SHARED HOUSING
FOR THE
ELDERLY

Edited by

Dale J. Jaffe

1989

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The Nature of Problematic Homesharing Matches: The Case of Share-A-Home of Milwaukee

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What makes for a successful homesharing match? This is a question that readers and writers of the chapters in this volume have posed and, based on their own research or experience, have attempted to answer. An evaluation of a new component of a homesharing program in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, offered us an opportunity to pose this question as well, and in this chapter, we examine some of the results of a survey of homesharing participants that bear most directly on this question. Before considering that data, however, we describe the community and programmatic context of these homesharing experiences, the methodology employed for the survey, and the characteristics of the individuals and matches that comprise the sample.

THE SETTING

Located 90 miles north of Chicago on the shores of Lake Michigan, Milwaukee is among those "rustbelt" cities in which the loss of heavy industry has created major economic dislocations. The basically blue-collar character of the city is enriched by strong ethnic enclaves. In keeping with the politically progressive tradition of Wisconsin, Milwaukee is generous in its provision of government and social services. This is reflected in the high tax climate of the city, and the latter is implicated in the slow but steady loss of population during the past two decades. The changing age composition of the city mirrors the national pattern: the elderly population is increasing both in absolute numbers and as a proportion of the total. Of the approximately 1 million Milwaukee County residents in 1985, 127,000 or 13.6% were age 65 or over. The growth is especially marked among those over age 75, who, although numbering 11,000 in 1980, will total over 50,000 by 1990, according to recent estimates. As for the pool of younger

homeseekers, Milwaukee is home to Marquette University, the University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee, and several small, private colleges.

A major organizational actor in the provision of services to older adults is the Interfaith Program for the Elderly, a nonprofit, nondenominational social service agency dedicated to promoting independent living for the elderly. Interfaith follows a "cluster" approach in which neighborhood religious groups sponsor, either through dollars or in-kind services, a neighborhood coordinator. The agency is thus able to offer clients a broad range of program options and centrally compiled information while drawing on the strengths of neighborhood outreach. Since its inception in 1973, Interfaith has grown from three staff persons to almost 100, about half of which are older adults. Funding is provided by the state and county offices on aging, the Board of Vocational and Technical Education, and private donations.

Among Interfaith's programs is the Older Adult Living Alternatives Program, of which Share-A-Home is a part. Share-A-Home was begun in 1981 in response to client's needs for additional noninstitutional housing options. The lone original coordinator has now been joined by a 75%-time staff person, and support for Share-A-Home has come from United Way and The Faye McBeath Foundation, a local private foundation dedicated to aging issues. Until the time of this study, Share-A-Home had functioned primarily as a housing program. Recent additional funding had opened up the possibility of expanding its target group to include elders who need assistance to remain in their homes, and it is the most recent group of matches in which explicit bartering plays a major role that is the focus of this research.

METHODOLOGY

The criteria for inclusion in the survey were (1) that one must have been involved in a barter match that was constituted during the calendar year 1986 through Interfaith's Share-A-Home Program and (2) that the match must have been constituted at least one month before the beginning of the data collection process. (This would insure that at least some patterns would have emerged before the interviewing of the participants.) A *barter match* is defined as a relationship in which the homeseeker receives some form of assistance, usually reduced rent or room and board, in exchange for providing some assistance to the older homeprovider, usually in the form of help with personal care, help around the house, or shopping and errand chores. The sample also consists of persons in both current and dissolved matches. Thus the sample includes all 42 persons and 22 matches that meet the specifications described above as of September 22, 1986, the day that the sample was drawn.

The instrument developed for this survey was an eight-page questionnaire designed to be administered over the telephone in 10 to 15 minutes. The content included questions about how the respondent heard about the Share-A-Home Program, what other sorts of living arrangements were being considered, why

homesharing was ultimately chosen, and what the major reasons were for considering the homesharing arrangement. Many questions dealt with the nature of the homesharing relationship, and it is the analysis of these responses that is most relevant to the issue of understanding the nature of problematic matches. Here, respondents were asked to identify any problems with their housemates that may have occurred; to characterize their relationships as familylike, businesslike, or friendship; and to assess the equity of the norms of give-and-take that emerged over time. Also included were questions regarding the extent to which expectations about one's housemate were met.

For homeproviders and homeseekers who were still involved in matches at the time of the interview, the final section of the questionnaire was designed to get a sense of the expected future trajectory of the match. For those no longer homesharing, questions focused on the perceived reasons for dyad dissolution and whether or not homesharing was still considered to be a viable alternative.

The data-collection phase of the survey involved contacting by telephone the 42 persons deemed eligible for inclusion in the sample. The survey was administered during the one-week period of October 1–7, 1986. The average interview length was 20 minutes; the shortest was completed in 15 minutes, and the longest lasted approximately 45 minutes. Respondent cooperation was promoted by an introductory letter that we composed and that was signed by the Share-A-Home program director. The letter explained the purpose and procedures of the survey and emphasized the desire to elicit clients' suggestions for program improvement. Also stressed was the confidentiality of all information given during the interview.

Interviews were completed with 31 of the 42 individuals in the sample for a response rate of 74%. This group of 31 consisted of 17 elderly homeproviders and 14 live-in homeseekers. The 3 homeproviders who could not participate included 2 with serious hearing loss and 1 with profound memory loss. The 6 homeseekers in the sample that were not interviewed were no longer in matches and could not be located despite our most resourceful attempts to find them. Thus no one who could be located and was physically able to communicate over the telephone refused our request for an interview.

Once the interviews were completed, responses to closed-ended questions were tabulated in terms of the frequency with which certain responses were given. Responses to more open-ended questions were recorded in abbreviated form and analyzed in terms of patterns and salient points.

DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SAMPLE

The demographic profile presented here includes the 17 homeprovider units and 14 homeseeker units who participated in the survey as well as the 20 matches that were described by these 31 individuals. We use the term *units* because in a few cases, it is a married couple that functions as homeprovider or homeseeker.

The 17 homeproviders are overwhelmingly white females. Ninety-four percent are white and 76% are female. Another 12% are male and an additional 12%

of this group are two married couples living together. Forty-seven percent are widowed, by far the most common marital status of this group. Eighteen percent are single, 12% divorced, 12% living alone but married (spouse in institution), and 12% living together as married couples. Thus almost one-quarter of the homeproviders are still married, a pattern that should not be overlooked when attempting to recruit new homeproviders into a program. Only one homeprovider (6%) is under the age of 50. Twelve percent are between the ages of 51 and 65, 41% are between 66 and 75 (the largest group), 29% are between 76 and 85, and 12% are 86 or older. This program does seem to be serving individuals who fall into the middle-old and old-old age categories. This conclusion is bolstered by the fact that our 3 homeprovider nonrespondents were from the two oldest age categories listed above. Clearly, the dominant profile here of the Share-A-Home homeprovider is that of the older white female who is living alone.

The 14 homeseeker units are also predominantly white. Seventy-nine percent are white, 7% are black, and 14% asian. They, too, are likely to be female, but this group is not as overwhelmingly female as the homeprovider group. Sixty-four percent are female, 29% are male, and a married couple constitutes 7% of this group. Homeseekers tend to be single (43%) or, if not single, legally or functionally separated (29%). Only 7% are widowed (one person), 14% are divorced, and 7% are living together as a married couple. The age distribution reflects a relatively wide range. One percent is aged 18 to 22. Twenty-one percent fall into the category of 23 to 27. Twenty-one percent also have an age between 28 and 32, and 21% are between 33 and 42. Seven percent fall into the age group of 43 to 52, and another 21% are 53 or older. Thus although this range and the data on the distribution of homeprovider ages suggest that barter matches are almost always intergenerational, these data also suggest that there are no set generations from which homeseekers are consistently drawn. Thus the typical homeseeker in this program is an unmarried white female under 50 years of age.

Additional insights are revealed when we consider the demographic characteristics of the 20 matches. Forty percent of the 20 matches consist of homeproviders over the age of 65 living with homeseekers of age 30 or younger. Forty-five percent of the matches consist of homeproviders over the age of 65 living with homeseekers over the age of 30. The remaining 15% of matches are those in which the homeprovider is under the age of 65 and the difference in the age of the individuals is less than 10 years. Thus, these matches are overwhelmingly intergenerational, and it is almost equally likely for the seekers to be over age 30 as it is for them to be under age 30.

The dominant pattern with regard to the sex composition of matches is for females to be matched with females (50%). In 15% of the matches, a male homeseeker is matched with a female homeprovider. Ten percent of the matches portray the reverse situation with a male homeprovider living with a female homeseeker. Ten percent are males matched with males and another 15% include married couples as the homeprovider, homeseeker, or as both. Thus 60% of the matches are sex homogeneous, 25% are sex heterogeneous, and 15% are het-

erogeneous due to the marital status of the individuals involved. As these figures suggest, the majority of matches involve individuals who have never been or are no longer married, but it must be emphasized that a significant proportion of all individuals involved in the Share-A-Home barter homesharing program in 1986 were married. This suggests that targeting and recruitment should not be limited solely to unmarried people.

Of the 20 matches in this study, 50% were still intact at the time of data collection and 50% had dissolved. Three-quarters of the matches had lasted three months or less and only 25% had lasted more than three months. This is due to the fact that the sample was drawn in September and the majority of the barter matches had not begun until the summer months. What is important to glean from this data is that the responses to our questionnaire were often based on homesharing experiences that at the point of discussion had not been particularly long lasting.

DEFINING PROBLEMATIC AND NONPROBLEMATIC MATCHES

The success of a homesharing program is often seen in terms of the success of the matches that are created by the program staff. It is assumed that a well-organized and well-run program will produce matches that are successful and that a program that is poorly structured will produce a large number of unsuccessful or failed matches. Given this assumption, it is not surprising that many program evaluations of homeshare programs begin with the question of what makes for a successful match. These evaluations then proceed to design methodologies for categorizing the existing matches as successes and failures and then, on the basis of the relative proportion of each, make a determination as to the relative success or failure of the program as a whole.

It is tempting to conceive of match success in terms of longevity and stability. It makes intuitive sense to suggest that successful matches last longer than failures and that they exhibit more social stability and harmony in the relationships that develop between homeproviders and homeseekers. Thus an agency that is able to match individuals who then live together for a relatively long time and who speak fondly of one another is "doing a good job" and one whose matches dissolve quickly amid all sorts of interpersonal conflict is not.

Our previous research suggests, however, that this conception reflects somewhat of a misunderstanding of the nature of homesharing (Jaffe, 1989). For one thing, individuals who present themselves as candidates for barter homesharing are in transition. Their lives are in some way up in the air. For an older adult, this may mean widowhood or the onset or worsening of a chronic and debilitating disease. For a young adult, being in transition may mean being newly divorced, being in between jobs, or being in school with limited financial resources. In general, living with a stranger is not one's preference, but if the alternative for the older adult is institutionalization or dependency on one's adult offspring, it

is the best of a few undesirable possibilities. Similarly for the young adults, if the alternatives are living with parents and expensive apartment living, home-sharing may be viewed as the least undesirable option. The importance of these situational factors in structuring the decision to get involved in homesharing is clearly evident in this sample as well. These two factors—the fact that home-sharing is not the first choice of either party and the fact that the individuals are usually in some sort of transition (implying temporariness)—suggest that there are significant limits to the longevity of barter matches. As the unstable aspects of life become more stable, other living-arrangement options may become more viable and the attractiveness of homesharing may then decline. These changes may occur within two months of the beginning of the homesharing match or not until after two years of cohabitation. The key point is that this is a "natural" progression, and as such, the match that ends relatively soon after its constitution is not necessarily less successful than one that lasts several years.

The element of interpersonal harmony is also problematic as an indicator of match success. To suggest that a relationship without any conflict is better than one with conflict is to promote a simplistic and unrealistic conception of what makes for a successful relationship. In fact, one could argue (as have several sociologists and psychologists) that conflict can actually strengthen rather than weaken a relationship. In situations in which norms are ambiguous to begin with, as is the case with homesharing, it seems somewhat "natural" that at least some conflict occur as homeproviders and homeseekers attempt to arrive at a common definition of their respective roles.

Since an objective of most barter homesharing programs is to help older adults maintain their independence in their own homes, it seems reasonable to suggest that any match is almost by definition a success as long as it functions to delay (for however long or short of a period) a move out of one's home.

On the other hand, there are qualitative differences between homesharing matches that relate to the degree to which participants are satisfied or dissatisfied with their arrangements. Rather than speak about these differences as indicators of success or failure, however, we prefer to think of them as reflecting generally problematic or nonproblematic relationships. Since match duration and internal conflict do not necessarily correlate with the qualitative differences between matches, we must proceed inductively and leave it up to our respondents to give us a clue as to how to conceptualize the difference between a generally prob-lematic and a generally nonproblematic homesharing arrangement.

To accomplish this task, we looked first at the responses to the question of whether or not the homeprovider/homeseeker had experienced any problems or difficulties getting along with the housemate. If the individual responded affirm-atively, the question was followed up with probing to get at the nature of the problem and to get the respondent to speculate as to its causes. Since we expected that the majority of problematic matches would have dissolved by the time we interviewed their participants, we also looked at a question that was asked of all individuals who were no longer in homesharing arrangements ("What was

the major reason that you stopped homesharing?") On the basis of responses to these questions, we were able to divide the 20 matches into two groups. One group contained individuals who identified "breach of agreement" as a major problem in their matches. This perceived breach was operationalized in one of two ways by the respondents. One way was to indicate that there had been unmet expectations and the other was to state that the problem was incompatibility between the two parties. Our assumption is that in these cases there was an initial ambiguous or unrealistic assessment of needs. As the relationship evolved, and needs were not being met (usually a perception of the homeprovider), the in-dividuals involved concluded that either one could not meet the expectations of the other or that the two were simply incompatible as housemates. Nine of the 20 matches (45%) fell into this category of problematic arrangements.

The other group consisted of those who indicated that no problems had de-veloped or gave us reason to believe that to the extent that if problems did emerge, they were relatively minor or easily overcome. In any case, the responses of the individuals in this group gave no indication of a problematic or ambiguous initial assessment of needs. Some of these matches were dissolved, but the dissolutions were due to the sort of "natural" progression toward more stable roles described above. Eleven of the 20 matches (55%) fell into this category of nonproblematic matches.

In the following section, we search for correlates of problematic and non-problematic matches. Clearly, the discovery of any differences between the two groups would be helpful in terms of furthering our understanding of why indi-viduals in some matches are more likely to perceive a breech of agreement than individuals in other matches.

CORRELATES OF PROBLEMATIC MATCHES

The Exchange Agreements

Three general categories of exchange agreements were developed according to responses to our questions. The first category involved an exchange of per-sonal-care services for the homeprovider for room and board for the homeseeker. This category involves the most extensive exchange of the three, and 20% of the matches in this study were in this group (4 of 20). The second category involved an exchange of household tasks and errands for the homeprovider and, again, room and board or simply reduced rent for the homeseeker. This was the most common type of exchange agreement negotiated, accounting for 70% of all matches (14 of 20). The final category involved the least amount of exchange between housemates. Here, the homeprovider received additional income by renting out a room and the homeseeker was able to rent the room at a price that was substantially less than what would be required in other sorts of private housing living arrangements. Two matches or 10% of the total were in this

is the best of a few undesirable possibilities. Similarly for the young adults, if the alternatives are living with parents and expensive apartment living, home-sharing may be viewed as the least undesirable option. The importance of these situational factors in structuring the decision to get involved in homesharing is clearly evident in this sample as well. These two factors—the fact that home-sharing is not the first choice of either party and the fact that the individuals are usually in some sort of transition (implying temporariness)—suggest that there are significant limits to the longevity of barter matches. As the unstable aspects of life become more stable, other living-arrangement options may become more viable and the attractiveness of homesharing may then decline. These changes may occur within two months of the beginning of the homesharing match or not until after two years of cohabitation. The key point is that this is a "natural" progression, and as such, the match that ends relatively soon after its constitution is not necessarily less successful than one that lasts several years.

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category. Thus matches involving personal care or simply monetary exchange are not common among this group of homesharing matches.

Interesting differences between the problematic and nonproblematic matches do appear here, although one must be cautious in interpreting these differences due to the relatively small numbers involved. Roughly equal proportions of both groups fell into the household chores/room and board category (72% of the nonproblematic matches and 67% of the problematic matches). However, 22% of the problematic matches involved only monetary exchange compared with none of the nonproblematic matches, and 28% of the nonproblematic matches involved personal-care assistance compared with only 11% of the problematic matches. Thus the more involved exchange agreements seem to be associated with the nonproblematic group, and the matches with the least amount of exchange (money only) appear to be associated with the problematic matches.

Patterns of Everyday Life

Many of the questionnaire items were designed to provide a sense of the everyday life in these barter matches. The first asked the respondents to characterize the equity of exchange in their relationships. Seventy-four percent of all respondents felt that things were fairly equal in the give and take of everyday life. Twenty-three percent said that they give more than they get, and only 3% believed that they get more than they give. Homeproviders are more likely than homeseekers to feel that there is an inequity in the exchange—29% of the homeproviders thought that they give more than they get compared with 14% of the homeseekers. Homeseekers are more likely than homeproviders to feel that the exchange is equitable (86% compared with 65%). Not surprisingly, members of problematic matches are also more likely to perceive an imbalance. Fifty percent of the individuals in problematic matches perceive an imbalance in their housemate's favor compared with only 5% of the individuals in nonproblematic matches.

Respondents were also asked to characterize the nature of the social relationship that they had with their housemates. The majority of those answering (45%) labeled their relationships as friendships. Thirty-two percent thought that their relationships were businesslike, and only 23% said they were familylike. Thus the very intimate relationship is the least common in these matches. Homeproviders and homeseekers differ on this question. Forty-seven percent of the homeproviders used the businesslike label compared with only 14% of the homeseekers. This relationship conception was most common for the homeproviders and the least common for the homeseekers. The largest group of homeseekers (50%) used the label of friendship as did 41% of the homeproviders. The familylike label was the least common for the homeproviders (12%) but not unusual for the homeseekers (36%). In general, the homeproviders see these relationships as either friendships or business relationships, and the homeseekers see them as either friendships or familylike relationships.

Interestingly, 73% of members of problematic matches defined their relationships as businesslike compared with only 10% of those in nonproblematic

matches. Individuals in nonproblematic matches were most likely to view their relationships as friendships (60%). The data clearly suggest that friendship and familylike relationships are associated with nonproblematic matches and the businesslike conception with the problematic matches.

From there, specific questions were directed at the respective homeprovider and homeseeker groups. Homeproviders were asked if they believed that their homeseekers were more willing to assist them than expected, less willing than expected, or about as willing as expected. The largest group (47%) thought that their homeseekers were less willing to help than expected. Twenty-nine percent said that their homeseekers helped them more than they expected. The final 24% thought that the level of assistance was about as expected. Thus most homeprovider's expectations are violated; some are pleasantly surprised, but more are disappointed. Major differences are apparent between problematic and nonproblematic matches. Eighty-eight percent of the homeproviders in problematic matches thought that their homeseekers were providing less than they expected compared with only 11% of the homeproviders in nonproblematic matches. Conversely, 56% of the homeproviders in nonproblematic matches said that they were receiving more than they expected, and no homeproviders from the problematic group felt this way. Finally, one-third of the nonproblematic match homeproviders said that they were getting about what they expected compared with 12% of the homeproviders in the problematic group. Thus viewing what one is receiving as expected or more than expected is associated with a nonproblematic match, whereas the response that one is receiving less than expected is associated with a problematic match.

Homeproviders were also asked if their homeseekers had ever violated their trust. Most responded negatively (76%), and, as expected, this is also related to whether or not one is in a problematic or nonproblematic match. Only 11% of the homeproviders in nonproblematic matches thought that their trust had been violated compared with 38% of the homeproviders in problematic matches.

Homeseekers were asked about whether or not their expectations about the functional status of their homeproviders were met. Most (60%) believed that the physical and mental abilities of their homeproviders were about what they expected. One-third stated that their abilities were greater than expected, and only 7% thought that the homeprovider was more impaired than he or she expected. The perception of greater than expected impairment does not appear to make a difference in terms of a problematic or nonproblematic match. In fact, 40% of the homeseekers in nonproblematic matches indicated that their homeproviders were more impaired than expected compared with only 20% of the homeseekers in problematic matches.

Differences between the two types of matches do show up in homeseeker perceptions of being pressured to devote more time to their homeproviders. Although one-half of all homeseekers felt such pressure, those in problematic matches were much more likely to acknowledge this pressure (75%) than those in nonproblematic matches (40%).

Finally, all respondents were asked if they believed that their obligations had

interfered with other aspects of their lives. An overwhelming 87% responded negatively. Those who felt otherwise did not tend to be in any particular subgroup of the sample (i.e., homeprovider versus homeseeker; problematic match versus nonproblematic match).

Overall, then, the majority of these individuals believe their exchanges are equitable, see their housemates as friends, do not find their expectations about their housemates to be violated in any major ways, and do not see their involvement in homesharing as interfering with other aspects of their lives. Significant differences do appear, however, between members of problematic and non-problematic matches. What is important to emphasize here is that we do not know if the patterns observed in the problematic groups are causes or effects of the perception of a broken agreement. It may be, for example, that individuals who define each other as business partners are more likely to create a pattern of everyday life that leads one or both parties to later perceive a breach of the initial agreement. Alternatively, it may be that individuals who violate the expectations set forth in the exchange agreement create a situation in which social distance is maintained and both members of the match define their relationship in businesslike terms. Thus the patterns described here must be seen as associated with particular sorts of matches and not necessarily as the cause of a problematic or nonproblematic match.

DISCUSSION

Data on who is involved in these 1986 barter matches and how they came to become involved in the Share-A-Home program suggest patterns that are not significantly different from other homesharing programs across the United States. On the other hand, two surprising findings do stand out among these data. First, a significant portion of these participants are married, and that is generally not the case in most programs. We usually think about the pressures that lead people into homesharing as not applicable to most married couples. After all, married older adults have each other as companions and to help each other out with everyday tasks, and young married adults often have the earning capacity of two individuals. Yet the prevalence of married couples in this sample, both as home-providers and homeseekers, suggests that it may indeed be a mistake to think about eligibility and recruitment for homesharing simply in terms of unmarried adults. We have no data here to assess the pros and cons of married couples playing these roles and suggest that staff persons in various programs monitor the differences between matches with singles and couples as participants in the future. It is possible that married couples adapt to the homesharing situation better and are easier to recruit. If that is the case, it may be reasonable to target programs more directly to couples in the future.

Second, the frequency with which the homeproviders in this sample mention companionship as a reason for homesharing is high. Although not inherently

problematic, this sort of felt need poses an especially challenging task for the staff whose goal it is to insure an equitable exchange. Providing companionship is not easily broken down into service units and hours, nor does one's felt need for it remain constant over time (as would be the case for many personal care tasks). Thus it is often the case that those who homeshare for the companionship it offers find their expectations violated. It appears that bartering is more difficult when companionship is one of the commodities to be exchanged than when money or meal preparation or house cleaning comprise the content of the exchange.

Given our definition of problematic and nonproblematic matches, it is important to note that the majority of these 1986 barter matches are nonproblematic. Yet a significant proportion *are* problematic and here we attempt to understand the reasons for this perception. Earlier, we defined a *problematic match* as one in which respondents indicated that there had been either a perceived breach of the agreement or an incompatibility of personalities. From other items in the questionnaire and impressionistic data as well, both complaints seem to have a common source—that there was an unrealistic or ambiguous assessment of needs to begin with. The central question that this reasoning raises, then, is whether this ambiguity in needs assessment is due to certain individuals simply having more ambiguous needs than others or whether it is due to the process of determining needs that the staff employ. In other words, is the needs assessment and agreement negotiation process faulty, or do some individuals who desire home-sharing simply have needs that are difficult to assess and operationalize for purposes of barter? We suspect that there is some validity to both of these hypotheses.

The frequent complaint among members (especially homeproviders) of problematic matches that their matches were unsatisfactory because of a basic incompatibility between themselves and their housemates, we believe, is to some extent a result of agency practices and personnel. In these instances, the homeprovider would suggest that more data on the "maturity" of the homeseeker would have been useful. The question raised by this pattern is really one of whether the staff collect enough of the right kind of information from prospective clients or whether they collect enough but do not communicate it well enough to the prospective housemates. We do not have the sort of data that would permit us to answer this question with a great degree of certainty; however, we do have a hunch. It does not appear that the intake form upon which all sorts of biographical and behavioral data are recorded has any serious flaws or gaps. Consequently, we are persuaded that the problem may lie in whether and how much of this information is communicated to a prospective housemate. A perusal of the program's guidelines and procedures for assessment and matching also reveals no major gaps or inadequacies, so it does not appear that the source of this problem is with any formal aspect of program structure. The only remaining possibility, then, is that the established procedures regarding communication to one prospective housemate about the other have been violated, and there is

evidence from other sources to support this claim. In fact, before the implementation of this survey, the program director realized that a staff person had been overzealous in "creating matches at any cost." Although it is unfortunate for both the homeproviders and homeseekers who find themselves to be incompatible in some significant way and the present staff who must deal with the "fallout" from these sorts of situations, it does suggest an important lesson: Minimal work up front creates maximum work later ("haste makes waste").

The data reported here support, perhaps even more strongly, the other hypothesis that the ambiguous assessment of needs is unavoidable because many of the homeproviders in this program simply have somewhat ambiguous or uncertain needs. The main evidential support for this contention is that the problematic matches are more likely to be based on monetary exchange or companionship only whereas the nonproblematic matches are much more likely to include the personal-care dimension. It is probably much easier to translate personal-care activities into quantitative indicators such as number of times per day or week. Furthermore, for those homeproviders who require personal care, they are likely to be more frail and be most concerned with getting those needs taken care of. Anything that comes to them beyond that is considered a bonus. For those whose perceived needs are mainly social, it is not only more difficult to quantify them for purposes of an exchange agreement, it is likely that the need itself changes from day to day. Some days, one may want as much company and visiting as possible and on others prefer solitude. In addition, we should note that there are strong norms in our society against expressing a need for companionship (that is, admitting one's loneliness). It is for some combination of these reasons, we believe, that the homeproviders in problematic matches complain about unfulfilled expectations.

One obvious implication is that social needs should be considered a legitimate and important part of the needs assessment process when individuals are initially interviewed by the staff. At the same time, we must recognize, and it should be emphasized to participants that these needs are not easily translatable into a set number of hours or times per day or week. The problem is inherent in the nature of sociability as an exchange commodity. Flexibility is important in establishing expectations about companionship as a service since one's need or desire for it does not remain constant. That same flexibility, however, is also a major source of strain in matches in which companionship is the key element of exchange for the homeprovider. Our sense is that complaints about unfulfilled expectations are going to be more common in homesharing programs (like Share-A-Home) whose clients are relatively healthy and view homesharing as a means to meet social needs than in programs that serve a much more frail group of older adults whose needs are much more health- and personal-care oriented.

Both lines of argument—the notion of a faulty process and the prevalence of individuals whose needs are relatively ambiguous, uncertain, and fluctuating—have led us to consider the degree of structure that is built into the needs-assessment and agreement-negotiation processes. Although we have suggested

that there are limits on just how structured this process can be, beyond a certain point, formalization and quantification may not be desirable. Part of the appeal of this sort of program is its informality and lack of legalistic overtones. To promote tighter structure may, in fact, compromise these appealing qualities and create additional problems later.

Finally, involvement in a problematic match does not seem to turn people against the homesharing concept in general or to the Share-A-Home program in particular. Of all of the individuals who were no longer in matches at the time of the interview (n = 11), and most of them were individuals who were in problematic matches, 82% said that they would consider homesharing again in the future. A similar proportion of individuals still in matches at the time of the interview (89%) indicated that they would also consider homesharing again if their present arrangement were to end. Ninety-three percent of all individuals in this sample said that they would recommend homesharing to a friend. Thus even people who are disappointed with their matches do not attribute their problems to either the agency or anything intrinsic to homesharing.

NOTE

REFERENCE

Jaffe, Dale J. *Caring Strangers: The Sociology of Intergenerational Homesharing*. Greenwich, Conn.: JAI Press, 1989.