

**An Education Note:**

**THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE CONTENT OF HOUSING EDUCATION:  
AN EXAMINATION OF SELECTED COLLEGE TEXTS, 1956-1983**

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Abstract

This study determines if a consensus is developing concerning the content of housing education at the college level and identifies changes in this content. Ten college-level housing texts published over a period of four decades are examined and their contents classified into six categories and 38 subtopics. The researchers found that there is variation among the texts in the topics included and in the length of coverage given. While the topics are covered in all the books, only limited evidence is found for developing a consensus about subtopics. Furthermore, it appears that the content of housing textbooks is somewhat responsive to economic and social changes during this period.

Introduction

Instruction in housing at the college level is a 20th-century development. It parallels the growth of home economics instruction in higher education. Together with clothing and food, shelter is a basic necessity of life. Therefore, housing is a natural component within the field of home economics, with basic emphasis on improving the quality of life for individuals and families.

While courses in housing at the college level have been offered for 75 years, housing as a separate field of study has received increased emphasis only during the last 30 years. Glenn Beyer (1965) notes, "Housing is a new field of study, one that is still just becoming established in many college and university curriculums" (p. ix). Several factors may be responsible for this development.

American life currently offers housing alternatives, problems, and complexities that were not present in earlier eras. There are several factors that make the process of securing shelter more difficult today. Government regulations, higher building costs, complexity of financing, and the law all have an impact. Previously, the housing knowledge that individuals needed throughout their lifetime was usually acquired at home. While not everyone has the opportunity to study housing in preparation for his or her role in the community and marketplace, the need for such study exists today more than ever before.

There has been a growing trend toward relating education to contemporary social problems. Consequently, the provision of adequate housing for the American population is an educational concern today. The goal of the 1949 Housing Act, "a decent home and a suitable living environment for every American family," is becoming difficult to fulfill. As housing costs increase more rapidly than income, the ultimate desire of most families to own a home has become more difficult to realize in recent years. When housing was identified as a major social problem in America, it became recognized as a subject matter worthy of study in schools (Smith, 1981).

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There is also a need for public education concerning housing issues and policies. The provision of housing is no longer solely an individual problem or concern. Housing is a community issue. The quality and quantity of housing are highly dependent upon local government concerns, activity, and legislation, as well as private programs such as "Habitat for Humanity".

Finally, housing education has received more emphasis today because it is only recently that researchers have recognized the effect of the environment on human behavior. According to Moss (1973), "The optimal arrangement of environment is probably the most powerful behavior modification technique which we currently have available" (p. 662). At best, it is believed that the human environment has the potential to support life in a meaningful way, to influence the development and behavior of individuals and families, and to shape their quality of life.

### Methods

This paper is based on an analysis and discussion of ten major college texts published since 1956. It is recognized that not all housing educators use texts. Many who do supplement them with other materials. The authors of this article felt that an examination of these basic textbooks would provide insights into the development of educational thinking over time and perhaps suggest a direction for the future.

The period chosen for the study -- 1956 to 1983 -- represents an era in which housing education received greater emphasis in home economic curriculums. This emphasis is documented by the proliferation of housing textbooks, especially during the last decade of the period. All of the textbooks selected for examination were comprehensive in scope and marketed as introductory-level texts. For the purpose of discussion, they are introduced in three different time periods.

The first is the mid-1950s to 1960. Tessie Agan's textbook, The House, was first published in 1939. Revised several times, including an edition with Elaine Luchsinger, it was the "bible" of housing textbooks. It is a good example of the consumer-oriented approach stressed by housing educators during this first era. This approach typically includes information on how to-buy, -select, and -plan a home. Accordingly, this textbook emphasizes middle-class values, and home ownership of single-family dwellings. It views housing primarily as an individual concern. As is the case with most of the texts in this era, it focuses primarily on selected physical aspects of the dwelling.

The second period is 1960 to 1970. Glenn Beyer's (1965) Housing and Society includes the consumer aspects found in earlier textbooks while introducing social and political aspects of housing. During this era, housing was beginning to be more widely viewed as a social concern for American society and not solely an individual concern.

The last period is 1970 to mid-1980s. It occurs at a time when there was a proliferation of texts and a variety of subject matter. Further, this era marked increased growth in housing as a subject matter since the number of undergraduate housing majors in home economics units more than doubled between 1970 and 1980 (Harper, 1972, 1980).

The texts examined differ somewhat in their stated or implied objectives. One noted by most is the introduction of a wide range of housing topics to students (Agan, 1956; Agan and Luchsinger, 1965; Beyer, 1965; Hartman, 1975; Keiser, 1978; Meeks, 1980; Roske, 1983, and Wedin and Nygren, 1979). Agan's (1956) text adds that one of its objectives is to foster a critical interest in the pros and cons of home ownership and to study the methods by which this is accomplished. A later text by the same author (1965) includes the desire "to foster home ownership and attainment" as a major objective. Two texts introduce a framework for learning that would be useful throughout a lifetime (Lindamood and Hanna, 1979; Morris and Winter, 1978).

In order to determine if a consensus is developing regarding housing education, it was necessary to examine the content of the texts on a topic-by-topic basis. Content analysis techniques, a type of documentary research described by Holsti (1969), was used in evaluating the texts. This technique permitted the description of the characteristics of particular messages, in this case a textbook, in terms of categories used, and the study of inter-relationships in the coverage of particular categories and trends over time.

The ten college texts and the classification system used in the analysis are listed in Table 1. They are texts that were widely used during the study period. An informal poll of authors and selected housing educators agreed that these ten texts were representative of the era.

Text content was classified into six broad categories and 38 subtopics. The percentage of pages devoted to each topic was recorded for each text. The procedure was, of necessity, subjective. The researchers believe, however, that this system provides a fairly accurate indication of the general content of each text, the topics included, and the depth of coverage for each topic. Only text material was recorded. End-of-chapter material was not recorded. The coverage of a topic was recorded only if the space devoted to the topic exceeds ten lines. The study results are presented in Table 1.

## Findings and Discussion

### Design Process

The subtopic given the most copy space under the broad category, design process, is housing design and construction. Agan and Luchsinger (1965) devote almost half of their total pages to this subject matter. Design and construction aspects encompass approximately one-third of Keiser's (1978) book. Four texts do not include any discussion of the subtopic.

Beyer (1965) makes a major departure from this design emphasis and includes scant coverage of the topic. Thereafter, design is given only moderate coverage with the exception of the Keiser text published in 1978. Two authors, Hartman (1975) and Meeks (1980), do not devote any space to the discussion of this topic. Two additional publications in the third period, Morris and Winter (1978) and Roske (1983), devote only a small amount of their content space to design-related topics.

Space utilization may be viewed by housing educators as the bastion of interior designers, while household equipment falls within the domain of home management specialists. Perhaps this shows the maturation of the housing field as these subtopics became fields of their own and areas not included in most contemporary housing texts. The remaining subtopics seem to lie solely within the realm of housing, yet uncertainty remains in their importance for inclusion in an introductory text. With the exception of Keiser (1978), the design process as-a-whole is given early emphasis. Its inclusion into the subject matter has diminished as the housing discipline has matured.

Roske's (1983) primary focus is on housing and energy, a subtopic in only two other texts. Wedin and Nygren (1976) concentrate little of their text space to energy issues, while in Lindamood and Hanna's (1979) book, the subtopic comprises almost 10% of the total content. With the exception of this latter text, the limited amount of coverage given to energy-related subtopics is surprising, particularly in view of the energy crisis of the 1970s. Brewer and Day (1984) reveal a sizable number of energy-related studies in their analysis of housing research conducted between 1959 and 1982.

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Table 1. The percentage of pages devoted to major housing topics in 10 selected college textbooks published in the period 1956-1983. (topic total)

| Textbook Author(s) and Publication Date     | Agan 1956 | Agan & Luchsinger 1965 | Beyer 1965 | Hartman 1975 |
|---|-----------|------------------------|------------|--------------|
| <b>Housing Education Topic</b>              |           |                        |            |              |
| <b>Design Process</b>                       | (72.93)   | (59.56)                | (5.86)     | --           |
| Space needs                                 | 20.17     | 11.91                  | --         | --           |
| Design & construction                       | 21.45     | 44.20                  | 5.86       | --           |
| Housing style and type                      | 2.00      | 3.45                   | --         | --           |
| Housing and energy                          | --        | --                     | --         | --           |
| Remodeling                                  | --        | --                     | --         | --           |
| Household equipment                         | 26.95     | --                     | --         | --           |
| Housing and safety                          | 2.36      | --                     | --         | --           |
| <b>Economics</b>                            | (8.01)    | (10.97)                | (28.39)    | (18.05)      |
| Housing industry                            | --        | 5.02                   | 13.19      | 15.97        |
| Housing expenditure                         | 1.77      | --                     | --         | --           |
| Housing decision                            | 1.03      | --                     | --         | --           |
| Housing alternatives                        | --        | --                     | 1.28       | 2.08         |
| Financing homeownership                     | 3.09      | 5.09                   | 13.92      | --           |
| Renting                                     | --        | --                     | --         | --           |
| Process of buying and selling               | 2.12      | --                     | --         | --           |
| <b>Social &amp; Psychological Aspects</b>   | (12.58)   | (23.51)                | (8.79)     | (7.64)       |
| Importance of housing                       | 1.03      | 2.19                   | 0.37       | 3.47         |
| Housing & human needs                       | --        | --                     | --         | --           |
| Housing constraints                         | --        | --                     | --         | --           |
| Housing & mental health                     | --        | --                     | --         | --           |
| Housing & environment                       | 4.33      | 5.02                   | 2.56       | --           |
| Housing & family                            | 0.59      | 5.02                   | --         | --           |
| Housing quality & norms                     | 2.95      | 2.82                   | --         | 4.17         |
| Housing for the elderly & disabled          | 0.88      | 4.39                   | 5.86       | --           |
| Housing & children                          | 2.80      | 4.07                   | --         | --           |
| Residential satisfaction                    | --        | --                     | --         | --           |
| Residential mobility                        | --        | --                     | --         | --           |
| <b>Public Policy</b>                        | (3.98)    | --                     | (21.43)    | (58.34)      |
| Federal housing policies                    | 1.62      | --                     | 4.40       | 45.15        |
| State & local government policies           | --        | --                     | --         | --           |
| Housing as a social policy                  | --        | --                     | 4.76       | --           |
| Public housing                              | --        | --                     | 0.73       | 11.11        |
| Rural housing                               | 2.36      | --                     | 5.13       | 2.08         |
| Urban renewal                               | --        | --                     | 1.28       | --           |
| Urban housing & suburbia                    | --        | --                     | 5.13       | --           |
| <b>Law</b>                                  | (2.50)    | (5.96)                 | (0.37)     | (11.11)      |
| Legal aspects of housing                    | 2.50      | 4.08                   | --         | --           |
| Codes & zoning                              | --        | 1.88                   | 0.37       | 11.11        |
| <b>Historical Perspective</b>               | --        | --                     | (35.16)    | (4.86)       |
| History of American housing, city, & family | --        | --                     | 19.23      | --           |
| Housing trends                              | --        | --                     | 4.03       | --           |
| International housing                       | --        | --                     | 11.90      | --           |
| The future prospects of housing             | --        | --                     | --         | 4.86         |

| Wedin &<br>Nygren<br>1976 | Morris &<br>Winter<br>1978 | Keiser<br>1978 | Lindamood &<br>Hanna<br>1979 | Meeks<br>1980 | Roske<br>1983 |
|---------------------------|----------------------------|----------------|------------------------------|---------------|---------------|
| (20.82)                   | (5.36)                     | (63.34)        | (16.44)                      | --            | (5.64)        |
| --                        | 5.36                       | 24.44          | --                           | --            | --            |
| 10.04                     | --                         | 30.54          | 6.85                         | --            | --            |
| 3.72                      | --                         | 8.36           | 0.46                         | --            | --            |
| 2.60                      | --                         | --             | 8.67                         | --            | 5.64          |
| 2.23                      | --                         | --             | 0.46                         | --            | --            |
| --                        | --                         | --             | --                           | --            | --            |
| 2.23                      | --                         | --             | --                           | --            | --            |
| (29.00)                   | (13.56)                    | (11.58)        | (48.40)                      | (57.85)       | (33.17)       |
| 7.81                      | 1.89                       | 1.93           | 17.35                        | 23.92         | 13.94         |
| --                        | 3.47                       | --             | --                           | --            | --            |
| 5.20                      | 5.99                       | 1.61           | --                           | 2.86          | 2.67          |
| 10.79                     | --                         | 1.93           | 7.31                         | 10.36         | 8.90          |
| 5.20                      | 2.21                       | 4.50           | 9.13                         | 11.43         | 2.37          |
| --                        | --                         | 1.61           | 5.02                         | 6.78          | 2.03          |
| --                        | --                         | --             | 9.59                         | 2.50          | 3.27          |
| (22.30)                   | (69.41)                    | (13.18)        | (20.09)                      | (12.86)       | (25.82)       |
| 10.41                     | 4.73                       | 1.29           | 2.74                         | --            | --            |
| 4.46                      | --                         | 3.21           | 0.69                         | 1.43          | 6.53          |
| --                        | 4.73                       | --             | 5.48                         | --            | --            |
| 5.20                      | --                         | --             | --                           | --            | --            |
| 2.23                      | 2.21                       | 7.39           | 6.39                         | --            | --            |
| --                        | 6.94                       | 1.29           | 1.14                         | --            | 12.17         |
| --                        | 17.67                      | --             | 1.60                         | 3.22          | --            |
| --                        | 5.05                       | --             | 0.91                         | 7.14          | 7.12          |
| --                        | --                         | --             | --                           | --            | --            |
| --                        | 17.99                      | --             | 1.14                         | 1.07          | --            |
| --                        | 10.09                      | --             | --                           | --            | --            |
| (12.27)                   | (11.67)                    | (4.83)         | (10.96)                      | (21.79)       | (11.87)       |
| 7.44                      | 5.68                       | 1.29           | 10.05                        | 15.36         | 4.45          |
| --                        | --                         | 0.64           | --                           | 5.71          | 0.30          |
| --                        | 5.99                       | --             | --                           | --            | --            |
| --                        | --                         | --             | 0.68                         | 0.72          | 2.07          |
| 2.23                      | --                         | 1.29           | --                           | --            | 1.19          |
| --                        | --                         | --             | 0.23                         | --            | 1.19          |
| 2.60                      | --                         | 1.61           | --                           | --            | 2.67          |
| (11.52)                   | --                         | (2.89)         | (2.97)                       | (5.00)        | (6.00)        |
| 6.69                      | --                         | --             | --                           | 2.14          | 4.52          |
| 4.83                      | --                         | 2.89           | 2.97                         | 2.86          | 1.48          |
| (4.09)                    | --                         | (4.18)         | (1.14)                       | (2.50)        | (17.51)       |
| 4.09                      | --                         | --             | --                           | 2.50          | 5.34          |
| --                        | --                         | --             | --                           | --            | 12.17         |
| --                        | --                         | --             | --                           | --            | --            |
| --                        | --                         | 4.18           | 1.14                         | --            | --            |

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Three other design-related subtopics receive only minimal coverage in the texts. These include household equipment, safety issues, and remodeling. In fact, Agan (1956) is the only author to include household equipment; over one-fourth of her text is devoted to that subtopic. Housing styles and types receive only cursory attention in five of the examined texts; it is not mentioned at all in the rest.

### Economics

During the era of relatively small down payments, low interest rates, and limited mortgage options; only a small percentage of early text coverage is devoted to the economics of housing (Agan, 1956; Agan and Luchsinger, 1965). Of this small coverage, most of the emphasis is on financing and the process of buying. Though almost half of all dwellings were rented during this time period (U.S. Presidential Commission on Housing, 1982), the subtopic of rental tenure is not included.

Thereafter, the amount of space allotted to the economics of housing increases, perhaps foreshadowing the importance this topic would occupy in the 1970s and 1980s. It is one of only two categories included by all the authors. Meeks (1980) devotes over one-half of her book to a discussion of economic-related issues. Lindamood and Hanna (1979) allot almost one-half of their text to housing economics.

None of the seven subtopics under the category of economics are included in all of the texts. The first Agan (1956) book does not cover the housing industry, while only Hartman (1975) omits a discussion of financing home ownership. Housing expenditures are given cursory attention in two of the texts and not mentioned in the rest. Agan's 1956 edition discusses the process of buying and selling a home. That subtopic does not surface again until the Lindamood and Hanna (1979) text. The books by Meeks (1980) and Roske (1983) devote much less space to the subject.

Housing decisions are covered most extensively by Morris and Winter (1978) and Wedin and Nygren (1979). Four other authors devote only minimal space to this subtopic. All three books published since 1979 allot space to housing alternatives. Wedin and Nygren (1976), as well as Meeks (1980), give substantial space to that subtopic. Roske (1983) and Lindamood and Hanna (1979) give the subtopic moderate coverage. It is briefly mentioned in three additional texts.

Lindamood and Hanna (1979) and Meeks (1980) give moderate coverage to the subtopic of renting. This subject matter is not included in any of the volumes prior to 1978. The omission is difficult to explain due to the low number of housing starts and high interest rates prevalent since the 1980's. Perhaps this subtopic should be addressed more fully in future texts.

### Social and Psychological Aspects

A discussion of the social and psychological aspects of housing is the second broad category to be included by all of the authors. Interest in this topic reached a zenith in the 1970s and 1980s as society recognized the important effects of the man-made environment on human behavior. The amount of space devoted to the subtopics ranged from about 7 percent (Hartman, 1975) to almost 70 percent (Morris and Winter, 1978). Again, there is little consensus as to what subtopics should be included under this category.

Wedin and Nygren (1979) are the only authors out of the group to include a discussion of housing and mental health. For information on residential mobility, students have to consult Morris and Winter (1978). Housing and children are included only in the Agan texts (1956, 1965). Two additional authors give limited coverage to housing constraints.

The subtopic given the largest percentage of pages is residential satisfaction (Morris and Winter, 1978). Only two other authors consider the subtopic significant enough to include (Lindamood and Hanna, 1979; Meeks, 1980). Subject areas included in five or more texts are housing and human needs, housing and family, housing quality and norms, housing and environment, and housing for the elderly and disabled. A discussion of housing for the elderly and the disabled is included in seven

of the texts. The percentage of pages devoted to this area increases, beginning with the texts written by Meeks (1980) and Roske (1983), indicating the significance of this emerging population group. The importance of housing as a discipline is included in all but the two texts published in the 1980s.

#### Public Policy

Although the 1965 edition of Agan and Luchsinger's text ignores this topic altogether, Hartman (1975) feels that housing and public policy is sufficiently important to devote 58.3 percent of his text to this category. Coverage of the subject matter by other authors ranges from about 5 percent (Agan, 1956) to about 20 percent (Meeks, 1980).

Federal housing policies, as a subtopic, are included in all of the texts except Agan and Luchsinger (1965). The increased importance of this subtopic is logical since federally subsidized housing and other housing programs became more prevalent in the 1960s and 1970s. Only Beyer (1965) and Roske (1983), however, include information on all but one of the seven subtopics in this category.

Six authors give limited coverage to rural housing. Five discuss public housing. Coverage by Hartman (1975) is the most extensive. Other areas receiving minimal coverage include urban housing and suburbia, urban renewal, and government policies. Housing as a social policy receives a moderate amount of space in only two texts -- Beyer (1965) and Morris and Winter (1978). Because of the increased importance that public policy has at various governmental levels, more attention should be given to housing and public policy issues than has been allocated in recent texts.

#### Law

Housing and law is included by all authors except Morris and Winter (1978). The category, however, is never given more coverage than about 10 percent of the total publication in any of the examined texts.

Hartman's (1975) discussion focuses solely on the subtopic of codes and zoning, while this subject receives minimal attention from seven other authors. Coverage of the legal aspects of housing is varied, with half of the texts not mentioning the subtopic at all. Wedin and Nygren (1979) and Roske (1983) devote the most space to this aspect of housing. Considering the recent trend toward increased litigation in today's society, this topic may be considered more important for inclusion in future texts.

#### Historical Perspective

Consensus among the authors is least noted in relation to coverage of the historical aspects of housing. Beyer (1965) gives this subject matter extensive coverage. It is not included again until Roske's book in 1983. Three authors do not discuss any aspect of this category in their textbooks.

Beyer (1965) gives the most extensive coverage to the history of American housing. He feels that "history seems to be more and more important for our understanding of where we are today" (p. vii). Roske (1983) chooses to focus on housing trends. Hartman (1975), Keiser (1978), and Lindamood and Hanna (1979) include brief sections on the future prospects of housing, a subject that neither Beyer nor Roske addresses. Beyer is the only author to discuss, almost 20 years ago, a recently emerging subtopic--international housing. No other authors have included this subtopic in recent years.

#### Conclusion

In using the results of this study to generalize about the field of housing education, it must be recognized that the conclusions are limited by the scope of the materials examined. The analysis focuses on an informally selected group of college texts that are generally introductory. It does not include other potential sources. This set of texts does not include all titles published during the time period studied.

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After nearly 30 years, there is still wide variation among the topics included in college textbooks and in the length of coverage given to these topics. Only two categories receive extensive coverage in all ten of the texts examined-- economics and social/psychological aspects of housing.

A second group of topics is included in most, but not all of the texts. These topics receive varied coverage when included. They include public policy and law.

Topics that are included the least comprise the third group. The length and adequacy of the coverage of these topics varies. This group of topics includes the design process and housing in the historical perspective.

Reviewing the content of housing textbooks over the study period suggests there is limited evidence for the development of a consensus about the importance of specific topics. Subjects receiving cursory treatment in several texts include housing for the elderly and the disabled, remodeling, rural housing, international housing, and future prospects. These are all areas, however, receiving research emphasis (Brewer and Day, 1984).

Several subtopics, primarily in the design area, are no longer emphasized in housing texts. These include: space needs, design and construction, household equipment, and housing and safety. This is consistent with trends in housing research (Brewer and Day, 1984). Housing and public policy became a central topic of the 1960s and 1970s. Authors also responded to current social, economic, and political changes during the 1970s and 1980s. Subtopics added or expanded during this period include housing alternatives, renting, the process of buying and selling, government policies, and energy. All of these changes represent some degree of responsiveness to public policy and current trends. Factors which may have triggered changes in housing subject matter are:

1. The 1949 Housing Act and subsequent housing acts;
2. Social concerns that led to housing policies of the 1960s and 1970s;
3. Economic situations generated by new mortgage alternatives and interest rates in the 1970s and 1980s.
4. The energy crisis of the 1970's;
5. Increased importance of designing houses for special needs including the elderly and disabled.

Some housing-related developments that seem to be ignored in currently available texts include discussions of the homeless, temporary shelters, international housing (especially developments in Sweden and Japan), environmental issues (radon, asbestos, formaldehyde), housing for special market segments (women, singles, and single parents).

After a flood of publications in the late 1970s and early 1980s, there have not been any major housing texts released. If the profession is to have an impact on developments in housing, future authors must continue to add content that is responsive to public policy and current socio-economic trends.



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