teitzel's (1966) results were similar. Economy, equality, physical health, and aesthetics ranked in the top four positions in her study of middle-

socioeconomic homemakers. A large percentage (62%) ranked social prestige as the least important value.

Fortenberry (1963) asked 239 white women in Mississippi to indicate their preference for three values in regard to kitchen design. The values used were: physical convenience, family-centred living, and social standing. Physical convenience was significantly dominant in both the intensity of agreement and forced-choice testing techniques. The second most dominant value was not clearly defined by the two testing techniques. Social standing had a slightly larger percentage than family-centred living when the intensity of agreement technique was used. Family-centred living was clearly in second place when the forced-choice technique was used. Age of the respondent, number and ages of children living at home were factors found to be significantly related to the dominant values.

The economic value was ranked highest by 50 percent of the respondents in another study of middle socioeconomic class families (Meeks and Deacon, 1972, p. 12). Of the five values studied--economic, social, aesthetic, prestige, and personal--homemakers listed prestige as least important. The conclusion of their study that "the values the homemakers gave as important in an explicit ranking were apparently not the same values they expressed in planning the selection of their environment" (Meeks and Deacon, 1972, p. 13) was not surprising in the light of the previous finding by Cutler (1947, p. 33) that people are not able to state off-hand what housing values are of real importance to them.

Carll (1973) examined the values of 53 black and white low-income

homemakers. From the values tested--convenience, leisure, health, safety, family centrism, equality, privacy, personal freedom, aesthetics, social prestige, and economy--she found that low-income people also rank economy first. However, unlike the middle-class homemakers in the Meeks and Deacon (1973) and the Teitzel (1966) studies, the lower class respondents ranked social prestige as third in importance.

Building on earlier work done by Beyer et al (1955) and Beyer (1959), data collected by Stoeckeler and Hasegawa (1974, p. 277) seemed to confirm the existence of housing value groups. In addition to the economy, family, and personal classifications found by Beyer et al (1955, pp. 55-56), Stoeckeler and Hasegawa also found a group with a balanced orientation. The importance of economy and family centrism in housing value hierarchies supports previous findings. Stoeckeler and Hasegawa (1974, p. 277) found support for the hypothesis "that individuals arrange their hierarchies of a set of personal values depending upon the situation in which they are applying the values".

In summarizing this review of literature, it appears that the purchase of living space can be classified as a major decision which probably consists of several steps. Husband and wife involvement in the decision process may vary at each of these steps and perceptions of this involvement may differ depending on who answers the questions. The literature indicates that a relationship exists between design and housing satisfaction. People do not seem to be able to state clearly their housing values, but studies have found that there are housing value groups. The most important of these value groups appear to be family centrism, equality, physical health, and economy.

The literature review gives some indication of the research undertaken in the areas of decision-making and housing. To further explore the major decision to purchase living space, the following objectives and research questions were identified for this study.

Objectives

The objectives in this study were:

1. to identify values held by husbands and wives,
2. to determine if there is a relationship between these values and living space design features selected in a purchase decision, and
3. to determine if this relationship is affected by such things as:
 - A. who is the decision-maker, the husband, the wife, or both,
 - B. level of family income,
 - C. size of downpayment
 - D. external factors such as peer group or parental pressure,
 - E. availability of housing, and/or
 - F. perceived debt ratio.

Assumption

The literature on values in general and the relationship of values to housing in particular have provided one basic assumption for this study.

1. Husbands and wives have values which can be measured.

Research Questions

This study answered the following questions:

1. What values do husbands and wives in a newly purchased living space hold?
2. Do husbands and wives rank the values which are guiding principles of their life similar to the way they rank the values which are guiding principles in the selection of their living space?
3. Are the values of husband and wife similar in both the life situation and the living space selection situation?
4. Are the design features listed as being most important to the husband similar to those listed as being most important to the wife?
5. Do the design features in the newly purchased living space reflect the most important design features as expressed by the husband and the wife?
6. Do husbands and wives with similar values select similar design features in their newly purchased living space?
7. What other factors may have affected the decision to purchase the living space? Consider for example:
 - A. who is the decision-maker,
 - B. level of family income,
 - C. size of downpayment,
 - D. external factors such as peer group or parental pressure,