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# Home Dissatisfaction, Body Image, and Sociocultural Attitudes: An Exploratory Study

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## ABSTRACT

This article explores home dissatisfaction using methods modelled on those used to understand negative body image and its causes. We found that a substantial proportion of UK participants (13–39%) expressed dissatisfaction with their homes. Although the strongest association was between home dissatisfaction and reported physical problems, there was evidence that dissatisfaction is also predicted by experiencing pressure from the media and your family to improve your home, as well as reporting a greater tendency to compare your home to others'. The results of the study provide initial evidence for a sociocultural explanation of home dissatisfaction, analogous to sociocultural explanations of body dissatisfaction.

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## Introduction

In 2019, the UK hardware retailer Wickes launched an advertising campaign offering consumers the opportunity to cure what they call “Houseembarrassment”, or feelings of shame and embarrassment that can arise in anticipating (negative) reactions from friends, family and work colleagues when visiting one’s home. Scenarios included an online work meeting where the lead actor feels too ashamed to take off screen background for the wider call because her kitchen is so dishevelled (Tantrum Productions 2019a), or the efforts of a teenager to avoid a friend’s visit because of the childish wallpaper lining his bedroom (Tantrum Productions 2019b). The adverts feature voiceovers by Phil Spencer, a celebrity estate agent and broadcaster whose television shows have been in the vanguard of promoting home ownership as emblematic of aspirational lifestyles (Lorenzo-Dus 2006) and barometers of cultural taste more generally (McElroy 2017). Played for laughs, these advertisements are comedic iterations of the embarrassment one is supposed to feel when one’s actual home environment falls short of ideals of what your home should look like. As such, they suggest an important role for the influence of sociocultural norms, attitudes and pressures in engendering a sense of dissatisfaction with one’s home.

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On the face of it, the phenomenon that these advertisements point to is similar to widespread, and extensively researched, experiences of negative body image, where the role of sociocultural norms, attitudes and pressures in causing body dissatisfaction is empirically well-supported across a range of demographic groups and geographical contexts (Thompson et al., 1999). The current study explores the causes of home dissatisfaction using concepts and methods modelled on those used to understand negative body image and its causes. It begins with a review of literature discussing questions of housing satisfaction, before moving onto a review of research on body dissatisfaction. After an outline of our research design and methodological approach, we present findings from our exploratory survey of 297 participants, carried out to better understand questions of home dissatisfaction and sociocultural attitudes towards home. We conclude with a consideration of the limitations of our exploratory study, as well as the potential implications for future research into housing satisfaction and the phenomenological idea that our homes are “extensions” of our bodies.

### ***Housing Satisfaction***

Existing research has shown that housing satisfaction varies based on a complex range of factors. Research has tended to focus on the influence of housing characteristics, including tenure, property type, size and physical condition, and demographic factors, including gender and stage in the life course. Housing satisfaction is standardly distinguished from neighbourhood satisfaction, although the two are closely related and together contribute towards a more general sense of “residential satisfaction” (Emami and Sadeghlou 2021; Lu 1999).

Key determinants of housing satisfaction include housing quality, size, and, at least in some contexts, property type, for instance whether the home is a flat or house. Tenure is also an important factor. Home owners have generally been found to report higher levels of satisfaction than renters across numerous studies in a range of geographical regions (Emami and Sadeghlou 2021). Exceptions include renters in countries with more heavily regulated rental sectors, like Germany and Austria (Kemeny, 1995; Elsinga and Hoekstra 2005), and some European social housing tenants for whom secure tenancies are combined with affordable rents and relative high standards of space, thermal efficiency and liveable neighbourhoods (Tunstall 2020).

Some have argued that the higher levels of satisfaction often reported by homeowners can be explained by the greater sense of “ontological security” that owning is perceived to afford (Saunders 1990), and that exceptions can be explained by differences in perceived ontological security linked to the wider housing context or the specific circumstances of particular individuals. According to Dupuis and Thorns (1998, 29), homes provide ontological security specifically when they are a place of constancy in the social and material environment, where day-to-day routines are performed, where we enjoy control and freedom from surveillance, and which provide a secure base around which to construct identities. From this perspective, the capacity for homemaking can be seen as a key driver of satisfaction, as ontological security lies at the conceptual core of homemaking. To enable homemaking, “home” has to exist in a predictable form, it cannot be insecure or temporary (Edgar et al., 2007; Padgett 2007).

The *absence* of housing, in this framing, becomes a multidimensional absence of “home” as an emotional, cultural, psychological hole in one’s life, not simply the absence of a physical structure to live in, which people try to compensate for by trying to pursue homemaking in other, unorthodox, ways (Lancione 2019).

Others, however, have argued that the apparently increased sense of ontological security associated with homeownership is not explained by tenure *per se*, but by associated factors such as greater affluence, living in larger and better quality homes, and wider life satisfaction (Hiscock et al., 2001). Others still question the explanatory value of the concept of “ontological security” and the wider idea that a “good home” can be defined in terms of a physically, legally, culturally and emotionally “stable home” (Gurney 2021; Lancione 2020; Meers 2021). Despite differing implications for stability, owner occupation is not necessarily a route to housing satisfaction, and exclusion from home ownership does not necessarily lead to dissatisfaction (Gurney 1999a). Indeed, “home” is often neither nurturing nor sustaining, it can be simultaneously unsafe, toxic *and* stable, and it is the place in which most (domestic) abuse occurs. Moreover, as experiences of pandemic “lock downs” illustrate, our needs as social beings are not met simply by stable, predictable, ontologically secure living environments (Gurney 2020).

Evidence for differences in satisfaction between different demographic groups is more mixed. Some studies have found that home satisfaction is higher in older age groups and amongst women (Lu 1999; Mridha 2020), although these trends may not be universal. In a study of residential satisfaction in urban areas in China, for instance, Ren and Folmer (2016) found that women tended to be more satisfied than men in inland regions, but in coastal and central regions there were no gender-based differences; they suggest that this might be explained by the lower participation of women in the workforce in inland regions, and hence the fact that women spend more time at home than men. Across Europe, women are more likely to experience housing exclusion, “after housing cost poverty”, and to live in marginalized neighbourhoods. They are also much more likely to experience domestic abuse that shatters any sense of safety and predictability in the home (Fondation Abbe Pierre and FEANTSA 2020), with the home a site of alienation for many as much as it is a site of belonging (Blunt and Varley 2004). More broadly, many demographic groups are simply locked out of the highly normative scripts of domesticity reproduced in ableist design practice (Imrie 2003).

Understanding housing satisfaction and its determinants is important for a number of reasons. Houses as physical objects are key sites in what Schillmeier and Domènech call “the art of dwelling”, which is a mode of being-at-home which involves “reassembling bodies, emotions, technologies, and places in highly specific, complex ways and often fragile and precarious ways” (2009: 288). Thinking of home as the nodal point in the art of dwelling can be key to understanding contemporary cultures and expressions of care, well-being, and self-identity (Latimer and Munro 2009; Schillmeier and Heinlein 2009) – and where these are failing. Precarious housing has been shown to impact negatively – indeed, corrosively – on the experience of health and wellbeing amongst young adults (Ong et al., 2022) and in later life (Bates et al., 2019). More generally, there is extensive evidence of links between physical and mental health and housing conditions, including housing quality, affordability, property-type and tenure-type (Evans, Wells, and Moch 2003; Palacios et al., 2021); there is also evidence of relationships between housing satisfaction and physical and mental health (Dunn and Hayes 2000), and between housing

satisfaction and subjective well-being and life satisfaction more generally (Clapham, Foye, and Christian 2018). Better understanding housing satisfaction and its causes can also inform housing design, planning, and policy, with measures of residential satisfaction often used as a way of evaluating the success of residential projects across a wide range of geographical contexts (Emami and Sadeghlou 2021).

Broadly speaking, housing satisfaction, and residential satisfaction more generally, can be understood in terms of the relationship between an individual's judgement about their actual housing conditions and their desired for, aspired to, or ideal housing conditions (Emami and Sadeghlou 2021; Galster 1987; Lu 1999). A variety of different models of housing satisfaction have been proposed, but many make either implicit or explicit reference to norms about housing and comparisons to others. According to Morris and Winter's (1975) "housing deficit model", for example, individuals judge their home against socio-cultural and personal or family norms about home. On this model, dissatisfaction arises where there is a "housing deficit", and the actual conditions are judged to fail to meet these normative standards. The model of residential satisfaction developed by Amérigo and Aragonés (1997), meanwhile, conceptualizes satisfaction as mediated by subjective evaluations of objective characteristics of one's dwelling and neighbourhood. These subjective evaluations are based in part on comparisons to particular frames of reference, which can include one's past experiences, the housing situations of others, and relevant sociocultural norms.

Existing research provides evidence that housing (and residential) satisfaction depends at least in part on sociocultural norms and comparisons. Vera-Toscano and Ateca-Amestoy (2008), for instance, found that renters are more likely to express dissatisfaction if they live in a neighbourhood where homeownership is the dominant tenure-type. Gurney (1999b) argues that public discourse in the UK normalizing home ownership has stigmatized renting, thereby contributing towards the residualisation of social rented housing. More broadly, Foye, Clapham, and Gabrieli (2017) provide evidence for the hypotheses that home ownership is not only a social norm but also a "positional good", with home-owners reporting greater subjective well-being not only because they are considered "normal" but also because they are considered as having higher social status than renters; Kuhlmann (2020) similarly argues that housing is a positional good, finding that people whose homes are small relative to homes in their neighbourhood are more likely to be dissatisfied than people whose homes are larger than their neighbours'. Further work is needed, however, to understand exactly how sociocultural norms and social comparisons mediate satisfaction: for instance to what extent the internalization of sociocultural norms affects satisfaction, and how and to whom individuals make social comparisons (Clapham, Foye, and Christian 2018).

These questions about the nature and determinants of housing satisfaction arise against the background of wider theoretical disagreements about the nature of home – and indeed even whether a neutral definition of "home" is possible (Meers 2021). Of particular relevance in this context is the philosophical theory of home common in the phenomenological literature, that home is a "second body" (Jacobsen 2009) or an "extension" of the body that provides a place for the "construction and reconstruction of one's self" (Young 2005, 162–163). According to this view, home is an extension of the body in the sense that it represents a necessary material condition for living meaningful and fulfilling lives (Casey 1993), playing an intimate, imaginative and emotional role in

positioning and shaping our sense of self (Bachelard 2014; see also Heidegger 1971). The idea that the body is in some way analogous to the home is the inspiration for the current study. It seems unsurprising that satisfaction will be affected in extreme cases, where a home is in bad repair, unsafe, unaffordable, or insecure. One of the aims of this exploratory study is to investigate in more detail the more subtle roles of sociocultural norms and pressures in engendering home dissatisfaction, by considering home dissatisfaction using concepts and methods drawn from research on body dissatisfaction.

### ***Body Image and Bodily Dissatisfaction***

There is considerable empirical evidence that many people experience dissatisfaction with their bodies and bodily appearance, with particular groups, including teenage and adolescent females, especially badly affected (Thompson et al., 1999). Body dissatisfaction has been found to predict a wide range of negative outcomes, including unhealthy eating behaviours, clinical eating-related disorders, and poor mental health, including low self-esteem, anxiety and depression (Vannucci and Ohannessian 2018). Estimates of the prevalence of body dissatisfaction within different populations and at different times vary, depending in part on the measures and criteria used to identify it, but some representative estimates suggest that around 70% of adolescent girls report wanting to be thinner (Wertheim, Paxton, and Blaney 2004), while body dissatisfaction amongst adult populations is between 13.4%-31.8% for women and 9%-28.4% for men (Fallon, Harris, and Johnson 2014).

According to prominent sociocultural theories of body dissatisfaction, one of the primary causes of body dissatisfaction is a perceived failure to live up to sociocultural norms about bodily appearance (Thompson et al., 1999). Sociocultural norms about the body and bodily appearance – traditionally, thin female bodies and muscular male bodies – are propagated via a range of social influences, with the “Tripartite Influence Model” giving particular prominence to three broad groups of social agents: family, peers, and the media, where this include both traditional media, such as film, TV and magazines and increasingly social media, including Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram (Fardouly, Pinkus, and Vartanian 2017).

Pressure from these groups is thought to cause body dissatisfaction via the mediation of cognitive processes including the internalization of normative appearance ideals that individuals judge their bodies negatively against (Thompson and Stice 2001), and a tendency to make “upward” appearance-based social comparisons (Mitchell et al., 2012). Sociocultural explanations of body dissatisfaction are complemented in broader biopsychosocial models by additional psychological risk factors such as perfectionism and physical risk factors such as high BMI (Rodgers, Paxton, and McLean 2014). Overall, however, there is clear evidence of the impact of sociocultural factors on bodily dissatisfaction in a variety of different geographical contexts and for a range of different demographic groups (Burke et al., 2021).

Body dissatisfaction can be successfully investigated using a variety of different qualitative and quantitative research methodologies, with quantitative methods particularly suitable for measuring the prevalence of body dissatisfaction and identifying its potential causes. The current study adapts two existing scales. The first is the Body Satisfaction Scale (Bird et al., 2013), which is a general measure of body image satisfaction consisting of five

questions: as well as a general question about body satisfaction, it also asks about body shape, appearance, attractiveness and weight. The second is the widely used Sociocultural Attitudes to Appearance Questionnaire (SATAQ), which has developed across a number of iterations and aims to explore the hypothesis that attitudes towards one's body are significantly affected by particular groups of social agents (Schaefer et al., 2015). The current version (SATAQ-4) comprises five distinct sub-scales. Two sub-scales probe the extent to which feminine (thin/low fat) and masculine (athletic/muscular) body image ideals have been internalized, by asking respondents about how much time they spend thinking about, and doing things to improve, their appearance; in the previous version (SATAQ-3), the corresponding sub-scales probed internalization of general appearance ideals and athletic ideals. Three additional sub-scales look at the influence of different social agents on the internalization of these ideals: family, friends, and the media.

The current study aims to use the well-established conceptual framework and methods for understanding body dissatisfaction as a model to investigate home dissatisfaction and its causes, by addressing the following specific research questions: Q1) Is it possible to create reliable measures of home dissatisfaction and related sociocultural pressures modelled on those used to assess body dissatisfaction and its sociocultural causes? Q2) Are home dissatisfaction, housing conditions, demographic factors, and sociocultural attitudes related? Q3) Is home dissatisfaction related to wider well-being?

## Methods

297 participants were recruited via Prolific, an online participant pool, and offered a small financial incentive for taking part. All participants lived in the UK, had Prolific approval ratings of over 95% (based on successful participation in previous Prolific studies) and were aged 30–65 (mean age = 44). The sample skewed towards women, with 240 participants who identified as women alongside 57 who identified as men.

Participants provided demographic information, information about their social media usage, and answered questions about their home, including tenure type (renter or owner), property type (flat, terraced house, semi-detached, detached), its physical condition and state of repair (do they have issues with overcrowding, thermal efficiency, damp, infestations, structural problems), and the perceived affordability of their home relative to their income. Participants were then presented with 29 verbal items about their attitudes towards their homes modelled on the conceptual framework and composition of the Body Satisfaction Scale and the SATAQ, and asked to rate their agreement with these items on a 5 point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree); they were also given opportunities to provide free-text comments. Finally, participants were asked about their general wellbeing using the Office for National Statistics personal well-being questionnaire (ONS-4), which asks respondents to rate their overall life satisfaction, how worthwhile they feel their activities are, how happy they felt yesterday, and how anxious they felt yesterday.

Where straightforward transpositions were possible, items were created by replacing "home" for "body" (e.g. "Do you feel satisfied with your body?" became "Do you feel satisfied with your home?"). Items relating to sociocultural attitudes towards home focussed on four types of attribute: appearance, attractiveness, how well-maintained your home is, and how clean, tidy, and clutter free it is. Cleanliness, tidiness and level of

clutter were intuitively thought of as analogous to thin/low fat body ideals, how well-maintained one's home is was inspired by athletic/muscular ideals, whereas appearance and attractiveness were intended to express more general ideals. Two items were also included exploring the extent to which participants compare their homes to others'; although comparative items no longer feature in the most recent version of the SATAQ, these items were loosely modelled on items in SATAQ-3. As in the SATAQ, the first set of items (12 in total) were intended to explore the internalization of ideals of home, and the second set (comprising three groups of four items) explored the extent to which participants feel pressure from family, friends and the media.

To determine whether it is possible to create reliable measures of home dissatisfaction and related sociocultural pressures (Q1) we used explanatory factor analysis to identify distinct latent variables within the items, checking factor reliability by Cronbach's  $\alpha$ . Relationships between home dissatisfaction, housing conditions, demographic factors, and sociocultural attitudes, as identified by exploratory factor analysis, were explored using bivariate correlations and binary logistic regression (Q2). Finally, whether there is a relationship between home dissatisfaction and wider well-being (Q3) was explored using bivariate correlations between responses to the factor measuring home satisfaction with responses to ONS-4.

Ethics approval was provided by the Arts and Humanities Ethics Committee at the University of York.

## Results

### *Scale Validation*

To determine whether the items can be used to create reliable scales that measure home dissatisfaction and related sociocultural pressures (Q1), exploratory factor analysis using principal components extraction with orthogonal rotation (varimax) was conducted on the 29 items. Only variables with factor loadings over 0.4 were interpreted (Spector 1992). Initial analysis suggested either five or seven factors with eigenvalues over 1, with the scree plot potentially ambiguous between two points of inflexion. Together, the five factors explained 64.69% of variance, and the seven factors explained 79.79% of variance, both above the 60% threshold commonly considered to be acceptable in social sciences (Hair et al., 2013).

Six factors were retained (Table 1). Factor 1 is naturally interpreted as representing internalization of ideals of home, factor 2 as home satisfaction, factor 3 as pressure from the media, factor 4 as pressure from friends, factor 5 as pressure from family, and factor 6 as a tendency to compare one's home to others'. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure verified the sampling adequacy,  $KMO = 0.848$ , which Kaiser and Rice (1974) describe as "meritorious". All KMO values for individual items were above 0.75, well above the acceptable limit of 0.5 (Kaiser and Rice 1974). Many of the factor loadings are "high", with values above 0.8 (Costello and Osborne 2005). All the factors demonstrated high reliability, with Cronbach's  $\alpha$  above 0.8, above the widely accepted rule of thumb of 0.7 (Spector 1992).

One factor (identified in the initial analysis as factor 6) was excluded. The three items comprising this factor formed a cohesive whole, testing internalized ideals relating to clutter and cleanliness. However, one item relating to cleanliness ("I think a lot about my



**Table 1.** Summary of results of exploratory factor analysis (orthogonal varimax rotation) on final 23 items.

Item	Internalisation	Home Satisfaction	Media Pressure	Friends Pressure	Family Pressure	Comparativeness
<b>Factor 1: Internalisation</b>						
I spend a lot of time doing things to make my home look more attractive.	<b>0.89</b>	0.15	-0.04	0.06	0.03	-0.01
I spend a lot of time doing things to improve the appearance of my home.	<b>0.88</b>	0.14	0.08	0.09	-0.02	-0.11
I spend a lot of time doing things to make my home look well-maintained.	<b>0.81</b>	0.28	-0.02	-0.10	-0.06	-0.09
I think a lot about the appearance of my home.	<b>0.74</b>	-0.09	0.11	0.03	-0.10	0.33
I think a lot about my home looking clean and tidy.	<b>0.71</b>	-0.24	0.14	0.11	-0.00	0.17
It is important for my home to look well-maintained.	<b>0.67</b>	0.11	-0.05	-0.08	-0.09	0.31
It is important for my home to look attractive.	<b>0.62</b>	0.23	-0.01	-0.06	0.06	0.32
<b>Factor 2: Home Satisfaction</b>						
Do you feel satisfied with the appearance of your home?	0.08	<b>0.88</b>	-0.12	-0.12	-0.09	-0.14
Do you feel satisfied with how attractive your home is?	0.14	<b>0.87</b>	-0.14	-0.13	-0.08	-0.10
Do you feel satisfied with your home?	0.06	<b>0.84</b>	-0.06	-0.09	-0.04	-0.09
Do you feel satisfied with how well-maintained your home is?	0.16	<b>0.78</b>	-0.18	-0.18	-0.05	-0.04
Do you feel satisfied with the size of your home?	0.03	<b>0.67</b>	-0.06	0.03	-0.16	-0.02
<b>Factor 3: Media Pressure</b>						
I feel pressure from the media to make my home look cleaner and tidier.	0.05	-0.18	<b>0.93</b>	0.14	0.14	0.10
I feel pressure from the media to improve the appearance of my home.	0.04	-0.17	<b>0.92</b>	0.15	0.15	0.14
I feel pressure from the media to keep my home well-maintained.	0.07	-0.14	<b>0.92</b>	0.19	0.14	0.14
<b>Factor 4: Friends Pressure</b>						
I feel pressure from my friends to improve the appearance of my home.	0.04	-0.14	0.11	<b>0.92</b>	0.18	0.11
I feel pressure from my friends to keep my home well-maintained.	0.03	-0.13	0.16	<b>0.90</b>	0.21	0.10
I feel pressure from my friends to make my home look cleaner and tidier.	0.06	-0.14	0.21	<b>0.89</b>	0.21	0.07
<b>Factor 5: Family Pressure</b>						
I feel pressure from family members to make my home look cleaner and tidier.	-0.01	-0.10	0.12	0.15	<b>0.91</b>	0.07
I feel pressure from family members to keep my home well-maintained.	-0.04	-0.11	0.17	0.18	<b>0.89</b>	0.01
I feel pressure from family members to improve the appearance of my home.	-0.01	-0.18	0.11	0.26	<b>0.87</b>	0.05
<b>Factor 6: Comparativeness</b>						
I compare my home to other peoples' homes.	0.23	-0.24	0.21	0.13	0.07	<b>0.85</b>
I compare the appearance of my home to the appearance of other peoples' homes.	0.26	-0.18	0.21	0.19	0.07	<b>0.84</b>
Cumulative % of Variance	18.58	35.15	47.75	59.94	71.39	79.61
Eigenvalue	4.27	3.80	2.91	2.80	2.63	1.89
$\alpha$	0.89	0.97	0.89	0.96	0.93	0.94

home looking clean and tidy”) loaded more heavily onto factor 1, and was below the threshold for interpretation (0.4) on the “clutter and cleanliness” factor. This suggests that this factor was not identifying as robust a construct as the others. We therefore excluded these items from further analysis, along with one item relating to “clutter” from each of factors 3, 4 and 5, leaving each of these factors with three items. This left 23 items in total.

Consistent with the body-image scales on which they are modelled, we suggest that factor 2 is best conceived of as a single scale: the “Home Satisfaction Scale”. Factors 1, 3, 4 and 5 meanwhile form the core sub-scales of the “Sociocultural Attitudes Towards Home Questionnaire” (SATHQ), which tests the degree to which ideals of home have been internalized and the sources of pressure that people experience.

Factor 6, Comparativeness, could also be conceptualized as a sub-scale of the SATHQ, in which case it could be thought of investigating an additional source of pressure: pressure not from external agents, but from the individual. However, an alternative is to conceive of the Comparative items as forming a distinct scale. Early versions of the SATAQ contained broadly similar comparative questions, but these are absent from the most recent version (SATAQ-4) in light of evidence that social comparison is a distinct construct (Myers and Crowther 2009). We have included the Comparativeness items in further analysis, and suggest treating this as an independent scale. Whether it is conceived of a sub-scale of the SATHQ or a distinct scale, further items should be added to it in future work to better ensure its reliability. Although two items per factor can be sufficient, particularly when the size of the sample is sufficiently large, at least three items are normally recommended for a reliable scale (Marsh et al., 1998).

## Analysis

Mean agreement scores for the Home Satisfaction Scale, the four sub-scales of the SATHQ, and the Comparativeness Scale were created by taking the mean of responses to all items on the scale/sub-scale (Table 2).

Three categories of variables were identified (Table 3). The first is *Housing Condition*. This encompasses whether respondents reported one or more physical problems with their home, tenure type, property type, and perceived affordability. Physical problems with home were aggregated into a single variable to create a sufficiently large group for analysis: the majority of participants reporting physical problems reported just one physical problem, the most frequent of which was poor thermal efficiency. The second category of variables is *Demographic Characteristics*, which includes gender, age, and self-reported social media usage. The third category of variables is *Sociocultural*, and

**Table 2.** Descriptive statistics for Home Satisfaction, the four sub-scales of SATHQ, and the Comparativeness scale.

	Min	Max	Median	Mode	Mean	Standard Deviation
Home Satisfaction	1	5	4	4	3.58	0.88
Internalisation	1.57	5	4	4	3.46	1.09
Family Pressure	1	5	2	2	2.31	1.04
Friends Pressure	1	4.5	2	1	2.04	0.85
Media Pressure	1	5	2	1	2.61	1.29
Comparativeness	1	5	4	4	3.46	1.09

**Table 3.** Descriptive statistics and codes for Housing Conditions and Demographic variables.

	<i>Coding</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>
<b>Housing Condition</b>			
Physical Problems With Home	1 = One or more physical problems	129	43.4
	<i>Problem Type: Overcrowding</i>	12	4.0
	<i>Damp</i>	30	10.1
	<i>Poor thermal efficiency</i>	109	36.7
	<i>Structural problems</i>	17	5.7
	<i>Infestation</i>	6	2.0
	<i>Number: 1 problem</i>	94	31.6
	<i>2 problems</i>	26	8.8
	<i>3 problems</i>	8	2.7
	<i>4 problems</i>	1	0.3
	0 = no physical problems	168	56.6
Tenure	1 = home owner	230	77.4
	0 = renter	66	22.2
Property Type	1 = flat	51	17.2
	0 = house (terrace, semi, detached)	238	80.1
Affordable	1 = affordable (agree, strongly agree)	178	59.9
	0 = not affordable (strongly disagree, disagree, neutral)	119	40.1
<b>Demographic</b>			
Gender	1 = woman	240	80.8
	0 = man	57	19.2
Social Media Use	1 = frequent (agree, strongly agree)	205	69.0
	0 = not frequent (strongly disagree, disagree, neutral)	92	31.0

comprises the mean of summed responses to the four sub-scales of the SATHQ and the Comparativeness scale.

To determine whether there are relationships between home dissatisfaction, housing conditions, demographic factors, and sociocultural attitudes (Q2), we first used bivariate correlations to explore relationships between mean responses to the Home Satisfaction Scale and the three categories of variables (Table 4). The largest correlation was between mean satisfaction and reporting one or more physical problems with the home, which explained 26% of the variance. There were also significant correlations to other variables in the Housing Condition category, although none with  $r > \pm 0.3$ ; of these, perceived affordability explained the most variation (5%). There were no statistically significant correlations with Demographic Characteristics. There were, however, statistically significant correlations with all four sub-scales of the SATHQ and the Comparativeness scale, although the only correlations with  $r > \pm 0.3$  were negative correlations to Friends Pressure and Media Pressure (which each explained 11% of the variance), and a negative correlation to Comparativeness (which explained 10% of the variance).

We also explored relationships between responses to the SATHQ and Comparativeness scales and the other two categories of variables (Table 5). Many of the correlations were

**Table 4.** Correlations between mean responses to the Home Satisfaction Scale, the sub-scales of the SATHQ and the Comparativeness scale.

	1	2	3	4	5	6
(1) Internalisation	—					
(2) Family	-0.27	—				
(3) Friends	0.52	0.68***	—			
(4) Media	0.10	0.34***	0.43***	—		
(5) Comparative	0.36***	0.20***	0.31***	0.40***	—	
(6) Home Satisfaction	0.18**	0.27***	0.33***	0.33***	0.31***	—

small, although some of the correlations with Demographic Characteristics were notable. Women were more likely to report feeling pressure from the media and a greater tendency to compare their homes to others', there were positive correlations between frequent social media usage and mean responses to all sub-scales of the SATHQ and Comparativeness scale, and negative correlations between all sub-scales of the SATHQ and Comparativeness scale with age.

Based on responses to the Home Satisfaction Scale, participants were distinguished into dissatisfied and satisfied groups. Different criteria can be used to do this. A liberal criterion for inclusion within the dissatisfied group is disagreement with one or more items on the Home Satisfaction Scale; on this classification 39.1% of participants ( $N = 116$ ) count as experiencing home dissatisfaction. A conservative criterion defines dissatisfaction in terms of median responses to the Home Satisfaction Scale or, similarly, mean agreement of  $> 2.75$  (compare Frederick et al. (2007) in the case of body dissatisfaction); these approaches classify 17% ( $N = 51$ ) as dissatisfied. For further analysis, we used an intermediate criterion of mean agreement to the Home Satisfaction Scale of  $> 3.0$  (compare Cash and Henry (1995) in the case of body dissatisfaction), which classifies 24% ( $N = 72$ ) as dissatisfied. While there is not necessarily a uniquely best way of identifying either home or body dissatisfaction, the rationale for adopting this criterion was to strike a balance between the size of the dissatisfied group (to increase the reliability of the results) and the demandingness of the criterion for membership of the group.

To assess the impact of the different variables on the probability that respondents would be categorized as dissatisfied, we performed a logistic regression. Six variables made no statistically significant contribution to the model: Tenure, Property Type, Gender, Age, Social Media Usage, and Friends Pressure. The remaining six variables that made a statistically significant contribution – Physical Problems With Home, Affordability, Family Pressure, Media Pressure, Internalisation and Comparativeness – were used to obtain a more parsimonious model,  $\chi^2(6, N = 298) = 98.418, p < 0.001$ , which explained between 28.2% (Cox and Snell R square) and 42.1% (Nagelkerke R square) of the variance, and correctly classified 80.8% of cases (compared to 75.8% of cases with no variables entered). The strongest predictor of dissatisfaction was Physical Problems With Home, with an odds ratio of 5.10, indicating that participants who reported experiencing one or more physical problems were just over 5 times more likely to be in the dissatisfied group. However,

**Table 5.** Correlations between mean responses to the Home Satisfaction Scale, SATHQ sub-scales and Comparativeness scales, and Housing Condition and Demographic Characteristics.

	Home Satisfaction	Internalisation	Family Pressure	Friends Pressure	Media Pressure	Comparative
<b>Housing Condition</b>						
Physical Problems With Home	-0.51***	-0.11	0.18**	0.31***	0.13*	0.16**
Tenure	0.18**	0.73	-0.02	-0.29	0.19**	-0.04
Type	-0.13*	-0.14*	0.03	-0.04	-0.06	-0.04
Affordable	0.23***	0.61	-0.04	-0.18**	0.25***	-0.01
<b>Demographic</b>						
Gender	0.00	0.15**	-0.08	0.01	0.27***	0.18**
Age	0.10	-0.15**	-0.21***	-0.14*	-0.25**	-0.24***
Social Media Use	-0.96	0.13*	0.14*	0.13*	0.26***	0.23***

Note: \* correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (two-tailed), \*\* correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (two-tailed), \*\*\* correlation is significant at the  $< 0.001$  level (two-tailed).

feeling pressure from family (odds ratio 1.61), from the media (odds ratio 1.42) and a tendency to compare one's home with others' (odds ratio 2.02) were also associated with increased probability of dissatisfaction. Conversely, the probability of being in the dissatisfied group decreased if participants thought their house was affordable, and as mean agreement to the Internalisation sub-scale increased (Table 6).

There are different ways of measuring satisfaction. The Home Satisfaction Scale is based on the Body Satisfaction Scale, which combines a single question about body satisfaction with four additional questions to create a more "comprehensive" measure of bodily satisfaction (Bird et al., 2013). The general idea behind providing more comprehensive measures of this kind is to better reflect nuances in attitudes towards the target, which are often multi-faceted (Spector 1992). However, it has been argued that it can be better to measure satisfaction via a single question, because aggregated scales risk arbitrarily combining unrelated measures, or combining attitudes to different factors that different individuals may weigh differently (Lu 1999).

To explore this, we performed an additional regression to assess the impact of the variables on the probability that respondents would be categorized as recording some degree of dissatisfaction to the single question "Are you satisfied with your home?" (Table 7). The size of the dissatisfied group according to this criterion was relatively small ( $N = 39$ , 13.1%). Only four variables made a statistically significant contribution to the full model: Physical Problems With Home, Gender, Media Pressure, and Comparativeness. These variables were used to obtain a more parsimonious model,  $\chi^2(12, N = 288) = 55.17$ ,  $p < 0.001$ , that explained between 17.4% (Cox and Snell R square) and 32.6% (Nagelkerke R square) of the variance, and correctly classified 88.6% of cases (compared to 86.9% with no variables entered). In the more parsimonious model, Comparativeness failed to reach significance. The strongest predictor of dissatisfaction was again Physical Problems with Home (odds ratio of 9.54), but experiencing pressure from the media also increased the probability of expressing dissatisfaction (odds ratio of 1.56). Gender also made a significant contribution in this model, with men over 3 times more likely to express dissatisfaction than women.

Finally, we explored whether home satisfaction is related to wider well-being (Q3). There were small- to medium-sized correlations between mean responses to the Home Satisfaction Scale and reported levels of well-being as measured by responses to the ONS-4 (Table 8). The largest correlation was between Home Satisfaction and Life Satisfaction.

**Table 6.** Binary logistic regression of statistically significant predictors of Home Dissatisfaction (mean response to Home Satisfaction Scale <3).

	b	S.E.	Odds Ratio	95% CI Lower	95% CI Upper
<b>Housing Condition</b>					
Physical Problems With Home	1.63***	0.35	5.10	2.56	10.14
Affordable	-0.90**	0.34	0.41	0.21	0.78
<b>Sociocultural Attitudes</b>					
Internalisation	-1.12***	0.29	0.33	0.19	0.57
Family Pressure	0.48**	0.16	1.61	1.17	2.23
Media Pressure	0.35**	0.15	1.42	1.06	1.89
Comparativeness	0.71***	0.21	2.02	1.33	3.07
Constant	-2.41*	0.98	0.90		

Note: \* significant at the 0.05 level, \*\* significant at the 0.01 level, \*\*\* significant at the < 0.001 level.

**Table 7.** Binary logistic regression of statistically significant predictors of Home Dissatisfaction based on response to “Are you satisfied with your home?”.

	b	S.E.	Odds Ratio	95% CI Lower	95% CI Upper
<b>Housing Condition</b>					
Physical Problems With Home	2.26***	0.51	9.54	3.54	25.72
<b>Demographic</b>					
Gender	-1.11*	0.51	0.33	0.12	0.88
<b>Sociocultural Attitudes</b>					
Media Pressure	0.44**	0.18	1.56	1.11	2.20
Comparativeness	0.36	0.22	1.43	0.93	2.20
Constant	-5.11***	0.89	0.01		

Note: \* significant at the 0.05 level, \*\* significant at the 0.01 level, \*\*\* significant at the < 0.001 level.

**Table 8.** Correlations between mean responses to the SATHQ sub-scales and Comparativeness and Office for National Statistics personal well-being questionnaire ONS-4.

	Home Satisfaction	Internalisation	Family Pressure	Friends Pressure	Media Pressure	Comparative
	<i>r</i>	<i>r</i>	<i>r</i>	<i>r</i>	<i>r</i>	<i>r</i>
Life Satisfaction	0.53***	0.23***	-0.16**	-0.25**	-0.15**	-0.13*
Worthwhile	0.38***	0.17**	-0.12*	-0.21**	-0.15**	-0.12*
Happiness	0.43***	0.14*	-0.21**	-0.29**	-0.24***	-0.17**
Anxiety	-0.26***	0.06	0.21**	0.23**	-0.43***	0.25***

Note: \* significant at the 0.05 level, \*\* significant at the 0.01 level, \*\*\* significant at the < 0.001 level.

There were also moderate correlations with Worthwhile and Happiness, and a small negative correlation with Anxiety. Although there were multiple statistically significant correlations between responses to the SATHQ and reported levels of well-being (the only non-significant correlation was between Internalisation and Anxiety), the only correlation with  $r > \pm 0.3$  was between Media Pressure and Anxiety.

## Discussion

The paper presents the results of an exploratory survey investigating home dissatisfaction and sociocultural attitudes towards home. Consistent with previous research on housing satisfaction (Department of Communities and Local Government 2016; Jansen 2013), we found that reported levels of UK home satisfaction were generally relatively high, with between 61–87% of participants expressing satisfaction with their homes. Nevertheless, a substantial proportion of participants expressed dissatisfaction with their homes: between 13–39%, depending on which criterion is used. Moreover, we found evidence that sociocultural attitudes and pressures are important predictors of this dissatisfaction.

Many participants reported feeling pressure to improve their homes, most notably from their family and the media, as well as a tendency to compare their homes with others'. The strongest association was between home dissatisfaction and physical problems with housing, although there was also evidence that experiencing pressure from the media, experiencing pressure from one's family, and reporting a greater tendency to compare one's home to others' increased the probability of expressing home dissatisfaction. By contrast, there was evidence

that the affordability of your home, internalization of ideals of home, and being a woman increased the probability of expressing satisfaction. Overall, it is interesting that there was limited evidence for actual and proxy measures of housing stability, or ontological security, which has hitherto been seen as foundational to our sense of “home” (Saunders 1990): tenure, for instance, which is a predictor of (relative) legal security was not clearly associated with dissatisfaction in the way that comparing your home to others’ and feeling pressure from the media were. The results also show correlations between home satisfaction and well-being more broadly, as well as correlations between feeling pressure from the media and experiences of anxiety.

The results of this exploratory study provide an initial evidence-base that home dissatisfaction is in some ways analogous to body dissatisfaction, in the sense that it can be investigated using similar methods and may be caused by similar cognitive processes. As in the case of the body, sociocultural attitudes are not the sole predictors of dissatisfaction; indeed, experiencing physical problems with your home is the best predictor. Experiencing pressure from the media, from your family, and having a greater tendency to compare your home to others’ nevertheless correlate with home dissatisfaction. When a retailer like Wickes runs a media campaign promising to cure “Houseembarrassment”, they may therefore simultaneously be highlighting the role of sociocultural attitudes and pressures in causing negative attitudes towards one’s home, but also contributing to the problem that they are purporting to solve.

The support for the analogy between home and body dissatisfaction needs to be qualified in a few important ways. First, the current study does not directly show that sociocultural attitudes and pressures *cause* home dissatisfaction: it could be that feelings of pressure and a tendency to compare one’s home to others’ are caused by home dissatisfaction, and not vice versa. Addressing this requires further investigation, although given the extensive evidence that sociocultural attitudes and pressures cause body dissatisfaction there are grounds for predicting that the causal relationship holds in the same direction in the case of home dissatisfaction (for relevant discussion, see Halliwell and Dittmar 2008).

Second, contrary to the Tripartite Influence Model of body dissatisfaction, the most significant sources of external pressure in the case of home appear to be the media and family; there was little evidence of a relationship between home dissatisfaction and pressure from friends. This difference between home and body dissatisfaction may reflect the age of the participants in the current study, which was restricted to adults between 30–65. Whether and why this is the case requires further investigation, although it is worth noting that the Tripartite Model is particularly well-supported in the case of body dissatisfaction for younger children and adolescents (Rieves and Cash 1996), and in general there is evidence that adolescents up to the age of 25 are more susceptible to peer influence (Blakemore 2018).

Exactly which forms of media exert most pressure also requires further investigation, although there is some suggestion from this study that social media is a particularly important factor. Frequent use of social media was widely reported by the sample, and correlated with experiencing media pressure and a greater tendency to compare one’s home with others’. This is consistent with evidence of the greater influence of social

media over traditional media in causing body dissatisfaction (Fardouly, Pinkus, and Vartanian 2017).

A third way in which support for a sociocultural explanation of home dissatisfaction needs to be qualified is that the current study found evidence that internalization of ideals of home *decreases* the probability of expressing dissatisfaction, and instead predicts satisfaction. This is an important contrast with sociocultural theories of body dissatisfaction, where there is considerable evidence that internalization of body appearance ideals is one of the primary cognitive processes by which sociocultural influences cause body dissatisfaction: the hypothesis is that body dissatisfaction arises when individuals negatively evaluate their bodies against normative standards of body appearance that they have internalized due to sociocultural pressures, and which are reflected in their body appearance thoughts and behaviours (Rodgers, Paxton, and McLean 2014; Thompson and Stice 2001).

It is possible that this apparent difference is an artefact of the wording of the items on the Internalisation subscale of the SATHQ. For instance, these items might have placed too much emphasis on appearance-improving behaviours (time spent improving home) and not enough on appearance-related beliefs and thinking (time spent thinking about improving home). After all, on one level it is perhaps unsurprising that those people who report spending more time on their home tend to be more satisfied with it. Further work is needed to explore this.

Importantly, however, internalization of ideals is not the only hypothesized cognitive process by which sociocultural influences cause dissatisfaction according to the Tripartite Influence Model. Dissatisfaction with one's body has also been found to be caused by a tendency to make "upward" appearance-based comparisons (Halliwell and Dittmar 2005; Myers and Crowther 2009). The current study provides at least indirect evidence that a tendency to compare one's home to others' may be a similar mediating process in the case of home dissatisfaction. This would be consistent with also acknowledging a role for media pressure in causing home dissatisfaction: given that images in the media are often highly selective and frequently present idealized or unrepresentative views of homes, individuals who compare their homes to images they see in the media may often be engaged in upwards comparisons that present their own homes less favourably, thereby leading to home dissatisfaction.

There are some important methodological limitations of this exploratory study. Further work is needed to develop and validate the scales, including verifying the factor structure identified here using confirmatory factor analysis. Future work would also need to verify the results with a larger and more representative sample. The current study uses a sample with a marked skew towards female experience among the respondents. The two regressions also identified slightly different sets of predictors of home dissatisfaction, depending on whether home dissatisfaction was identified on the basis of mean responses to the Home Satisfaction Scale or responses to the single satisfaction question. While we don't here assume that one approach to identifying dissatisfaction is in principle preferable to the other, the relatively small sample size of the dissatisfied group for the second regression might affect the reliability of these results.

More broadly, while the quantitative methodology adopted here draws on well-developed and widely-used approaches to body dissatisfaction, there is a clear case for



complementing survey-based methods with qualitative research methods that will provide a more nuanced understanding of experiences of home dissatisfaction, enabling greater understanding of individual constructions of a “good” home and how this relates to collective, cultural and media images of a good home; indeed, our next stages to build on this exploratory research will involve a qualitative approach to explore our findings in greater depth.

Nevertheless, this exploratory study hints at wider dimensions of housing satisfaction, beyond physical adequacy, stability and security, suggesting that our satisfaction with our homes is influenced by sociocultural attitudes, norms, pressures and comparisons. In this respect, the current study is consistent with theoretical approaches to housing satisfaction that emphasize the importance of subjective evaluations of one’s objective housing situation based on frames of reference (Amérgo and Aragonés 1997), suggesting a key role for the media and our families in particular in determining the standards against which we evaluate our homes. It is also consistent with existing evidence that concerns about social status can mediate the relationship between housing situation and subjective well-being (Clapham, Foye, and Christian 2018): for example, if conforming to sociocultural norms about the appearance of one’s home confers higher social status, while not conforming to them reduces your social status, then it seems likely that perceptions of the social status that your home conveys will affect your satisfaction with it.

Recognising wider dimensions of housing satisfaction beyond physical adequacy, stability and security on one level creates a further challenge to the arguably unsuccessful attempts to consistently define a shared idea of “home” that have been attempted to date (Meers 2021). However, it might also be a route by which we can better understand the patterns that generate a sense of “home” and happiness within that home. In this respect, this exploratory work may mark a step towards better understanding the human dimensions and human complexities of our relationships with our homes, through the complex reality of variable patterns of housing satisfaction shaped by experience, relationships, characteristics, choices, expectations and comparisons. It also provides at least indirect support for the philosophical theory of home commonly found in the phenomenological literature, according to which our homes are extensions of, or in some important sense similar to, our bodies (Jacobsen 2009; Young 2005). The claim that our homes are extensions of our bodies provides a broader theoretical framework in which to understand the parallels identified in this study between experiences of home and body dissatisfaction and sociocultural attitudes and pressures.

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