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EXPLORING COHOUSING FRAMING & IDEOLOGICAL BARRIERS

Cohousing by Any Other Name:
A Framing Study Exploring Ideological Barriers to Adoption of Collectivist Housing Options

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Abstract

Recent research suggests there is broader interest in cohousing in the US than its current niche market suggests. However, the lack of ideological diversity among cohousing adopters does not seem malleable. Cohousing adopters are predominately liberal and liberal ideology strongly predicts interest in cohousing. This research explored perceptions (including misperceptions) of cohousing and tested whether framing the concept differently could make it more appealing to Republicans and conservatives. Survey participants were randomly assigned to receive one of two versions of a survey, identical in all ways except in one version the term *pocket neighborhoods* was substituted for *cohousing*. Results revealed substantial misunderstanding of the concept of cohousing, particularly that it involves multiple unrelated households living under the same roof. There was no framing effect; those who identified as Republican or conservative did not find cohousing more appealing when it was called pocket neighborhoods. The most cited perceived benefits of cohousing were social interaction, relationships, and support, while lack of privacy and personal space topped the list of drawbacks. Understanding these common perceptions about cohousing can help stakeholders communicate more effectively about this model that promises many benefits to an apparently untapped prospective market.

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Introduction

Housing in the US is dominated by suburban single-family detached homes. There have been a myriad of criticisms of this development pattern. For example, suburban “sprawl” has been blamed for contributing to the breakdown of social institutions (Putnam, 2000), environmental degradation (Johnson, 2001), and lack of physical activity and obesity (Frumkin, Franck, & Jackson, 2004). The detached single-family dwelling has been criticized for being unsupportive of current demographics of household composition (Franck & Ahrentzen, 1989) and reinforcing stereotyped gender roles (Hayden, 1982, 2002). Although there are exceptions to this characterization of suburbia, there is general agreement that isolating development patterns became ubiquitous in the US after World War II.

Movements and concepts like New Towns (Forsythe, 2005) and the more contemporary New Urbanism (Congress for the New Urbanism, 1999; Katz, 1993) and smart growth (Daniels, 2001), are reactions against this pattern, seeking to counter alienation by adopting design strategies at various scales that promote community connection and provide access to nature. The current paper focuses on another similarly motivated movement: Cohousing. Cohousing differs from the aforementioned top-down strategies in that it is grassroots (resident-driven rather than developer-driven), smaller in scale, and imposes alternative social structures (e.g., collaborative design and management) in addition to physical design strategies.

Understanding consumer demand for these alternative housing models can support policy and industry practices to increase their diffusion. Demand for and diffusion of cohousing is especially complicated due to the larger role consumers play in the development process.

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Creating a cohousing community is resource-intensive in a number of ways (Boyer, 2017; Williams, 2008). Members need financial resources to contribute towards the common house in addition to their unit and to put money up front while living elsewhere during a typically long development process, and the time and energy to invest in growing membership, design and planning, etc. Residents need to have a variety of expertise within their community membership, or develop or outsource it, e.g., in design, project management, finance, marketing, and maintenance (Williams, 2008).

To date, cohousing has been adopted by a fairly homogenous niche market. Several studies (Boyer & Leland, 2018; Sanguinetti, 2015; Sanguinetti & Hibbert, 2018) suggest there is broader interest in cohousing among the US general population beyond the demographics that characterize most early adopters. However, lack of awareness, barriers to access, and ideological barriers undermine the potential for cohousing to become a mainstream option. The present research focuses on ideological barriers and considers how framing might influence how cohousing resonates with certain demographics. We first briefly overview US cohousing and the relevant literature.

Overview of US Cohousing

The cohousing model originated in Denmark in the 1960s. Architects McCamant and Durrett (1994; 2011) brought the concept to the United States in the 1980s. The Cohousing Association of the United States (Coho/US; cohousing.org) defines cohousing as follows:

Cohousing is an intentional community of private homes clustered around shared space. Each attached or single-family home has traditional amenities, including a private kitchen. Shared spaces typically feature a common house, which may include a large kitchen and

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dining area, laundry, and recreational spaces. Shared outdoor space may include parking, walkways, open space, and gardens. Neighbors also share resources like tools and lawnmowers.

Households have independent incomes and private lives, but neighbors collaboratively plan and manage community activities and shared spaces. The legal structure is typically an HOA, Condo Association, or Housing Cooperative. Community activities feature regularly-scheduled shared meals, meetings, and workdays. Neighbors gather for parties, games, movies, or other events. Cohousing makes it easy to form clubs, organize child and elder care, and carpool. (http://www.cohousing.org/what_is_cohousing)

Most cohousing communities are legally organized as condominium or homeowner associations (CoHousing Solutions, n.d.; Fromm, 2000). With these arrangements, each household owns their private lot and/or home and all residents jointly own the common property and facilities.

According to the cohousing directory on the Coho/US website (data provided by the Fellowship for Intentional Community), there are currently 165 established cohousing communities in the US. They are more concentrated on the coasts and can be urban, suburban, or rural, though they tend to be located near large cities or in university towns (Margolis & Entin, 2011). Most are multigenerational, though there are about eleven established senior-only cohousing communities and more in the forming stages. Most cohousing communities are new build developments, but some are adaptive reuse of industrial or commercial buildings (e.g., Swan's Market in Oakland, California) or retrofit (i.e., housing-to-housing adaptive reuse; e.g., N Street Cohousing in Davis, California).

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Research has pointed to a variety of cohousing benefits. Oft-cited benefits relate to social support, including opportunities for socializing, support, sharing chores, sharing expertise, living with people with similar interests, interdependent living, sense of belonging, self-esteem, and well-being (Markle et al., 2015; Williams, 2005a). Cohousing may also promote civic engagement (Poley & Stephenson, 2007) and political participation via practice exercising quasi-political skills in the context of cohousing (Berggren, 2013, 2016). Research also points to environmental benefits of cohousing (e.g., Hendrickson & Wittman, 2010; Kirby, 2003; Meltzer, 2000, 2005; Moos et al., 2006; Sanguinetti, 2014); the size and cooperative culture of cohousing is conducive to pro-environmental practices, such as obtaining renewable energy, growing food, and recycling.

Who Lives, or Might Want to Live, in Cohousing?

The Cohousing Research Network (CRN; cohousingresearchnetwork.org) conducted a nationwide survey of cohousing households in 2012, with respondents from 116 communities, which constitutes the largest and most representative source of demographic data on cohousing residents to date (unpublished data from Cohousing Research Network, 2017; see Sanguinetti, 2014, 2015, for methodology). These data are summarized in Table 1, alongside comparative data for the US general population. Compared to the general population, cohousing adopters are disproportionately older (particularly more are 60 or older), female, White, and more diverse in terms of sexual orientation. They also include a higher proportion of home-owners and are more highly educated than the general population. The discrepancy in income would likely be higher

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if not for the overrepresentation of retired persons. Finally, Republicans and Christians are extremely underrepresented in US cohousing.

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of the US population and the US cohousing population.

	US Cohousing Population From CRN 2012 Survey (<i>N</i> = 426 - 473)	General US Population 2010 US Census (unless otherwise noted)
Age	41% ≥ 60	25% ≥ 60
	24% 50-59	19% 50-59
	21% 40-49	19% 40-49
	12% 30-39	18% 30-39
	2% ≤ 29	19% 20-29
Gender	72% female	51% female
	95% White	73% White
Race and ethnicity	1% Black	13% Black
	2% Asian	5% Asian
	2% multiple races	9% multiple races
	2% Hispanic or Latino	16% Hispanic or Latino
Sexual orientation	86% heterosexual	92% heterosexual ¹
Housing tenure	89% own	65% own
Median Income	\$50-99,999	\$35-49,999 \$50-99,999
Education	66% Graduate degree	11% Graduate degree
	28% Bachelor's	18% Bachelor's
	4% Some college	21% Some college
	2% Associate's	8% Associate's
	0% no college	43% no college
Political affiliation	83% Democrat	34 % Democrat
	1% Republican	29% Republican
	16% Independent	33 % Independent
Religious affiliation	22% Agnostic	4% Agnostic ²
	16% Atheist	3% Atheist ²
	13% Unitarian	0.3% Unitarian ²
	11% Buddhist	1% Buddhist ²
	10% Jewish	2% Jewish ²
	8% Protestant	49% Protestant ²
	7% New Age	
	4% Quaker	
2% Catholic	21% Catholic ²	

¹ Gallup 2012

² PEW

Sanguinetti (2015) suggested that ideological barriers may prove most obstructive to the growth of cohousing. Using data from the CRN study mentioned above, Sanguinetti compared

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residents of retrofit cohousing communities to residents of traditional cohousing (new build or adaptive reuse developments involving a group of members in the planning process who moved in all at once). Residents of retrofit cohousing were younger and included more full-time students, renters, racial minorities, single householders, and residents with fewer financial assets. Retrofit cohousing residents did not differ from traditional cohousing residents in terms of political affiliation or level of education. Thus, Sanguinetti suggested that the less resource-intensive retrofit model may mitigate barriers to access (e.g., in terms of time, money, and effort), but fail to significantly address ideological barriers. Thus, the retrofit model may be making cohousing accessible to ideologically similar individuals at a different (e.g., earlier) life stage.

Two recent studies (Boyer & Leland, 2018; Sanguinetti & Hibbert, 2018) explored interest in cohousing among the US general population. Both found that interest in cohousing among the US general population is broader than the demographics that characterize most early adopters. For example, gender, age, race, and education did not predict interest. However, both studies found that having a liberal political ideology predicted greater interest in cohousing.

The Influence of Language and Framing

Williams (2008) interviewed cohousing experts who noted that when individuals are learning about cohousing they are often confused about whether it is a housing form or a lifestyle. Furthermore, “for those who have not experienced living in cohousing, associations with other collective housing forms or communitarian lifestyles are often confusing and not

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helpful in its promotion” (Williams, p. 278). In the US in particular, cohousing may conjure connotations of the well-known hippie movement’s communes.

Contrary to these perceptions, there are aspects of cohousing that seem well-aligned with conservative ideologies. For example, an advertisement once distributed by The Cohousing Association of the United States (Coho/US) aroused nostalgia, describing cohousing as “like a traditional village or the close-knit neighborhoods of earlier generations” and “a return to the best of small-town America”. Greater interdependencies among community members might be viewed as worthwhile from an individualistic point of view if framed as a means to secure greater independence from the state. Cohousing characteristics of private dwellings and no shared income, and promises of safety, supportive child-rearing, and aging in place all align with traditional values of family, home, and property.

Perhaps misconceptions of cohousing being more communal than is actually the case, arise due to qualities it shares with communes (e.g., common property and collaborative management), though to a degree these are qualities of all homeowners’ and condominium-owners associations (HOAs and COAs), which are relatively prevalent and familiar (and how cohousing communities are typically legally structured). Misperceptions may also be reinforced by the limited ideological diversity among cohousing early adopters and advocates. However, the term *cohousing* itself may have an influence. In particular, the prefix *co-*, in a most literal translation, may imply being housed *together*, i.e., living with non-related individuals under the same roof. It may also evoke perceptions that cohousing is like other forms of housing that begin with “co-”, i.e., commune or cooperative, suggesting more intimacy or dependence than is actually characteristic of cohousing.

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These hypotheses are supported by theories of decision-making, linguistics, and verbal behavior (Skinner, 2014). For example, the theory of heuristics asserts that labels can trigger subconscious processes, known as heuristics, that influence decision-making (Tversky & Kahneman, 1974). A *representativeness heuristic* refers to a process of judgment based on a stimulus' similarity to other known phenomena. A similar concept in relational frame theory is called a *frame of coordination* (Hayes, 2001).

Framing strategies that leverage these phenomena have been studied across a variety of topics and can help inform public policy. For example, Menegaki et al. (2009) found that consumers were significantly more willing to use “recycled water” than “treated wastewater”, which refer to the same thing. An example relevant to the present research is Schuldt, Konrath, and Schwarz (2011), who found that Republicans were significantly more likely to believe in “climate change” than “global warming”.

Since many people in the US have not heard about cohousing (Sanguinetti & Hibbert, 2018), there is an opportunity to test whether framing the concept in various ways impacts how it resonates with different population segments when they formulate initial opinions. In this research, we explored consumer perceptions of cohousing and tested the influence of framing on ideological barriers to cohousing adoption. Specifically, we investigated the influence of the term *cohousing* versus the term *pocket neighborhood* (a related concept).

The term *cohousing* was coined by Architects Katie McCamant and Chuck Durrett, who adopted the concept from Denmark, where it is called *bofællesskab*, which translates to *living community*. Architect Ross Chapin introduced the term *pocket neighborhood* in his book of the same name, which he defined as “a cohesive cluster of homes gathered around some kind of common ground within a larger neighborhood” He used traditional and retrofit cohousing

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communities as examples of this broader, perhaps more ideologically neutral, concept. Chapin's definition of pocket neighborhoods is strictly architectural, not specifying social requirements, such as participatory development and collaborative management that are key components of McCamant and Durrett's definition of cohousing. Thus, most cohousing communities might also be considered pocket neighborhoods, though all pocket neighborhoods are not cohousing.

Method

We created an online survey using SurveyMonkey software. There were two versions of the survey, identical in all ways except in one version the term *pocket neighborhoods* was substituted for *cohousing*. Participants were randomly assigned to one version or the other.

First, participants were asked about their familiarity with either the term cohousing or pocket neighborhood (depending on the survey version they received). Specifically, they were asked whether they knew what the term meant: *Do you know what [cohousing/a pocket neighborhood] is?* (response options: yes; no; not sure). Then, they were asked what they thought it meant: *What do you think [cohousing/a pocket neighborhood] is? (Please use your knowledge or guess, but do not look online)*, with an open-ended response. We coded cohousing definitions as 'very accurate' if they included both architectural and social characteristics (at least one of each). If only architectural or only social characteristics were mentioned, we coded the response as 'somewhat accurate', thus giving the social and physical characteristics equal weight which seems consistent with the cohousing model. Answers to these two questions from the *cohousing* version of the survey were analyzed to test these hypotheses:

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H₁: There is substantial misunderstanding of the concept of cohousing, including among those who think they know what it is.

H₂: Upon seeing the term for the first time, those unfamiliar with cohousing will conjecture that it may be similar to a commune and *not* involve private family dwellings.

After the questions about awareness and knowledge of cohousing, participants were exposed to a description of cohousing (Figure 1; labeled as either *cohousing* or *pocket neighborhoods*), with images representing a range of possible aesthetics and physical forms (Figures 2-5). After this illustrated description, participants were asked how much the idea of cohousing (or pocket neighborhoods) appealed to them: *How do you like the idea of [cohousing/a pocket neighborhood]?* With a response scale from 1 to 10, with 1 representing *I do not like it at all*, 5 representing *neutral*, and 10 representing *I like it very much*. Participants were also asked whether they would consider living in such an arrangement: *What is the likelihood that you would consider living in [cohousing/a pocket neighborhood]?* This question offered a response scale from 1 to 10 with 1 representing *Not very likely*, 5 representing *Neutral*, and 10 representing *Very Likely*. Responses were analyzed via two-way ANOVA to test this hypothesis:

H₃: Those who identify as Republican or have a conservative political ideology find cohousing more appealing when it is labeled *pocket neighborhoods*.

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Please read the following description of cohousing:

Cohousing is a community of private homes clustered around common space. Housing units can be single-family or attached homes (like duplexes or apartments). Common spaces can include open space, shared parking and walkways, garden, playground, storage, workshop, and a pool or hot tub. There may also be a common house with a large kitchen and dining area, guest rooms, laundry, space for community activities, office space, and exercise facilities.

People who live in cohousing sometimes participate in the design of their community. They may meet monthly or form small committees to manage common space and community activities (like gardening or construction). Neighbors sometimes share meals once or twice per week or per month; they may have potlucks at the common house or take turns cooking and cleaning. They may have community work days, parties, holiday celebrations, game nights, movie nights, and host concerts or other events for the larger community. Neighbors with similar interests may form clubs, organize childcare, or carpool to work.

Figure 1. Description of cohousing in the survey.



Figure 2. Swan's Market Cohousing in downtown Oakland; an example of an urban adaptive reuse cohousing development. Source: swansway.com. Photographed by Neil Planchon. Used with permission.



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Figure 3. Cobb Hill CoHousing in Vermont; an example of a rural cohousing development.

Source: boatdogbilly@blogspot.com



Figure 4. Nevada City Cohousing in California. Source: www.nccoho.org. Used with permission from CoHousing Solutions.



Figure 5. Greenwood Avenue Cottages in Washington; a pocket neighborhood. Source: Book *Pocket Neighborhoods*. Photographed by Karen Delucas. Used with permission.

We also included several open-ended responses to further explore participants' perceptions of cohousing:

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- (1) *Based on the description above, please list what you consider to be some positive aspects of cohousing/pocket neighborhoods;*
- (2) *Based on the description above, please list what you consider to be some negative aspects of cohousing/pocket neighborhoods; and*
- (3) *Under what conditions, if any, would you live cohousing/a pocket neighborhood?*

We conducted comparative qualitative analyses of these open-ended data based on results of the ANOVAs. Specifically, we compared responses between groups based on variables that were associated with statistically significant differences in level of interest in cohousing/pocket neighborhoods. These analyses were more exploratory; we did not have hypotheses about different themes emerging in these groups' responses, but perhaps rather the prevalence of certain themes would differ.

Participants and recruitment

We conducted an online survey with two samples. First, we recruited a sample via Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk). Participation on Mechanical Turk was restricted to US residents with a "HIT approval rate" of 95% or higher, meaning no more than 5% of their work on Mechanical Turk had been rejected by the requester. We judged MTurk to be a reasonable sampling strategy for this study for several reasons. First, it has been shown to compare favorably to other convenience sampling methods in terms of representativeness of the general population (Berinsky, Huber, & Lenz, 2012). For example, Huff and Tingley (2015) found that MTurk

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participants closely resembled samples from the Cooperative Congressional Election Survey in terms geographical (urban-rural) and employment sectors. MTurk workers were younger, in particular including more young Asian men and women and young Hispanic women. Voting patterns, partisan preferences, news interest, and education were also comparable when controlling for age (restricting analysis to younger participants).

In order to increase the range of participants' age, income, education, and political affiliation, we deemed it appropriate to supplement the MTurk strategy with an additional method. Specifically, we used snowball sampling of personal contacts via email invitations and social media postings, with a request to forward or re-post the invitation to recipients' contacts. Contacts of the authors living in cohousing or known to be familiar with cohousing were not recruited. Table 2 reports sample characteristics compared to the general US population.

The total sample size was 308 participants; 157 received the *cohousing* version of the survey and 151 received the *pocket neighborhoods* version.

Table 2. Sample characteristics compared to US population.

Demographic	Cohousing version		Pocket Neighborhoods Version		U.S. Population
	Mturk (<i>N</i> = 114)	Convenience (<i>N</i> ≈ 43)	Mturk (<i>N</i> = 98)	Convenience (<i>N</i> ≈ 53)	
Sex: Female	42%	79%	43%	83%	51% *
Age (<i>Mdn</i>)	31	44	30	45	38 [□]
Household Income (<i>Mdn</i>)	25,000 to 49,999	75,000 - 99,999	25,000 to 49,999	75,000 - 99,1000	53,889 *
Education (<i>Mdn</i>)	bachelor's	assoc bach	associate's	bachelor's	hs associate's*
Race: White	73%	72%	75%	81%	77% *
Employed	83%	65%	70%	79%	59% ‡
Married	29%	40%	24%	45%	48% *
Voted in 2012 Election	62%	72%	65%	70%	58% ◇
Political Affiliation					
<i>Republican</i>	18%	19%	19%	13%	26% †
<i>Democrat</i>	47%	28%	32%	51%	29% †
<i>Independent</i>	34%	40%	35%	36%	42% †

* U.S. Census Bureau

[□] United Nations Population Division

‡ U.S. Bureau of Labor and Statistics

◇ 2012 Voter Turnout report

† Gallup

Results

Results are presented in three parts. The first part is in answer to the first two hypotheses regarding awareness of cohousing, accuracy of perceptions, and connotations of the term *cohousing*. Next, the results of the ANOVAs for the framing experiment are presented. The final section explores more deeply participants' perceptions of positive and negative aspects of cohousing and under what conditions they would consider living in cohousing.

Cohousing Awareness and Connotations

Table 3 shows participants' reported awareness of cohousing (or pocket neighborhoods), as well as accuracy of their knowledge or guesses. In the *cohousing* version of the survey, 39% of respondents thought they about cohousing, 27% did not, and 34% were not sure.

Those who did not know or were unsure about cohousing were generally not able to guess accurately when subsequently asked what they thought cohousing was. The most common theme in their responses by far was that it might be *sharing a roof with unrelated persons*, (e.g., *It sounds like a shared house for multiple unrelated families; Cohousing sounds like several families living in the same house*). Many responses also mentioned financial characteristics *contrary to conventional private homeownership*, including co-homeownership (*Owning a house with another person*), sub-leasing or renting (*I would guess that cohousing is something similar to a co-op, but instead of owning you are renting*), sharing expenses (*I think cohousing is probably when two or more individuals, families or groups share a common house in order to save on the price of rent, mortgage, utilities, etc.*), and an affordable housing option for those

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with low income (*I believe cohousing are homes built for people of low income*). Some responses also mentioned ***connected dwellings***, guessing that cohousing is similar to apartments, duplexes, or condominiums.

Table 3. Awareness of cohousing/pocket neighborhoods and accuracy of definition/guess.

Do you know what cohousing is?	Yes			No/Not sure		
		39%			62% (No: 27%/Not sure: 34%)	
What do you think cohousing is?	Not at all accurate	Somewhat accurate	Very accurate	Not at all accurate	Somewhat accurate	Very accurate
	29%	48%	23%	97%	3%	0%
Do you know what a pocket neighborhood is?	Yes			No/Not sure		
	23%			77% (No: 51%/Not sure: 26%)		
What do you think a pocket neighborhood is?	Not at all accurate	Somewhat accurate	Very accurate	Not at all accurate	Somewhat accurate	Very accurate
	34%	43%	23%	87%	12%	1%

Of the 39% of participants who said they knew about cohousing, only 23% were very accurate in their definition, which equates to 9% of the total sample; 48% were somewhat accurate. These participants' descriptions of cohousing hit on a number its physical and social characteristics, including, in rough order of prominence (each with one illustrative quote): ***private residences with shared facilities*** (*A community of individual homes but with shared spaces*); ***participatory design*** (*I'm fairly sure it is the procedure in which residents of a neighborhood have substantial input in the design, layout and overall flow of the architecture present in their neighborhood*); ***participatory management*** (*A group of people collaborating to maintain their neighborhood*); and ***social interaction and support*** (*Cohousing is housing that tries to create community and group interactions among it's residents*). There were also a few mentions of other ***unique***

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architectural features (The houses are typically close to each other centered around a focal point) and the concept of *intentional community* (Cohousing residents consciously commit to living as a community).

Some responses coded as ‘somewhat accurate’ may have just been relating a single feature or set of features that stood out most to them, whereas others might have been missing the point slightly, discounting either the social side (*It’s like a subdivision with an HOA. Homeowners collectively own things like community pools and gyms*), or the physical/architectural side [*It’s a community of homes (not necessarily a housing plan). In these homes, several families might do activities, like cooking and eating, together, rather than separate as most families do*].

Misperceptions of cohousing among those who said they were familiar included sharing a roof with unrelated persons, similar to what we observed for respondents who were guessing or not sure they knew what cohousing meant. Other misperceptions included a number of vague responses (e.g., *People living in small communities; Housing that is shared*) and others that were just not quite right in various ways (e.g., *Suburban housing developments; I think it is taking care of people*). There were only two references to communes/communism, both in the group who reported familiarity with cohousing: *It’s pretty much community communism; I associate the term with communes*.

Framing Experiment

In all four ANOVAs (Table 4 and Figure 6), the main effect of label (*cohousing* versus *pocket neighborhood*) on each the appeal of cohousing or likely consideration of living in cohousing

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was not significant. There was a significant main effect of each political affiliation and political ideology on both appeal of cohousing and likely consideration of living in cohousing. In general, Republicans and Conservatives found the idea less appealing. There were no significant interaction effects whereby political affiliation and ideology interacted with label to impact attitudes toward cohousing.

Table 4. The appeal of living in cohousing in relation to political affiliation and ideology.

	Main Effect		Interaction Effect
	Political Affiliation <i>F</i> (1,290), (<i>p</i> -value)	Framing <i>F</i> (1,290), (<i>p</i> -value)	<i>F</i> (1,290), (<i>p</i> -value)
Like the idea of	5.521(.019)**	0.014(.906)	0.091(.764)
Would consider living in	5.057(.025)**	0.106(.744)	0.150(.699)

	Main Effect		Interaction Effect
	Political Ideology <i>F</i> (1,282), (<i>p</i> -value)	Framing <i>F</i> (1,282), (<i>p</i> -value)	<i>F</i> (1,282), (<i>p</i> -value)
Like the idea of	1.969(.070)*	0.006(.940)	0.58(.746)
Would consider living in	2.909(.009)***	0.153(.696)	0.195(.978)

* = $p < .1$; ** = $p < .05$; *** = $p < .01$; **** = $p < .001$

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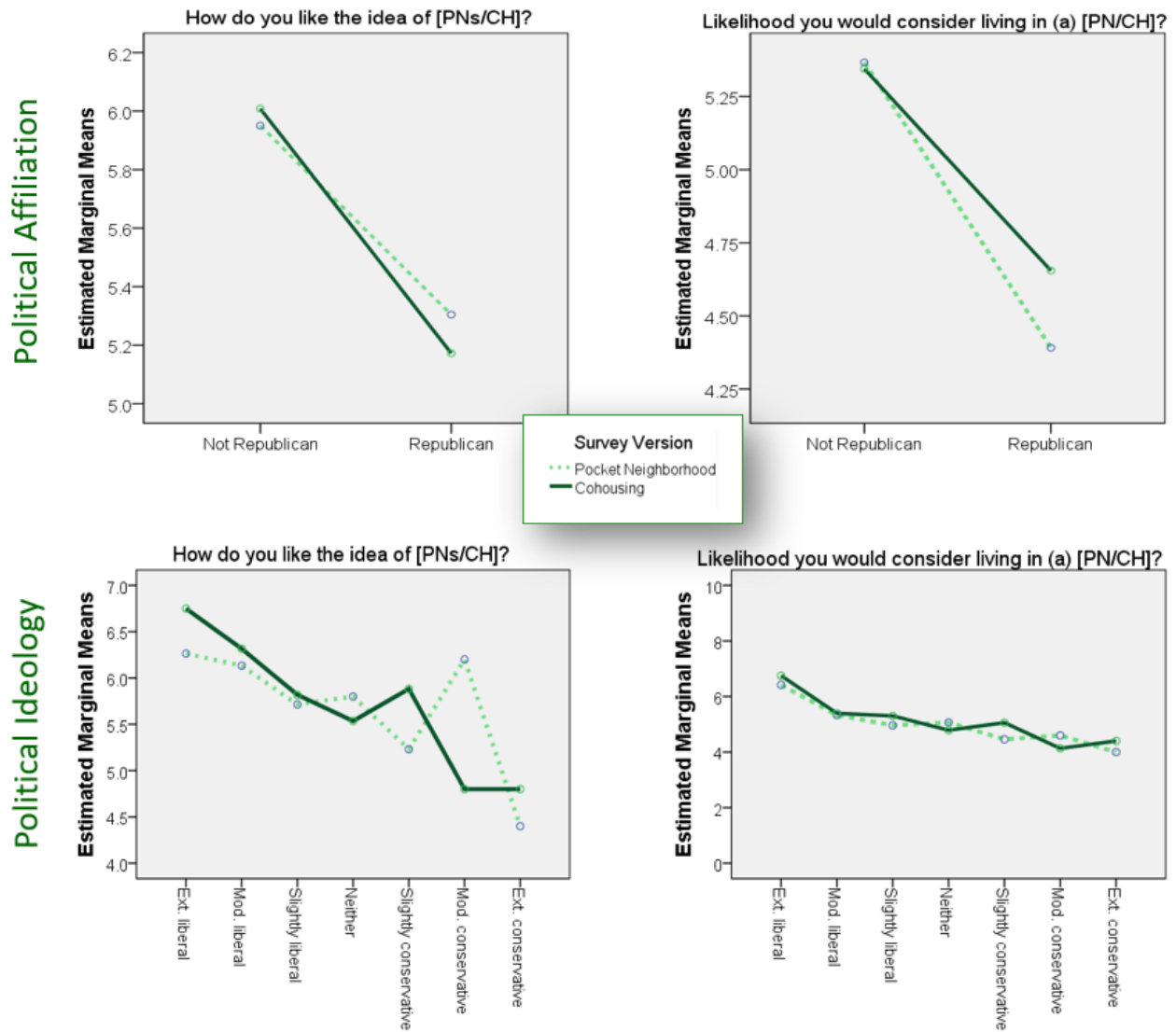


Figure 6. The representation of the idea of cohousing by framing of cohousing (cohousing vs. pocket neighborhood) and political affiliation and ideology.

Exploring Attitudes toward Cohousing

This section presents themes in participants' open-ended responses regarding perceived positive and negative aspects of cohousing, and the conditions under which they would consider living in cohousing. First, all responses from the cohousing survey version were coded according to

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emergent themes. We excluded responses to the pocket neighborhood version from this analysis because cohousing is the main focus of the paper and although the term used was not a significant predictor of interest in the idea, different connotations of the two terms were evident (e.g., pocket neighborhoods were often confused with culs de sac, which is also an interesting association given similarities between the concept of a pocket and a cul de sac: semi-circular shape and no outlets).

Positive aspects of cohousing. In terms of perceived positive aspects, the most prevalent themes among the entire sample of participants who received the cohousing survey version concerned *social benefits, including **social support** (e.g., Always have a supportive group of people around you; Helping one another), **social interaction** and **relationships** (e.g., You would probably make a lot of lifelong friends; Opportunity for close friendships among children; Fun, bonding, social activities that every person needs in some form), and **identity** and **sense of community** (e.g., Knowing that you belong to a community is nice; Feel as if you're a part of a group or community).*

In addition to the more psychological and emotional aspects of social ties in community, participants also frequently noted **practical benefits of sharing** the responsibilities and costs of resources, services, and facilities, e.g., related to gardening, baby-sitting, carpooling, and property maintenance. Many noted that such sharing could enable **access to better, bigger, or more amenities and opportunities** (e.g., *With so many people working together on a small area it is possible to create some impressive spaces that you could share; More benefits for less costs and work; Opportunity to have access to a pool or other amenities that you can't afford on your own; Have more amenities (a swimming pool, a large garden, etc.) when everyone pitches in*

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with labor and finances). Another practical benefit mentioned was increased **safety** and lower crime as a result of being with like-minded neighbors that know and “*look out for each other*”.

Negative aspects of cohousing. In terms of perceived negative aspects of cohousing, the most prevalent themes were **lack of privacy and personal space** as a result of social relationships and community size and density (e.g., *Too close proximity may invade privacy; Gossip may spread quickly; Neighbors would probably be nosy or in your business*). Many participants also described potential for **interpersonal conflict** related to personality and ideological differences (e.g., *If you do not get along with the others in your community it may be uncomfortable; Cohousing may not allow enough space for people to raise their own family. Differences in beliefs and cultural practice may pose a barrier between families and the community*). Another prevalent theme was **loss of individuality and control** (e.g., *You don't have complete control over how your shared space is used; Not as much freedom to make decisions for yourself; Having to abide by what the community wants rather than your own individual style*).

Other concerns were **too much social obligation** (e.g., *Forced to participate in social events; Feeling obligated; You may be pressured to do things*); increased **burdens of effort, time, and money** (*Time spent in meetings; Potentially steep membership dues; Homeowners are responsible for maintenance; Lots of time, money and energy to upkeep*); and the potential for **unequal or unfair workshare** (e.g., *Not all neighbors doing their job to keep the place looking nice*).

Conditions for considering cohousing. Several general themes emerged from responses to the next question, *Under what conditions, if any, would you live in cohousing?* These were: Social conditions, logistical conditions, and physical conditions. In terms of social conditions, many respondents noted that they would live in cohousing if they could **live with current friends**

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or family (If it was a community of friends; My own family and friends living in the Cohousing already), or if *neighbors were nice or like-minded* (e.g., Shared similar beliefs as I do; The neighbors are friendly; If my neighbors shared a common interest or profession with me). Many respondents felt that *life-stage and family structure* were important factors (e.g., Would be great [with/for] aging parents who could be part of the community; As a retiree; As a single-mom; As I age and live alone; If I was younger with children maybe). Again, sufficient *privacy* was important (e.g., Freedom to do what I want; Offered a degree of privacy).

Other respondents communicated logistical criteria such as *financial conditions* (e.g., If it was more affordable; Cheaper home options; Financially beneficial), *improved amenities* (e.g., Better facilities; A lot of amenities), *location* (e.g., If there were any [of these] neighborhoods in my town) and *safety*. Some participants said they would consider trying cohousing if there were *opportunities to test* via short-term or non-permanent residence (e.g., If I could do so temporarily or without restriction on moving out should I decide I didn't like it; Lease option versus immediate purchase).

The physical considerations for participants to live in cohousing included concerns about having *ample space* (e.g., Out in the wilderness: If the houses were farther apart) and *preferred aesthetics* (e.g., If the place was beautiful; Appeared to be clean; Beautiful community). Finally, some participants stated there were no conditions which they would live in cohousing.

Comparative analysis. Since there was no framing effect revealed in the ANOVAs, we did not compare responses to pocket neighborhood v. cohousing versions of the questions. Because both political affiliation and ideology both emerged as significantly related to attitudes toward cohousing (appeal and likelihood of considering), we compared perceptions of participants identifying as Republican and/or conservative (right of neutral) to the rest of the

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sample (Democrat or Independent and liberal or “neutral”). This was done by coding responses according to these two groups after the entire sample was coded by theme, allowing assessment of the proportion of each group represented under each theme. Any theme where the proportion of each group represented differed by at least 10% was further explored for sub-themes that could help explain the discrepancy.

Participants identifying as Republican and/or conservative contributed comments under each of the aforementioned themes found in the full sample. The only case where they differed from others was underrepresentation in the comments coded under social support. Their perceptions of social benefits featured enjoying friendships and practical benefits of balanced mutual support, e.g., *looking out for each other and working together to make the community better*. In contrast, some comments from the other group (not conservative or Republican) implied deeper types of social support--perhaps emotional or even financial, where each exchange may not be a fair give-and-take, e.g., *If one particular family was going through problems, a neighbor or neighbors could help them and in that way, everyone could keep the next person afloat*. This was, at most, a minor difference in tone. On the whole, the two groups expressed similar perceptions about the positive and negative aspects of cohousing, and even the conditions under which they would consider living in cohousing.

Discussion

Results were in full support of **H₁**, that there is substantial misunderstanding of the concept of cohousing, including among those who think they know what it is. **H₂** was partially supported, in that those unfamiliar with cohousing often misunderstood it to involve multiple unrelated

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households living under the same roof; however, few respondents compared it to communes. **H₃** was not supported; those who identified as Republican or conservative did not find cohousing more appealing when it was called pocket neighborhoods. Qualitative analysis revealed social interaction, relationships, and support as the most appreciated benefits of cohousing, while lack of privacy and personal space topped the list of drawbacks.

Limitations. The small sample size in this study, in particular the low numbers of Republicans and/or conservatives, may have precluded detection of a framing effect (cohousing v. pocket neighborhoods) and some connotations of the term *cohousing* we were expecting (i.e., communes). Only 18% of the sample identified as Republican and 20% as conservative (3% ‘Extremely conservative, 7% ‘Moderately conservative’, and 10% ‘Slightly conservative’). However, despite the small sample size there was a significant main effect of each party affiliation and political ideology on interest in cohousing, in keeping with prior research (Boyer & Leland, 2018; Sanguinetti & Hibbert, 2018).

The convenience sample in this study also limits the generalizability of the findings of low awareness and tendencies to misunderstand cohousing. In addition to underrepresentation of Republicans, the sample was characterized by higher education and included more single individuals compared to the US general population. To increase the validity and generalizability of findings, replications or extensions of this study should aim for a larger and more representative sample, and/or oversample Republicans and conservatives.

What’s in a Name: Cohousing, Cohouseholding, or Coliving? Understanding common misperceptions about cohousing, as well as perceptions of its positive and negative qualities, can help stakeholders communicate more effectively about the cohousing model that promises many benefits to an apparently untapped prospective market (Boyer & Leland, 2018;

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Sanguinetti & Hibbert, 2018). The most common misconception of cohousing is that it entails multiple unrelated persons/families living in one home. Likely in response to this, cohousing advocates and professionals have learned to lead with the feature of private homes when defining cohousing (cohousing.org/what_is_cohousing).

Multiple unrelated persons living in one home actually describes a different type of collaborative housing called *cohousing* (The Cohousing Project; <http://www.cohousing.org/>). In addition to the connotation from its prefix, cohousing also has to contend with this model with a similar name that actually is what cohousing sounds like. However, cohousing has enjoyed greater popularity, so cohousing advocates, professionals, and adopters likely also have to overcome the inverse misperception when trying to communicate about these models, as evidenced by the definitions of both on the home page of Cohousing.org preceded by the question, “Cohousing and cohousing: Are they different?”

Coliving (<http://coliving.org/>) is another model that is gaining popularity. It is similar to cohousing (multiple unrelated persons in same house) but typically operated by for-profit rental companies and geared toward young professionals. Coliving.com actually names cohousing as a synonym (coliving.com/what-is-coliving), directly communicating the most common misperception of cohousing as multiple households under one roof.

The diversification of collaborative housing models, though confusing and challenging in some respects, should also inspire those involved in these movements. It is the result of a core idea evolving to fit the different needs of multiple segments of the population. It should signal to the housing industry and policy-makers that each of these collaborative housing models are part

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of a broader movement with broader public interest than the niche membership of any single model might suggest.

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