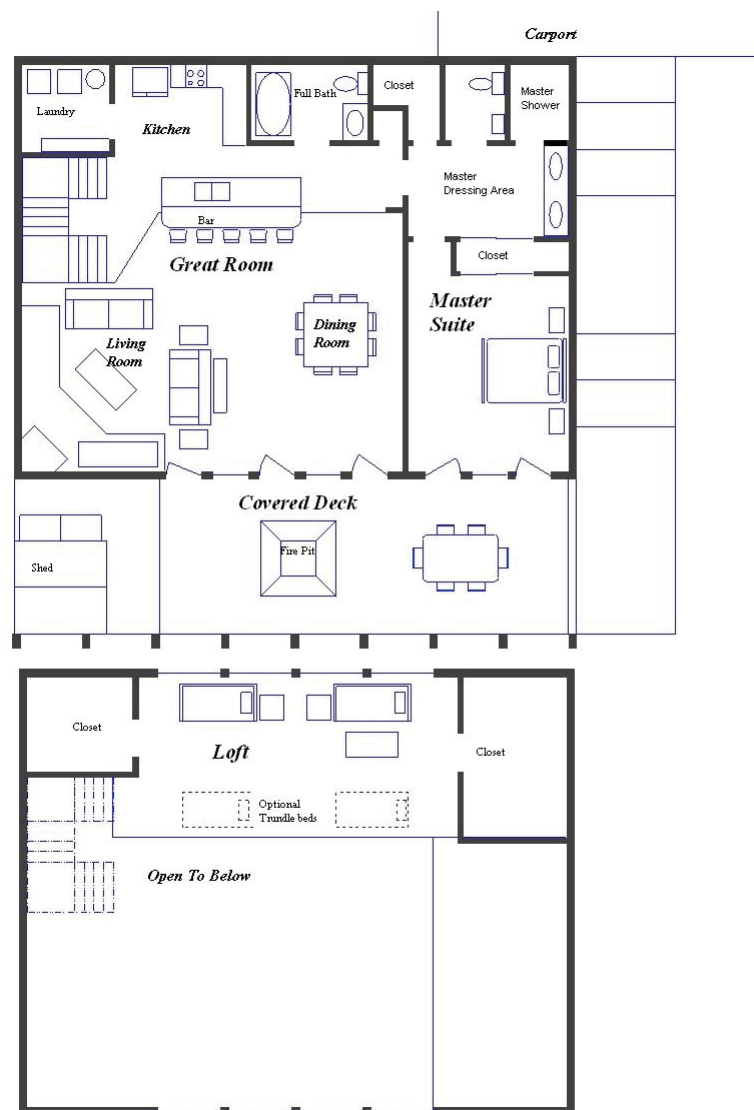


At Home Abroad:

A Study of Expatriates' Housing and Its Ties to Assignment Success

Final Report 2010

Research conducted by
The Interchange Institute



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At Home Abroad: A Study of Expatriate Housing and Its Ties to Assignment Success

The Interchange Institute

Executive Summary

Participants were 130 expatriates from 24 countries, living in one of 48 countries. 50% were US citizens. The most common current residence was US (12%). They had lived in their current country an average of 4.6 years and in their current home 2.5 years. The mean age was 41 (range 23 to 70). 81% were female. 79% were married. 32% had moved to the current country because of their own jobs or education; 56% were accompanying spouses; the rest had moved for personal reasons. 51% had children living with them. Participants completed an on-line survey about the role their homes played in their expatriate experience. This study:

- ♦ Clearly documents the importance of careful home selection and efficient settling-in for the overall well-being of expatriate assignments:
 - ♦ Efficient settling in and satisfaction with home were consistently related to participants' loyalty to their employer, their rating of the assignment and their mental health.
 - ♦ Those who said they would pick their same house again were also more loyal to their employer, happier with the assignment, felt more settled and had better mental health.
- ♦ Identifies an important dimension of how a home affects families – the difference in being “centrifugal” vs. “centripetal.” Centrifugal homes lead family members to be more separate from each other, and to spend time alone in separate spaces, often a feature of increased space that people think they like. Centripetal homes lead family members to spend more time in common space.
 - ♦ This dimension was largely invisible to participants yet was one of the most predictive aspects of their response to the assignment. Those in centripetal homes rated the assignment consistently more positively than those in centrifugal homes.
- ♦ Teases apart which aspects of an expatriate home are the most relevant for assignment outcome. “Décor” and “quality of neighborhood” were more important than “proximity to work.”
- ♦ Enumerates what is important to accompanying spouses in a home, and how that differs from what is important to employees themselves. Given the results, support services for spouses are clearly justified.
- ♦ Analyzes and pulls together some personal characteristics and beliefs that affect what a person thinks is important in a home. These findings lead to a few quick questions expatriates can be asked to target and direct relocation support.
- ♦ Articulates the way in which people have an internal “ideal” home that they use to compare their new homes against, and documents which aspects of these internal homes are most important to satisfaction.
- ♦ Clearly documents how people feel about their housing policy and relocation support services (if any) and the aspects of the policies that matter most to them. Generosity and choice in how much to spend and where to live permanently are critical.
- ♦ Spells out what people who are happy on their expatriate assignments actually do when they first move into their homes, and how this differs from those who are unhappy. Happy ones “nest” (hang photos and art work and organize their kitchens) and make connections with neighbors.
- ♦ Examines the cultural context of the new expatriate home. Those who lived in a home that was typical of local culture were more positive about their assignment. Demographic differences in who lived in culturally-typical homes vs. expatriate bubbles suggest a complex relationship between where people want to live and what their housing policy allows. Vivid quotations from open-ended responses illustrate how:
 - ♦ a home's architecture offers access to a deeper cultural experience,
 - ♦ new climate conditions influence room layout and heating and ventilation and, through that, new family interaction patterns
 - ♦ changes in formality or size of a home affect how parents and couples interact with each other, not always in expected ways
 - ♦ expatriate families have to adjust to new neighborhood expectations, opportunities and limitations
 - ♦ having domestic help or not having domestic help live in the home for the first time challenges families
 - ♦ unfamiliar amenities (e.g. gas fire places, number of doors, new size of refrigerator) require subtle but profound family change
 - ♦ new room layouts affect who spends time with whom
- ♦ Gives voice to participants' advice to other expatriates about how to select a home, and about what a “home” means in the context of living a globally mobile life.

Table of Contents

Chapter 1: About the Study	5
Chapter 2: Homes Really Do Make a Difference	8
Chapter 3: What Matters to Families, Whether They Know It or Not	13
Chapter 4: Some People Care More About Homes than Others; Their Adjustment Path Differs	16
Chapter 5: People's Internal Ideal Home Affects Their Perceptions and Evaluations of Their Current Home	21
Chapter 6: Relocation Assistance Makes a Difference	30
Chapter 7: How People Settle In Makes a Difference	37
Chapter 8: The Cultural Context of Home Matters	40
Chapter 9: Participants' Advice	43

Chapter 1: About the Study

Goals of Study

The goals of this study were to:

- ♦ Assess the ways in which expatriate housing selection is related to subsequent assignment satisfaction. In particular, the importance of housing policy clarity, generosity, and flexibility were examined.
- ♦ Understand the ways in which a home affects a family's interaction patterns, with special consideration given to aspects of a home that change when moving to a new country.
- ♦ Offer data-based recommendations about how to maximize the chances of a successful assignment in the context of a satisfied homedweller.

Participants and Methods

- ♦ Participants were 130 expatriates from 24 countries, living in one of 48 countries*. The most common current residence was US (12%).
- ♦ Fifty percent were US citizens**.
- ♦ They had lived in their current country a mean 4.6 years (range one month to 20 years) and in their current home 2.5 years (one month to 13 years).
- ♦ The mean age was 41 (range 23 to 70).
- ♦ 81% were female. 79% were married.
- ♦ 32% had moved to the current country because of their own jobs or education; 56% were accompanying spouses; the rest had moved for personal reasons.
- ♦ 51% had children living with them.

Participants were contacted via a variety of expatriate support and information sites, and completed an on-line survey about the role their homes played in their expatriate experience.

* Participants were currently living in: Afghanistan, Algeria, Angola, Argentina, Austria, Belgium, Belize, Bolivia, Bulgaria, Burundi, Canada, Chile, China, Ecuador, Egypt, France, Gabon, Germany, Greece, Hungary, India, Iraq, Italy, Japan, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Luxembourg, Macedonia, Malta, Mexico, Netherlands, New Zealand, Nicaragua, Nigeria, Philippines, Romania, Russia, Rwanda, Singapore, Spain, Sri Lanka, Switzerland, Tunisia, United Kingdom, United States, Uruguay, Zambia, Zimbabwe.

** Participants were citizens of: Australia, Bulgaria, Canada, Denmark, Ecuador, France, Germany, Iceland, India, Indonesia, Ireland, Italy, Jordan, Netherlands, Nigeria, Peru, Philippines, Romania, Russia, Sweden, Turkey, United Kingdom, United States, Venezuela

Topics Covered in Survey

Participants were asked questions about the following areas:

Whether they received **relocation support** of the following types, and if so, who paid for the support:

- ♦ finding a home
- ♦ negotiating a rental or sales agreement
- ♦ tax assistance regarding home rental issues
- ♦ decorating service
- ♦ buying or renting furniture
- ♦ handyman service
- ♦ purchasing computer/DVD/TV
- ♦ purchasing cable/TV/internet service for home
- ♦ set up of computer/DVD/TV in home s
- ♦ gardening or lawn service

How much **choice** they had in where they lived, whether or not they moved under conditions of a housing policy, and how they felt about their housing policy's clarity, flexibility, equity, generosity and amount of choice.

How **settled** they felt in their current home, how long it took them to feel settled, and what steps they took to settle in, including:

- ♦ unpacking all moving boxes
- ♦ cleaning home
- ♦ repainting or redecorating at least one room
- ♦ displaying family photos in living areas
- ♦ hanging art work on walls
- ♦ organizing kitchen
- ♦ arranging furniture
- ♦ meeting at least one neighbor
- ♦ having local friends, co-workers or neighbors to home
- ♦ having friends or family from home visit you
- ♦ having holiday meal/celebration in home
- ♦ setting up children's space

How **satisfied** they were, and **how their current home compared to some ideal one** in their personal history (a childhood home, their most recent home, or some other adult home), on the following dimensions:

- ♦ size of kitchen
- ♦ size of common living spaces
- ♦ size of your bedroom
- ♦ number of rooms
- ♦ quality of neighborhood
- ♦ security
- ♦ decor
- ♦ sunlight
- ♦ age of building
- ♦ comfort
- ♦ luxuriousness
- ♦ formality
- ♦ modernity
- ♦ privacy from neighbors
- ♦ privacy for individual family members
- ♦ proximity to shopping
- ♦ proximity to work
- ♦ proximity to school
- ♦ proximity to public transportation
- ♦ proximity to favorite activities
- ♦ amount of space for favorite activities
- ♦ amount of indoor space for children's play
- ♦ amount of outdoor land accessible
- ♦ interesting architectural details
- ♦ contemporary design
- ♦ historic importance of home
- ♦ storage space
- ♦ family-friendly layout

How/whether their new home influenced the way their family interacted with each other. Three open ended questions were asked:

- ♦ Sometimes new homes change where adults and children spend time and do activities. Please compare your **current home layout** with the one you lived in MOST RECENTLY and describe any differences in where you do activities that are a result of a difference in home layout or organization. Think about things like cooking, entertaining, reading, watching TV, sleeping, relaxing, doing hobbies, working at home, children's homework - do you have more or less interaction with others in your family while doing any of these than you did before?
- ♦ Sometimes new homes have an **appliance, facility or a piece of furniture** that change family patterns -- a wide-screen TV or swimming pool that draws teenagers, for example, or a dining room table that is big enough for large dinner parties. Other times, new homes are missing such things in ways that affect families -- no comfortable couch to sit together while watching TV, for example, or no large refrigerator and so more frequent small shopping trips with children. Please describe any differences in the appliances, furniture or facilities you have in your current home compared to the last place you lived, and how it has changed your interactions with people in your home.
- ♦ If you were **evacuated** suddenly from your current home, what would be the one item you would take with you?

Topics Covered in Survey (continued)

The importance to them of their **role as a homemaker** and of their **career**.

How **typical their home was for the culture** in which they were living.

The **importance** to them of the following aspects of a home:

- ◆ that the home is cosy
- ◆ that all neighbors feel welcome to come in any time they like
- ◆ that the home is considered a good place for children's friends to spend time
- ◆ that the home is considered a good place for work colleagues to spend time
- ◆ that the home is a place where one can get away from any stress

Various measures of **how participants were feeling** in general, and specifically about the assignment:

- ◆ a five-item Mental Health Inventory
- ◆ a 7-point rating of satisfaction with the assignment
- ◆ levels of agreement with these statements:
 - ◆ I am happy I moved to this country.
 - ◆ I feel very loyal to my employer/my spouse's employer.
 - ◆ I would move to another country again, assuming the conditions would be the same as what I have had this time.
 - ◆ I plan to live in this country as long as originally planned.
 - ◆ My home greatly influences my feelings about whether moving to this country was a good idea.

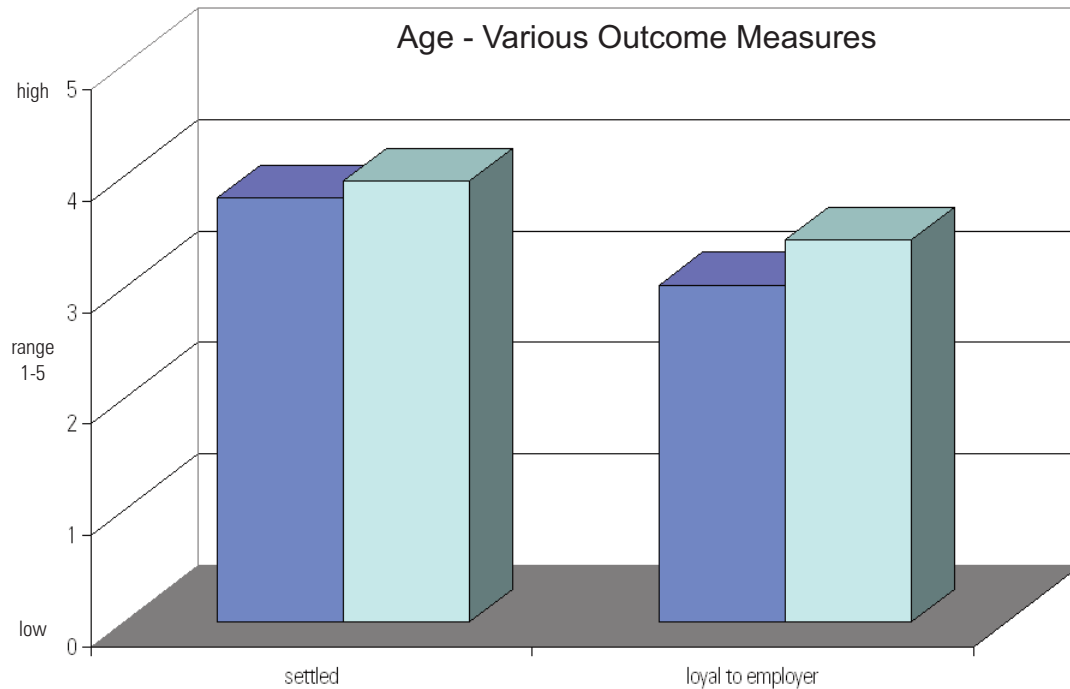
These **open-ended questions**:

- ◆ If you had it to do over again, would you pick this same home? Why or why not?
- ◆ Do you have other thoughts or reflections about the role of your house/home and your intercultural experience?
- ◆ What advice do you have for people selecting and setting up a home in a new country?

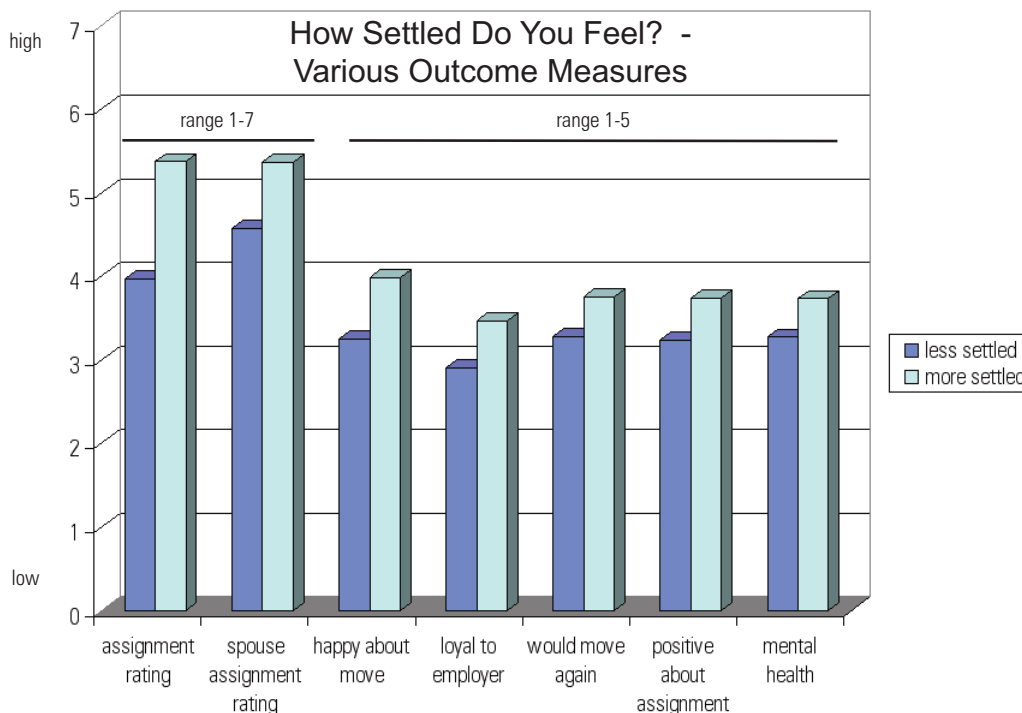
Chapter 2: Homes Really Do Make a Difference

Does it really matter where someone lives? Aren't one's jobs, family and friends the really important factors in expatriates' adjustment? Of course, it is true that those who are happy with one domain of their lives tend to be happy in others as well. Results from this study clearly support the idea that where one lives is fundamentally important to expatriates, and that the selection of a home is a task that should be taken very seriously.

We asked participants how settled they felt in their home and in their community.

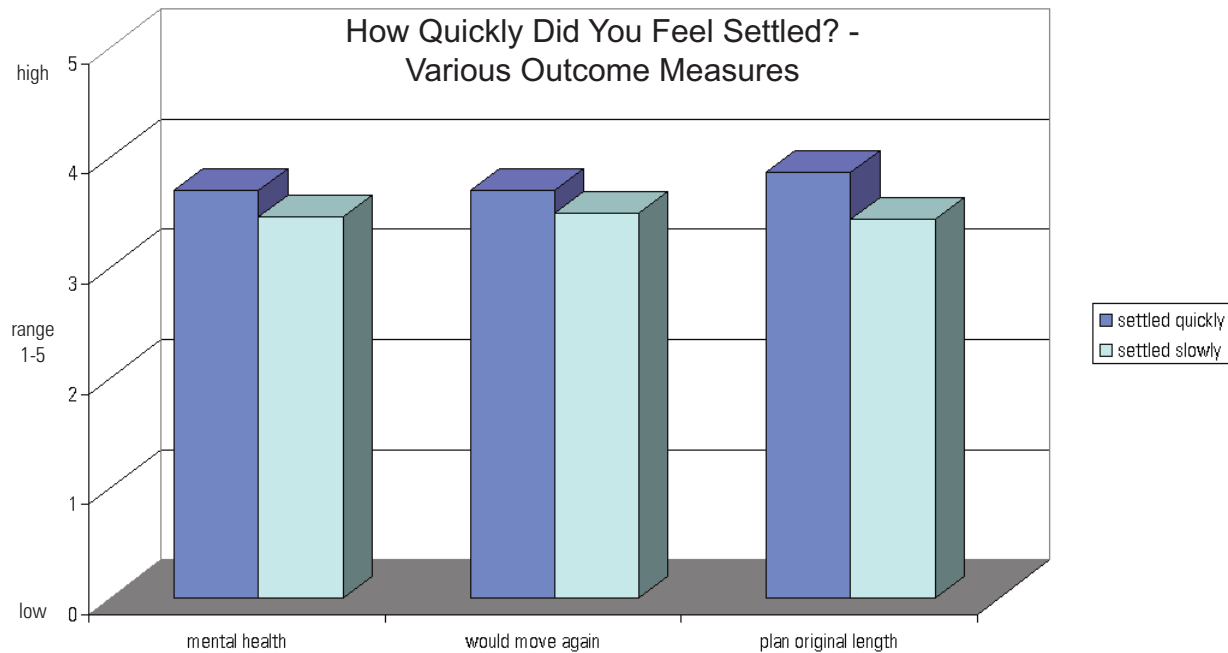


Older participants felt more settled in their home and community than younger participants. They also reported feeling more loyal to their employer than younger participants.

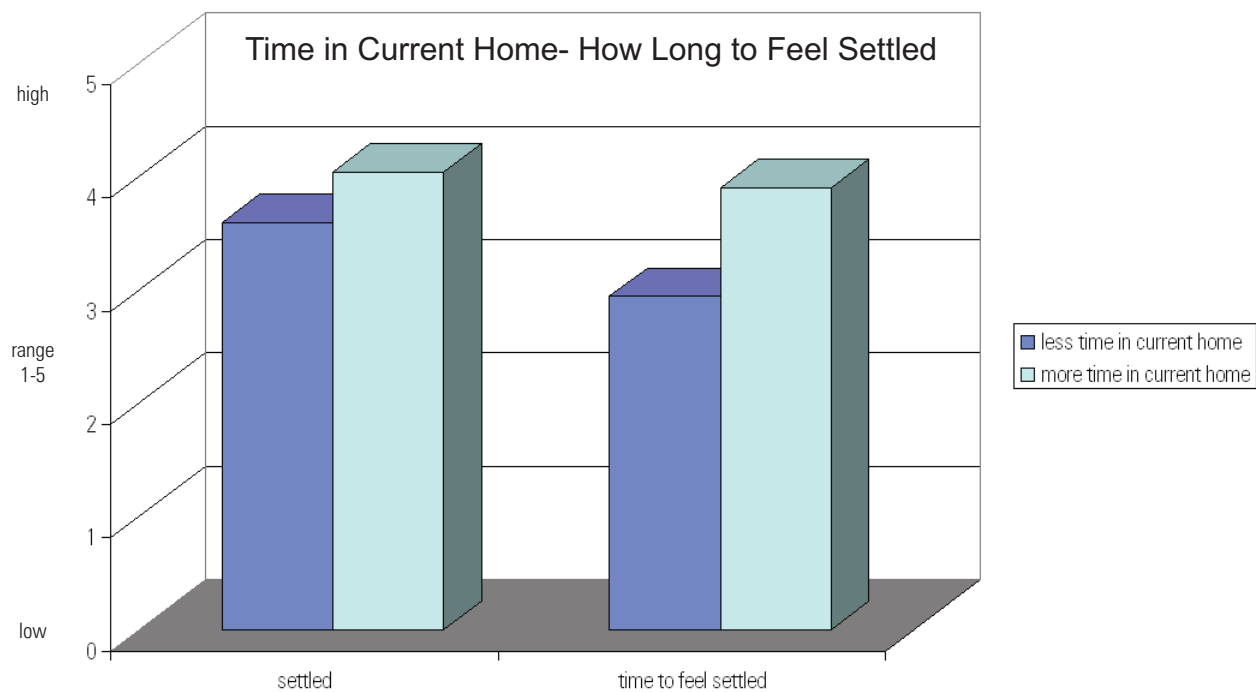


Compared to those who did not feel well settled, those who felt more settled had better mental health; rated the assignment more positively and said their spouses would, too; were happier about the move; felt more loyal to the employer that had sent them on the assignment; said they would be more willing to take another similar assignment; and, in general, felt more positive about the assignment. In short, on every indicator of adjustment, feeling settled in home and community was important.

Next we asked about the importance of a quick and timely settling in period. Is it important to settle in quickly?

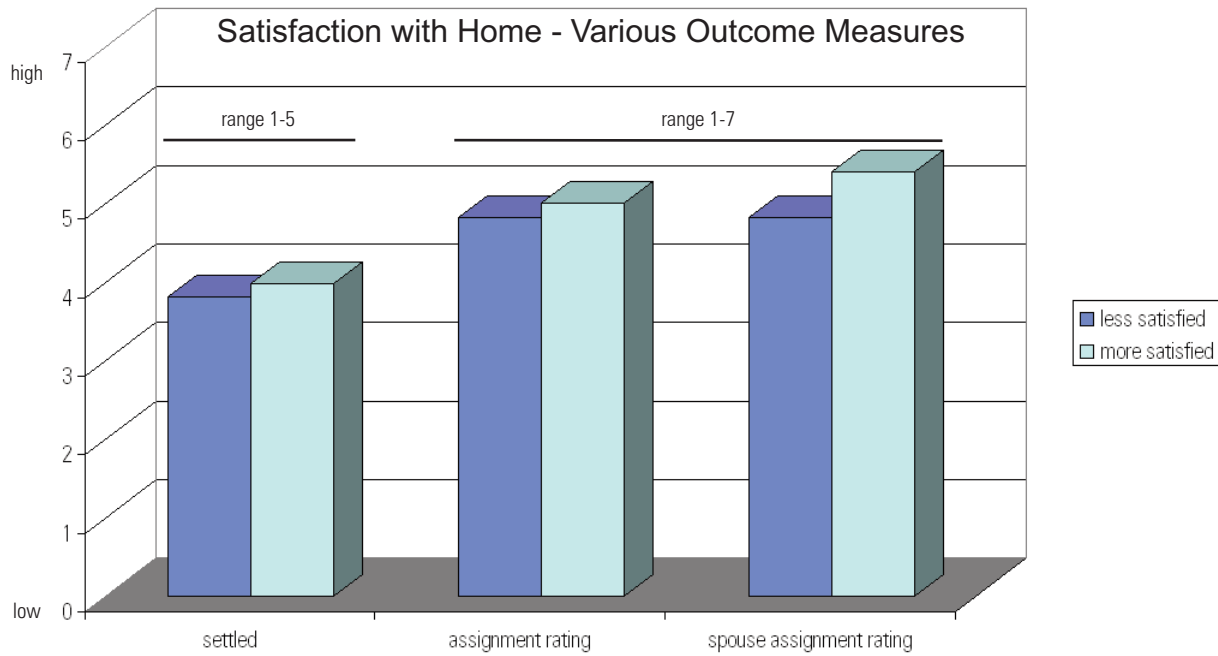


Those who settled into their new homes quickly had significantly better mental health. They also had more positive views of the assignment — they were more likely to say they would move again on a similar assignment, and were more likely to say they planned to stay on assignment for the originally-agreed-upon time.



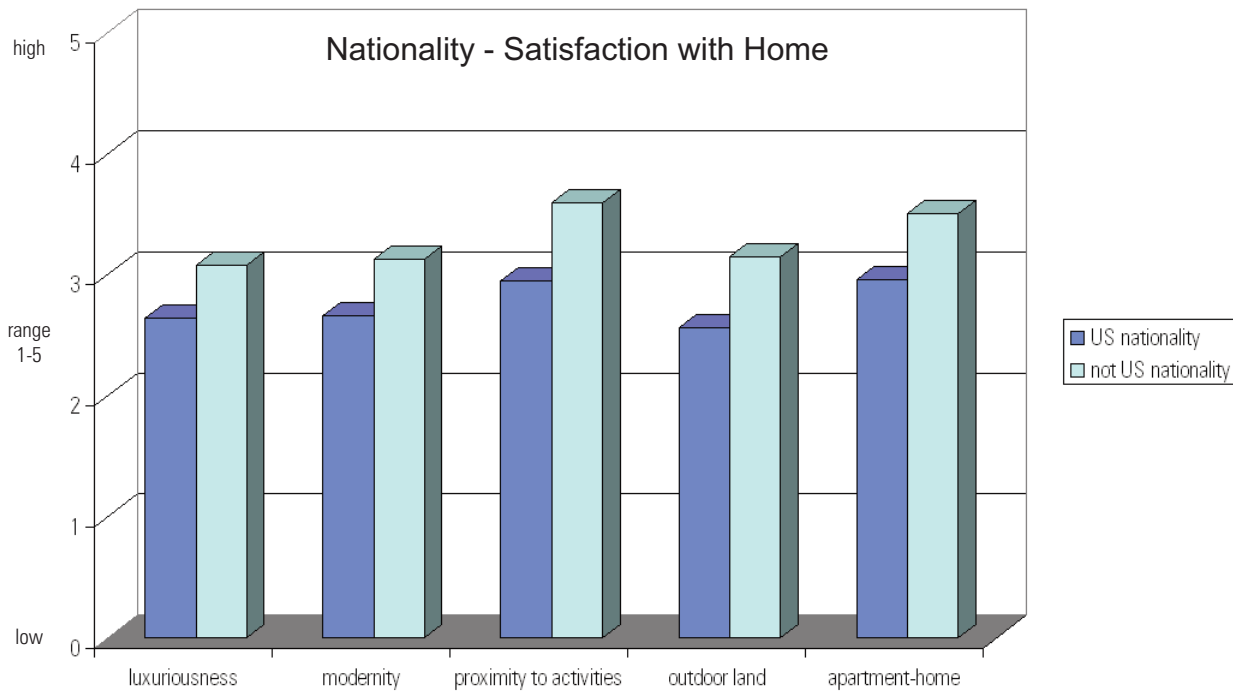
Those who had lived in their current home a longer time felt more settled, not surprisingly, but also said it took them longer to feel settled.

We asked participants about their satisfaction with particular aspects of their homes, in an attempt to identify any factors that would consistently relate to better outcome.

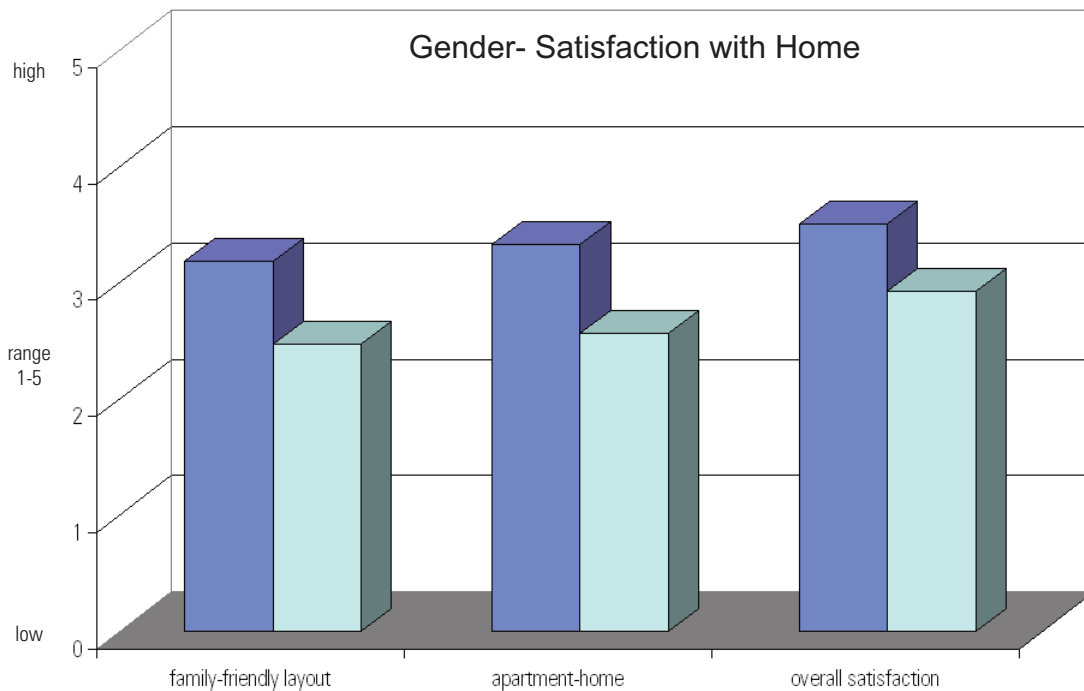


Looking first at their overall satisfaction, participants who felt more satisfied with their homes overall felt more settled in their home and community, rated the assignment more positively, and said their spouses would rate it more positively, too.

We next examined whether US Americans differed from those from other countries in their home satisfaction. (Unfortunately, there were not enough participants from any other single country to look at other specific country comparisons.)



US Americans were less satisfied with their homes on a number of dimensions: its level of luxury and modernity, its proximity to activities they enjoy, the amount of outdoor land accessible to them, and whether the home was an apartment or a house.



Females were more satisfied with their current home's layout, whether it was an apartment or a house, and overall, compared to males.

Do different aspects of a home matter to people? In the chart below, we show significant relationships between many aspects of a home and four outcome measures: how settled participants felt in their home, their overall rating of the assignment, how happy they were that they had accepted the assignment, and their mental health. Results are reported separately for accompanying spouses (S), employees (E), and females (F). (There were too few males to analyze them separately.) For example, spouses and females felt significantly more settled in their home if they were satisfied with the family-friendliness of the layout and the number of rooms. Spouses satisfied with number of rooms were also happier they accepted the assignment.

	Feel Settled in Home	Overview	Happy Accepted Assignment	Mental Health
Family-friendly layout	SF			
Number of Rooms	SF		S	
Size of Kitchen				
Size of Common Living Spaces	F		SF	
Size of Your Bedroom			S	
Amount of Space for Activities	SF			
Amount of Indoor Space for Play	SF			
Amount of Accessible Outdoor Space	F			
Storage Space		S - E		
Privacy from Neighbors				
Privacy for Family Members	SF	S	S	
Age of Building	-E			
Interesting Architectural Detail				
Contemporary Design				
Historic Importance				
Décor	S	SF	SF	
Sunlight		F	SF	
Comfort	SF	S	S	SF
Luxuriousness	SF	S	S	
Formality	S	SF	S	F
Modernity			S	
Apartment vs. House	F	S		
Quality of neighborhood	SF	SEF	E	
Security	SF			
Proximity to shopping				
Proximity to Own or Spouse's Work				
Proximity to Children's schools				
Proximity to Public Transportation				
Proximity to Activities We Enjoy	SF	SF		
Overall	SEF	SF	S	

Note that there are many more "S"s in the chart than "E"s — homes were more consistently related to feelings about the assignment for spouses than for those whose jobs brought them to the assignment.

The aspects of a home most consistently related to outcome for spouses were its privacy for family members, décor, and levels of comfort, luxuriousness and formality. (Note that this does not mean that very luxurious or formal homes were the best — it was satisfaction with whatever level the home had that was important; indeed, a very informal home could be preferable to a family.)

For employees, quality of neighborhood was the most important single aspect of the home.

S = aspect of home was significantly related to outcome measure for accompanying spouses
 E = aspect of home was significantly related to outcome measure for employees
 F = aspect of home was significantly related to outcome measure for females
 Bold font indicates p < .01; others p < .05; "-" indicates inverse relationship

Take Away

*Pay particular attention to accompanying spouses' housing concerns.
Their housing satisfaction is closely related to assignment outcome.*

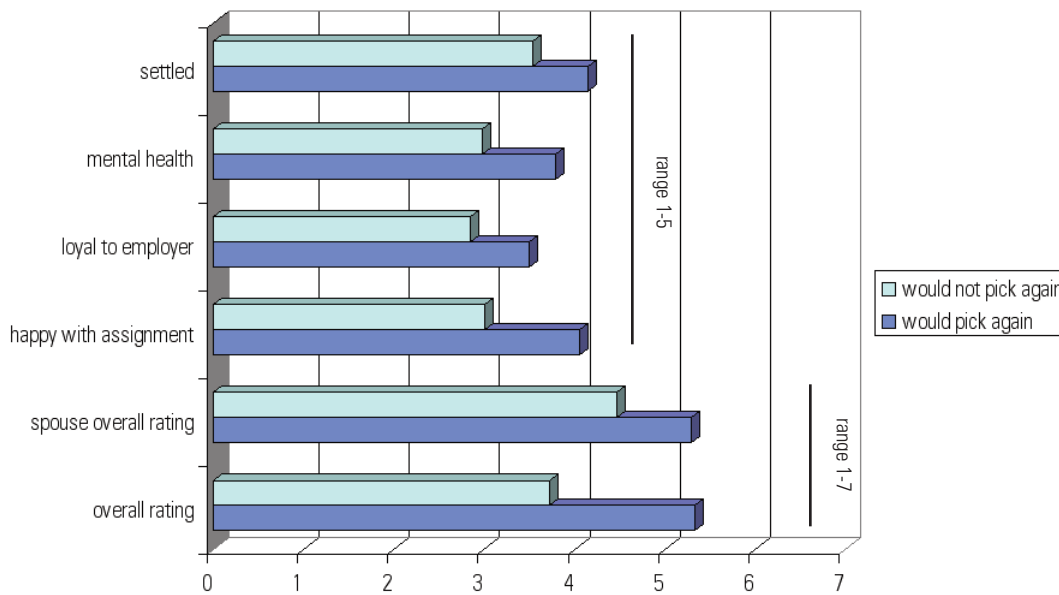
Chapter 3:

What Matters to Families, Whether They Know It Or Not

We asked participants to answer several open-ended questions about their homes. We used the results to understand how feelings about one's home affects or reflects a broad range of reactions, interaction patterns, and outcomes.

First we asked whether participants would pick the same home again, if given the chance. Not surprisingly, those who would pick the same house again reported that their homes were more similar to their favorite home, and were more satisfied with most aspects of their current home. Importantly, they also scored higher on every outcome measure:

Would Pick House Again - Various Outcome Measures



Those who would pick the same house again were more loyal to their (or their spouse's) employer, were happier with their assignment, gave the assignment a higher rating and said their spouse would too, felt more settled in their home and community, and had better mental health.

Of course, we cannot know if being happy with one's home *caused* these positive feelings about the assignment — it is likely that there is a “halo effect” in which those who are generally happy report being happy with all aspects of their lives. But these relationships with feelings about home are strikingly consistent and support the idea that ensuring positive feelings about one's home is important to general expatriate adjustment.

Next, we asked *why* they would or would not pick their home again. No surprise to real estate agents: location was very important:

Would Pick House Again- Location

	liked location	did not like location
would pick same house	100%	0%
would not pick same house	18.2%	81.8%

Of those who would pick the same house again, 100% spontaneously mentioned its location as something they liked. Of those who would not pick the same house again, almost 82% mentioned that they did *not* like its location.

In detailing what they did or did not like about their homes, participants also mentioned amenities (like having a swimming pool, attractive outdoor space, or wonderful light). However, these amenities were statistically unrelated to whether they would pick the same house again.

We asked participants two specific questions about whether their home layout or amenities had affected how or where they spent time with others in the family:

- ♦ “Sometimes new homes change where adults and children spend time and do activities. Please compare your current home layout with the one you lived in most recently and describe any differences in where you do activities that are a result of a difference in home layout or organization.”
- ♦ “Sometimes new homes have an appliance, facility, or a piece of furniture that change family patterns -- a wide-screen TV or swimming pool that draws teenagers, for example, or a dining room table that is big enough for large dinner parties. Other times, new homes are musing such things in ways that affect families. Please describe any differences in the appliances, furniture or facilities you have in your current home and how it has changed your interactions with people in your home.”

In responding to these questions, participants generally described the amount of space they now had, whether they liked the space, whether the space was open, the ease of entertainment, etc.

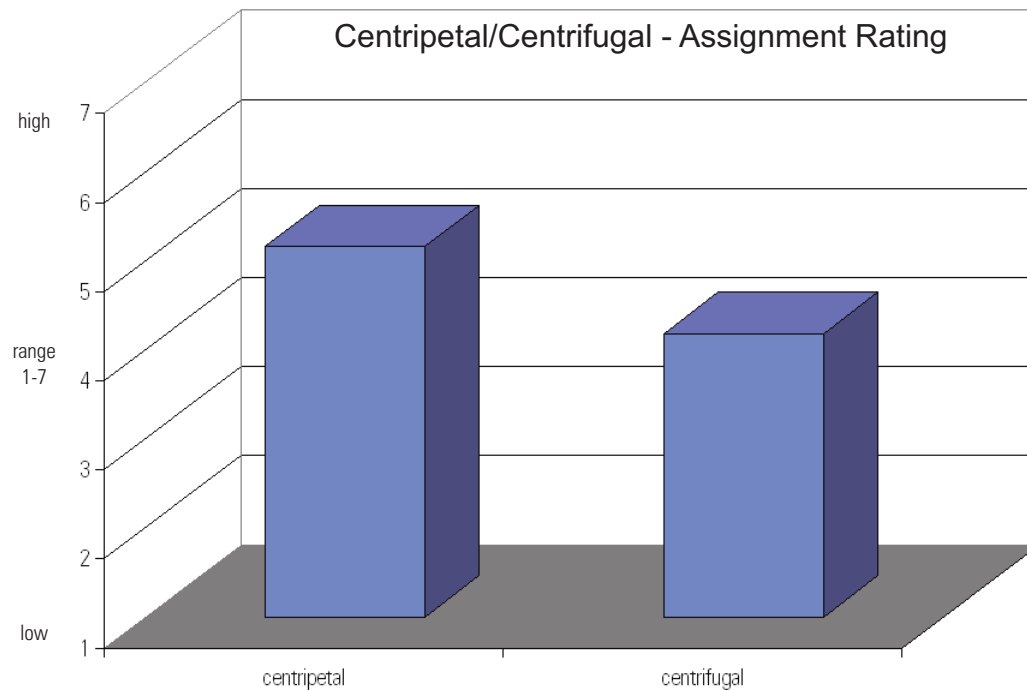
We coded their responses to these questions with family interaction patterns in mind. Responses were coded as “centrifugal” if the home was described as resulting in family members being more separate from each other, and/or as spending more time alone in separate space. Examples of centrifugal responses are:

- ♦ *Have to use a guest bedroom for my office and this is isolative..*
- ♦ *The kitchen and family room in my most recent home were open to each other so I had a lot of conversations while cooking; now it is all closed off.*
- ♦ *My daughters used to share their bed rooms previously. Now with their own rooms, they seemed be happier.*
- ♦ *My daughter now has her own computer so we see her much less.*
- ♦ *My son has a playroom where the majority of his toys are rather than in his bedroom or the family living space. My partner and I have an office space that is away from the main part of the house and it's often my private retreat - my own personal space. The house is large and not open plan and over 4 stories so it does often mean that we don't interact as much as we did in our previous house - but with a young child (5) it's often great that he can have his own space and not be constantly told "Tidy this, be quiet, etc."*

Responses were coded as “centripetal” if the home was described as resulting in drawing family members into more interaction with each other, either through closer proximity or in more common, open space. Examples are:

- ♦ *Our last flat didn't have a garden or sunny terrace. Our current flat does, so we have barbecues and spend time outdoors as a family much more.*
- ♦ *The kitchen is connected with the family room, so we spend more time together.*
- ♦ *We spend more time in the kitchen area now where there is a large AGA oil stove which keeps the place warm during the long cold/damp Scottish winter. There is a conjoined living area where we have a large screen TV.*
- ♦ *The house is more "intimate" so we're never far apart. Of course that can be a good thing or bad thing. :-)*
- ♦ *The apartment is a little formal with its "salons" and so on and so we spend all of our time in a very small room that contains the tv and the computers and the comfortable sofas.*

Note that whether the homes were described as centrifugal or centripetal seemed to be independent of whether the participant liked the space. Indeed, we coded whether these were related and they were not — some people liked centrifugal, some liked centripetal. However, the dimension was related to outcome, seemingly unbeknownst to the participants:



Those who described their homes as having a centripetal (closeness-enhancing) force rated the assignment more positively than those who described their homes as having a centrifugal (distancing, isolating) one.

Of those who described their homes as having a centripetal influence on their family, 78.8% said they would pick their same home again. In contrast, only 28.6% of those who described a centrifugal force would pick the same house again — even though many of them reporting liking the centrifugal aspect of the home. Some people described both a centripetal and a centrifugal influence — this “mixed” group was also very likely (85.7%) to say they would pick the same home again. The centripetal feature appears to be a powerful influence on people’s feelings about their homes.

Would Pick House Again - Centripetal/Centrifugal

	centripetal	centrifugal	mixed
would pick same house	78.8%	28.6%	85.7%
would not pick same house	21.2%	71.4%	14.3%

In contrast, the following were unrelated to whether participants would pick the same house again: whether they said they liked the space, amount of space, whether the space was open, ease of entertainment:

Would Pick House Again - Aspects of Home

	like space	not like space	more space	less space	open space	closed space	entertaining easier	entertaining harder
would pick same house	77.3%	66.7%	66.7%	75.0%	71.4%	71.4%	87.0%	75.0%
would not pick same house	22.7%	33.3%	33.3%	25.0%	28.6%	28.6%	12.5%	25.0%

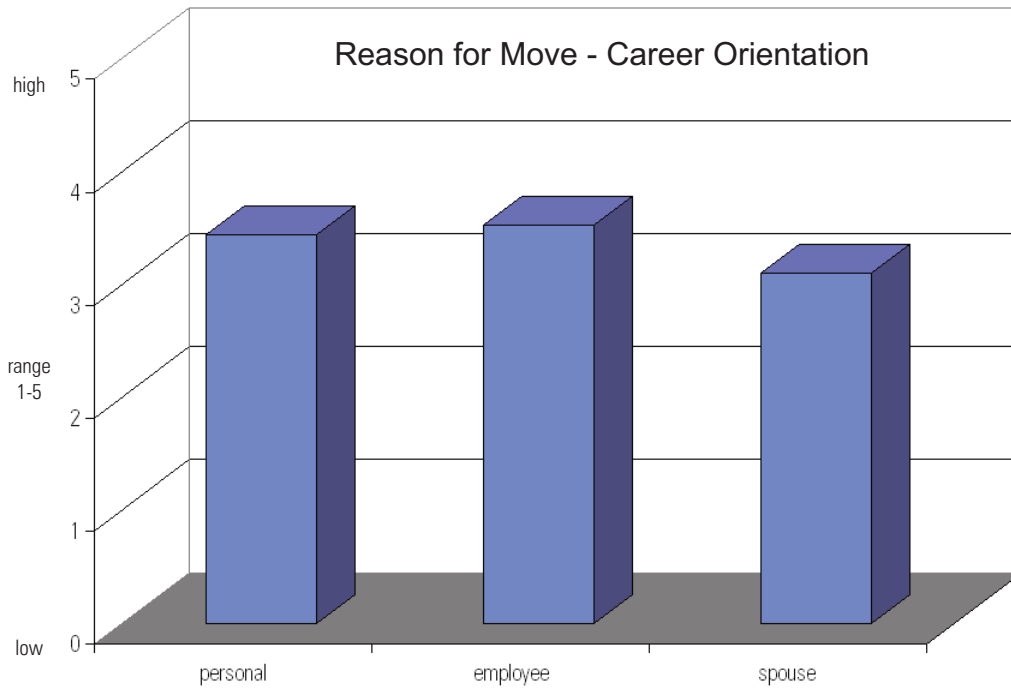
Take Away

When choosing a new home, consider how a home’s layout and arrangement of furniture and appliances will influence family interaction. The most satisfied expatriate families were those living in homes that promoted more and easier communication within the family.

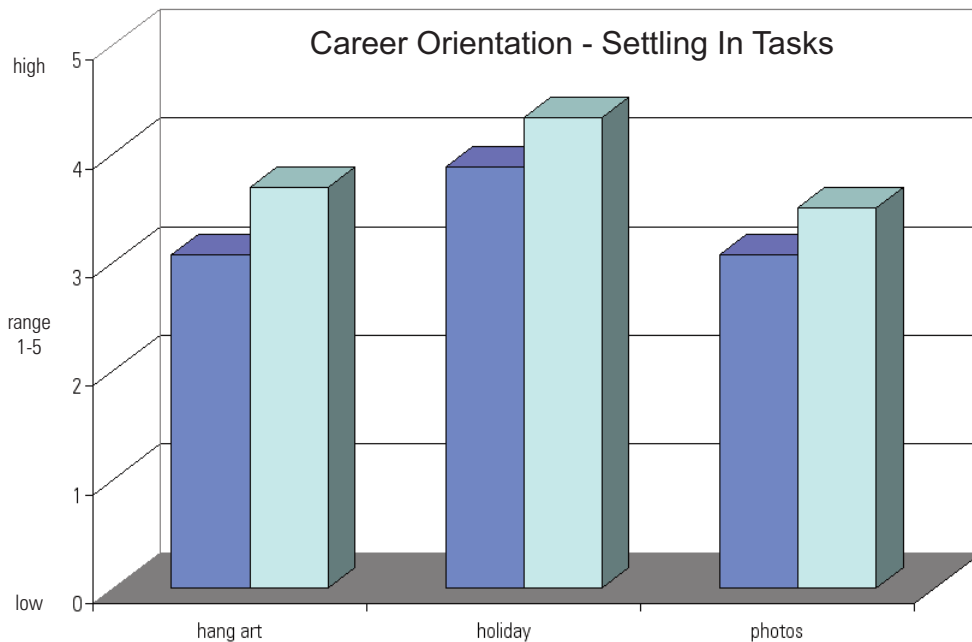
Chapter 4:

Some People Care More About Their Homes Than Others; Their Adjustment Paths Differ

We saw in the previous chapter that accompanying spouses and employees differed in how important satisfaction with their homes was to their overall adjustment. What other factors make a difference in individuals' assessment of their homes? Using a commonly-used research tool, we asked participants about the importance to them of their homemaker and their career roles — both accompanying spouses and employees could be either high or low on these orientations. Not surprisingly, those with strong homemaker role identities were particularly strongly affected by their homes.

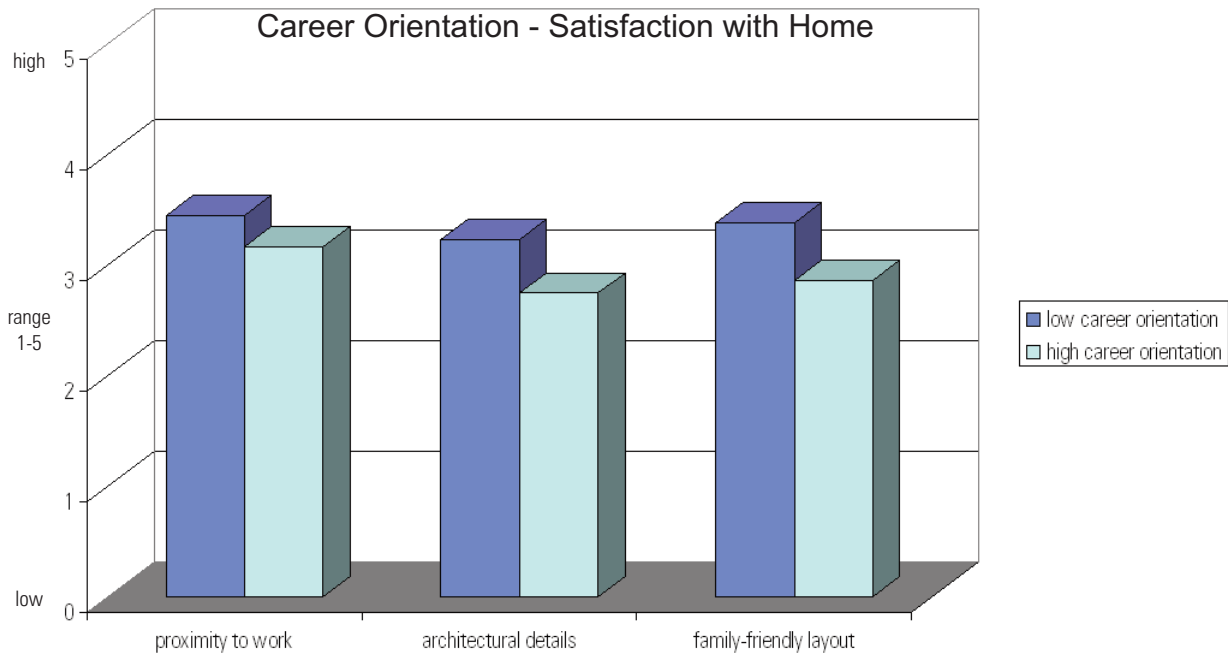


Those who moved for their own career had, not surprisingly, the highest career role identity, followed by those who moved for personal reasons. Accompanying spouses had the lowest career orientation, although differences, while statistically significant, were in fact quite modest.



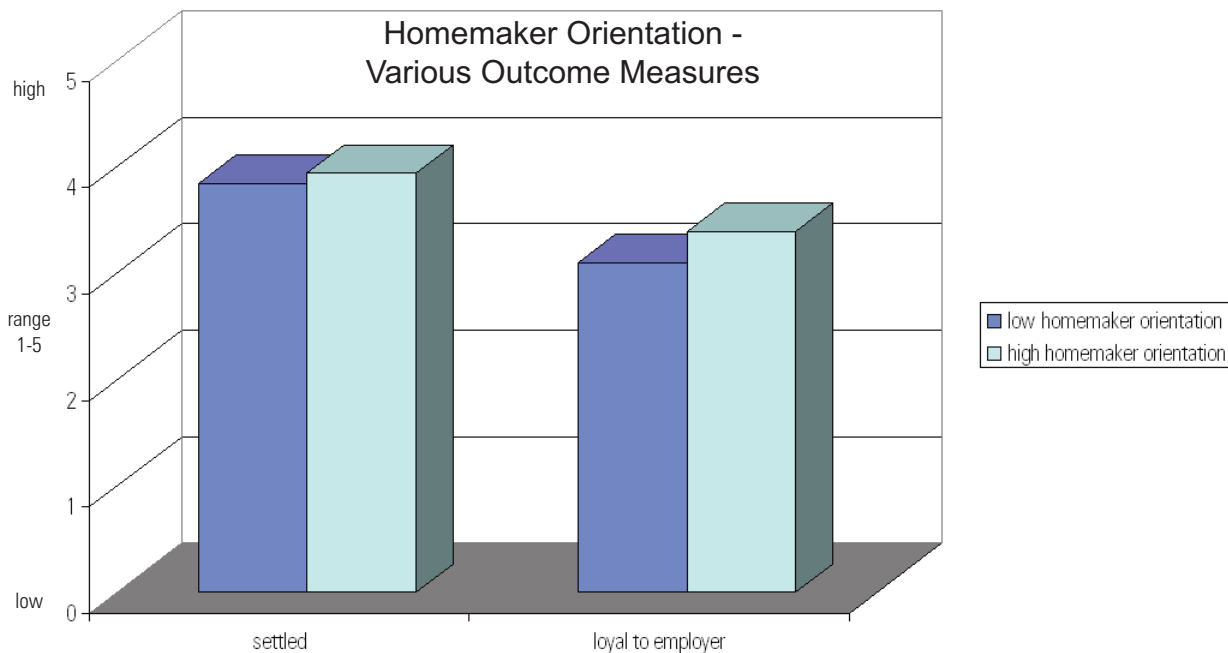
■ low career orientation
■ high career orientation

Compared to those with low career identity, those with very high career orientation took longer to do the settling in tasks of hanging art work, having a holiday celebration in their home, and displaying family photos.



Those with low vs. high career orientation also differed in their satisfaction with their homes. Those with very high career orientation were less satisfied than those with low career orientation with their home's proximity to their (or their spouse's) work, with their home's level of interesting architectural detail, and with their home's layout.

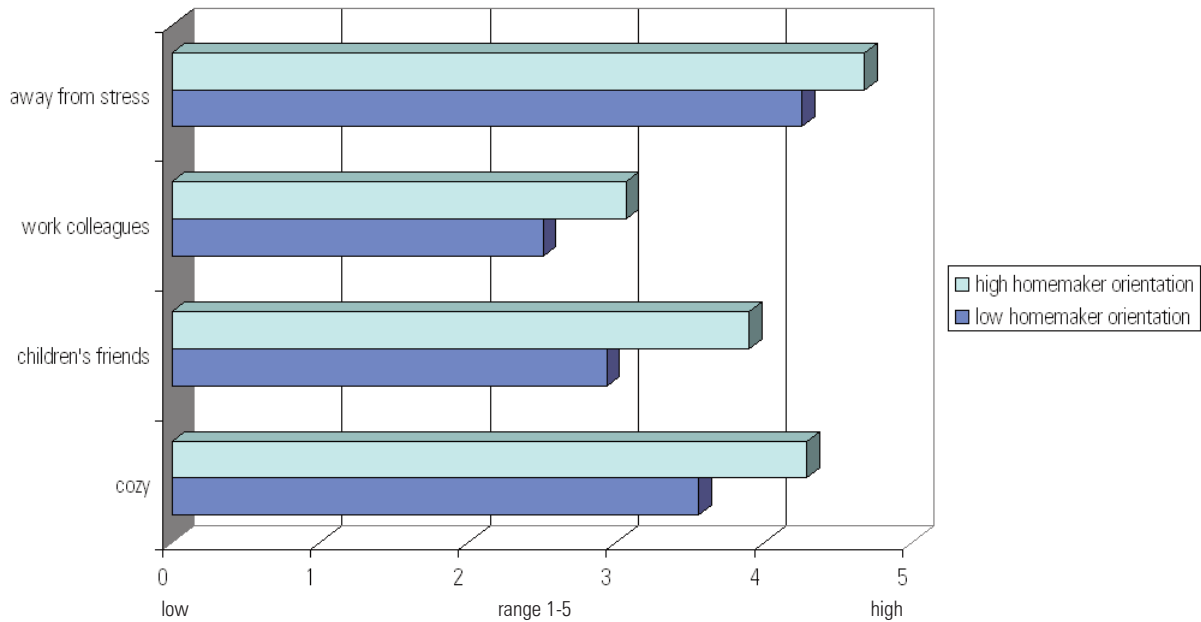
Those with low vs. high homemaker orientation differed from each other in many ways.



Those with higher homemaker orientation felt more settled in their homes and communities, and felt more loyal to the employer responsible for the assignment.

Level of homemaker orientation was related in consistent ways to what was important in a home — those with higher homemaker orientation cared more about a number of factors than did those with a lower homemaker orientation.

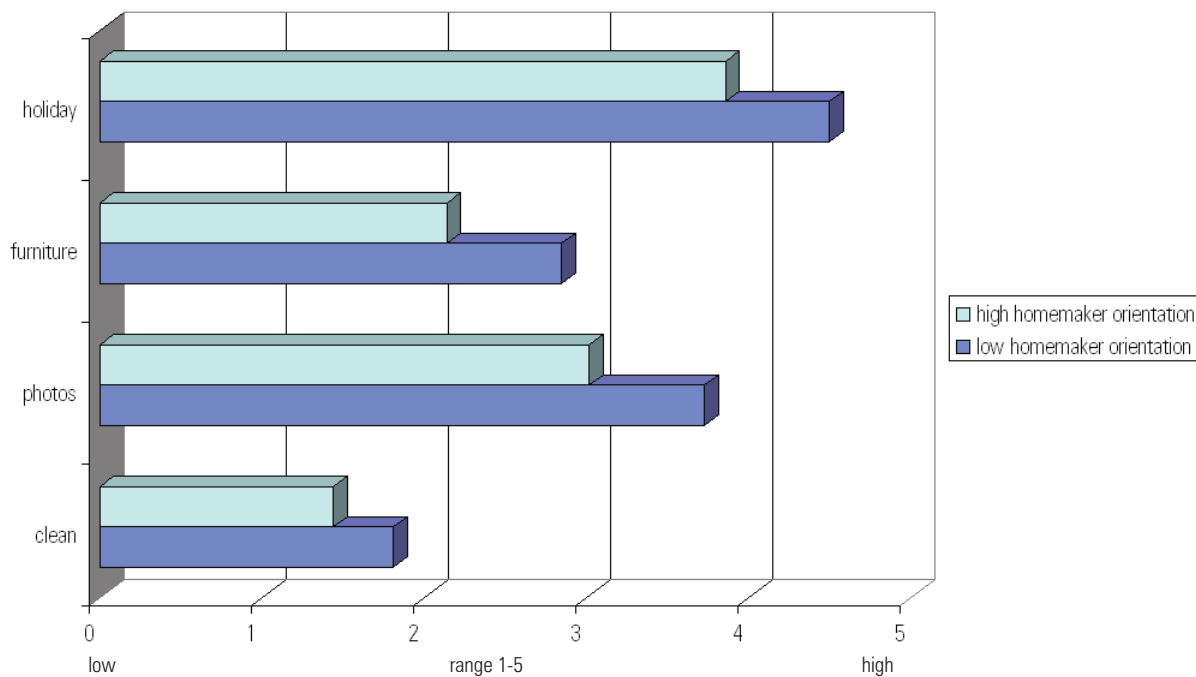
Homemaker Orientation - What is Important in a Home?



Compared to those with low homemaker orientation, those with high homemaker orientation said it was more important to them that their homes be a way to get away from stress, a good place for work colleagues to spend time, a place where their children's friends wanted to spend time, and that it be cozy.

Those with varying levels of homemaker orientation settled into their homes differently.

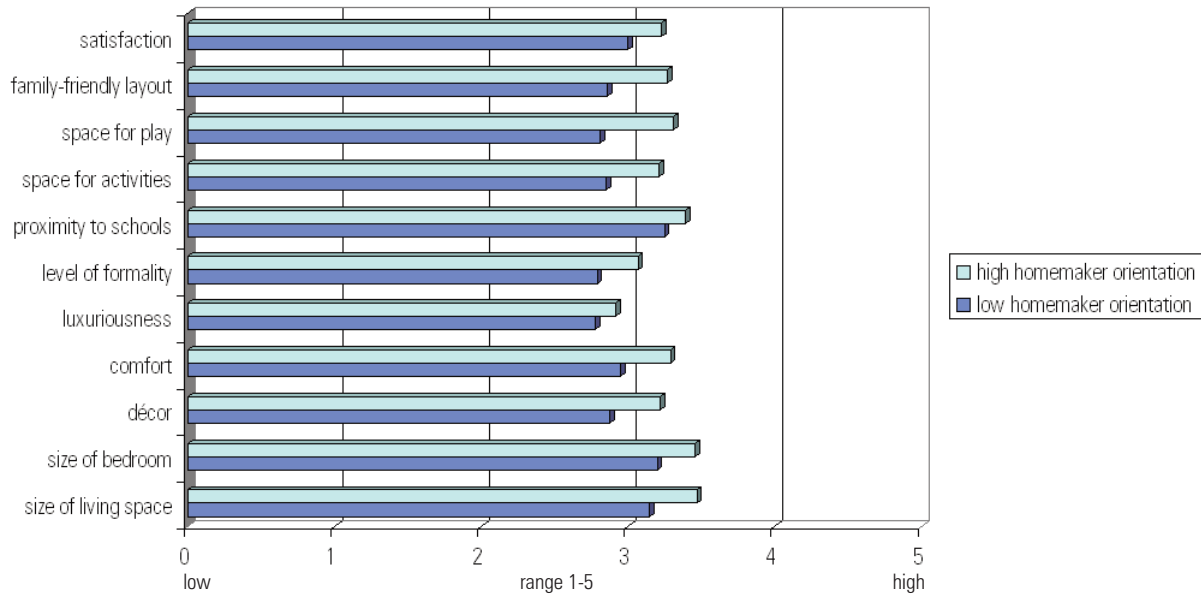
Homemaker Orientation - Settling In Tasks



Compared to those with high homemaker orientation, those with low homemaker orientation took longer to have a holiday celebration in their home, to arrange their furniture, to display family photos, and to clean their new home.

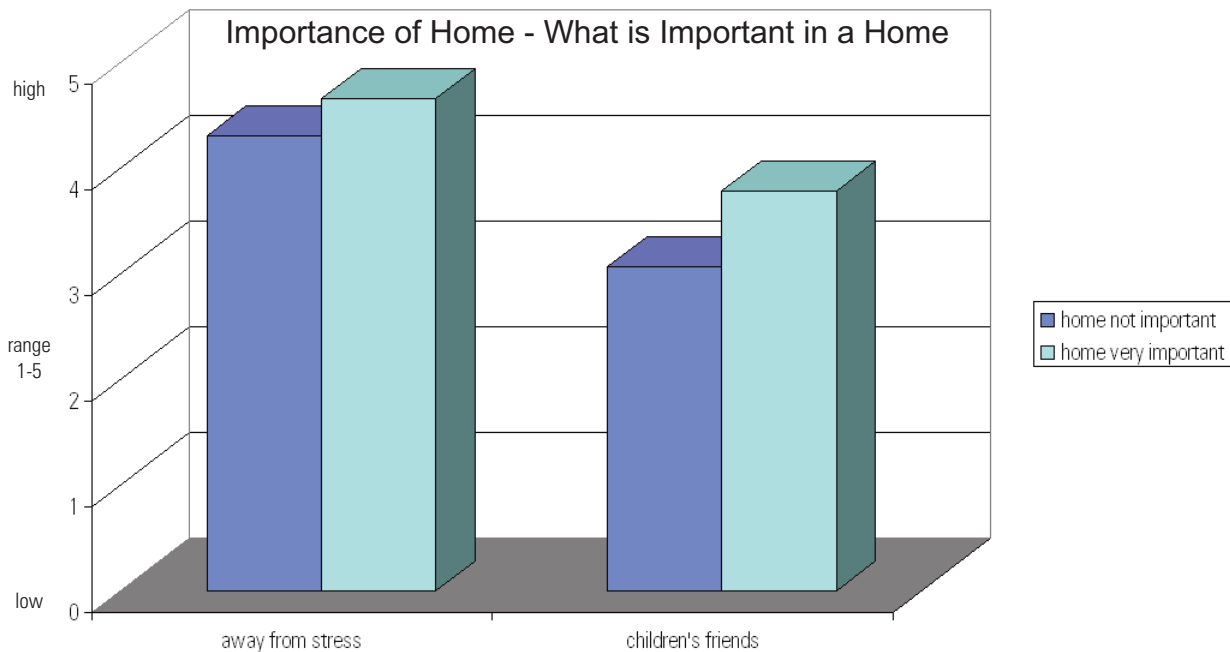
Does this all mean that those with higher homemaker orientation were more picky, more difficult to please? We do not have information about their home search process, but in fact, in the end, those with high homemaker orientations were generally *more* satisfied with their homes than those with low homemaker orientation.

Homemaker Orientation - Satisfaction with Home

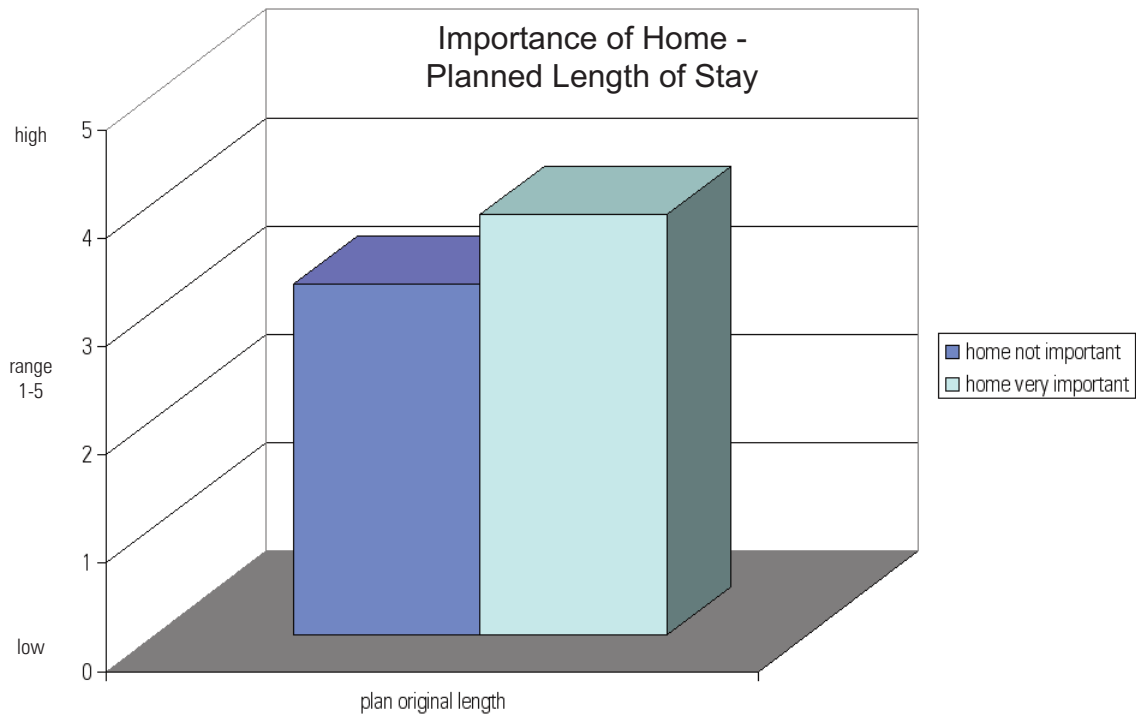


Compared to those with low homemaker orientation, those with high homemaker orientation were more satisfied with their new homes overall, and in particular with its layout, its amount of space for children’s play and for activities they enjoy, its proximity to children’s school, its level of formality, luxuriousness and comfort, its décor, and the size of its bedroom and living space.

Finally, we asked specifically and directly how important their home was to their assignment. Participants rated their agreement with this statement on a five-point scale: “My home greatly influences my feelings about whether moving to this country was a good idea.” Those who agreed more with the statement valued different things in their homes, and had different ideas about how long they would stay.



Those who said their homes were more important to their assignment’s success seemed to look for more nurturing homes: they said it was especially important for homes to be places they could get away from stress and where their children would want to invited their friends.



And importantly, those who said their homes were more important to their assignment's success indeed were more likely to say that they planned to stay on assignment for the originally-planned length of time.

Take Away

Assess how important expatriates' homes are to them and focus resources on those for whom importance is high.

Chapter 5:

People's Internal Ideal Home Affects Their Perceptions and Evaluations of Their Current Home

We asked participants to think back to all the homes they had lived in, as an adult or child, and to pick the one that was their favorite. We assumed this favorite home had been internalized as an ideal that any current home would be compared to. We asked them to compare this favorite home to their current home on a list of 29 aspects (see below). Not surprisingly, the more similar the current home was to their favorite home, the more satisfied they were with each of these 29 aspects — for example, the more similar the current home was to their favorite home in terms of size of common living space, they more satisfied they were with their current home's size of common living space. This was true for all 29 aspects of the home.

We next examined whether overall satisfaction with the current home was related to any particular aspect of similarity — is similarity in the “look and feel” of the home more important, for example, or is similarity in the “size and utility” more relevant? We compared overall home satisfaction with perception of similarity on each of the 29 aspects. Results are found in the list below, in order of decreasing strength of relationship.

Satisfaction with Home and Similarity to Favorite Home

size of common living space	.53
space for children's play	.51
décor	.50
family-friendly layout	.49
amount space for interests	.49
contemporary design	.49
size of kitchen	.47
sun light	.47
comfort	.46
luxuriousness	.46
architectural details	.44
storage space	.39
number of rooms	.39
formality	.38
modernity	.36
age of building	.31
size of bedroom	.30
historic importance	.28
apartment vs. house	.28
quality of neighborhood	.26
security	.22
privacy from neighbors	.22
proximity to shopping	NS
proximity to work	NS
proximity to school	NS
proximity to transportation	NS
proximity to activities	NS

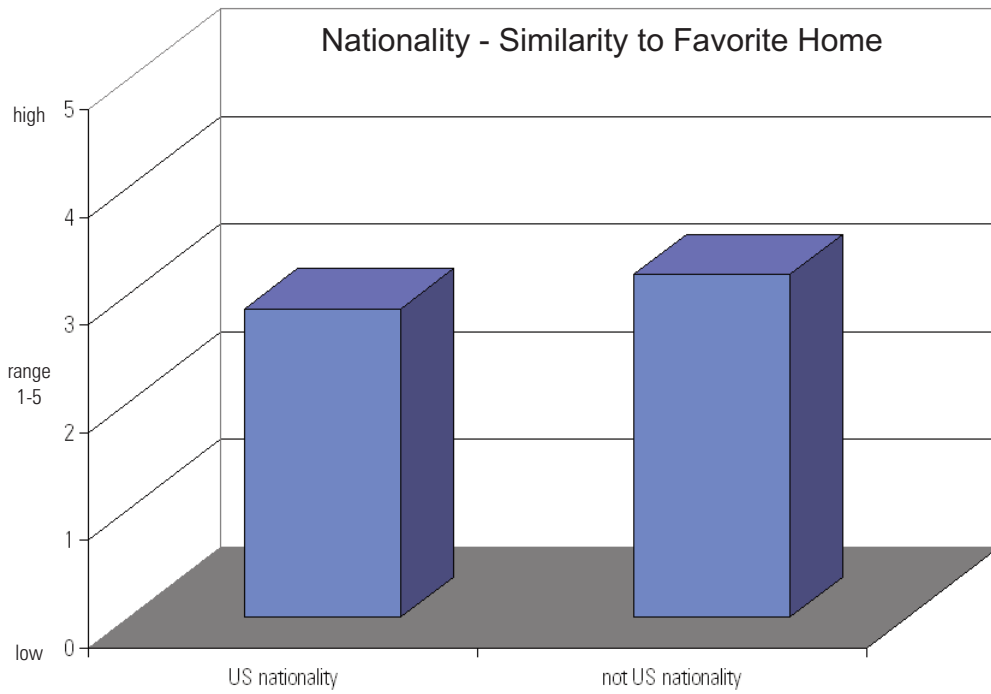
At the top of this list are the aspects in which the current home's similarity to the ideal, favorite home were most strongly related to participants' satisfaction with their current home. That is, the more the current home was like the favorite home in size of common living space, space for children's play, décor, family-friendly layout, amount of space for interests, and contemporary design, the more the participants were very satisfied with their current home. At the bottom of this list are the aspects of a home for which similarity to a favorite home were unrelated to current satisfaction. That is, the current home could be very similar or very dissimilar to the current home in terms of proximity to neighbors, shopping, work, school, transportation and preferred activities — similarity to the favorite home in proximity was completely unrelated to whether they liked their current homes.

It is interesting that similarity in the broader setting of one's favorite home — its quality of neighborhood, security, and proximity to important functions — is not what is important to participants' current satisfaction. Their current homes could be quite different from their favorite ones on these setting aspects and still they might be satisfied with their current homes. Where similarity to the favorite home *is* more relevant is in the usability of the home — size of common living space, space for children's play, family-friendly layout, amount of space for interests — and in its “look and feel” — its décor, its design, comfort, level of luxuriousness, architectural details.

Note: Numbers refer to the correlation between similarity to favorite home and satisfaction with current home; larger numbers denote stronger relationships — the more similar, the more satisfied. “NS” means similarity and satisfaction were “not significantly” related to each other.

Take Away

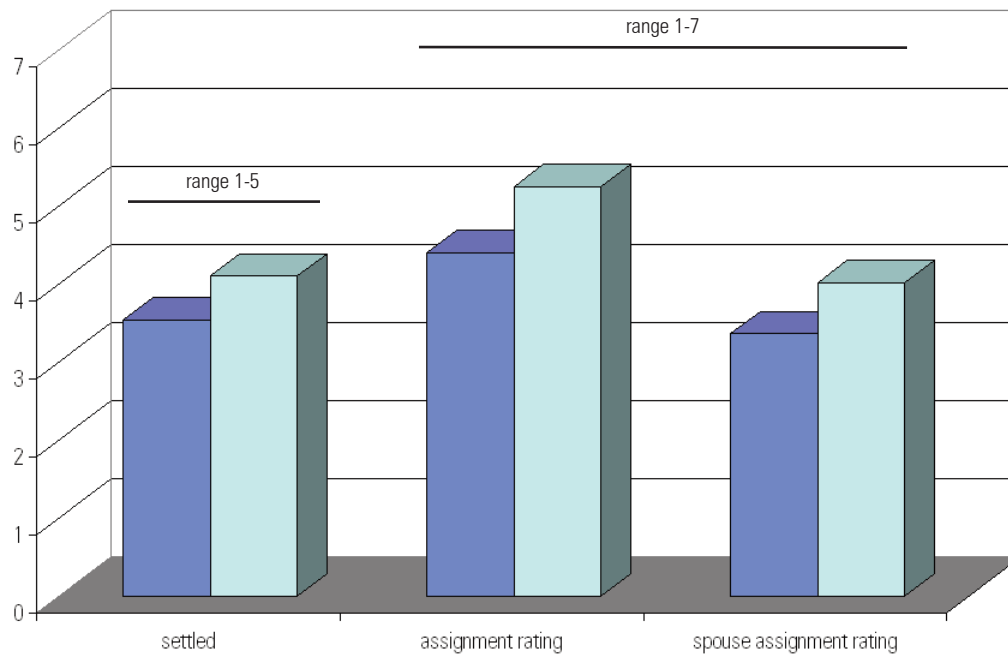
Inquire about transferees' favorite home. Try to match a new home on size of common living space and kitchen, space for children's play, decor and design, layout, available space for interests, amount and type of light, comfort, and level of luxuriousness.



US Americans said their current home compared less positively to their favorite home than did participants from other parts of the world.

Does similarity to one's ideal, favorite home make a difference in how participants do on an expatriate assignment? Yes, it does.

Similarity to Favorite Home - Various Outcome Measures

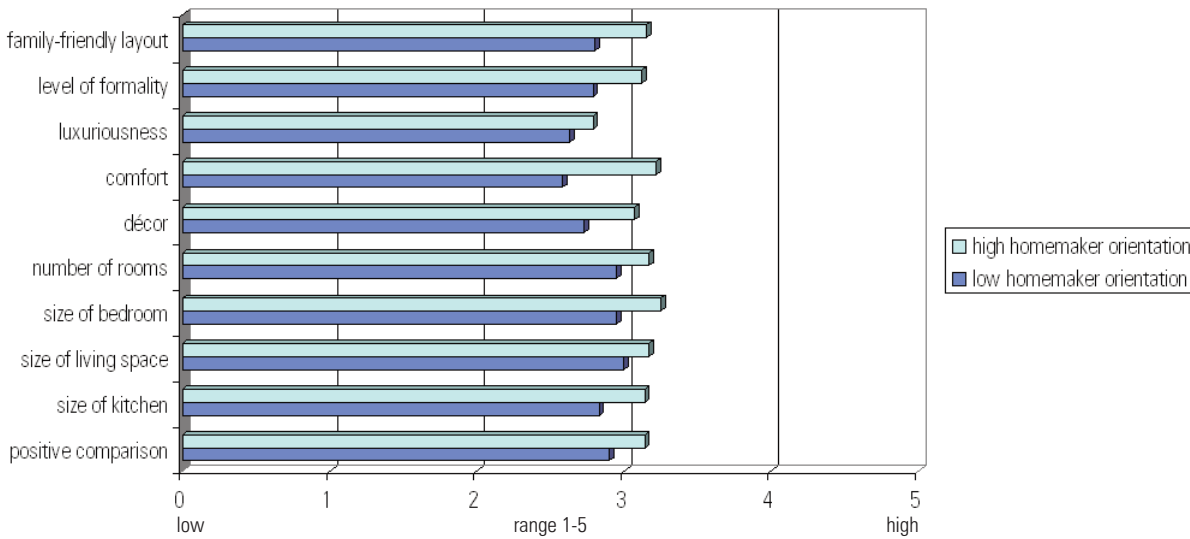


■ different
■ similar

Participants whose current home was more similar to their favorite home felt more settled into their home and community, rated the assignment more positively, and said their spouse would do the same.

Ideal, favorite homes appeared to be especially salient to those with higher homemaker orientations (see Chapter 4):

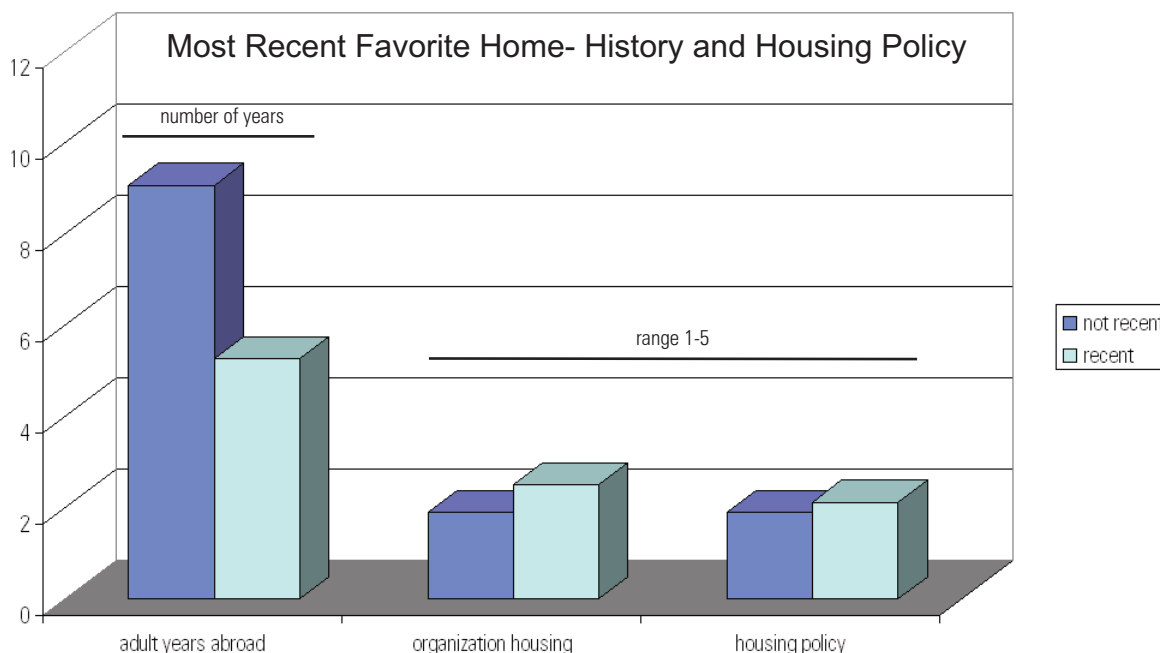
Homemaker Orientation - Similarity to Favorite Home



Participants with higher homemaker orientation said their current home compared more positively to their favorite home than those with low homemaker orientation, in these ways: family-friendly layout, level of formality, luxuriousness and comfort, décor, number of rooms, size of bedroom, living space and kitchen, and overall.

It is not clear whether those with higher homemaker orientations were more effective in selecting a home that matched their memories of their favorite homes, or whether they simply perceived more similarity in the homes they found themselves in. In any case, it is clear that understanding a person's level of homemaker orientation and his/her memories of a favorite home could be useful in helping expatriates choose a new home that is likely to be satisfactory to them.

Which homes did participants remember? Eighteen percent chose a childhood home. Thirty-two percent chose the home they had lived in right before taking the current assignment. The remaining 50% chose some other adulthood home. Did it matter which home they saw as their favorite? The most striking differences were found when examining those whose favorite homes were their most recent ones, perhaps ones they felt "torn away" from.

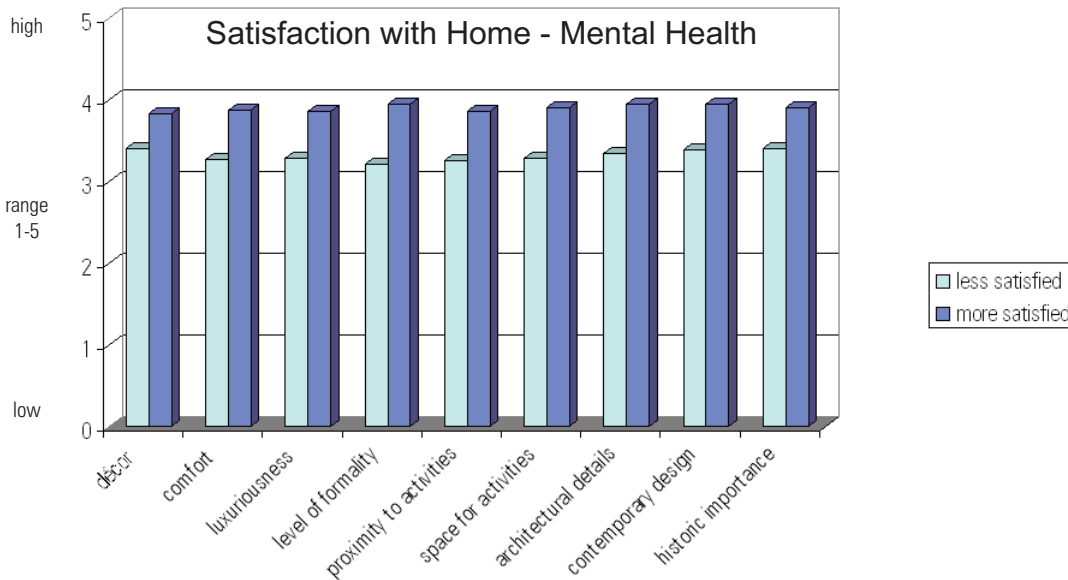


Participants whose favorite home was the one right before this assignment had lived fewer years outside their passport country as an adult, had more choice about whether to live in organization housing, and were more likely to have a housing policy. It seems this group are newer expatriates, with more constraints in housing.

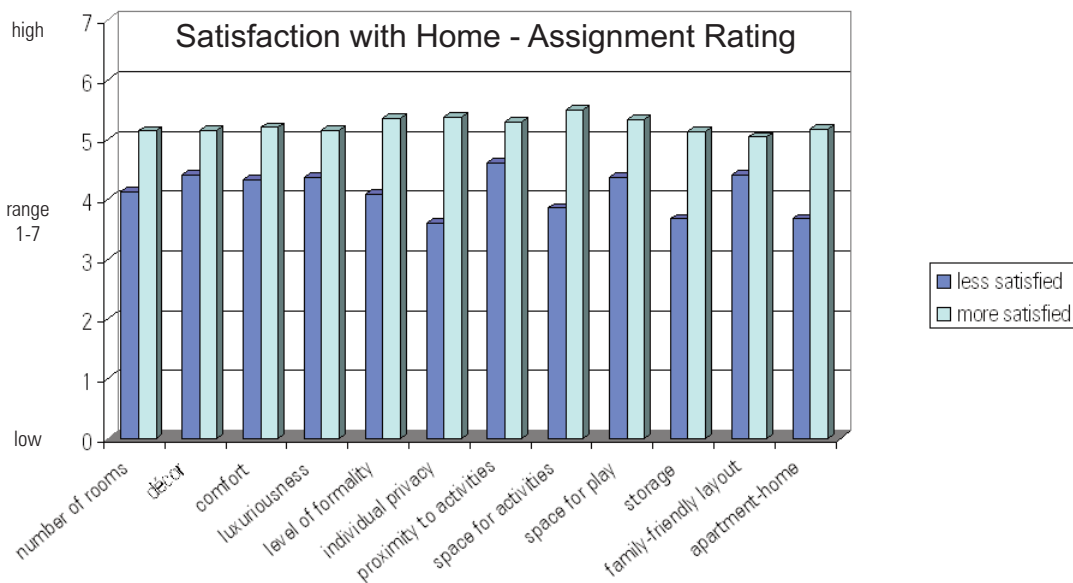
Those whose favorite home was their most recent one did not differ in outcome from those with other favorite homes. However, they were significantly and consistently more sensitive to aspects of their homes in ways that would be useful for relocation professionals to understand. We looked separately at (1) those whose favorite homes were the most recent ones and (2) those whose favorite homes were from some more distant time in history. For each group, we analyzed the relationship between satisfaction with home and similarity to the favorite home on one hand, and several outcome measures on the other. Results for the two groups were strikingly different.

Participants Whose Favorite Home Was Their Most Recent One

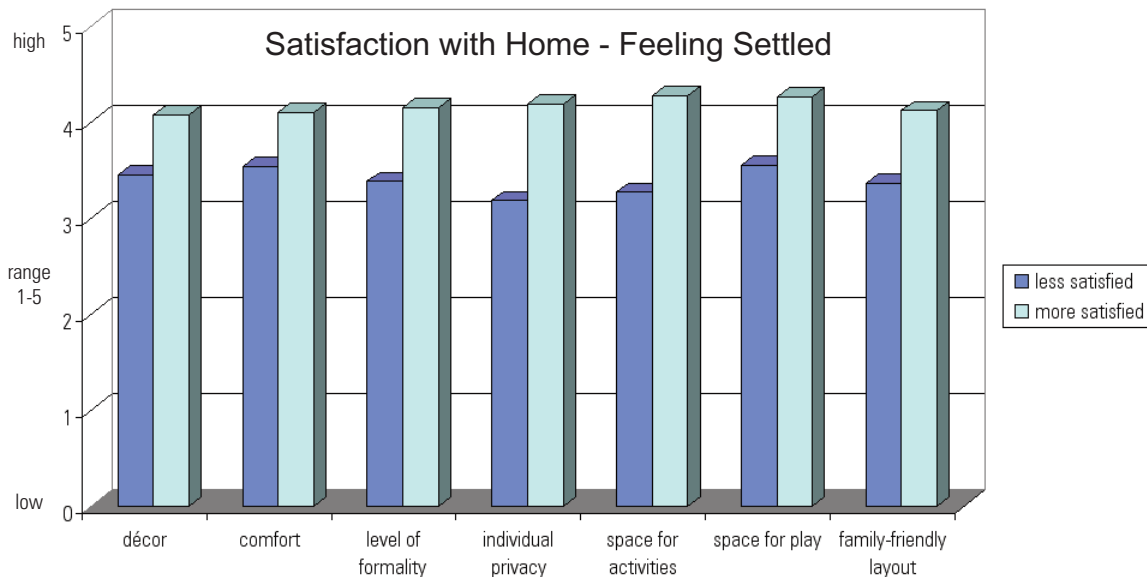
We asked how satisfaction with one's home and its similarity to one's ideal home were related to various outcome measures - first for participants whose favorite home was their most recent one (and then, separately, for those which was some other home). Satisfaction and similarity were each consistently related to outcome for the recently-left group, and hardly at all related for the group whose favorite home was more in the past.



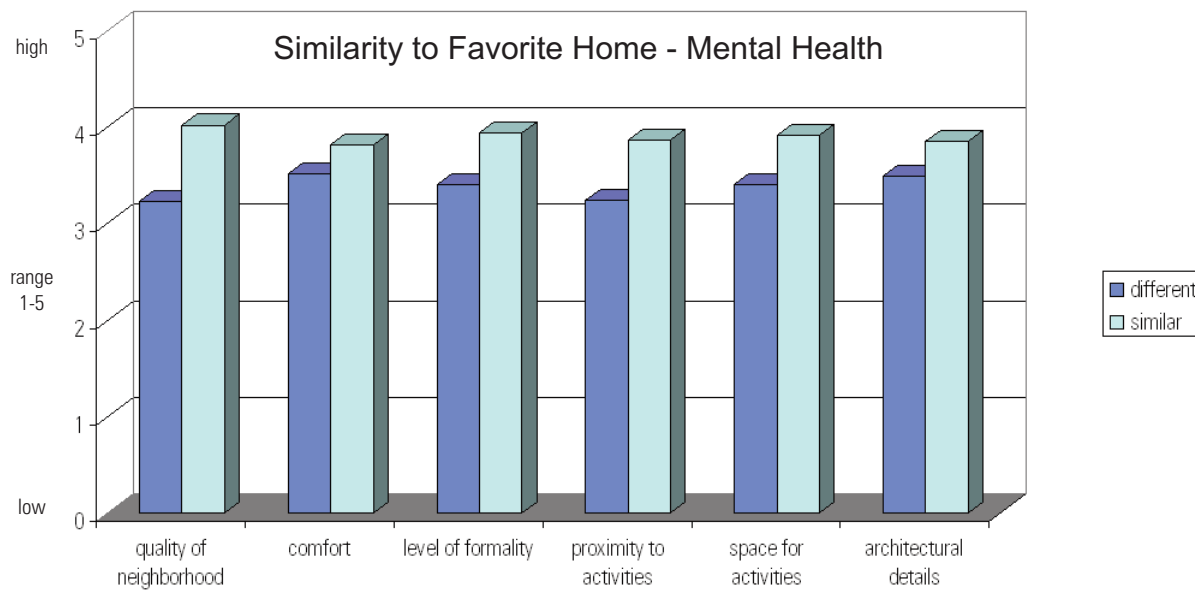
Participants whose favorite home was their most recent one had better mental health if they were more satisfied with their current home's décor, level of comfort, luxuriousness and formality, the home's proximity to activities they enjoy, the home's amount of space for their interests, its architectural details, its contemporary design, and its level of historic importance.



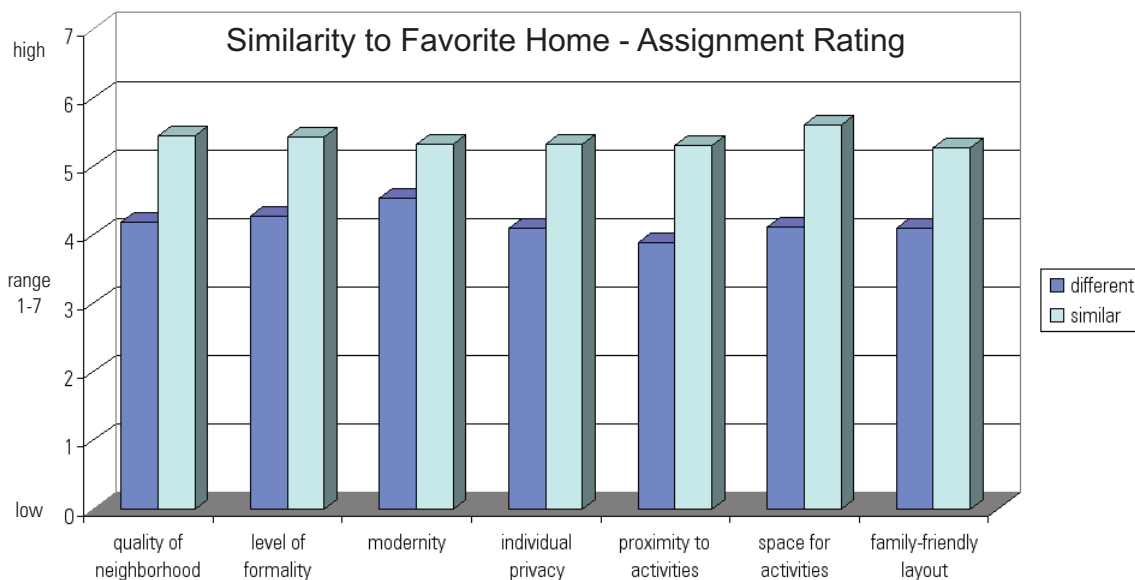
Participants whose favorite home was their most recent one rated the assignment more highly if they were more satisfied with their current home's number of rooms, décor, level of comfort, luxuriousness, and formality, the amount privacy available for family members, its proximity to activities they enjoy, amount of space for their interests and for children's play, storage space, family-friendly layout, and whether the home was an apartment vs. a house.



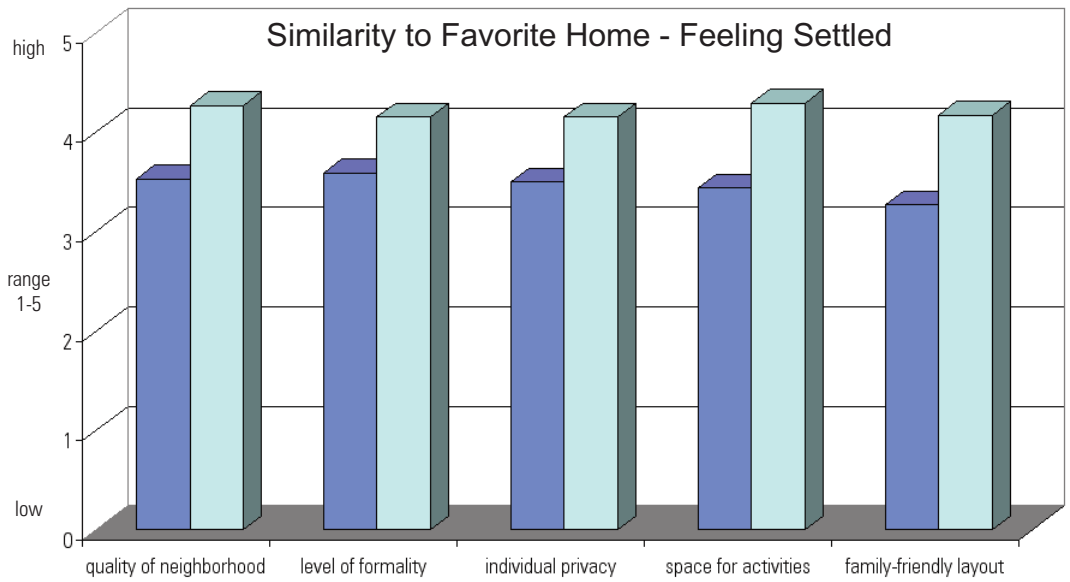
Participants whose favorite homes were their most recent ones felt more settled in their homes and communities if they were more satisfied with their current home's décor, level of comfort and formality, amount of privacy for individuals, amount of space for their interests and for children's play, and its family-friendly layout.



The mental health of participants whose favorite homes were their most recent ones was also better if their current homes were more similar to their favorite ones in quality of neighborhood, level of comfort and formality, proximity to activities they enjoy, amount of space for their interests, and architectural details.

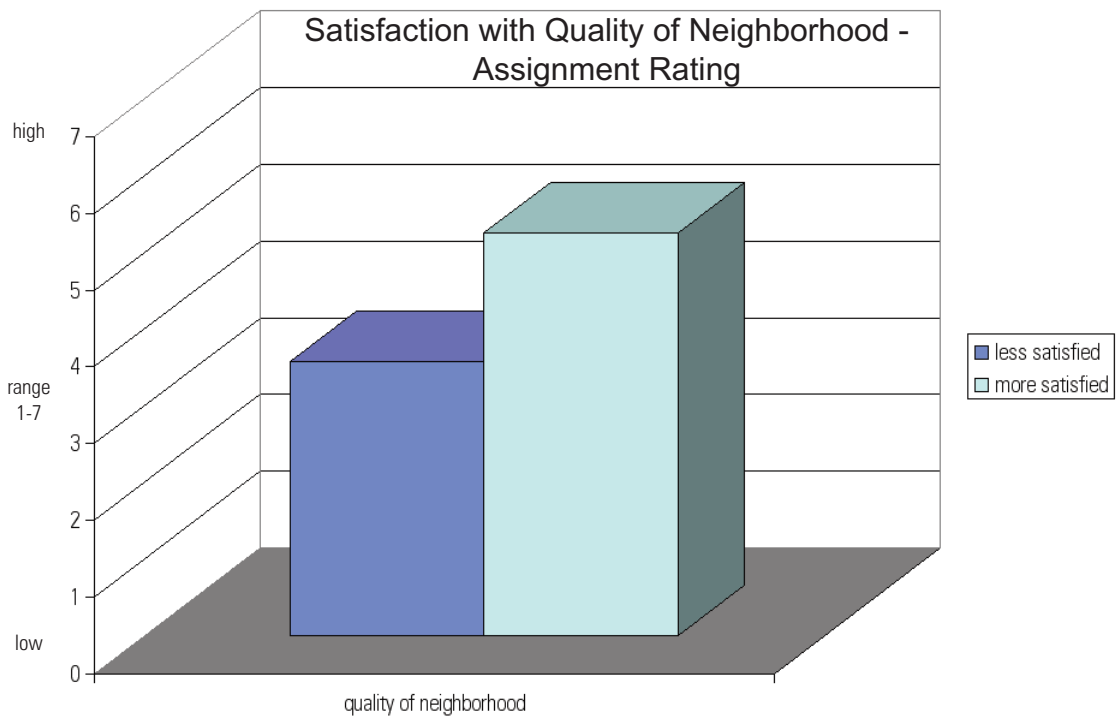


The ratings of the assignment of participants whose favorite homes were their most recent ones was also better if their current homes were more similar to their favorite ones in quality of neighborhood, level of formality and modernity, amount of privacy for individuals, proximity to activities they enjoy, amount of space for their interests, and family-friendly layout.



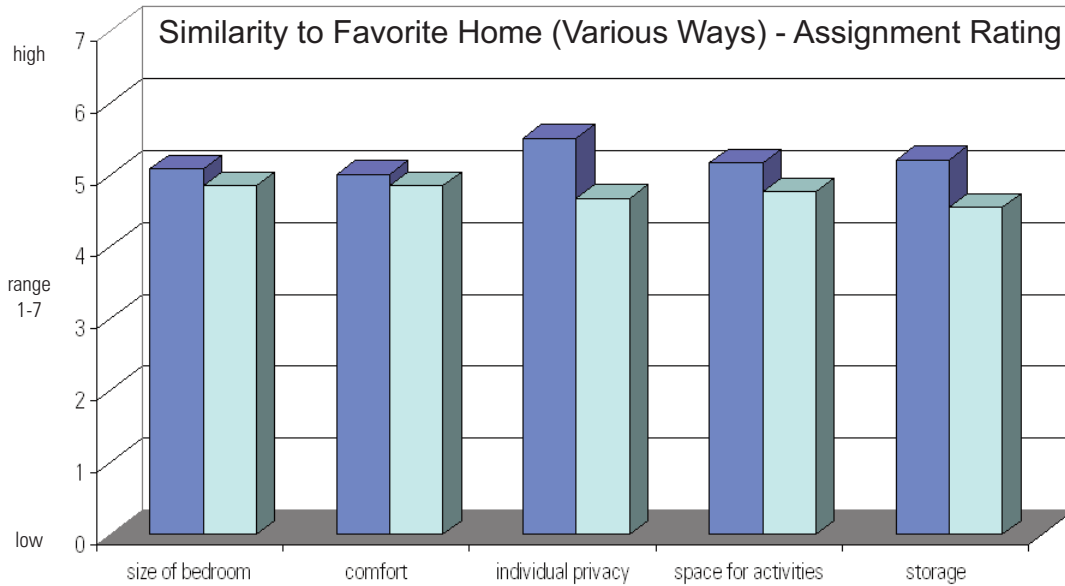
Participants whose favorite homes were their most recent ones felt more settled in their homes and communities if their current homes were more similar to their favorite ones in quality of neighborhood, level of formality, amount of privacy for individuals, amount of space for their interests, and family-friendly layout.

The story for participants whose favorite homes were other than their most recent ones was quite different. Very few aspects of similarity or satisfaction were related to outcomes for them.

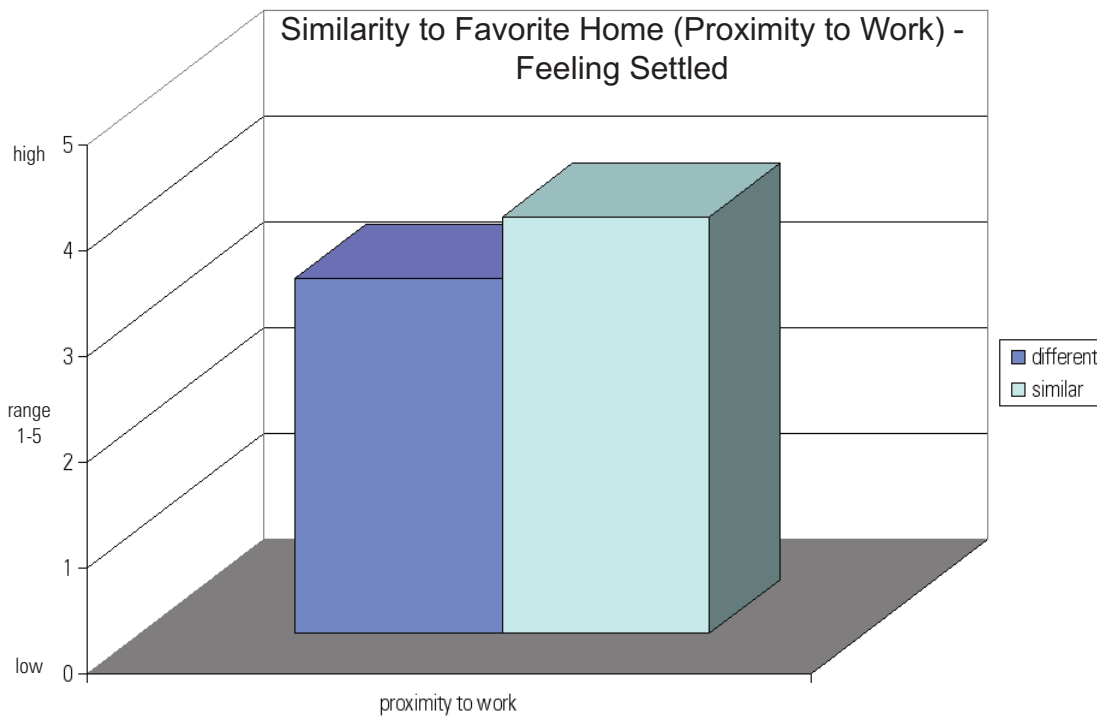


First, only one dimension of satisfaction with their current home was related to only one adjustment measure: participants whose favorite home was *not* their most recent one had higher ratings of the assignment if they were more satisfied with the quality of their neighborhoods. Satisfaction with all other dimensions of their home were unrelated to all other outcome measures.

Perceived similarity to the favorite home was related to higher overview ratings for participants whose favorite homes were other than their most recent homes — but in surprising ways.



These participants rated the assignment more positively if their current home was *less* similar to their favorite home in size of bedroom, level of comfort, amount of privacy for individual family members, amount of space of interests, and storage space.

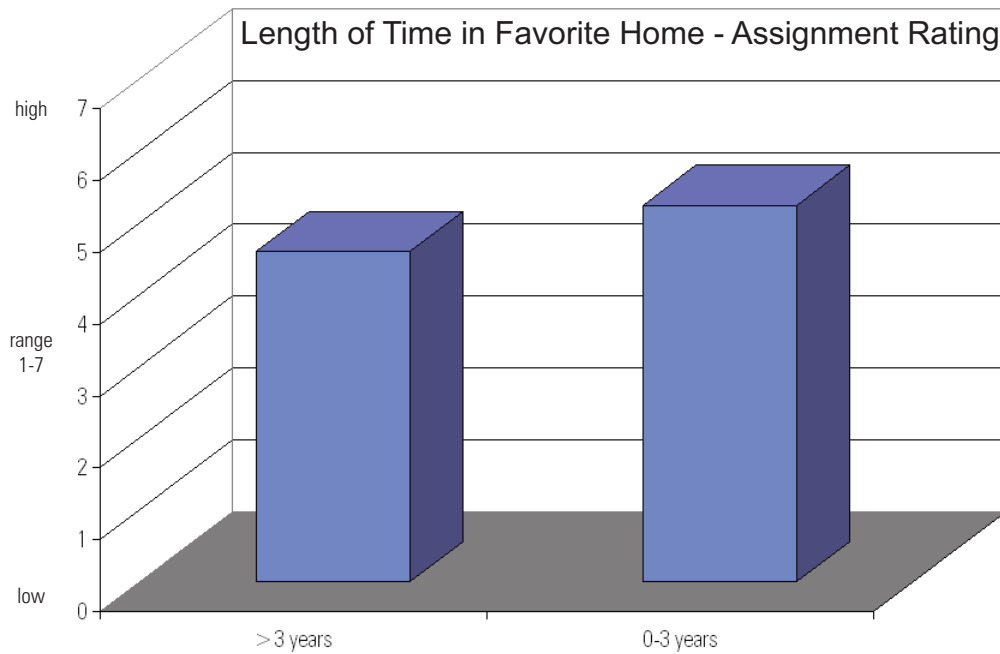


More in line with expectations, these participants felt more settled if their current home was more similar to their favorite one in proximity to work.

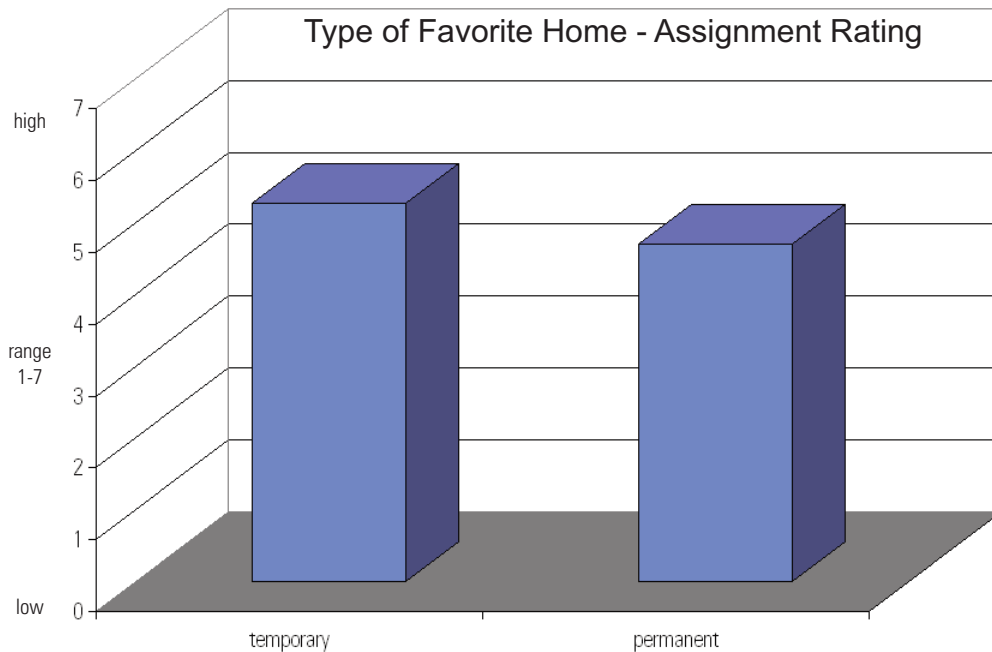
Take Away

Participants whose favorite homes were the ones they had most recently left, and perhaps felt “torn away from,” were particularly sensitive to aspects of their current homes. They had better mental health, rated the assignment more positively and felt more settled if they were more satisfied with their homes and saw them as like those favorite homes. Assess how expatriates feel about leaving their current homes and treat those leaving an idealized home with special care.

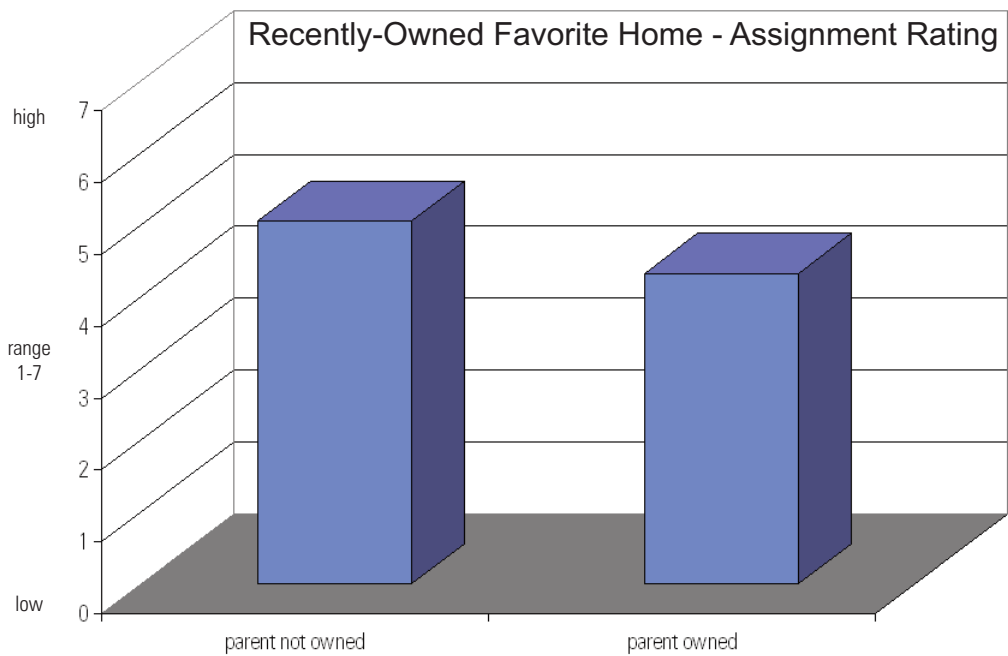
These results raise the question, "What is the favorite home of the happiest expatriates?" Perhaps if we understood this, we could be more alert to those likely to have an easier or difficult time by asking about their favorite home memories.



Those whose favorite homes were ones they had lived in only 0-3 years rated the assignment more positively than those whose favorite homes were ones they had lived in longer.



In addition, those whose favorite homes were temporary rated the assignment more positively than those whose favorite homes were permanent ones for them.



And finally, those whose parents had not owned their favorite homes rated the assignment more positively than those whose favorite homes had been owned by their parents.

Take Away

The favorite, ideal homes of those with the most positive ratings of the assignment were short-term, temporary homes they had probably lived in as adults. Those with more experience living in homes for shorter periods of time may have an easier time adapting to a new expatriate home.

Chapter 6: Relocation Assistance Makes a Difference

We asked participants to describe any relocation assistance they received, and to describe the details of any housing policy that applied to their move. Not surprisingly, these factors were consistently related to how participants felt about their assignment.

First, we asked about housing policies.

Did You Have a Housing Policy? - Reason For Move

	total	personal reasons	employee accompanying spouse	Only about 6% of our participants had an "informal policy." The rest of the sample was roughly evenly split between "no policy" and "formal policy." Of these, no one who moved for personal reasons had any kind of housing policy. Accompanying spouses and employees were both roughly split between none and a formal policy, with spouses being slightly (55.6%) more likely to have a formal policy than employees (48.6%).
no policy	47.4%	100.0%	45.9%	36.5%
informal policy	6.1%	0.0%	5.4%	7.9%
formal policy	46.5%	0.0%	48.6%	55.6%

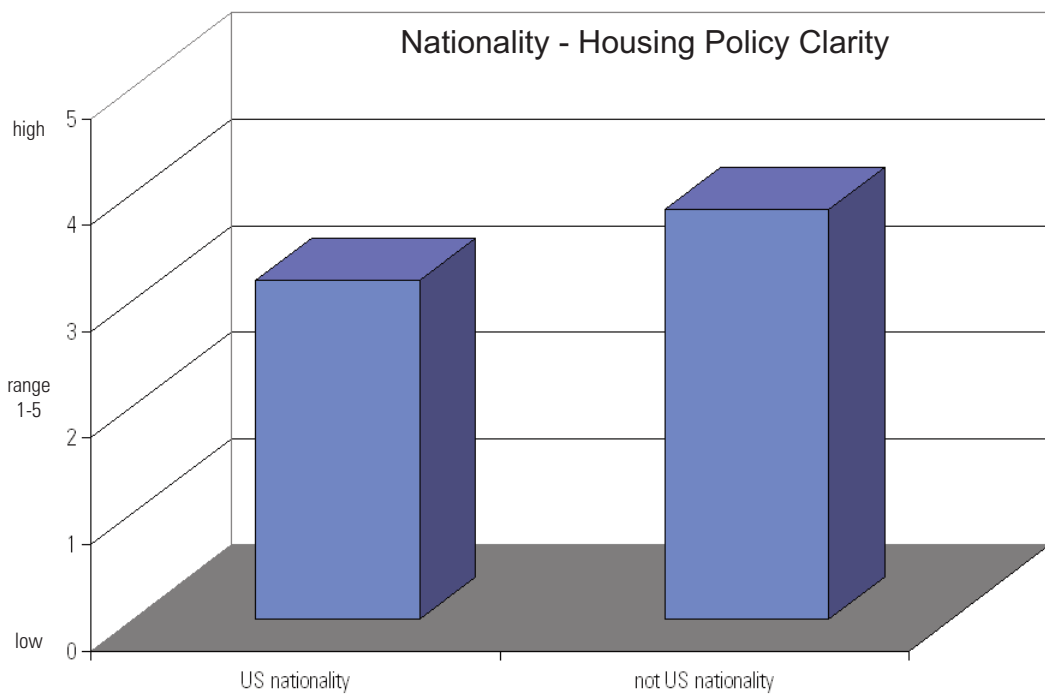
Did You Have a Housing Policy?- Nationalities

Americans were significantly more likely to have moved under terms of a housing policy than non-Americans.

	not US nationality	US nationality
no policy	61.8%	36.9%
informal policy	7.3%	4.6%
formal policy	30.9%	58.5%

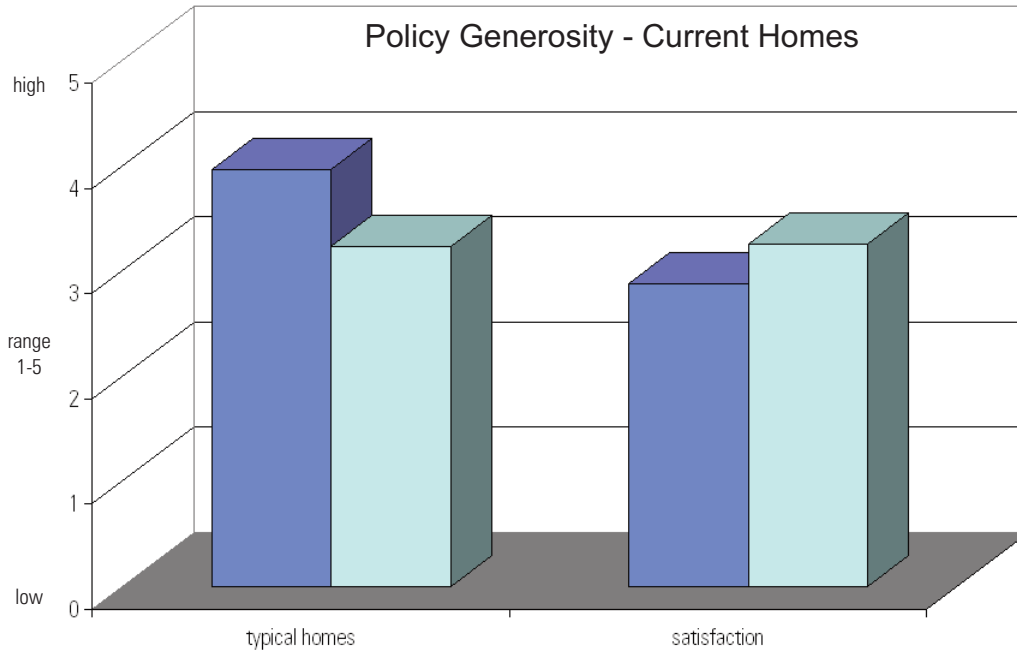
Ratings of Housing Policies

	policy clarity	policy flexibility	policy equity	policy generosity	amount of choice	Participants who did move under terms of a housing policy described how they felt about their policy, on five-point scales (1 = very negative, 5 = very positive). There was a full range of opinion about the policies. Participants felt most positive about their policy's clarity and generosity, and least positive about its flexibility.
mean	3.41	2.64	2.88	3.28	2.74	
range	1-5	1-5	1-5	1-5	1-5	



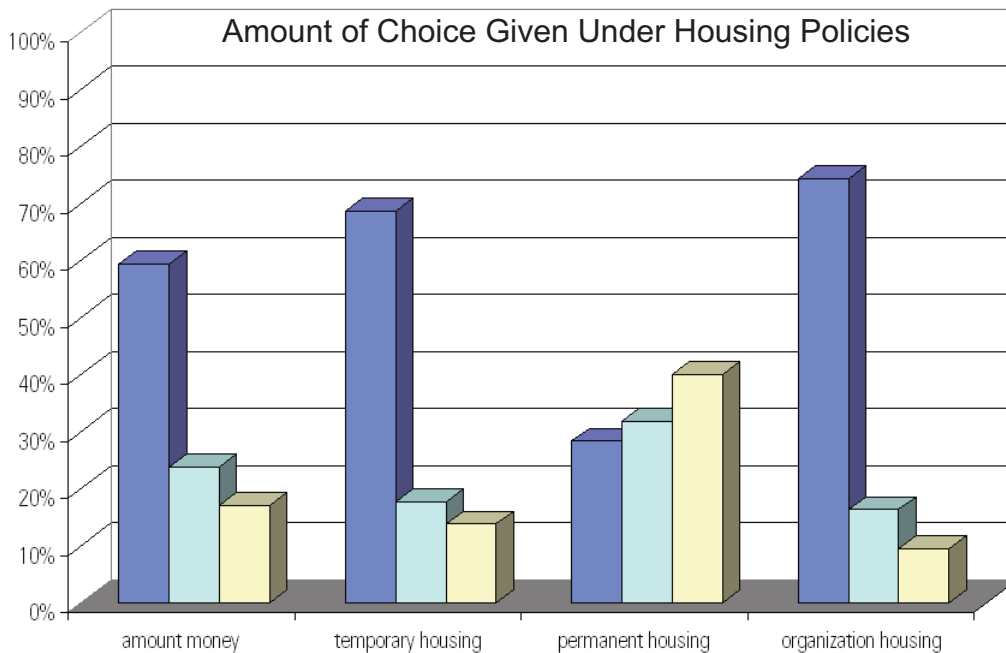
US Americans felt their housing policies were less clear than participants from other countries.

We next examined whether participants' adjustment and response to the assignment were related in any way to their feelings about their housing policies. (These analyses included only those participants who did have a formal or informal housing policy.)

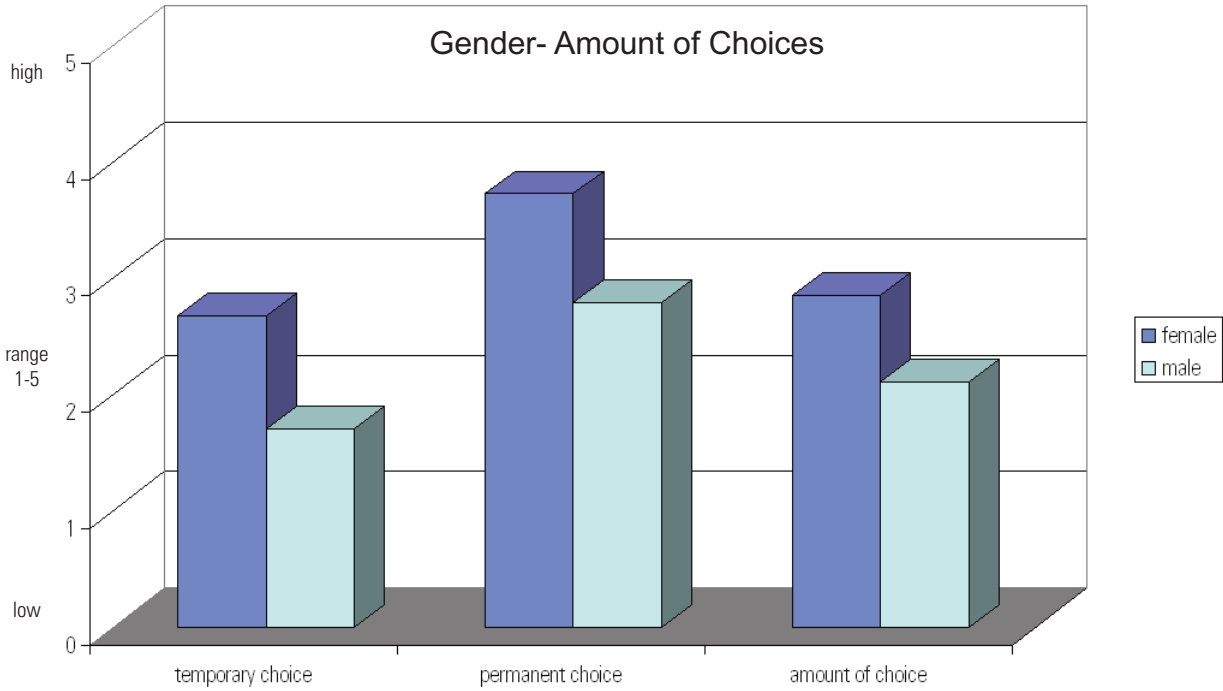


Participants who described their housing policy as more generous were less likely to live in homes typical of their host local culture, and they were more satisfied with their homes.

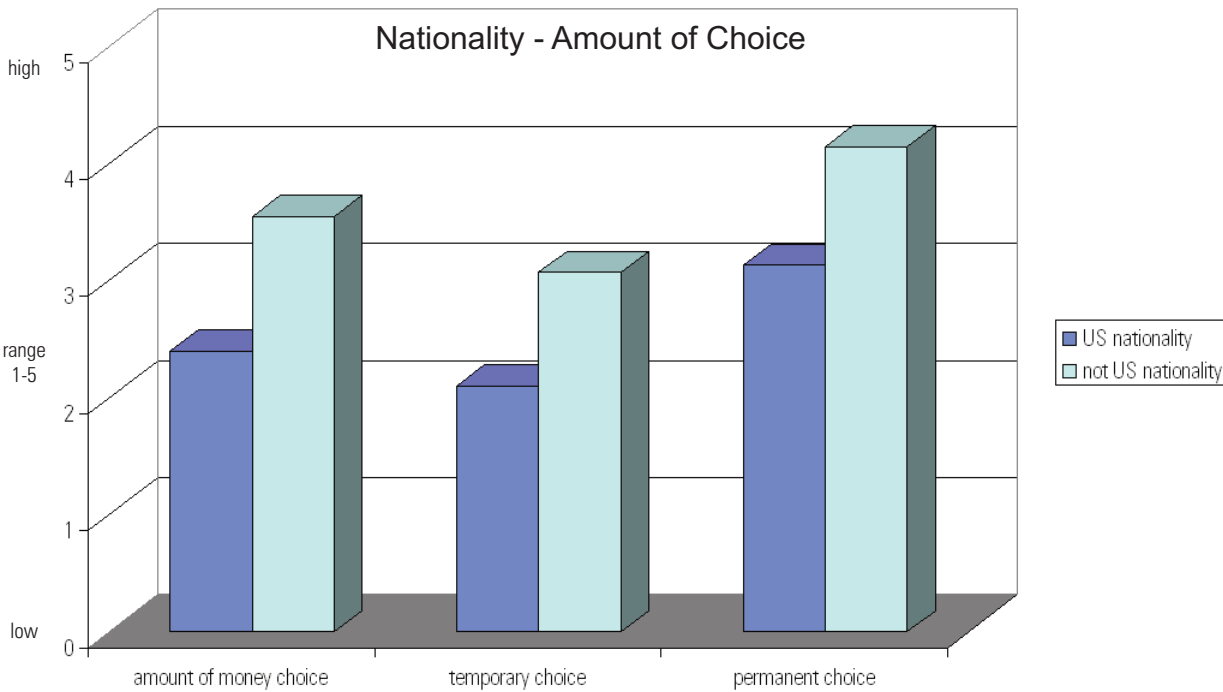
Continuing our analysis of those with a housing policy, we asked how much choice these policies allowed, in terms of how much money they could spend on housing, where they would live in temporary and permanent housing, and whether they were required to live in housing provided by the sponsoring organization.



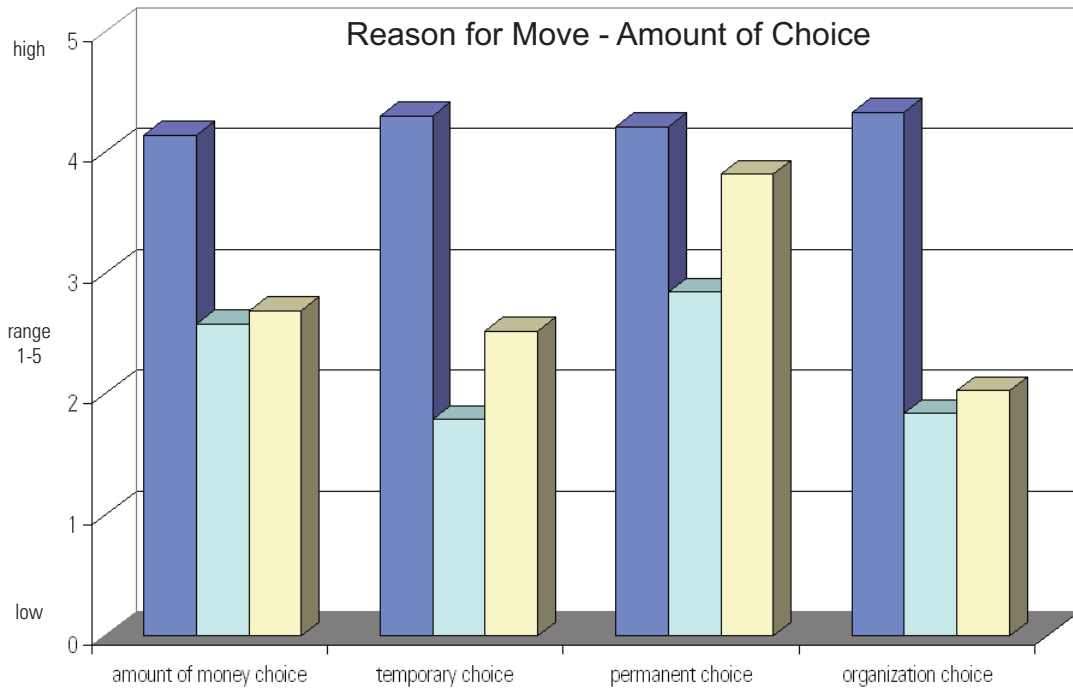
Participants' housing policies allowed the most choice in terms of where to live permanently, and least choice in terms of whether they had to live in organization housing (but note that participants who worked for organizations that did not have their own housing would have answered "no choice" to that item — they had no choice about living in organization housing; they had to *not* live in organization housing).



Compared to males, the females reported having more choice in where they would live, both temporarily and permanently, and in general.

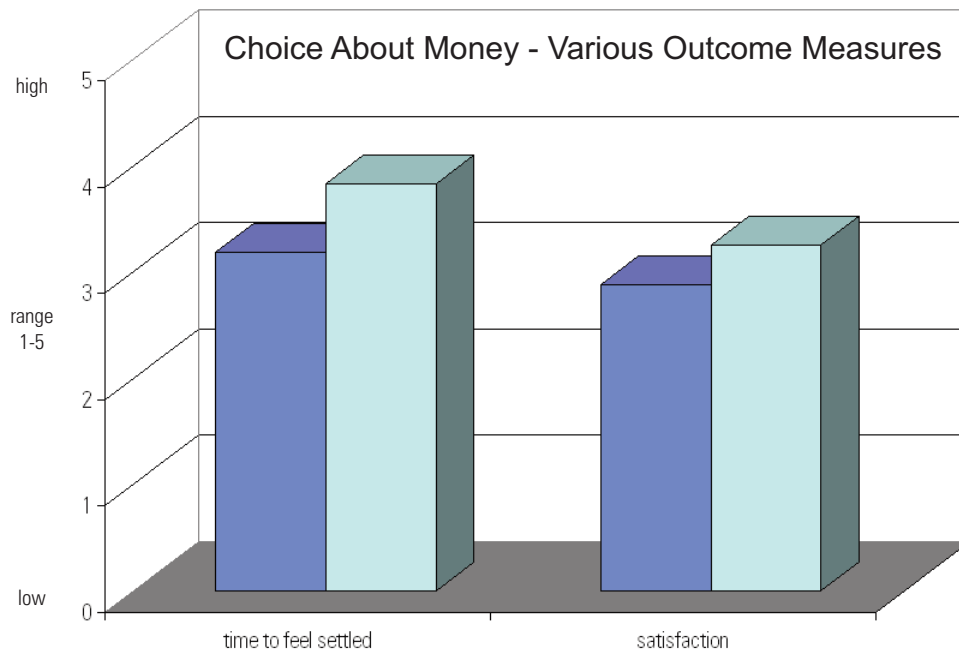


Compared to participants from other countries, US Americans had less choice about how much money to spend on housing, and where they could live temporarily or permanently.

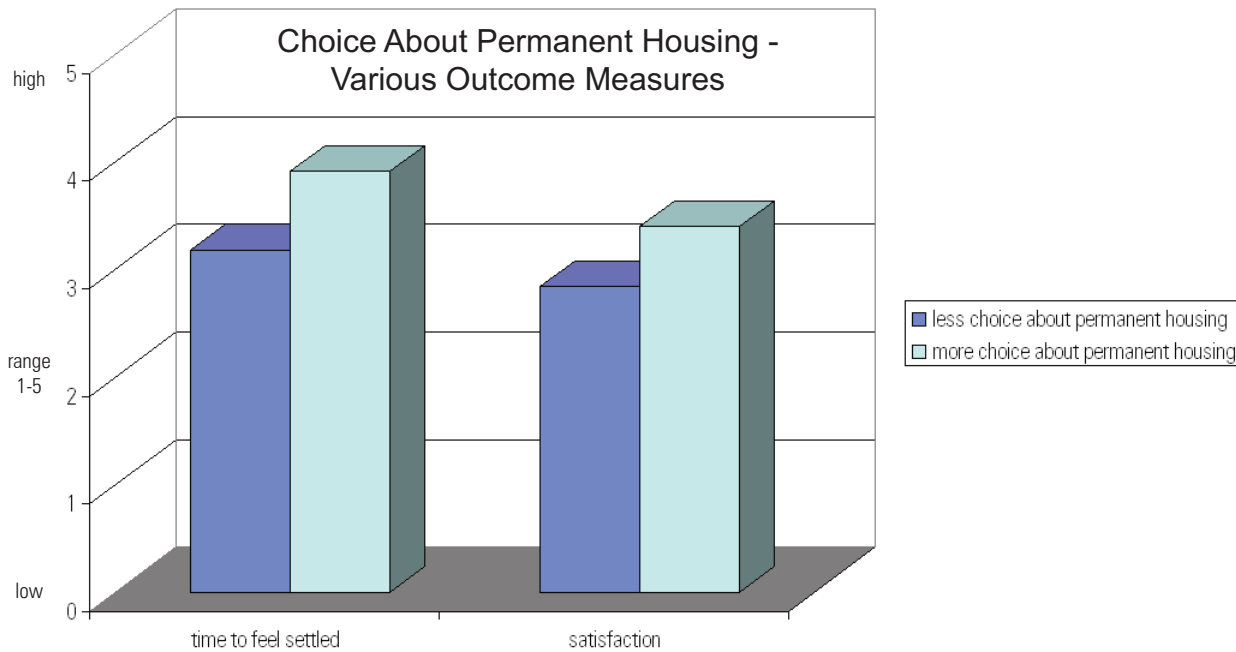


Probably because they had no constraining housing policy, those who moved for personal reasons had significantly more choice in how much money to spend on housing, where to live temporarily and permanently, and whether to live in organization housing.

Did people who had more choice about their housing have a better assignment outcome? Again, here, we examined only those with a housing policy.



Participants' who were given more choice about how much money they could spend on housing took longer to feel settled, but they were more satisfied with their homes.



Similarly, participants' who were given more choice about where to live permanently took *longer* to feel settled, but they were more satisfied with their homes.

Next, we examined the kinds of assistance people received, whether or not they had moved under terms of a housing policy. If they had received assistance, we asked if they had paid for it themselves or if the organization had paid for it.

Who Paid for Relocation Assistance?

	none	self-pay	organization pay
finding home	41.1%	8.9%	50.0%
negotiating agreement	44.3%	5.7%	50.0%
tax assistance	49.1%	4.3%	46.6%
decorating service	84.5%	5.2%	10.3%
acquiring furniture	70.1%	6.0%	23.9%
handyman service	61.9%	11.9%	26.3%
getting computer or TV	90.8%	5.0%	4.2%
buying internet or cable	69.4%	21.5%	9.1%
setting up computer or TV	78.8%	16.9%	4.2%
gardening service	71.2%	18.0%	10.8%

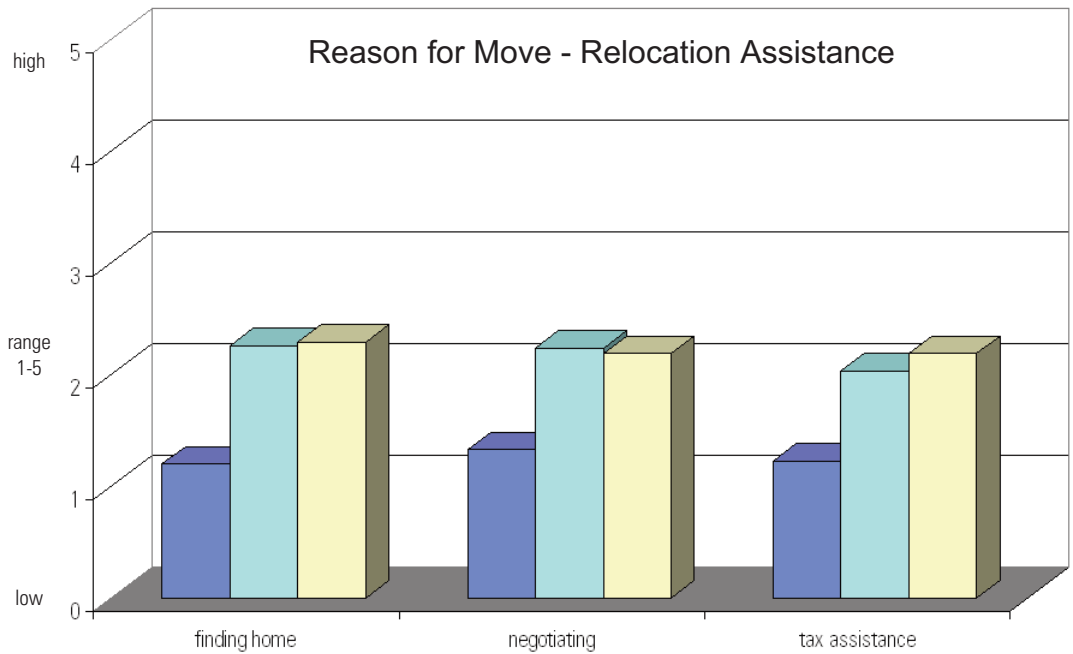
Participants received most assistance from their organizations for finding a home, negotiating a sales or rental agreement, and preparing their taxes. They were most likely to pay for their own assistance in buying and setting up internet or cable service, and gardening.

Below we report the pattern just for those with a formal housing policy. Compare these numbers to the chart above.

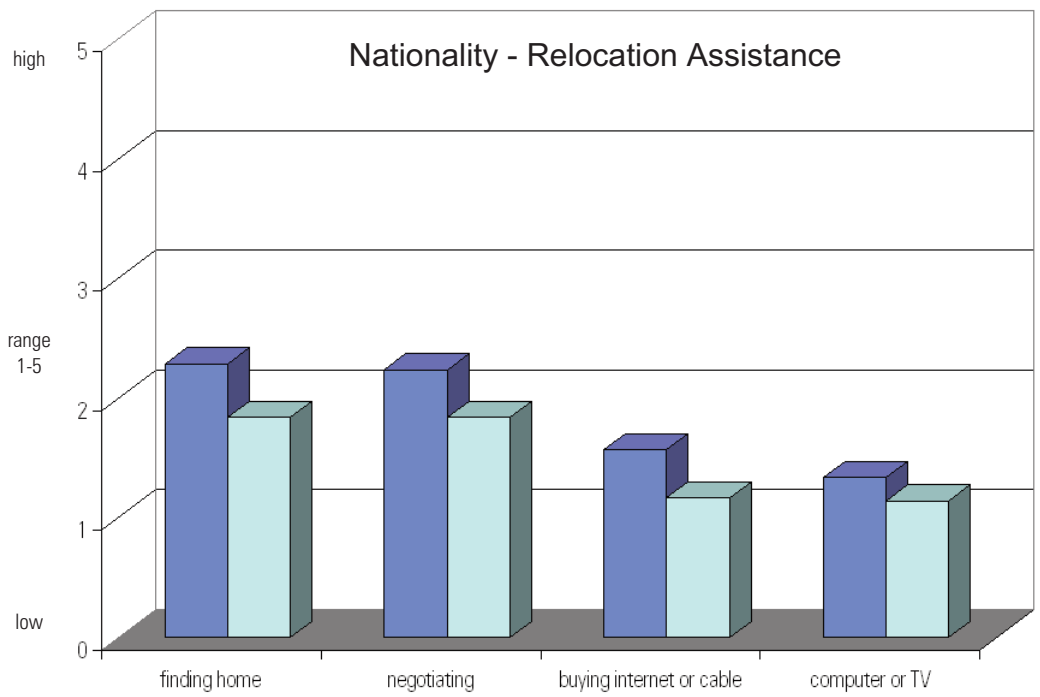
Who Paid for Relocation Assistance? (Those with a Formal Housing Policy)

	none	self-pay	organization pay
finding home	3.7%	3.7%	92.6%
negotiating agreement	5.7%	5.7%	88.7%
tax assistance	14.0%	0.0%	86.0%
decorating service	72.5%	3.9%	23.5%
acquiring furniture	45.1%	7.8%	47.1%
handyman service	36.5%	11.5%	51.9%
getting computer or TV	86.5%	5.8%	7.7%
buying internet or cable	43.4%	37.7%	18.9%
setting up computer or TV	64.7%	27.5%	7.8%
gardening service	52.2%	23.9%	23.9%

Those who had moved under a formal policy were more likely to get help with every task queried except purchasing a computer or television.

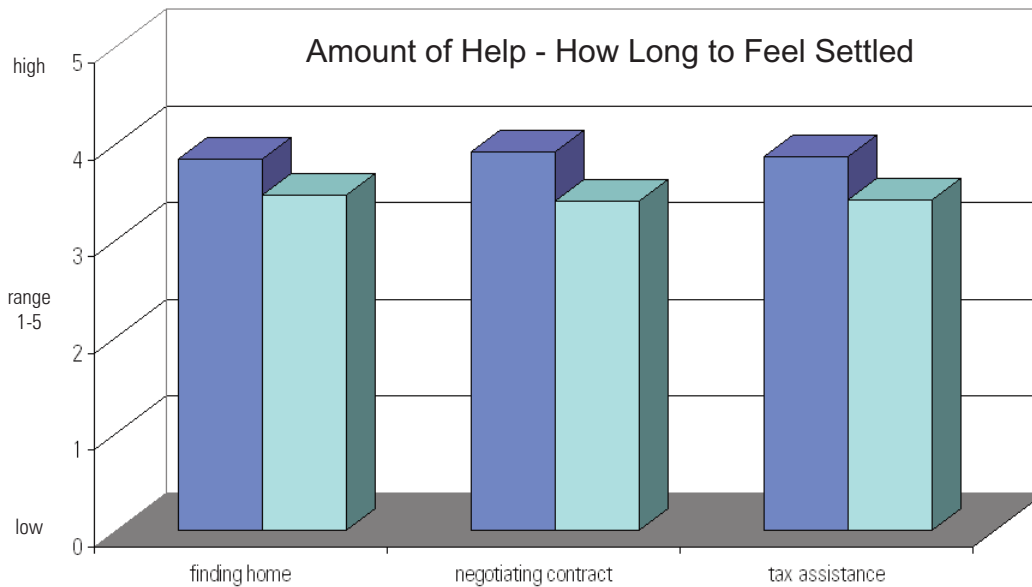


Probably because they were moving without organization support, participants who moved for personal reasons had significantly less assistance finding their home, negotiating a sales or rental agreement, or preparing their taxes.



US Americans were more likely than those from other countries to receive assistance in finding a home, negotiating a rental or sales agreement, buying internet or cable service, and setting up their computer or television.

Did those who received more help during the relocation process have a different pattern of settling in and adjustment than those who received less or no help? That is, does this provision of assistance make a discernable difference in expatriates' lives? Here we examined all participants, not just those with a housing policy, since assistance would be available regardless of policy constraints.



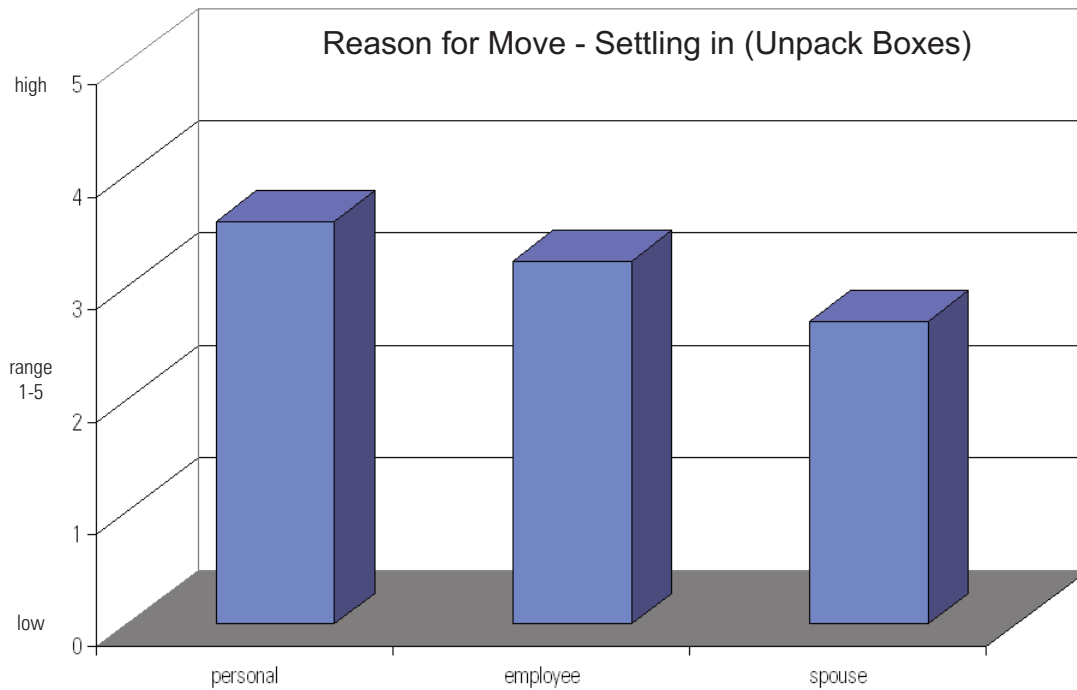
Participants who received more help in finding a home, negotiating a sales or rental agreement, and with tax preparation took less time to feel settled than those who received less help.

Take Away

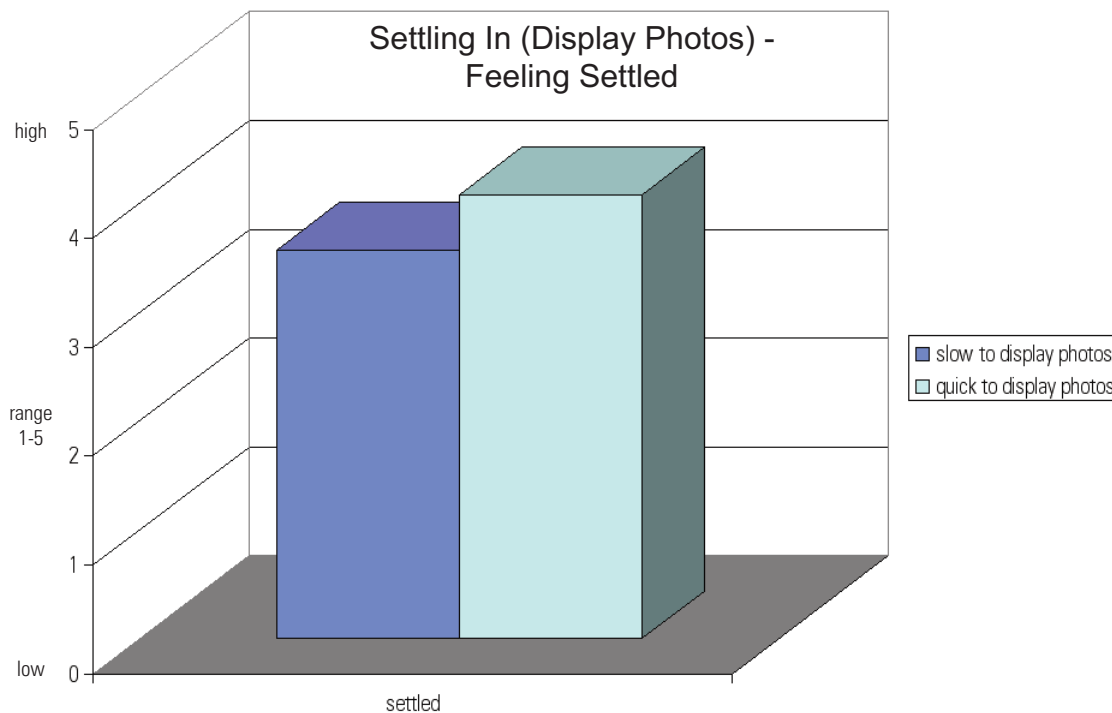
Housing policy generosity and flexibility, and the provision of relocation assistance are clearly related to expatriates' feeling settled in their new homes.

Chapter 7: How People Settle In Makes a Difference

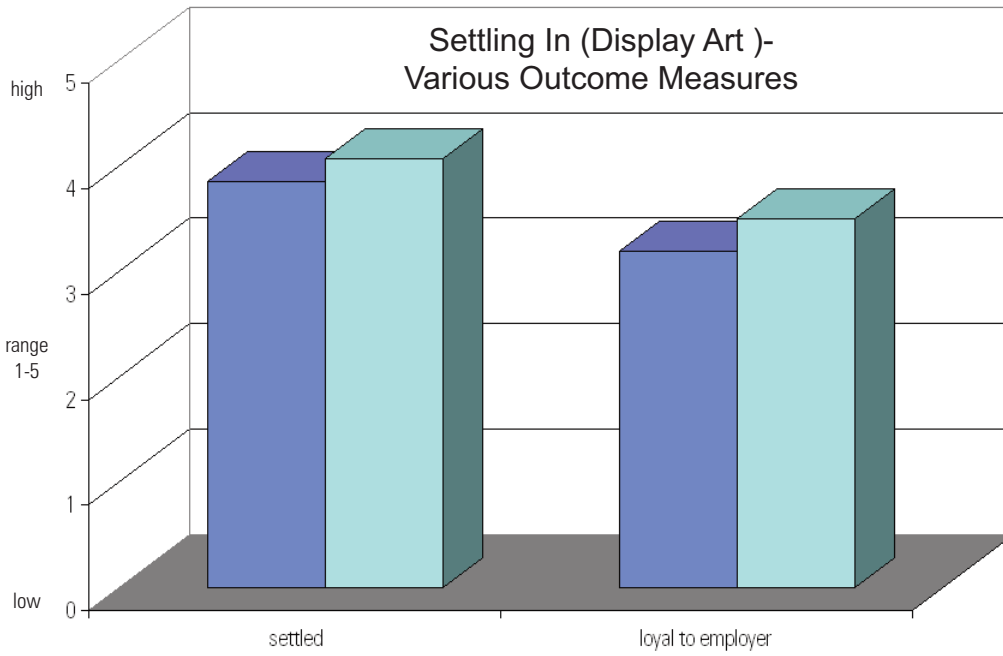
What do people actually do when they move into their new homes? Are some settling-in strategies more effective than others? We asked participants whether and when they had completed twelve different settling-in tasks, then examined whether the speed with which they completed the tasks was related to their assignment. It is important to remember that the direction of causality is not clear here — it could be that settling in quickly causes people to feel better, or that those who feel better have the energy to settle in quickly.



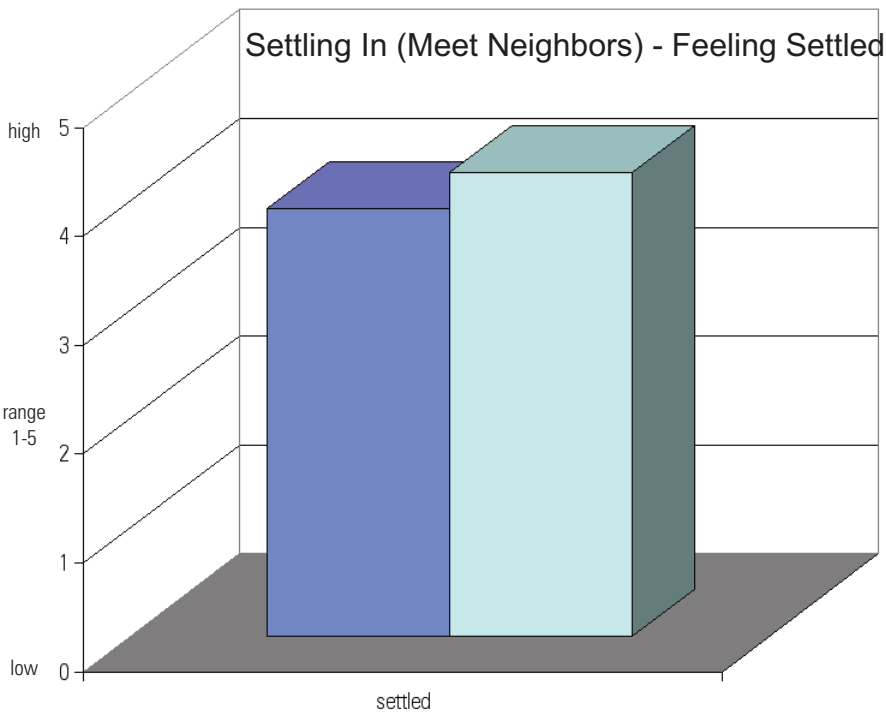
Participants who moved to the new country for different reasons differed in how they completed the settling in tasks on only one dimension — accompanying spouses were the fastest to unpack boxes; those who moved for personal reasons took the longest to complete this task.



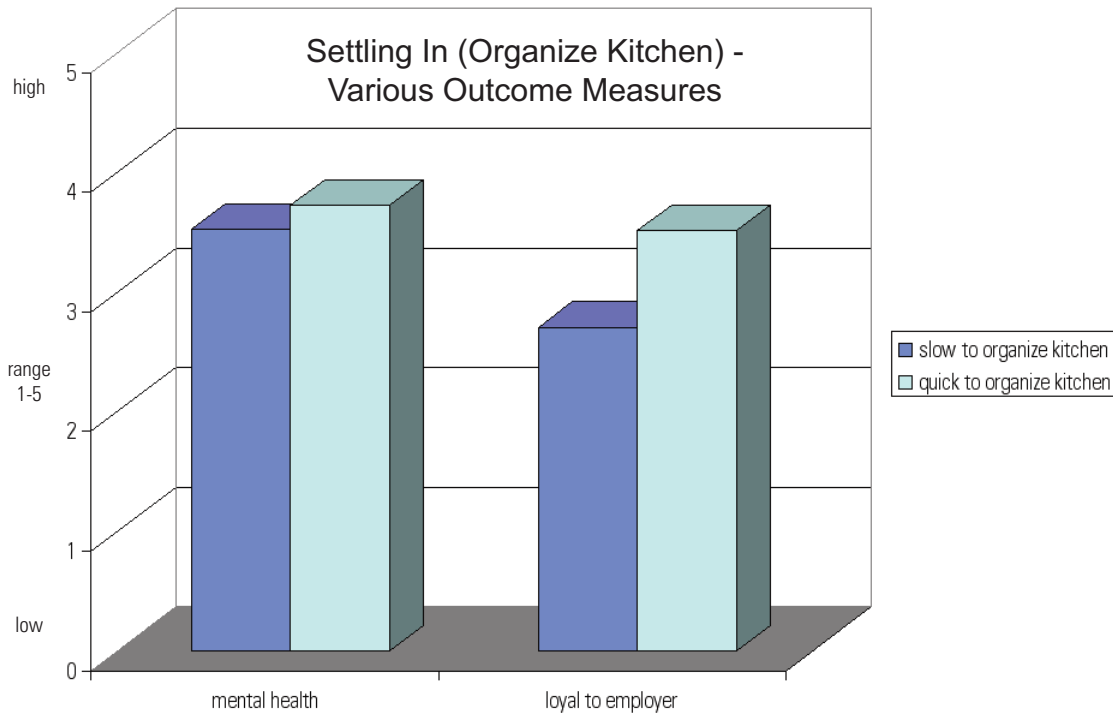
Participants who were quicker to display their family photos said they felt modestly but significantly more settled in their home and community than those who took a longer time to display photos, or had not done it yet.



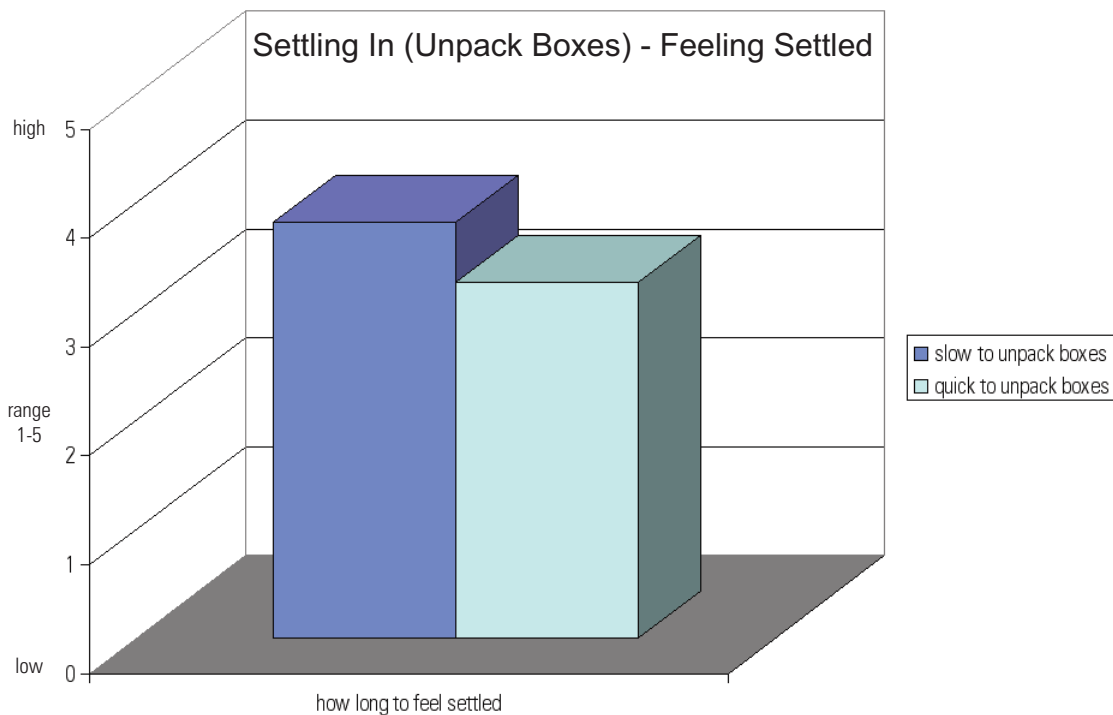
Those who were quicker to hang art work on their walls felt more settled in their home and community, and felt more loyal to their employer, than those who took longer to hang art work on the walls.



Participants who were quicker to meet at least one neighbor felt modestly but significantly more settled in their home and community than those who took longer to meet a neighbor, or had not done that yet.



Participants who were quicker to organize their kitchen had better mental health and felt more loyal to their employer than those who took longer to organize their kitchen.



Not surprisingly, participants who were quicker to unpack their moving boxes felt settled more quickly than those who unpacked their boxes more slowly.

Clearly, doing what has to be done to settle in to a new home is related to feeling more settled and to a variety of other positive indicators of outcome. Again, it is not clear whether settling in quickly causes this improved income, or if people who are feeling better about the assignment have the energy to do the acts of settling in. Still, offering settling in assistance and advice is likely to be helpful.

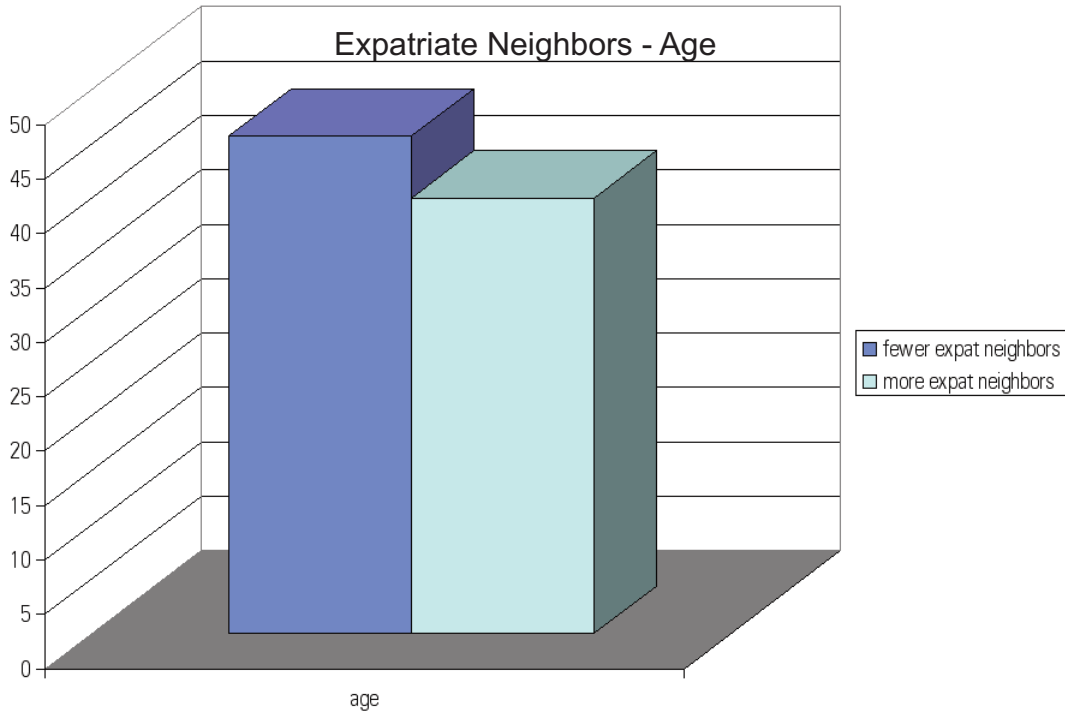
It is interesting to note which settling-in tasks were *not* related to any outcome indicators: cleaning the home, re-painting or re-decorating at least one room, arranging furniture, having visitors, and having a holiday meal.

Take Away

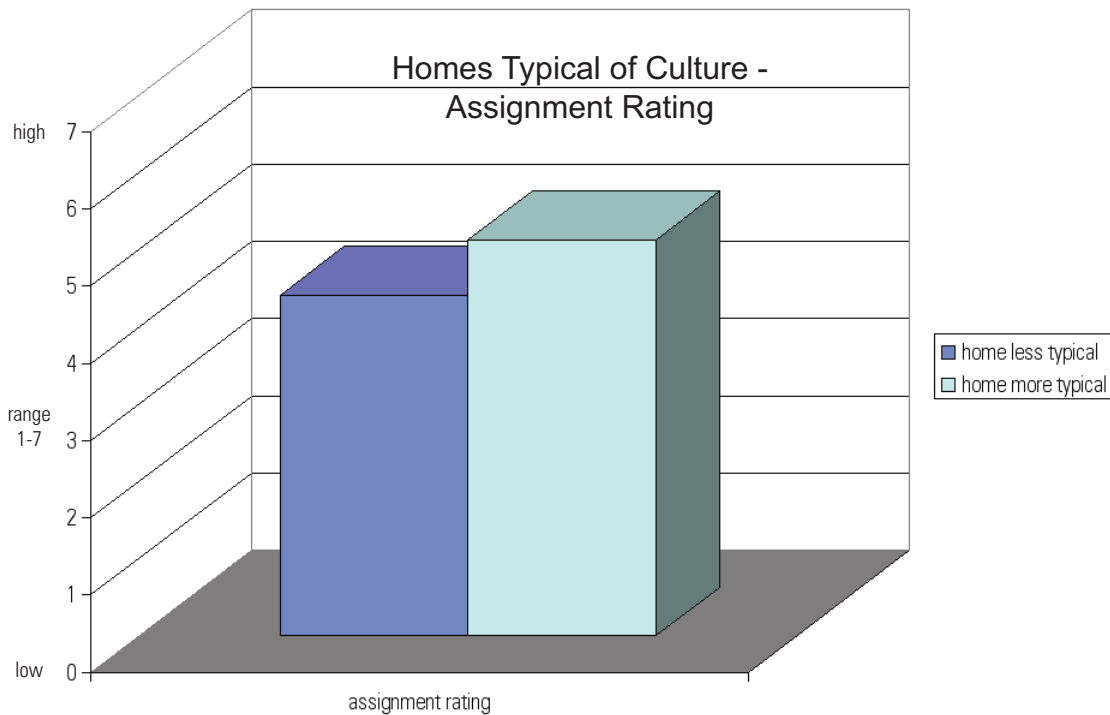
Assistance in settling in is likely to pay off in terms of quicker adjustment and better outcome.

Chapter 8: The Cultural Context of Homes Matters

All of the participants in this study were expatriates, yet some were more embedded in their host local culture than others. How do local architecture and community settings affect the expatriate experience? We asked participants how typical their home was in their new culture, and whether many of their neighbors were expatriates.



Participants who said they lived in neighborhoods with more expatriate neighbors — perhaps an “expatriate bubble” — were younger than those who lived in neighborhoods with fewer other expatriates.



Participants who said their home was more typical of the host local culture gave the assignment a more positive rating than those who lived in homes that were culturally atypical.

We included several open-ended questions about homes in our survey. We searched participants' responses for information about how the host culture might have influenced the participants' homes and their experiences living in them. We noted the following themes (and include an example or two of each):

A home's architecture can represent something deeper about the culture and offer access to it.

- ♦ *We wanted a 'Scottish' house with character. We were lucky to find a converted farmhouse with local character outside, but modernised inside.* (Irish man living in Scotland)
- ♦ *If you buy a house that is at least mostly reflective of the homes built for in-county nationals, I think you have a more interesting experience.* (American woman living in Mexico)
- ♦ *We wanted to live near to Dutch people and I wanted to be part of the neighbourhood for my daughter's sake as well as for my own. It's been part of our intercultural experience to live here and mix with our neighbours (well I mix and my husband does under duress). It was nice for our daughter to be living in this area as it is near to her school, so other children were around and it made it a bit easier for her to make friends.* (British woman living in The Netherlands)

New climate conditions and the resulting home facilities change family patterns.

- ♦ *We spend more time in the kitchen area now where there is a large AGA oil stove which keeps the place warm during the long cold/damp Scottish winter. We lived in Malaysia before and our house there had an outdoor swimming pool in which the family used to relax together. We don't have a pool in our house in Scotland and the difference in climate lends to different activities.* (Irish man living in Scotland)
- ♦ *We have a huge terrace here and it's much nicer to be outside here than where we lived before (southern US)* (American woman living in Switzerland)

Perceived inferiority of homes affects perception of assignment.

- ♦ *On the whole I find affordable housing in NZ inconvenient because of lack of storage space, size of bedrooms, older kitchens, and lack of sufficient electrical outlets.* (American woman living in New Zealand)
- ♦ *We have no separate guestroom and we have told our friends that this means they cannot stay that long, four days is the maximum during school weeks. I miss my own office space, I now only have a desk in the TV/play room. So more interaction but less privacy. And I guess that point goes for the whole family. The children rooms are smaller and my son (who has the biggest room) complains he has not enough space to build his Lego monsters. But again, I realize we are very lucky to have a house and a garden in a 1.6 mln people city!* (Dutch woman living in Austria)
- ♦ *An apartment in Europe is much smaller than a house in the US. We do not have as much space, but it is enough.* (American woman living in Switzerland)

Homes can feel too large or too formal for desired family style.

- ♦ *The apartment is a little formal with its "salons" and so on and so we spend all of our time in a very small room that contains the tv and the computers and the comfortable sofas. The living rooms (salons) are never occupied except when the maid cleans or during a dinner party.* (American woman living in Egypt)
- ♦ *Our new house is extremely big and laid out across four floors. This is a strange complaint, but it is unnecessarily large, so that we are quite spread out. We are too lazy to switch floors often, even though we'd rather be somewhere else. Even now, 16 months after we moved in, the place still feels like it's someone else's.* (American man living in Russia)

The surrounding community or neighborhoods challenge people to change their family patterns.

- ♦ *Drop-in visitors are common here, unlike the U.S. which takes some getting used to.* (American woman living in Bulgaria)
- ♦ *We moved from the suburbs in the US to a house in the city. There are no other children to play with for my kids (culture and language barriers), so no outdoor play.* (Dutch woman living in Austria)
- ♦ *We miss going out on small shopping trips with the kids, the country is not convenient and it's hard to walk around with kids.* (Jordanian woman living in Egypt)
- ♦ *We used to enjoy taking twice-daily walks with our dog throughout the neighborhood. Our current neighborhood is not very "walkable" so while the dog has a larger yard, she misses her daily walks.* (American woman living in Gabon)
- ♦ *I could not interact with other people here in my neighbourhood, because our culture and education level are very different.* (Indonesian woman living in Algeria)
- ♦ *We get very little help from the landlord/ rental agency when problems occur - the dutch culture is very much do it yourself, yet its frustrating and difficult and time consuming when you don't speak enough Dutch and constantly chase services/ repairs etc.* (British woman living in The Netherlands)
- ♦ *Living in a small village has allowed us to integrate quickly - lack of other expats to 'cling to.'* (British woman living in Bulgaria)
- ♦ *My neighbours do not think we maintain the house to proper Dutch standards! We don't - it's true. To me a home is somewhere to relax and I cannot be bothered to keep it up to their standard of cleanliness and maintenance. We can't afford to either - we spend our money on other priorities (one of which is for me to take a couple of trips home - at least - every year). However, I feel bad about the state of the house and wish we had more money to spend on it. We are getting the external paintwork done this year - for the first time since we came to live here! I see my home as being a small part of England in The Netherlands. I see it as a refuge to a certain extent. It reflects a bit of who I am. so I will not make it the same as all the Dutch houses that I visit. I have adopted some things though that are Dutch but not much in the house.* (British woman living in The Netherlands)

Culture's expectations about live-in domestic help is expressed in homes' architecture.

- ♦ *We brought our maid with us from HK and the design does not suit this type of living arrangement - we need more separation for us as a family from our domestic helper and this house does not provide it* (American man living in Angola)
- ♦ *I used to prefer in France a US-style open type kitchen for more interaction with family members, however in India as an expat, it is a habit to employ house help and therefore she spends more time in the kitchen and gets some kind of privacy while I am doing other things in the home.* (French woman living in India)

Not knowing the host language changes how people spend their time at home.

- ♦ *I spend more time on the internet or watching dvds now due to lack of English programming on the television.* (American woman living in Germany)
- ♦ *We have no English TV here, so the children watch little TV. I buy them DVDs. We play more games together in the evening.* (Dutch woman living in Austria)

Unfamiliar but culturally typical amenities require family changes.

- ♦ *This house is not as cosy as the other one and I preferred snuggling up in front of the gas fire in the other house. The only direct heat here is when we light a real fire in the open hearth but that switches the heating off (thermostat is in the sitting room) and makes the rest of the house freezing! Sleeping is much better here. We have a bigger, airier bedroom and it is on the quiet side of the house. There is also a fixed, rigid mosquito net at the window to stop any insects coming in, so the window is open every night. There is a sink in the bedroom though and - wait for it - a bidet!! We always meant to have the bidet removed but never got round to it. The drains sometimes smell here and the room then smells terrible. I move to the spare room! I found the other house better for relaxing because generally I was warmer and felt cosier.* (British woman living in The Netherlands)
- ♦ *Brasília, Brazil is the kind of assignment where homes are extremely important. The city itself is bland, so people (both locals and expats) tend to do lots of entertaining in their homes. I had two small children, so I was grateful to have a yard. That being said, I did not want a swimming pool because I didn't want to have the risks associated with pools and small children. But we found it all but impossible to find houses without pools! Most houses we saw were also totally inappropriate for tiny children because they were designed with features like dangerous stairs. Even the two-storey house we ended up taking had a loft room and balconies. I ended up installing loads of baby gates so that I wouldn't have a heart attack trying to keep track of both babies.* (American woman living in Brazil)
- ♦ *U.S. sized dishes don't fit in Japanese sized dishwasher or fridge. Washer and dryer are also smaller, so laundry is more inconvenient.* (American woman living in Japan)
- ♦ *What I've noticed lately is that even though I like our apartment and we are very comfortable here, the fact that the parts are very different (marble floors, different kinds of windows, doors, shutters, etc.) makes it hard for me to feel "at home" here. It still feels very foreign to me because it looks very unfamiliar even though it is extremely comfortable, bright, airy, clean, etc.* (American woman living in Italy)

New food and meal customs change family patterns.

- ♦ *It is more difficult to eat together because the main meal here is lunch and at that time everyone is either at work or school. Everyone gets home at different times and eats separately so we only have real family meals on the weekends.* (American woman living in Chile)
- ♦ *Our last house had a huge stand-alone freezer as food was not plentiful in that country and if you found it, you bought it and froze it. Now we have so much wonderful frozen food available but a tiny freezer.* (American woman living in France)
- ♦ *Less storage space, so more planning when shopping. Shops are closed on Sundays here, so I have to think on Saturday what to buy for the whole week, but the flip side is a real family Sunday with no practical things to do.* (Dutch woman living in Austria)
- ♦ *Small refrigerator means more shopping trips, but also fresh food. A nice cafeteria at work and German eating habits means a large, warm meal while at work and less cooking at home--smaller kitchen (surfaces and appliances) means I don't enjoy cooking at home as much as I used to. Smaller kitchen means less dinner parties, too.* (American woman living in Germany)

Security concerns affect relationships with friends and family.

- ♦ *With security concerns becoming a bigger issue here in Mexico we have a wonderful gated community and have had the same security personnel for over four years. Many expats complained that I lived too "far away" and didn't like to drive out to my house, but their neighborhoods have experienced crime and I would not trade my neighborhood for theirs any day.* (American woman living in Mexico)

Take Away

A home is a critically important but subtle window to one's host culture. A culturally-typical home can offer access to a deeper cultural experience.

Chapter 9: Participants' Advice

We asked participants what advice they had for other people who were selecting and setting up a home in a new country. Their advice fell into several categories, listed below (in order of decreasing frequency of mention):

1) **Before making your final choice, visit the location, take your time, make sure you see the big picture.**

Make sure you go and look at what is available. Do not settle for just one that gets you by - you have to live there sometimes by yourself in a way because many spouses work long hours on foreign assignments. Make sure it's the house you want and will be happy in - don't settle.

Do your research BEFORE you come.

Get help and local market information up front. Never move under pressure. Take your time to find the right home for yourself and your family even if it requires a financial investment on your part.

Take your time to get to the neighborhood and community. Go house hunting with an open mind and be flexible. You have to compromise, so get your priorities straight and good luck!

Start with renting a house in the area you plan to live in. Then get to know the neighborhood and after a period of time you will be able to make a better choice of home for you and your family.

Rent first and try to get invited to other people's houses so you can compare. Ask them how much they're paying and compare. Make sure you're not getting ripped off because you're a foreigner. Look for accommodation in the local press which is not in English, ask someone to help you if you don't speak the language. Ads in English are always overpriced.

If you are going to be spending a lot of time in the house - due to small children, weather, location, non working spouse - ensure you "feel" comfortable in the house. Go on intuition where possible and where possible visit several properties in your new country to get a feel for what is the cultural norm. Also visit the property - I let my partner choose one of our homes with a check list I'd given him and only photos emailed to me as time meant we had to find somewhere. My gut told me it wasn't the house for us, but I went with him as he'd visited, he felt it was suitable for a family and it was near to his new office which meant we could have his support as a young family. I was very unhappy when I first arrived as it was so "old", dark and dirty when I arrived and I couldn't lock the front door / back doors to stop my son going out onto the road nor into the swimming pool in the yard - I was on constant outlook. We only stayed for 3 months.

If possible visit the house at different moments, in the morning, afternoon, rush hour and at night. See how traffic is, the noises, how lively (or not) the neighborhood is, if you feel safe etc. Know what is really important in a house for you, and where you want to compromise. Spending months in a hotel or temporary apartment (especially with kids) is also not a lot of fun. So you need to balance your demands with what is feasible in the location, your budget etc.

Don't assume that the community rules and norms will be the same just because it seems to be a comparable sort of area to the one you lived in at home! Here in the Netherlands for example - neighbours are much more involved with each other and will tell you if you are letting the neighbourhood down (garden, windows, drive way, paintwork etc)! Mind you, they will also help you if you are in difficulties. Don't let others persuade you to do what they think is best. Live in rented accommodation for a while first. We lived in a rented house for 8 months and it gave time to get to know that town and the different areas and to settle in generally before making the huge decision about purchasing a house and choosing a particular area. Goodness knows where we would have ended up without that 8 months to look around and get our bearings! We did end up in a place that suited most needs for all members of our family - including the pet!

Sometimes, you might want to look further afield - we ended up half an hour from my husband's office and decided to get a car rather than live in the city without, and it was a good choice. But it did take us nearly 6 months to find a place - I looked at hundreds of apartments on the Internet. Be persistent, too, I suppose.

Identify what is important to you and choose your neighborhood well. Then figure out the 5 most important things you need in a house (amount of space, place to park, how many rooms, how much light, proximity to work, grocery store, kid's schools, etc.) Then, try to find something as close as you can that meets your most important needs.

Look for security, a level of comfort and convenience similar to your home(s) in your home country. If you are middle class in your home country, look for housing at least up to that level where you relocate. "Going native" usually backfires as you look phony to the natives and will wear you out trying to do something very difficult on top of your adaptation to a new culture. On the other hand take advantage of some of the new opportunities offered where you relocate, that help make up for some of the inconveniences of the new setting: for instance, household help in place of conveniences like dishwashers, convenience foods, etc.

Take your time with choosing furniture and decorations, let the house grow organically. Do not expect to find the same quality as home. Dream up the essential qualities you need for your home, light, ceiling heights, age, proximity to ground, tree canopy, architectural style and try to be really clear with the agent when looking, this helps them to narrow the field, and eliminates visits to inappropriate housing offers. You never know what might be available that is close to your 'dream' house French doors, high ceilings, wooden floor boards - it is all possible!

2) **Personalize the home and make it yours, by using cherished and personal items.**

"Make it your own" as soon as possible and happiness will come.

For my next move, I will be more willing to invest in decor such as new paint, slipcovers, rugs etc that will help make the space feel like my own. Iden-

tify what you CAN change and what you have no ability to change ... then be willing to make changes early on. Moving in quickly, and bringing some familiar items that you really like helps ease the transition. Prioritize nesting/settling in since your home (living space) will be the anchor and refuge for your situation, whether it's in a developed, developing or un(der)developed country, Always bring some personal things with you, like a favourite chair or pictures, those things make it your home away from home Decorate your house and use ornaments, photographs, familiar furniture, artwork whatever to make the place a home from home if that's what you need for your soul. You can always add local pieces as you go along and may even change entirely over to them once you feel fully settled. Some people embrace all that's new right from the start. I needed the security of familiar things around me but not everybody wants that. DO WHAT SUITS YOU. Unpack fast to make the place feel like home. Don't worry about white goods, bring personal possessions - art work, blankets to make a place feel like home. Bring your "comforts of home." If you like grilling out, bring a grill. If you like fondue, bring a fondue pot. Don't just assume something will be available in that country. Bring as much as you can to make the house personal and reflective of you and your family. Embrace the quirks and remember home is where you and your family are. Bring some of your own stuff.. whether it's a piece of furniture, decoration, art work, etc. this makes the new house feels more like home, not like a temp housing. also, paint the walls if you can. makes it cozy and comfortable. Do something to it to make it yours. Decorate it in your own style. I am constantly shocked that so many expats just keep the houses as they are given to them with absolutely no effort to decorate or style them. Just corporate blah. Yuck. Bring your small, most cherished possessions, but don't bother shipping furniture, etc. Paint and hang pictures quickly. Focus on the positives and not what you don't have. Your house is VERY important. It needs to be your 'home' rather than just a dwelling place as it acts as your 'island' where you can be insulated from the stresses of work and cultural differences.

3. Pay careful attention to the location of your home.

Choose a neighborhood you like and don't settle for any other. Look for convenience for things like transport and hospitals and shopping and don't be tempted to live somewhere very isolated only for the beautiful view Depends if it's for a year or forever! For a year just pick a place convenient for work and social life. If it's forever you need to think of much wider issues, such as neighbours, room for expansion, parking etc. Proximity to school bus stop or school is important for families. Living in a building with other foreigners or in a neighborhood with foreigners is also important in a culture like Japan where there are so many rules for living. Location, location, location. Decide what kind of commute you can handle (to work, school, etc) and search within communities near the target location. If you have kids, be near other kids or they will be miserable...and you too, in turn. Get a place near the center of town so that you can easily get around and also so that you don't feel isolated Make sure that you investigate properly your neighbourhood and choose a good school (first is a good idea) and then the house. If you have children, consider basing your location on their schooling rather than the workplace because it's more important for them to be near school-mates and forge that community than to have a shorter work commute. Location, location, location. It's great to have a lovely house but if it's not accessible to the facilities that suit your life style, the dream home soon can become a weight around your neck.

4. Be flexible and don't expect your new home to be exactly like the last one you had.

To be open to the new culture and surroundings and to make local friends. Be open. Things will not be the same as your previous home. It's part of the adventure. Take your time to get to know the neighborhood and community. Go househunting with an open mind and be flexible. You have to compromise, so get your priorities straight and good luck! Be flexible. Think of your own lifestyle first, but don't assume that living in a house will be the same as living in a house back home. Expect the unexpected. We have had fire-ant invasions and bats in Brazil. We have had two apartments with insufficient power to run our appliances and iffy hot water and hookers on the corner. We always end up getting stiffed on hidden costs and damage deposits. But that being said, it's all part of the adventure of living in a new country. Love life, not your house! That's my secret of happiness. Do not set your expectations on what you had. Learn as quickly as you can to accept the new culture. Be positive; negativity will grow very fast if you let it. Figure out what is most important to you and be willing to settle on any lesser issue. Be open minded and flexible. Try to get a feel for different neighborhoods and match those with your needs if at all possible. Be open. Have reasonable expectations. Bring as much as you can to make the house personal and reflective of you and your family. Embrace the quirks and remember home is where you and your family are. Stay flexible and expect to deviate from your original plan (a number of times!) Be FLEXIBLE! Enjoy and celebrate the differences.

Be flexible - and don't focus on the negatives - ask questions to property managers about things you may feel uncomfortable about... and hold them to their promises. Keep good records -- and purge, purge, purge so that you don't accumulate too many things.

5. Make your family's happiness a priority.

Prioritize children's needs over other things ... i.e. play areas, homework areas, ability to invite friends over, etc

Have the accompanying spouse have the ultimate say on which house to rent/buy since in almost all cases, it is her living in it, decorating it, making sure that the family is happy (I had too many examples of where the culture shock was much deeper than expected because the wife didn't choose the house and never loved it

If you have children, consider basing your location on their schooling rather than the workplace because it's more important for them to be near school-mates and forge that community than to have a shorter work commute.

Think through why you want to live in another country and what in your living situation will really make the possibilities in the new country happen. This of course has to be balanced with a meditation on what the most important keystones are to a calm and happy everyday life for you and your family.

If they have children, be sure there are things in the home to entertain them such as yard, pool etc. Also to move somewhere close to a park.

Keep your family happy.

6. Meet your neighbors and make community connections as quickly as possible.

Don't isolate yourself with only people from work or the US Embassy.

Meet neighbors. Make it a comfort zone where you can unwind, where people feel welcome.

Find someone who is local to help you find what you need.

Get your network happening. Mingle with locals, get your "important contact list" ready with doctors, hair dressers, handy-man, etc. It makes your life sooooo much easier.

Make a local connection before or as soon as possible to get local knowledge. If you are serious about immigrating rather than 'just visiting' - avoid expat community and 'mix it up with the locals'.

And finally, a number of participants offered their thoughts on what a "home" is, in the context of living as an expatriate. Comments fell into several categories:

"Home" is something intangible and portable, not a physical location.

Your house is VERY important. It needs to be your 'home' rather than just a dwelling place as it acts as your 'island' where you can be insulated from the stresses of work and cultural differences.

Bring some of your own stuff whether it's a piece of furniture, decoration, art work, etc. This makes the new house feels more like home, not like a temporary housing.

Remember, home is where you and your family are.

One's home is of critical importance to a successful assignment.

Make sure you have a home you love as it will be your shelter. Do not compromise on it. I would rank it at the same # 1 level as a good school for the kids in negotiating the relo package. And make sure it is close to the office AND the school. You don't want to spend your years abroad driving.

Make sure you are in a place that is accessible and fun for you. Make it a comfort zone where you can unwind, where people feel welcome.

Prioritize nesting/settling in since your home (living space) will be the anchor and refuge for your situation, whether it's in a developed, developing or un(der)developed country,

Take your time to find the right home for yourself and your family even if it requires a financial investment on your part.

If you have little or no choice about your housing, as we did on this stay, learn as much as you can ahead of time about the space, both interior and exterior/neighborhood/accessibility issues. Really try to learn more ahead of time so that you can plan in terms of material, concrete things, but also as much as you can in terms of emotional responses/feelings about those features of the home you are not choosing but being told to live in.

This participant summed up the issue of homes very well:

Central to our identity as expats is the process of burrowing into foreign cultures and expanding our ideas of what "home" really means. In my own case, I have not even been able to obtain work permits at our last two postings. But that has not stopped me from doing what I call "growing a memory," learning as much as I can about the language, culture and history of the places I've been lucky enough to live in. Nobody pays me for it so it's not a "job," but it is certainly my life's work... For people in more traditional one-country lives, home and house are often the same. In the U.S., we even call home ownership the American Dream. But for people who move from country to country, home ownership is often impossible ... and beside the point.

Home is by nature a movable feast. There is, of course, the physical home that becomes instantly familiar the moment we hang our pictures — this is always the moment that makes my house my home. But with each overseas assignment, "home" becomes less of an architectural construct and more of an internal feeling, a haven where we know we will find familiar warmth in each other. This is especially important when uprooting children, forcing them to undergo all the traditional burdens of moving with the additions of unfamiliar language, food and culture.

Home, I told my little ones, is where Mommy and Daddy live. We still live by those words. The house changes, the neighborhood changes, the friends change, the school changes, the language changes, the culture changes, but the love stays the same.

Take Away Summary

When choosing a new home, consider how a home's layout and arrangement of furniture and appliances will influence family interaction. The most satisfied expatriate families were those living in homes that promoted more and easier communication within the family.

Assess how important expatriates' homes are to them and focus resources on those for whom importance is high.

Inquire about transferees' favorite home. Try to match a new home on size of common living space and kitchen, space for children's play, decor and design, layout, available space for interests, amount and type of light, comfort, and level of luxuriousness.

Participants whose favorite homes were the ones they had most recently left, and perhaps felt "torn away from," were particularly sensitive to aspects of their current homes. They had better mental health, rated the assignment more positively and felt more settled if they were more satisfied with their homes and saw them as like those favorite homes. Assess how expatriates feel about leaving their current homes and treat those leaving an idealized home with special care.

The favorite, ideal homes of those with the most positive ratings of the assignment were short-term, temporary homes they had probably lived in as adults. Those with more experience living in homes for shorter periods of time may have an easier time adapting to a new expatriate home.

Housing policy generosity and flexibility, and the provision of relocation assistance are clearly related to expatriates' feeling settled in their new homes.

Assistance in settling in is likely to pay off in terms of quicker adjustment and better outcome.

A home is a critically important but subtle window to one's host culture. A culturally-typical home can offer access to a deeper cultural experience.



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