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**DISSERTATION**

**EXPLORING SINGLE/NONCOHABITING PROFESSIONAL  
WOMEN'S EXPRESSION OF SELF THROUGH THE  
INTERIOR DESIGN OF THEIR RESIDENTIAL ENVIRONMENTS**

**Submitted by**

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**In partial fulfillment of the requirements**

**for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

**Colorado State University**

**Fort Collins, Colorado**

**Fall 2002**

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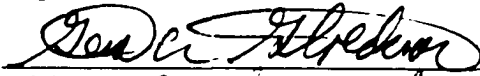

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COLORADO STATE UNIVERSITY

NOVEMBER 8, 2002

WE HEREBY RECOMMEND THAT THE DISSERTATION PREPARED UNDER OUR SUPERVISION BY LISA M. VOGEL ENTITLED EXPLORING SINGLE/NONCOHABITING PROFESSIONAL WOMEN'S EXPRESSION OF SELF THROUGH THE INTERIOR DESIGN OF THEIR RESIDENTIAL ENVIRONMENTS BE ACCEPTED AS FULFILLING IN PART REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY.

Committee on Graduate Work

  
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## ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

### EXPLORING SINGLE/NONCOHABITING PROFESSIONAL WOMEN'S EXPRESSION OF SELF THROUGH THE INTERIOR DESIGN OF THEIR RESIDENTIAL ENVIRONMENTS

The purpose of this dissertation was to understand the process single, noncohabiting, professional women used to express their selves through the interior design of their residential environments. The primary research questions explored were: (a) What are the decision-making processes women use when deciding how and where to express their identity through the interior design of their residential environments?; (b) What messages do women convey about their selves and to whom are they conveying them to with the interior design of their residential environments?; and (c) What methods do women employ to express their selves with the interior design of their residential environments?

This research employed a mixed method approach. The primary research design was based on Glaser and Strauss' grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Data also were collected using the Tennessee Self-Concept Scale, a standardized instrument that provides a multidimensional description of self-concept, defined as "who am I" (Fitts and Warren, 1996). The research question associated with this quantitative instrument was: Is there a difference between the sample group in terms of their Identity Score and Total Self-Concept Score and the standardized population with similar demographic characteristics?

Findings indicate that homes act as the setting in which single women express who they are and what they are all about. Participants recognized the socially constructed meaning of the objects they chose to display in their homes, and used those objects and other interior design features to represent who they are to others, and to reinforce their identity to themselves. Decisions about self-expression were determined by distinguishing the objects that were representative of self and using them to communicate messages about personal characteristics, interests, important relationships, personal accomplishments, and significant memories. Participants recognized the power of their environments to express their selves. They articulated the process by which they chose objects that said something about who they were, and often, they only displayed items that were meaningful to them. A grounded theory and associated model was proposed. This theory and model was interpreted through three existing theoretical perspectives: (a) symbolic interaction (Mead, 1934); (b) dramaturgy (Goffman, 1959); and (c) symbolic self-completion (Wicklund & Gollweitzer, 1982).

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION</b> .....	1
<b>Background</b> .....	1
<b>Purpose</b> .....	5
<b>Research Questions</b> .....	5
<b>Definition of Terms</b> .....	6
<b>Delimitations</b> .....	7
<b>Limitations and Assumptions</b> .....	8
<b>Researcher's Perspective</b> .....	9
<b>Significance of Study</b> .....	10
<b>CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF LITERATURE</b> .....	13
<b>Self</b> .....	14
<b>Symbolism of the Residential Interior Environment</b> .....	18
Home and Self-Expression .....	21
Space Associations in the Home.....	22
<b>The Symbolism of Objects in the Home</b> .....	23
Objects as a Means of Status .....	25
Objects and the Self .....	26
<b>Home as a Means of Nonverbal Communication</b> .....	27
<b>Theoretical Framework</b> .....	28
Symbolic Interaction.....	28
Dramaturgy .....	31
<b>Symbolic Self-Completion Theory</b> .....	34
<b>Summary</b> .....	35
<b>CHAPTER THREE: METHODS</b> .....	37
<b>Research Design</b> .....	37
<b>Participants and Site</b> .....	38
Participant Characteristics and Site .....	38
Recruitment.....	39
<b>Data Collection</b> .....	40
<b>Data Analysis</b> .....	42
Qualitative Analysis.....	42
Quantitative Analysis.....	44

<b>CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS .....</b>	<b>46</b>
<b>Overview .....</b>	<b>46</b>
<b>Interpretation of Quantitative Results .....</b>	<b>47</b>
<b>Descriptive Data .....</b>	<b>48</b>
<b>Findings Related to Research Questions .....</b>	<b>50</b>
<b>Research Question One .....</b>	<b>50</b>
<b>Construction of Identity Representation .....</b>	<b>50</b>
<b>Connectivity .....</b>	<b>53</b>
<b>Home for Personal Satisfaction .....</b>	<b>56</b>
<b>Summary of Research Question One .....</b>	<b>58</b>
<b>Research Question Two .....</b>	<b>59</b>
<b>Representative Objects .....</b>	<b>59</b>
<b>Characteristic Representation .....</b>	<b>60</b>
<b>Interest Representation .....</b>	<b>63</b>
<b>Relationship Representation .....</b>	<b>65</b>
<b>Status Representation .....</b>	<b>70</b>
<b>Memory Representation .....</b>	<b>71</b>
<b>Meaningful Objects .....</b>	<b>76</b>
<b>Self-Reminders .....</b>	<b>78</b>
<b>Public and Private Messages .....</b>	<b>80</b>
<b>Summary of Research Question Two .....</b>	<b>83</b>
<b>Research Question Three .....</b>	<b>83</b>
<b>Purposive Articulation of Self .....</b>	<b>83</b>
<b>Message Communication .....</b>	<b>86</b>
<b>Determination of Object Location for Self Expression .....</b>	<b>88</b>
<b>Summary of Research Question Three .....</b>	<b>91</b>
<b>Summary of Findings .....</b>	<b>92</b>
 <b>CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS .....</b>	 <b>94</b>
<b>Summary of Study .....</b>	<b>94</b>
<b>Discussion .....</b>	<b>98</b>
<b>Research Question One .....</b>	<b>98</b>
<b>Research Question Two .....</b>	<b>102</b>
<b>Research Question Three .....</b>	<b>105</b>
<b>Proposed Grounded Theory and Relevance to Existing Theory .....</b>	<b>108</b>
<b>Objects' Contribution to Participants' Image of Self .....</b>	<b>108</b>
<b>Objects' Communication of Self to Others .....</b>	<b>110</b>
<b>Relevance to the Interior Design Profession .....</b>	<b>113</b>
<b>Conclusions .....</b>	<b>113</b>
<b>Recommendations for Future Research .....</b>	<b>115</b>
 <b>REFERENCES .....</b>	 <b>117</b>
 <b>APPENDIX A: Human Research Committee Approval .....</b>	 <b>124</b>
<b>APPENDIX B: Consent Form .....</b>	<b>126</b>
<b>APPENDIX C: Interview Schedule .....</b>	<b>129</b>

<b>APPENDIX D: General Information Survey.....</b>	<b>132</b>
<b>APPENDIX E: Coding Guide.....</b>	<b>134</b>
<b>APPENDIX F: Example of Coded Transcript.....</b>	<b>139</b>
<b>APPENDIX G: Example of NUD•IST Report.....</b>	<b>142</b>

## LIST OF TABLES

### Table

3.1	Tennessee Self-Concept Scale: Available Scores.....	45
4.1	Summary of Descriptive Characteristics .....	49
4.2	Summary of Tennessee Self-Concept Scale Scores.....	50

## LIST OF FIGURES

### Figure

2.1	Structure of the Review of Literature .....	13
4.1	Example of Connectivity for Others .....	55
4.2	Example of Feminine Influence and Participant Identification .....	63
4.3	Example of Meaningful Items based on Family Relationships .....	69
4.4	Example of Accomplishment of Others.....	72
4.5	Example of Memory Representation .....	74
4.6	Example of Meaningful Object for Personal Communication .....	77
4.7	Example of Self-Reminder .....	79
4.8	Example of Private Messages .....	82
4.9	Example of Purposive Articulation of Self.....	85
4.10	Example of Object Placement for Personal Viewing .....	89
5.1	Proposed Model of Women’s Expression of Self.....	112

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Prior research has left a void in the understanding about how people use their interior environments to communicate their self, or identity, to others and to themselves. In recognition of this concern, Kucko (1998) made a call for a reevaluation of the role of residential design in interior design curricula in light of expanding notions of residential space. This research proposes a theory or hypothesis that seeks to explain women's expression of self through the interior design of their residential environments. Findings seek to provide a basis for interior design practitioners and students to design spaces that are representative of their clients' identities.

#### **Background**

The practice of theoretical research grounded in the social sciences has resulted in an "increase in the quality and scholarly level of research in interior design," (Kaukas, 2001, p. 12) thus adding to the depth and professionalism of the discipline. However, further exploration into and advances in theoretical development within the field are necessary. Guerin (1992) stated that there "must be defensible documentation, empiricism, and then theory guided by philosophy" (p. 14) to truly legitimize the field of interior design. Research studies are needed to document the effectiveness of interior design, but they must be guided by "a theoretical framework that tests and builds theory" (Guerin, 1992, p. 15) for the discipline. Marshall-Baker (2000) proposed a social science

approach to design research in an effort to gain insight into the human/environmental relationship. In continued support of theoretical development, Malmar and Vodvarka (1992) recommended that designers base their work upon proven theory rather than simply using design elements because they are the 'standard,' regardless of their prior success or failure.

In terms of self expression in the home, it is generally accepted by design researchers and practitioners that the interior environment is a means by which identity can be articulated (Cooper, 1974, 1995; Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981; Gunter, 2000). Cooper (1974) saw the house as the basic protector of man's [sic] internal environment, representing or symbolizing the unconscious self" (p. 131). The ways that one furnishes, arranges, and decorates one's personal environment "are expressions of our image of ourselves, all are messages about ourselves that we want to convey back to ourselves, and to the few intimates that we invite into [our house]" (Cooper, 1974, p. 131). In more recent writings, Cooper (1995) spoke in reference to the home of psychoanalyst Carl Jung. His home was a "representation of his own evolving and maturing psyche" (p. 50). Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton (1981) further supported this notion with findings that indicated that houses and their associated objects might symbolically represent conflicts within the self, express qualities of the self to others, signify status, define group membership, create bonds between people, and encourage socialization. More recently, Gunter (2000) said that the home was a projection of our personalities, and that "it transmits messages about us to the rest of the world and reflects back aspects of our defining characteristics on to us, providing clarification and reinforcement of our self-identity" (p. 157).

Though design researchers have acknowledged the work that has been conducted regarding identity and the interior environment, the theoretical underpinnings for this work are frequently overlooked in current design literature. Researchers in the social sciences, however, have long considered the relationship between self-expression and the interior environment. This doctoral research will help to bridge the gap between interior design research and social science by creating theory to help explain how women express their self through the interior design of their home. Theories such as Symbolic Interaction (see Mead, 1934; Charon, 2000), Dramaturgy (Goffman, 1959), and Symbolic Self-Completion (Wicklund & Gollweitzer, 1982) suggest explanations about how people identify and attempt to communicate their identities through the design of their personal environments. (See Magee, 2000 for a prior application of Dramaturgy.) This research proposes a new theory or hypothesis based on qualitative interview data and is interpreted through these existing social theories. Sociological theory is considered as a viable framework to apply to interior design as it helps to explain people's methods of self-expression.

Symbolic Interaction theory, developed through the work of James (1890), Cooley (1902), Mead (1934), and others, focuses on the nature of social interaction, or in other words, the dynamic social activities that take place among people. In this theory, objects are viewed as social objects, suggesting that we negotiate meanings about them through interaction with others. Human beings naturally categorize, sort, interpret and give meaning to the social object, and therefore, each object is viewed through a person's unique perspective, and may be seen differently depending on the viewer's particular 'lens' (Charon, 1998). For communication to occur, however, the meanings of these

objects must be approximately shared between viewers. Otherwise, people may misinterpret the association with the object and not understand the intended message.

Goffman's (1959) Dramaturgy theory, often considered to fall within the Symbolic Interactionist perspective, maintains that with the use of those props and settings that one finds in everyday life, people actively attempt to create a desired impression for an 'audience' to see. This theory asserts that people perform roles in order to communicate who they are and what they are all about. We expect people to understand these 'parts' and to take them seriously. Goffman (1959) related this theory to a dramatic performance. The 'setting,' which includes furniture, décor, physical layout, and other background items, supplies the scenery for the interaction. It is important to understand that in this theory the setting stays put, and therefore interaction cannot begin until everyone is in the appropriate place, and it can only continue while in that particular environment. It is also emphasized that a performer (the self) must be present and there must be an audience to perform to (or, in other words, a visitor to the setting).

Symbolic self-completion theory (Wicklund & Gollwitzer, 1982; Solomon, 1983), another theory rooted in the symbolic interaction perspective, is based on the premise that while people often display objects for "impression management," these objects also may be used for self-definition. In other words, objects help people to define the role that they are attempting to communicate to others and support those roles back to self. Wicklund and Gollwitzer (1982) argued that people use possessions to compensate for their own inadequacies. The theory predicts that people who have an incomplete self-definition tend to complete this identity by acquiring and displaying symbols associated with the identity for which they are striving. People look for ways to signal to others that they do have a

credible, legitimate claim to a particular identity that has been challenged. In doing so, objects actually help people perform *and* define their roles.

### Purpose

The primary purpose of this study was to present a grounded theory of women's expression of self through the interior design of their residential environments. This work was guided by three major research questions: (a) What are the decision-making processes women use when deciding how and where to express their identity in their residential interior environment? (b) What messages do women convey and to whom about their self through their residential interior environment? and (c) What methods do women employ to express their self through their residential interior environment?

### Research Questions

#### Qualitative questions.

1. What are the decision-making processes women use when deciding how and where to express their identity through the interior design of their residential environments?
2. What messages do women convey about their self and to whom are the conveying them to with the interior design of their residential environments?
3. What methods do women employ to express their self with the interior design of their residential environment?

#### Quantitative questions:

In addition to the qualitative data, the researcher chose a quantitative instrument, the Tennessee Self-Concept Scale, to determine whether this group of participants is statistically different from a national standardized sample regarding their Identity and Total Self-Concept scores. Please refer to Chapter Three for a complete description of this instrument.

1. Is there a difference between the sample group as a whole in terms of their Identity Score and Total Self-Concept Score and the standardized population with similar demographic characteristics?

As the thematic codes emerged in the first and second levels of coding, and when participant characteristics defined groups, they were counted (e.g., participant discussed use of private space, yes or no?). The quantitative identity and total self-concept scores were determined and compared to the appropriate qualitative code counts. Finally, the appropriate associative statistics were conducted. Based on the counts, the following two questions were asked:

1. Is there a difference between women who consciously determined their selves when considering the interior design of their homes in terms of their survey scores?
2. Is there a difference between women who decorate their homes strictly for personal satisfaction versus those who consider visitors' opinions in terms of their age and their survey scores?

### Definition of Terms

**Constructed Self:** The concept that the Self is developed through ongoing interaction with others (Mead, 1934).

**Decoration:** "Some definite form or arrangement to which decoration is to be applied, and a reason for applying it" (Parsons, 1916, p. 4).

**Grounded Theory:** Theory generated from data systematically obtained and analyzed through the constant comparative method (Creswell, 1998).

**Identity:** How we make sense of ourselves (Rose, 1995); a defined distinctiveness in contrast to others that is made known to others and continuously reinforced (Rapoport, 1982).

**Interior Design:** The physical arrangements of rooms, furnishings, and mechanical and electrical systems based on aesthetics and functions, and including the furniture, fabrics, and finishes of a space (Allen, Stimpson, & Jones, 2000).

**Professional:** "Of, relating to, engaged in, or suitable for a profession: for example: lawyers, doctors, teachers and other professional people" (The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, 2000).

**Residential environment:** The inside spaces of participants primary residences. May also include semi-outdoor spaces that are considered and used as rooms like other interior spaces (i.e., back porch; greenhouse room).

**Self:** “An interactive, self-regulating system of self-referent thoughts, feelings, and motives. It gives rise to an enduring experience of physical and psychological existence—a phenomenological sense of continuity and predictability. The self is reflexive and dynamic in nature: responsive yet stable, complex yet unified; both private and public, conscious and nonconscious, variable and fixed” (Hoyle, Kernis, Leary & Baldwin, 1999). Please note: in the reporting of the data, the phrase “**their selves**” was used to describe participants’ descriptions of the self. This should not be confused with the use of the word “**themselves**”—the meaning is different.

**Self-Concept:** How people think about themselves (Hoyle, Kernis, Leary & Baldwin, 1999)

**Single/Noncohabiting:** Participants have either never been married or have been divorced for more than five years, and are currently living alone.

### Delimitations

There are several delimitations of this study. First, the participants were unmarried (never married or divorced for more than five years) women, living alone, and in a professional career in Northern Colorado. Women were chosen because, historically, they were the decorators, caretakers and decision-makers of and for the home (Jones, 1997; Madigan & Munro, 1986; Madigan, Munro & Smith, 1990; Mazumdar & Mazumdar, 1999; Wilson & Mackenzie, 2000). Unmarried women living alone were chosen because the researcher wants to develop theory about the expression of identity. When more than one person lives in a home, more than one identity will be expressed (Laumann & House, 1972; Madigan, Munro & Smith, 1990). It is important to speak with women who only have their own identities to express in the home. Home ownership also is a requirement for inclusion in the study sample. Home and family magazines often

focus on the owner-occupied house as a status symbol and means for realizing interior design 'fantasies' (Agnew, 1982). Professional women were chosen for this study because they will most likely have the financial means to own their own home and therefore have the ability to alter their environments in an effort to create spaces that best express their identity.

Another delimitation of this study is location. Participants were chosen from the Northern Colorado area offering a mix of town and city sizes. This area is easily accessed by the researcher and affords a large enough population to locate appropriate participants. The researcher studied the participants' residential spaces. This study did not include questions about how the participant expressed her identity in her work or office spaces.

A final, yet important, delimitation for this study involved concerns about "constructing the other" and producing "a credible account that is faithful to and respectful of those who have participated in interactions in which data are created" (Olesen, 1989, p. 4). To address this issue, the researcher used frequent quotations, not only to present evidence and illustrate the analysis, but also to give the reader an impression of the informant and her personal experience and interpretation of her home as an expression of self (Hall, 1992). It should be noted, however, that researcher analysis based upon the research questions was used as a framework to present the participant experience in an effort to understand the data.

### Limitations and Assumptions

Limitations of this study may have included participants' inability to convey to the researcher how they expressed their identity in their residential spaces. They either may have chosen to omit a particular type of identity expression or they may not have

been trying to convey their identity. They also may have misled the researcher in their answers about their expression of identity. The researcher, however, assumed that participants were open about how they express who they are to others through the interior design of their residential spaces. The Tennessee Self-Concept Scale helped to identify misleading answers provided on the quantitative instrument with its four validity scores: Inconsistent Responding, Self-Criticism, Faking Good and response distribution for extreme responses, but did not contribute to an understanding of misleading information provided during the interviews. The validity scores on the Tennessee Self Concept Scale instrument “are designed to identify defensive, guarded, socially desirable, or other unusual or distorted response patterns” (Fitts & Warren, 1996).

#### Researcher’s Perspective

In addition to my graduate student status, I am educated and have practiced as an interior designer. My interest in this topic stemmed from a discussion about how interior designers interpret their clients’ identity when designing residential spaces. As an interior designer, I view design as a method of expression, either of personal or corporate identity. Having said this, I also believe that people often do not understand their own identity or self well enough to fully express it within their environment. Nor do I think that they often consciously consider the interior design of their homes as a method of expressing who they are. These issues were somewhat of a challenge in this research but, in the researcher’s opinion, were overcome during the interviews. It should also be noted that I am a single, never married homeowner, living alone, and working in a professional field, and therefore could be considered a member of this participant group. This status

therefore reduces the interpretive distance between the researcher and the participant and may have helped to alleviate or lessen these challenges.

As a designer, I also have a tendency to view people's homes from a design perspective. This was addressed in the initial contact with each participant. It was important that participants did not feel as if I were judging their home and its décor based on its design and decoration, but rather was interested in knowing how they expressed themselves through the interior design of their home.

This study was a mixed method yet primarily qualitative study, grounded in data in an effort to create theory. The majority of my prior research experience had been quantitative in nature. Previously, I had a tendency to measure data. Therefore, although I immersed myself in a study of the paradigm and focused on the work of Strauss and Corbin (1999), it was a challenge to use primarily words as the basis of my inquiry. Having said that, this study presented me with the opportunity to witness the richness of data available in a qualitative study and I look forward to working more in this paradigm.

#### Significance of Study.

The significance of this study is threefold. First there was a gap in the theoretical literature. Research suggested a connection and provided an empirical foundation between the 'self' or identity and our interior environments, but few studies tried to explain this connection within a theoretical framework. What few researchers did speak of the associated theory did not attempt to further or expand the original theory (see for example: Gunter, 2000; Sadalla, Vershure, and Burroughs, 1987). Damhorst (1991) discussed five stages of theoretical development. Stage three is the application of theories from supporting or related fields. This stage primarily emphasized the borrowing and

application of theory from one field or area of research to another. Stage four included the development of existing theory, where efforts are made not only to borrow theory from other fields, but also to make “contributions back to the fields from which we borrow,” (p. 194) so that we can be a viable part of the scientific community. The fifth stage asserts development of new theory. This study made advances in three ways toward theory development. First, a new theory and model based on the interview data emerged from the data. Second, the research was interpreted through existing theory based in the field of sociology, and third, the research advanced the existing theory, thus making a contribution back to the original field. Sociological theory was considered a viable framework to apply to interior design as it helps to understand people’s methods of self-expression.

Second, it is also important to note the type of researcher who, historically, has worked in this area of research. Social scientists, environmental psychologists, and sociologists have authored much of the literature related to identity expression in the interior environment while designers have performed very little of the related research. It is important to understand how people express their identities through the interior design of their homes so, consequently, interior designers can understand how they affect their clients and their clients’ environments. Supporting this stance, the Foundation of Interior Design Education and Research (FIDER) states in one of their accreditation standards: “...the program **MUST** [sic] incorporate learning experiences that develop knowledge of client and/or user needs and their responses to the interior environment,” and “...the program **MUST** [sic] provide learning experiences to: lead students to understand the designer’s ability to affect people and the environment” (FIDER, 2000, p. 15). Research

attempting to ascertain the method in which people choose to express themselves through their environment will ultimately help interior design students and practitioners understand their role in the negotiation of their clients' identities. Understanding how users give meaning to their environments will contribute to more successful interior spaces (Dohr, 1992). Therefore, interior design educators and practicing interior designers are well suited to conduct this research and should be engaged in this dialogue.

Finally, much of the research conducted in this area was performed in the 1970s and early 1980s. It is only since the mid 1990s that there has been resurgence in the interest of identity expression. This body of work has discussed identity expression in the interior environment, but thus far, few have looked empirically at the process people go through when they decide how they will express themselves to others and themselves through their environments.



Literature for this review was identified through a comprehensive search in the following databases:

Applied Social Sciences Index & Abstracts  
Social Science Abstracts  
Social Sciences Citation Index  
Sociological Abstracts

A review of the bibliographic references of all identified books and articles led to the discovery of many additional resources. This process continued until saturation of available literature occurred. Keywords that were used (in combination with each other) included:

Self  
Identity  
Home  
Symbol/Symbolism/Symbolic  
Interior  
Objects/Possessions  
Symbolic Interaction  
Dramaturgy/Presentation of Self

The structure of this review of literature was developed with the keywords and combinations of the keywords listed above. A historical review of the self and identity is first discussed, which then will provide a foundation for the examination of both the symbolism of the residential interior environment and the symbolism of objects and possessions in the home. This review will also discuss how the home and associated objects are used as a form of non-verbal communication. Finally, this chapter will review the major theoretical constructs that influenced this study.

### Self

Mead (1934) described the self as “something which has a development; it is not initially there, at birth, but arises in the process of social experience and activity” (p.

135). The self is developed over time and continuously changes with different stages of life (Mead, 1934). Kaiser (1990) further defined the self as consisting of “an individual’s consciousness of being” (p. 95) which comprises a tangible, conceptual, and perceptual dimension. A person’s sense of existence, or personal awareness, is based on interactions with others. Thus, the self is socially constructed through interactions. It is apparent that this process of constructing a sense of self is “something people do not typically do alone; rather, they do it in their interactions with other people” (Hoyle, Kernis, Leary, & Baldwin, 1999, p. 31). Gallup’s (1977) experiments supported this notion. Chimpanzees raised in isolation and without benefit of ongoing interaction with others had not developed even basic self-awareness. Only after prolonged social exposure did they show signs of self-recognition. Gallup’s (1977) study provides support for the notion that the self is socially constructed.

James (1890), who laid the foundations for modern conceptions of self, drew distinctions between the “Me,” the empirical ego, and the “I,” the pure ego. He divided the empirical ego (the “Me”) into three components of the self: the material self, the social self and the spiritual self. The material self is that which includes the individual’s body and his or her possessions. The social self is that which an individual develops from interactions with other people. James (1890) argued that a person can have as many social selves as he or she has acquaintances. The final part of the empirical self is the spiritual self. James (1890) considered this the “self of all other selves” (p. 297). The spiritual self was considered the central part of the self: that which is unconscious and which James (1890) used to “set the stage for treating the emotions that accompanied self-awareness (i.e., self-complacency and self-dissatisfaction)” (Hoyne, *et al.* 1999, p.

5). Furthermore, James (1890), phrased in a manner that would not be considered politically acceptable today but was tolerable in 1890, held that:

A man's [sic] Self is the sum total of all that he can call his, not only his body and his psychic powers, but his clothes and his house, his wife and children, his ancestors and friends, his reputation and works, his lands, and yacht and bank-account. All these things give him the same emotions. If they wax and prosper, he feels triumphant; if they dwindle and die away, he feels cast down, —not necessarily in the same degree for each thing, but in much the same way for all.

Cooley (1902), most noted for introducing the concept of “looking-glass self,” also saw the self as “totally bound up with other people” (Wicklund, 1979, p. 190). Infants’ first intelligible communications pertain to others (i.e., mama or dada) and as they mature, their own reflection (in the mirror) becomes an important focal point and the first signs of self-awareness. Children later begin to use words such as “I,” “me,” and “mine” as personal referents (Cooley, 1908). The “looking-glass self” comprises three phases: (a) the imagination of how the self appears to others; (b) the imagination of how that appearance is evaluated or judged; and (c) the development of a self-feeling based on how the self perceives others’ evaluations (Cooley, 1902). This self, therefore, is based on one’s interpretation of other people’s evaluations.

The concept of self is a precursor to the term identity (Hall, 1992). The term identity originated with Erik Erikson. Erikson (1959) distinguished between personal identity and ego-identity. Personal identity is a non-technical term that refers to the manner in which we are seen and interpreted by others, similar to Kaiser’s (1990) description of self, whereas ego-identity refers to:

“the awareness of the fact that there is a selfsameness and continuity to the ego’s synthesizing methods and that these methods are effective in safeguarding the sameness and continuity of one’s meaning for others” (Erikson, 1959, p. 23).

Weigert, Tietge, and Tietge (1986) discuss identity as the subjective component of a role. Identity theorists such as Rosenberg (1979) and Burke (1980) argued that people have and maintain multiple role identities and these identities constitute the self (Hall, 1992). Examples of these multiple identities include racial/ethnic identity, political identity, occupational identity, and family identity. It has been observed, however, that the concept of identity lacks adequate theoretical development (Turner, 1981; Weigert, Tietge and Tietge, 1986). It is argued that there is continual conceptual ambiguity in the use of self and identity in some analyses and that no clear theoretical distinction exists between the two.

Rapoport (1982a), a leader in person-environment research, suggested that the process of establishing identity required two steps. First, the distinctiveness of the person must be defined, specifically in contrast to 'others.' Second, this distinctiveness must be made known to others and continuously reinforced. Rapoport (1982b) also posited that there are two goals of identity communication: communicating identity internally (to oneself or to members of one's established group), and communicating identity externally (to others outside or outsiders). The latter, communication of identity to others or outsiders is more critical, and its communication via environmental cues is dependent on the flow and management of information.

Belk (1988, 1992) proposed the concept of the Extended Self. The extended self includes as symbols of self: external objects, personal possessions, persons, places and group possessions, as well as body parts and vital organs. The extended self is seen as "me" (the self), but also that which is seen as mine. James' (1890) also supported this notion of extended self as he had said, "the empirical self of each of us is all that he is

tempted to call by the name of me. But it is clear that between what a man calls me and what he simply calls mine the line is difficult to draw” (p. 291).

### Symbolism of the Residential Interior Environment

Since the architect, Le Corbusier, coined the phrase, “the home is a machine for living,” thus establishing the home as a dynamic source for the activities and functions that take place, many architects have viewed the dwelling unit as a place only for that set of activities to occur. Consequently, much of the research to date has been focused upon the activities that take place in the home and the creation of space that is convenient, functional, ergonomically correct, and efficient (Sebba & Churchman, 1986). Social scientists, however, have expressed the view that the meaning of the home does not simply stem from the activities and function of the home, but rather from its social (Rapoport, 1968) and psychological meaning (Cooper, 1974).

Moore (2000) cited several early examples of research about the symbolism or meaning of the home from the 1970s. This research, however, criticized them because while they were widely referenced, they did not place their significance within a particular context, nor develop a universal or generalized set of meanings that were truly inclusive of diverse settings (yet were viewed as inclusive) (see Cooper, 1974; Hayward, 1975). Moore (2000) continued to discuss other attempts at research about the symbolism of the home (see Appleyard, 1979; Depres, 1991; Putnam and Newton, 1990; Sixsmith, 1986), but even these resulted only in lists of meanings and were not based upon sound research methods. Moore (2000) stated that these studies were lacking in that their participants were primarily middle class, most were not built using a theoretical foundation, they did not have universal applicability, and they “tended not to examine

core processes or inter-related features of the concept of home and [instead] presented a static and de-contextualized view of the home” (p. 210). Additionally, Moore (2000) noted that the lists provided as results in these previously mentioned research endeavors “imply all meanings are equally experienced, and do not encourage a focus on the relationships between items” (p. 210). Although Moore (2000) found fault in some of these research findings, these early studies were still important steps toward understanding the meaning of the home.

Early in the work about the symbolism of home, Cooper (1974), using Jung’s theory of the collective unconscious, argued that home may be viewed as a symbol of the self. This paper examined the symbolic and representative nature of home and its significance in people’s lives. Cooper (1974), acknowledging that for most people the self is a fragile entity, said that people therefore envelop themselves in the home because it is a symbol of self and provides assurances as such. The way one furnishes, arranges, and decorates one’s personal environment “all are expressions of our image of ourselves, all are messages about ourselves that we want to convey back to ourselves, and to the few intimates that we invite into [our house]” (Cooper, 1974, p. 131). Consequently, a major change in a person’s concept of what the home should be is similar to suggesting a change in self-concept (Cooper, 1974). This notion is further supported with findings that indicated that houses and their associated objects symbolically represented conflicts within the self, expressed qualities of the self to others, signified status, defined group membership, created bonds between people, and encouraged socialization (Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981). More recently, it was established that the home was a projection of our personalities; “it transmits messages about us to the rest of

the world and reflects back aspects of our defining characteristics on to us, providing clarification and reinforcement of our self-identity” (Gunter, 2000, p. 157). Sixsmith (1986) and Gunter (2000) also noted that the home’s structure, layout, decoration, and furnishings are a direct expression of self, and that the home “can be created as a mirror image of those valued aspects of self-identity such as the ‘artistic me’ or the ‘intellectual me’” (p. 15). When referring to home as self and self identity, Hayward (1975) concluded that the home offers the opportunity to create expressions of self and that the “embodiment of oneself in one’s environment provides a perceptibly solid manifestation of ‘who I am’” (p. 7).

Rapoport (1982a) found that the meanings of environments are culture-specific and that “people react to environments in terms of the meanings the environments have for them” (Rapoport, 1982a, p.13). Spaces and possessions within the home usually express more than one meaning. “People attribute multiple meanings to domestic spaces and objects. Both spaces and objects can express private/personal and public/shared meanings and values, because the home is simultaneously a haven for withdrawal from society and a credential for esteem and the respect of others (Lawrence, 1987, p. 163).

Gunter (2000) found that women define their homes by the personal touches they bring in to it. It is not only a safe environment over which they may have some control, but also a place where they can project their personalities. Men find the home a much more functional space that caters to their basic needs and provides a base from which they can launch themselves into other more important social and professional aspects of their lives (Gunter, 2000).

Home and self-expression. Initial work on the self indicated that the concept of home is something that people most identify with self. Cooper (1974) proposed that people unconsciously use the home to represent who they are:

The first and most consciously selected form to represent self is the body, for it appears to be both the outward manifestation, and the encloser, of self. On a less conscious level, I believe, man [sic] also frequently selects the house, that basic protector of his [sic] internal environment (beyond skin and clothing) to represent or symbolize what is tantalizingly unrepresentable (p. 131).

Furthermore, Cooper (1974) determined that the home supports our vision of our selves with the messages it conveys in reference to who we are. James (1890) made specific mention of the symbolic nature of homes to their owners:

Our home comes next. Its scenes are part of our life; its aspects awaken the tenderest feelings of affection; and we do not easily forgive the stranger who, in visiting it, finds fault with its arrangements or treats it with contempt. All these different things are the objects of instinctive preferences coupled with the most important practical interests of life (p. 292).

Later research maintained that the meanings one gives to place are often so strong that they become an integral part of self to the people experiencing them (Rose, 1995). The home also acts as a source of social fulfillment, where people can express themselves to others through its design or “simply establish some kind of personal identity through which we are known to others” (Gunter, 2000, p. 96). A New York photojournalist, fascinated that identical spaces could look so different, photographed all of the living rooms in a middle-class apartment building. The photo study revealed that all of the spaces made personal statements about their owners regarding nationality, gender, values, lifestyle, and income using scheme, possessions and divisions of space (Kron & Pfeffer, 1976). The transmission of information about residents through the way the home is

presented has been shown to occur through the way the home is decorated (Gunter, 2000). Other research also concluded that home is an important expression of identity which is achieved in part through the furnishings and décor in the home (Madigan & Monroe, 1996).

Gunter (2000) found that the ultimate aim of the home is to obtain some reinforcement of personal identity, either from ourselves or from others. The home functions as a repository of memory and experience. Thus, the objects

that adorn our interior walls or furnishings are not invariably designed to invoke comment from others in the form of praise or reassurance of our aesthetic taste. Instead, they may serve a more simple and personal purpose of reminding us of enjoyable moments from our past. Our life history is put on display to reinforce our personal identity as well as to share that identity with others whom we invite into our home (p. 160).

Space associations in the home. Certain associations are prevalent in parts of the home. The kitchen, for example, was historically considered the housewife's domain, and was spatially separated from other areas of the home (Lawrence, 1987). Living rooms and their meanings have probably been studied more often than any other room in the home. In an ethnographic study of the objects found in living rooms, the living room was chosen as the site of study because it is the most public area of the home and where visitors are often received. That is, the living room "is in most American homes the place where the use of artifacts for the purpose of impression management is the most obvious and deliberate" (Riggins, 1994, p. 102). The living room was also found to be:

the area where performances for guests are most often given, and hence the setting of it must be appropriate to the performance. Thus we expect that more than any other part of the home, the living room reflects the individual's conscious and unconscious attempts to express a social identity (Laumann & House, 1972, p.190).

Altman and Chemers (1980) found, “for many American families, the living room is as close to being a sacred place as any area in the home...[and] in the psychological sense, serving as a symbol of the family’s status and values” (p. 198).

Bedrooms represent a particularly private area of the home. Visitors are not generally permitted to enter these areas unless they enjoy a special relationship with the owner or are invited to inspect that part of the house (Gunter, 2000). The bedroom is often the place for a person’s very personal possessions. A teenager, for example, will keep all of their items of value within the confines of their bedroom. Similarly, adults will keep items of a very personal nature in the bedroom (Gunter, 2000).

### The Symbolism of Objects in the Home

A significant amount of research has been conducted regarding the symbolism of objects in the home and their relationships to their owners (Belk, 1988; 1991; 1992; Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981). Belk (1988) stipulated that only when the basis for attachment to possessions is emotional could they be considered elements of the extended self. This concept can be illustrated by comparing the emotional attachment one feels for a pet or a set of china handed down from family, versus only the functional involvement with an umbrella or a recently purchased set of pots. It should be noted, however, if those pots were either a symbol of recently attained independence or an important event (e.g., a wedding present), they may in fact become a constituent of the extended self. People may become bonded to an object in a variety of ways (Belk, 1988). First, objects may become a part of one’s self when he or she masters or controls it, such as in the case of a musical instrument. McClelland and McCarthy (1989) also found that the more control one has over an object or an environment, the more closely he/she aligns

him/herself with the object. Belk (1992) also added that things might become a part of self when they control us, such as in the case of a prison uniform. A second means for an object to become a part of self is by creating or purchasing it. This may be the case specifically when involved with various possession rituals, such as cleaning or redecorating a new home to make it truly one's own (McCracken, 1988; Saile, 1985). Finally, the last means of object bonding is through habituation. A knickknack, for example, through its mere continuous presence, may become bonded to the self (Belk, 1992).

Gunter (2000) found that people use possessions to communicate messages to other people about themselves. The messages that objects communicate vary from personal characteristics to how people fit into society. Gunter (2000) stated:

Some objects have a personal message in that they say something about our personality; others have a social message in that they say something about our culture and our status. Certain objects may represent a link between the past and the future as they are rich in associations with other places or people (p. 116).

In similar fashion, Bourdieu (1984) found that antiques might represent family continuity through inheritance, and Boschetti (1995) determined that possessions that "have passed down through several generations are bearers of family history, linking individual lives across the span of time, preserving family continuity and the individual's place with the extended family structure" (p. 7). Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton (1981) also determined that objects were valued, not based on their monetary or functional value, but because they conveyed information about themselves and their relationships with other people. Objects serve as important reminders of past experiences and relationships for older persons, albeit they might have little or no value to others. The importance of these

objects is primarily based on the connections they represent. “As concrete phenomena, objects can embody memories in tangible form, thereby enabling a person to hold onto pieces of the past that may be crucial to a present sense of well-being” (Boschetti, 1995, p. 4). Boschetti (1995) found that objects fit within two major categories: those that represented a connection or extension of the self, which was then termed the Personal Self, and those that represented a continuity or discontinuity with the self, termed the Historical Self. Objects in the first category, the Personal Self, included childhood possessions and records of daily life. Objects in the second category, the Historical Self, represented records of family history and family heirlooms. Boschetti’s (1995) findings supported prior work that illustrated the relationship “between personal possessions and maintenance of identity in the senior years” (p. 9). In further defense of this notion, Eshelman and Evans (1999) found that once the functional needs of an older person in a continuing care retirement community (CCRC) are met, the display of objects with meaning and the satisfaction of display space played “an important role in enabling people to reestablish a sense of attachment after a move into a CRCC” (p. 24). This research suggested that the designer should “anticipate and even celebrate personal possessions” (Eshelman & Evans, 2002, p. 7) and therefore provide display space accommodating large and small personal possessions within each CRCC living unit.

Objects as a means of status. The display of objects in the decoration of one’s home may be a result of the quest for status (Kron, 1983; Pratt, 1981; in Lawrence, 1987). Amaturio, Constagliola, and Ragone (1987) found that people with costly objects and decoration in their home use these objects to convey status. While these individuals use “opulence and conspicuousness” (p. 240) to express and to symbolize their wealth to

others, Amaturio, *et al.* (1987) found that these were also the homes that scored lowest in terms of personalization. Those of lower social class were most likely to strive for “homeyness” in their residences in contrast to people of a higher social class (Costa & Belk, 1990; McCracken, 1989; Pratt, 1981). Riggins (1994) also supports the supposition that objects can be considered indices of status. He contends that since “domestic artifacts” (p. 112) express one’s lifestyle and value system, they communicate to others information relevant to ranking people by social class. He does, however, caution, “actual cost is rarely known or ascertainable, but apparent cost may be a more accurate term” (p. 112) when one makes status judgments based on someone’s belongings.

Objects and the self. Belk (1988) suggested that the fact that anthropologists assume that possessions tell us about their possessors is “itself evidence of the tendency to see possessions as symbols of self” (p. 144). Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton (1981) found that objects have a formative effect on the development of the self and that it is therefore important to understand the relationship that exists between people and things. Objects, such as souvenirs and mementos, help people to construct, rather than just preserve, their identity. They are reminders of where someone has been and the relationship they have with others. In that capacity, objects remind people of, essentially, who they are (Belk, 1992). In fact, when studying environmental issues in the corporate and institutional realm, Cooper Marcus (1992) found that rules that severely limit personalization in the work area “can be serious inhibitors of self-expression in the physical environment, and thus [inhibitors] of a positive sense of self-identity” (p. 88). In a residential setting as well, Cooper Marcus (1995) found that objects and other interior design features “display messages from the unconscious about who we are, who we were,

and who we might become” (Cooper Marcus, 1995, p. 17). In much earlier work, James (1890), in his treatises about the self, said,

An equally instinctive impulse drives us to collect property; and the collections thus made become, with different degrees of intimacy, parts of our empirical selves. The parts of our wealth most intimately ours are those which are saturated with our labor. There are few men who would not feel personally annihilated if a life-long construction of their hands or brains—say an entomological collection or an extensive work in manuscript—were suddenly swept away. The miser feels similarly towards his gold, and although it is true that a part of our depression at the loss of possessions is due to our feeling that we must now go without certain goods that we expected the possessions to bring in their train, yet in every case there remains, over and above this, a sense of the shrinkage of our personality, a partial conversion of ourselves to nothingness, which is a psychological phenomenon by itself” (James, 1890, p. 293).

James (1890) asserted in the statement above, that objects help people to define their roles, and when they are disposed of or are taken away, a piece of the self is lost.

#### Home as a Means of Non-Verbal Communication

It has been established that the home serves as a means of communication among oneself, other household members, and visitors to the home (Lawrence, 1987). How it serves as a means of communication and to what degree are issues of concern to some researchers. Searing (2000) found that as homeowners reflected on the contents of their homes, they were able to describe who they were. By analyzing what was in their homes, participants had a clearer understanding of who they were and what their homes communicated to people who visited their homes. These items conveyed “meanings about the identity of the person and who they are presently, who they were in the past, and who they want to become in the future (p. 102).

Home appears not only to be a medium for communication to others, but also to oneself. As Appleyard (1979) stated,

The most important messages in this system (people and homes) are, I think, those we send back to ourselves. These are the interactions with our homes that we initiate and it communicates back to us. Their realization is a never-ending accumulation of intimate and subtle actions and perceptions, which confirm, establish, question, modify, enrich, extend, transform, and in other ways, affect our sense of identity (p. 55).

A guest, confronted with hundreds of items within a home environment, may not know which objects hold the greatest significance to the owner. "To the outsider, the vase or book or plate is just that, but to the resident, the cherished item fairly glows with significance" (Kron, 1983, p. 56). Likewise, if identity or self is to be communicated through the environment, those identity cues must be noticeably different from their surroundings or highly redundant in order for them to be read by others (Rapoport, 1982b).

### Theoretical Framework

Rapoport (1982a) suggested that environmental meaning can be studied by using several different frameworks of research including models based on nonverbal communication. He supports these nonverbal communication models by stating that, "[they] are the simplest, the most direct, and the most immediate and they lend themselves to observation and inference as well as to relatively easy interpretation of many other studies" (p. 16). Three such theories will be used for further analysis in this doctoral study: (a) Symbolic Interaction; (b) Dramaturgy; and (c) Symbolic Self-Completion.

Symbolic interaction. Symbolic interaction theory is generally attributed to the work of George Herbert Mead (1934) at the University of Chicago, although Mead's views were heavily influenced by pragmatism and the work of William James (1890) and

Charles Cooley (1902). Pragmatism is an important concept to symbolic interactionism “primarily in its approach to how humans relate to their environment” (Charon, 2001, p. 39). Pragmatists contend that people intervene in determining what is real, knowledge is stored in long-term memory because it is important to the person storing it, objects are defined because of how they are used, and “humans must be understood primarily by what they do in their situations” (Charon, 2001, p. 39). Charon (2001) outlined five major premises of symbolic interactionism.

1. First, the primary focus of the theory is two-way (social) interaction. Symbolic interaction focuses on the:

nature of social interaction, or in other words, the dynamic and social activities that take place among people....In focusing on the interaction itself as the unit of study, the symbolic interactionist creates a more active image of the human being and rejects the image of the passive, determined organism. Individuals interact; societies are made up of interacting individuals (Charon, 2001, p. 27)

2. The second premise of the theory refers to the role of thinking in human action. Human beings act according to how and what they are thinking within a particular context—what their perspective is of the situation.
3. The third premise refers to the role of definition. Humans do not directly sense their environment, but rather, they define their situation as occurrences unfold. “What we do does not result simply from reality as it is but from how we define what it is” (Charon, 2001, p. 28).
4. Fourth, the role of the present is an integral component of symbolic interactionism. The actions that humans take are a result of how they define the present situation rather than how it was previously defined by themselves or by society.

5. Finally, the concept that humans take an active role rather than a passive one in creating interactions is also central to this perspective. In other words, humans are participants rather than observers in their interactions—it is their process of defining a situation that results in the interaction.

Other key tenets of symbolic interactionism include: (a) reality is socially defined; (b) objects are “social objects;” and (c) symbols are a class of social objects that are meaningful and significant (Charon, 2001).

The view that reality is socially defined is based on human beings’ ability to categorize or catalog information. This categorization occurs primarily through social interaction—humans come to understand what items fit into which categories in the world according to how others (the world in general) categorize them (Charon, 2001).

Objects are considered social objects because although any object may have a general purpose of existence, human beings learn what an object is and is used for through their interactions with others. Since reality is socially defined, then objects and their meanings are also socially defined, or constructed. Also as previously stipulated, humans are active participants in their interactions and as such, they constantly define and redefine objects through their interactions. (Charon, 2001). The caveat of this notion is that each object is viewed through a person’s unique perspective, and may be viewed differently depending on the viewer’s particular “lens” (Charon, 2001).

Symbols are considered social objects that represent a shared meaning that is agreed upon among groups of people (Charon, 2001). “Information may or may not be meaningful to a person. It could be considered more meaningful, in symbolic interactionist terms, if two people process the same bits of information similarly, or if

they jointly construct an interpretation using the same information” (Kaiser, 1997, p. 39).

An important element of this theory is that the people involved must interpret the meaning of an object or environment similarly, thus viewing it as a symbol, for an interaction to be meaningful. If an analogous interpretation is not achieved, then the people involved either have to negotiate the meaning, or the communication will not truly occur. The perspective focuses upon these processes of negotiation, and individuals are said to have communicated meaningfully when the ‘same’ or ‘approximate’ response is evoked in an observer as in the self (Kaiser, 1997).

Signs may be defined as something that leads to an automatic response. However, it should be noted that if reflection occurs, and humans create consensus with different meanings for the same sign (in a context-dependent manner), then the sign is transformed into a symbol (Charon, 1998). Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton (1981) stated that not all objects are symbols. When they possess personal characteristics or meanings known only to the owner (there is no shared meaning among different people) then they are to be considered signs. Examples of this are a “lucky bottle cap.” Only the owner would consider the cap “lucky” and therefore the shared meaning necessary for “symbolic” status is missing.

The present study explored the process single women use to communicate their selves to others and as support back to self. Symbolic interaction theory was thereby used to explore how participants ensured communication of self with the objects and other interior design features in their homes.

Dramaturgy. Goffman’s (1959) contribution to symbolic interactionism is called “dramaturgy.” In addition to influence from Mead, Cooley, James and Blumer, all

significant to the symbolic interaction perspective, Goffman was highly influenced by French sociologist Emile Durkheim and British anthropologist A. R. Radcliffe-Brown. Although his work furthered the symbolic interaction perspective, he never aligned himself with this perspective.

Goffman (1959) viewed interaction as something similar to a staged drama and a religious ceremony, filled with ritual observances. These two characteristics of “social interaction—drama and ritual—are complementary, and both are implicated in the collaborative manufacture of selves” (Charon, 2001, pp. 187-188). As in symbolic interactionism, the self is given an important role in dramaturgy. The self is “something of collaborative manufacture that must be produced anew on each and every occasion of social interaction” (Goffman, 1959, p. 253).

Goffman (1959) begins the analysis of the dramatic processes of social interaction by stating,

When an individual enters the presence of others they commonly seek to acquire information about him [sic] or to bring into play information about him [sic] already possessed. They will be interested in his general socio-economic status, his conception of self, his trustworthiness, etc.. Although some of this information seems to be sought as an end in itself, there are usually quite practical reasons for acquiring it. Information about the individual helps to define the situation, enabling others to know in advance what he will expect of them and what they may expect of him (p. 1).

With this excerpt Goffman (1959) spoke about the human tendency to seek out information about people within a setting in an effort to define the situation. They may be in search of information about a person’s current social identity, their mood, or any other pertinent details. These details, though essential for an understanding of the interaction, are rarely asked of the other person through direct approach. Instead, people depend on

“an individual’s “front” or appearance, manner, and the setting where [they] meet to define the situation” (Charon, 2001, p. 188). Goffman’s (1959) theory asserts that people manage others’ impressions of them (known as “impression management”) by controlling appearance and manner, or “personal front” (Goffman, 1959, p. 24). These attempts are an effort to deliver a performance, either to evoke a particular response or to present an authentic act (Charon, 2001). These performances take at least two people, an actor and an audience, and these roles are switched back and forth. “Each participant in social interaction expresses a self and forms an impression of each of the other participants on the basis of their appearance and manner and the setting of the interaction” (Charon, 2001, p. 189). The setting, as described by Goffman (1959), consists of:

...furniture, décor, physical layout, and other background items which supply the scenery and stage props for the spate of human action played out before, within, or upon it. A setting tends to stay put, geographically speaking, so that those who would use a particular setting as part of their performance cannot begin their act until they have brought themselves to the appropriate place and must terminate their performance when they leave it (p. 22).

Social actors (in the case of a home, social actors could be the owners), like those in the theater, rely on costume, body carriage, props and “other dramatic devices to produce a shared experience and sense of reality” (Charon, 2001, 189). Goffman (1959) also emphasized that that most environments consist of a “frontstage,” where the interaction takes place, and a “backstage,” where preparation for the interaction occurs, and often the performance is contradicted. The backstage is often the place where secrets are hidden that one does not want to audience to know.

The meaning of ritual is central to the dramaturgical approach. Goffman (1959) focused attention on the everyday practices and environments of social interaction to

which most people seldom pay attention. For example, the act of ‘looking away’ rather than staring at someone is an expression of “respect and regard for what we value most highly—each individual’s “sacred” self” (Charon, 2001, p. 196). Goffman (1959) asserted that these ritual acts of respect attest to the goodwill and value people have of others. Based on Durkheim’s influence, Goffman (1959) established that people avoid “intruding on one another’s many self territories...and often treated their possessions similarly” (Charon, 2001, p. 196). In these situations, objects such as a jacket draped over a chair or a book on a table are treated as “extensions of their owner, showing those objects the same respect and regard as we would show that individual” (Charon, 2001, p. 196).

In this study it is essential to understand that, according to Goffman (1959), all interpersonal interactions occur within a setting or environment. These settings contain props and physical objects central to the interactions that take place. The physical environment helps visitors define what type of interaction will occur and how it will occur—it provides guidelines for the interaction. The present study explored the relationship between the home and interactions that occur as a result of the setting. A formal living space, for example, might guide the interaction to be more formal in nature. Dramaturgy acts as a framework to examine this concept.

Symbolic self-completion theory. Symbolic self-completion theory (Wicklund & Gollwitzer, 1982; Solomon, 1983), another symbolic interaction perspective, is based on the premise that while people often display objects for “impression management,” these objects also may be used for self-definition. In other words, objects help people to define the role that they are attempting to communicate to others and support those roles back to

self. Wicklund and Gollwitzer (1982) argued that people use possessions to compensate for their own inadequacies. The theory predicts that people who have an incomplete self-definition tend to complete this identity by acquiring and displaying symbols associated with the identity for which they are striving. For example, they found that mediocre business students were more apt to carry a fancy brief case and otherwise dress the part of a successful business executive than students who were doing well in their studies. People look for ways to signal to others that they do have a credible, legitimate claim to a particular identity that has been challenged. In doing so, objects actually help people perform *and* define their roles. These premises are based on Cooley's (1902) 'looking-glass self' where objects are used to communicate role information after they have been used by the owner for role determination. Solomon (1983) argues,

If in fact the possession and display of such products as clothing, cosmetics, jewelry, automobiles, and furniture are taken to be indicators of the underlying characteristics of others and are used to infer or predict their behavior, it seems reasonable to consider the role of these same products for *self-attribution* [sic].

### Summary

Through this review of literature, it has been determined that there is a need for further research regarding the expression of self in the residential interior environment. Although many authors have established that the home is a place of self-expression, the process by which people express who they are through the design of their homes has not been well-explored. Research has been conducted that established that people use objects to represent who they are (see Cooper, 1974; Cooper Marcus, 1995; Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981), but research regarding the specific messages that these objects convey and how the messages are communicated has not been conducted. This present

**study aims to fill in some of these gaps and provide a model for future analysis and assessment. The present research examined objects women use to express information about themselves that also, in turn, support personal roles back to self.**

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **METHOD**

#### Research Design

This research used a mixed method approach. The primary research design was based on Glaser and Strauss' Grounded Theory approach (Glaser, 1978, 1992; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss, 1987; Strauss & Corbin, 1998), a method commonly used for research "about persons' lives, lived experiences, behaviors, emotions, and feelings as well as about organizational functioning, social movements, cultural phenomena, and interactions between nations" (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 11). Development of theory involves systematic categorization of statements to illustrate relationships between concepts. Through three steps of coding: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding, the researcher is able to identify, develop, and relate concepts that are the building blocks of theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Coding allows the researcher to identify as many tentative categories and their properties as possible. Examination of words, phrases, sentences, and paragraphs of text (e.g., field notes, interview transcripts, documents) is conducted, and then compared with other indicators in the data that display similarities or differences (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss, 1987; Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

The secondary research approach was quantitative and entailed the use of the Tennessee Self-Concept Scale (Fitts, 1965; Fitts & Warren, 1996), a measure of self-concept that has been standardized on a nationwide sample of more than 3,000 people

between the ages of 7-90 years (Fitts & Warren, 1996). The instrument provides a multidimensional description of self-concept, defined by Fitts and Warren (1996) as “who am I.” Data were collected to support the interviews, providing a measure of how well participants knew themselves, and thus could interpret their own identity through the interior design of their residential environments. Reliability of this instrument has been estimated using Cronbach’s alpha with internal consistencies ranging from a low of .73 on the Social Self-Concepts scale to a high of .93 on the Total Self-Concept scale (Fitts & Warren, 1996). It should be noted, however, that although participants in this study may have had a high Total Self Concept score and/or Identity score, they might not have been adept at translating it through the interior design of their residential environment.

#### Participants and Site

Participant characteristics and site. Participants were women who were either single and never married or divorced for more than five years. They were professionals from Northern Colorado who lived alone and owned their home. Women were chosen because, historically, they were the decorators, caretakers, and decision-makers of and for the home (Jones, 1997; Madigan & Munro, 1986; Madigan, Munro & Smith, 1990; Mazumdar & Mazumdar, 1999; Wilson & Mackenzie, 2000). Unmarried women living alone, who had never been married or had been single for a significant period of time, were chosen because the researcher wanted to develop theory about the expression of identity. When more than one person lives in a home, more than one identity will be expressed (Laumann & House, 1972; Madigan, Munro & Smith, 1990). It was important to speak with women that only had their own identities to contend with in their homes. Cooper (1995) supports the study of women who have not previously been married by

saying, "if a relationship ends in separation or divorce, all kinds of emotions come to the surface regarding possessions, furniture, houses, and property, since statements about the marriage have often become concretized in these material objects" (p. 13). Women who had been divorced for more than five years also were interviewed. A five year time frame was chosen based on Bohannan's (1970) six stages of divorce. Marital status was analyzed during data analysis and it was determined that there were no differences between women who were single and never married and women who were single but divorced regarding their Identity and Total Self Concept scores. Additionally, none of the women who had been previously married mentioned objects or other interior design features that still held associations with their previous marriages, thus refuting Cooper's (1995) concern. Women who owned their own home were chosen for this because home and family magazines often focus on the owner-occupied house as a status symbol and means for realizing interior design 'fantasies' (Agnew, 1982). Professional women were chosen for this study because they were the group of single women most likely to have the financial means to own their own home and therefore had the ability to alter their environments in an effort to create spaces that best expressed their identity. All interviews and associated data collection took place during a single visit to each participant's home and were arranged at a time convenient for both the participant and the researcher.

Recruitment. Participants were identified through personal references and snowball sampling techniques (Creswell, 1998). The women were chosen because they met the general criteria: Single, never married or divorced more than five years; living alone; homeowners; and in a professional career. A flyer was developed to provide

information to potential participants. All potential participants were given the flyer to determine their interest in the study. Flyers were distributed by email or mail either by the researcher or by associates of the researcher who knew potential participants. Once a flyer had been distributed to the potential participant, they initiated further contact with the researcher in order to take part in the study.

### Data Collection

Data were collected through 1-1.5 hour interviews with 22 participants. As this was an emergent design, a group of guiding questions had been established to encourage the discussion, but additional questions were developed as the interviews progress (see Appendix C for Interview Schedule). Each interview was digitally recorded and a professional typist transcribed the data. At the beginning of the interview, each participant was asked to photograph several areas of her home where she felt she had successfully expressed her identity through the interior design of her residential environment. These photographs were taken using the researcher's digital camera. This particular equipment was used because the images were immediately accessible, and therefore could serve as a stimulus for discussion during the interview. This method also ensured quality photographs that would be useful in the various methods of reporting this research. It should be noted that while the photographs were used as stimuli to engage the participant in the conversation and to illustrate examples in the reporting of this data, they were not analyzed separately for content.

Guiding questions help to guide the interview. They “change over time, are based on evolving theory, and are specific to the particular research. They begin open-ended and tend to become more specific and refined as the research moves along” (Creswell,

1998, p. 78). While a question started out in very general terms, the researcher further defined it as information about specific concepts and their properties and dimensions became more applicable and important (Creswell, 1998). To begin this research, the following questions were be considered guiding question and are listed under their corresponding Research Question. Please refer to Appendix C, however, for the complete Interview Schedule.

1. What are the decision-making processes women use when deciding how and where to express their identity through the interior design of their residential environments?
  - How do you determine what objects, décor or other interior design features you will use to represent your identity?
  - How do you determine what messages you will try to convey in what spaces?
  - Do you express different parts of your identity in different parts of your home and how?
2. What messages do women convey about their self and to whom are the conveying them to with the interior design of their residential environments?
  - When considering the interior design of your residential environment, what do you want people to learn about who you are and what you are about?
  - How do you communicate that information to visitors of your home?
  - Do you want specific people to come away with different ideas about who you are and how?
  - What parts of your identity do you feel you are successfully expressing?
  - What parts of your identity haven't you been able to successfully express? Why do you think you have had difficulty expressing those parts of your identity?
3. What methods do women employ to express their self with the interior design of their residential environment?
  - Where are the spaces where it is more important than others that your identity is expressed?
  - How do you use objects placement or interior design layout to express yourself?

Upon completion of the interview, participants were asked to complete the Tennessee Self-Concept Scale instrument (Fitts, 1965; Fitts & Warren, 1996). The purpose of using this instrument wss to gain descriptive quantitative data regarding how well participants know themselves by answering the question, "Who am I?". The Tennessee Self-Concept Scale Identity and Total Self-Concept scores were used to

compare the group of women in this doctoral study to the population of standardized participants. These quantitative data also were used to further define groups and were used in conjunction with the qualitative interview data as noted in the section Research Questions in Chapter One.

### Data Analysis

Qualitative analysis. Analysis of the qualitative research data was conducted using NUD•IST software (Non-numerical Unstructured Data Indexing, Searching, and Theorizing; Richards & Richards, 1994). This program, part of the Code and Retrieve category of programs available to qualitative researchers, enabled the researcher to ‘tag’ text information and place it into a category. NUD•IST provides a system that helps to store and organize files, search for and cross-reference themes, and diagram, analyze and report the data (Creswell, 1998).

The use of NUD•IST software, or any computerized qualitative analysis program, ‘forces’ the researcher to look at the data line-by-line and to think about the meanings of each sentence and idea. Without a program, it is possible for the researcher to casually read through the text files and not analyze each idea with care (Creswell, 1998). This supports Strauss and Corbin’s (1998) suggestion that the data must be, at least partially, micro-analyzed in an effort to determine

“what the interviewees are saying and how they are saying it. This prevents [the researcher] from jumping precipitously to our own theoretical conclusions, taking into account the interviewees’ interpretations. It helps [the researcher] to avoid laying first interpretations on data, and forces the consideration of alternative explanations” (p. 65).

The coding process for this study employed the three levels of coding required for the Grounded Theory paradigm. In an effort to determine the concepts used by

participants as part of their expression of self through the interior design of their homes, the researcher chose three transcripts for analysis. These particular transcripts were chosen because they were “judged to represent a broad and richly expressed array of ideas and themes” (Ogle, 1999, p. 47). The researcher made notes in the margins of these three transcripts that described the many different concepts each participant discussed. These notes were then grouped together into categories. Strauss and Corbin (1998) described this process by saying, “Grouping concepts into categories is important because it enables the analyst to reduce the number of units with which he or she is working. In addition, categories have analytic power because they have the potential to explain and predict (p. 113). These categories were then developed into the Coding Guide and applied to the data (see Appendix E for the final Coding Guide). During this open coding process, the researcher continually searched for new categories, and when necessary, went back through the transcripts to apply these new codes.

To establish trustworthiness (see Lincoln & Guba, 1985) of the data coding, a second coder (a master’s candidate in the apparel merchandising and design field) reviewed the primary researcher’s application of the coding guide to a random sampling of the interview data (four transcribed interviews, or 18% of the data). There was coder agreement on 99% of the codes found in the reviewed transcriptions. Based on the high percentage of agreement, further code review was not required.

The next step of the coding process, axial coding, involved searching for and determining subcategories within each of the categories and relationships within the data. This process entailed the comparison of units within each of the NUD•IST reports and their grouping into meaningful themes that related to each of the concepts. Subcategories

answer questions “about the phenomenon such as when, where, why, who, how, and with what consequences, thus giving the concept greater explanatory power” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 125). This was primarily an inductive process as the researcher identified categories and subcategories. In the final selective coding process, these subcategories were then analyzed to form the basis for the theory and related to each research question. Deductive analysis was conducted as the researcher searched for data to support or disprove the previously proposed hypotheses. The researcher interpreted the data to form a story that explained the process of what is happening. This story formed the theory or hypothesis and was visually illustrated as a model. (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

During each level of coding, the researcher recorded conceptual ideas, relationships between concepts, initial and more developed impressions, and directions for later analysis through the use of memos and diagrams (Glaser, 1978; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Memos are meant to be “analytical and conceptual rather than descriptive. Diagrams are visual rather than written” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 217) and depict the varied relationships between concepts. Memos will take several forms: code notes, theoretical notes, and operational notes. Code notes followed the three types of coding: open, axial and selective, and contain the actual code products. Theoretical notes served as summaries that contain the researcher’s thoughts and ideas about the data and design. Finally, operational notes contain the procedural directions and reminders (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Quantitative analysis. The Tennessee Self-Concept Scale (Fitts, 1965; Fitts & Warren, 1996) provided 15 different scales divided into four categories: Validity,

Summary, Self-Concept, and Supplementary. A breakdown of the available scores and their associated categories is illustrated in Table 3.1. For the purpose of this study, however, all of the Validity Scores were used, but the researcher used only the Identity Score and Total Self-Concept Score from the other categories. Several *t*-tests were conducted using SPSS, a statistical analysis computer program. These tests were conducted to determine whether there were any significant differences between this group of participants and a standardized national sample regarding validity scores. No significant differences were determined—mean scores from this group of female participants were statistically the same as women who took were standardized in the national sample. Although it may be determined later that other Scores were applicable, the data from those will be reserved for future research. Scoring of this instrument is explained in the Tennessee Self Concept Scale Manual (Fitts & Warren, 1996). Scoring was conducted by hand and took approximately 20 minutes for each instrument. A full explanation is provided in the Manual (Fitts & Warren, 1996) to aid in the interpretation of the scores. The quantitative data provided descriptive information about the participants. Additionally, as the interview codes established groups, several *t*-tests were conducted using SPSS to further define the data.

**Table 3.1** Tennessee Self-Concept Scale: Scores available for analysis from this instrument. Only the Validity Scores, Total Self-Concept score and Identity scores were used in this study.

<b>Validity Scores</b>	<b>Summary Scores</b>	<b>Self-Concept Scores</b>	<b>Supplementary Scores</b>
<b>Inconsistent Responding</b>	<b>Total Self-Concept</b>	Physical	<b>Identity</b>
<b>Self-Criticism</b>	Conflict	Moral	Satisfaction
<b>Faking Good</b>		Personal	Behavior
<b>Response Distribution</b>		Family	
		Social	
		Academic/Work	

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **RESULTS**

#### Overview

The purpose of this mixed method approach was to determine the process by which women expressed their identity or self through the interior design of their residential environment. The primary research design was based on Glaser and Strauss' Grounded Theory method (Glaser, 1978, 1992; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss, 1987; Strauss & Corbin, 1998), with the additional use of the Tennessee Self-Concept Scale as an instrument to attain Identity and Total Self Concept Scores for this group of participants. The grounded theory method was appropriate for this topic of research as it is commonly used for research "about persons' lives, lived experiences, behaviors, emotions, and feelings" (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 11).

This chapter will provide descriptions of the participants and the setting in which participants' actions related to identity expression took place, an overview of the Tennessee Self-Concept Scale results, and a report of the findings organized around the research questions presented in Chapters One and Three. Data were collected during in-depth interviews at each participant's home. All interviews were transcribed verbatim and qualitative analysis was conducted using the NUD•IST program. Open, axial, and selective coding processes were implemented. Themes that emerged from the data analysis are presented in this chapter according to the appropriate research question.

**Quantitative data analysis was conducted using first the Tennessee Self-Concept Scale scoring sheet, and then the SPSS program.**

### **Interpretation of Quantitative Results**

**The Tennessee Self-Concept Scale provides individual scores as both a T-score and as a percentile (the T-score is a score specific to the TS-CS instrument). Most individuals' scores "tend to fall between 40T and 60T" (Fitts & Warren, 1996, p. 21). These profiles indicate no disturbance or only mild disturbances in self-concept. High scores between 60T and 70T indicate areas of particular strength whereas lower scores below 40T indicate specific disturbances in self-concept (Fitts & Warren, 1996). Scores above 70T possibly indicate a positively distorted view of self, and in the case of a psychological diagnosis, further interviews and observations should be performed. As the goal of this study was not to diagnosis participants, those further actions will not be performed.**

**The Total Self-Concept (TOT) score "reflects the individual's overall self-concept and associated level of self-esteem" (Fitts & Warren, 1996, p. 21). Individuals with Total Self-Concept scores higher than 60T "tend to define themselves as generally competent and to like themselves. Such individuals can present a clear, well-articulated view of themselves and world " (Fitts & Warren, 1996, p. 21). Individuals with TOT scores lower than 40T are "doubtful about their own worth...and may avoid expressing themselves" (Fitts & Warren, 1996, p. 22). The Identity (IDN) score reflects individual's perception of who they are and how they identify themselves. When both the IDN and TOT scores are above 60T but below 70T, they reflect a positive self-view and the ability to express it.**

When both scores are low (below 40T), the individual's self-view is "particularly vulnerable to situational factors and to the reactions and opinions of others" (Fitts & Warren, 1996, p. 25).

Descriptive results of the Tennessee Self-Concept Scale are presented under Descriptive Data. Additionally, after every participant quotation presented within each of the themes, the participant number, Identity T-score, and Total Self-Concept T-score are provided. This affords the reader a basic understanding about the participant's view of self and whether it fits into the generalized norm (between 40T and 60T).

### Descriptive Data

Twenty-two women participated in this study. All except one were of Caucasian descent—one was biracial, of Caucasian and African American descent. All of the participants currently lived alone and owned their own homes east of the Rocky Mountains in a western state. Seventeen of the participants (77%) were single and never married, while five participants (23%) had been previously married but divorced for longer than five years. Participants ranged from 29 to 65 years of age and the mean age was 51. Participants ranged in educational level from having completed some college to having doctoral degrees. Ten participants were university faculty members, three were grade or middle school teachers, three were veterinary technicians, two were therapists, and one each was a real estate agent, a librarian, an estimator, and a pension plan supervisor. Participants lived in their current homes for an average of 11 years and had an average of one and a half previous homes. For a more detailed description of participant characteristics, see Table 4.1.

**Table 4.1.** Summary of descriptive characteristics. Career is not included for reasons of confidentiality.

Participant Number	Marital Status	Age	Education Level	Years in Home	Prior Homes	TOT	IDN
1	Single	59	Ph.D.	14	1	55	53
2	Single	39	Ph.D.	1	1	50	43
3	Single	46	Ph.D.	8	2	51	53
4	Single	56	Ph.D.	9	1	55	51
5	Single	62	Ph.D.	25	1	57	56
6	Single	53	Ph.D.	9	1	68	59
7	Single	41	Bachelors	1	0	45	45
8	Single	59	Ph.D.	1	3	57	58
9	Single	51	Masters	23	0	80	80
10	Single	46	Masters	12	0	59	59
11	Single	41	Ph.D.	6	3	64	58
12	Single	54	Some College	2	3	44	42
13	Divorced	45	Some College	2	3	39	31
14	Single	39	Some College	1	1	48	47
15	Divorced	57	Bachelors	29	2	60	54
16	Divorced	65	Masters	23	3	45	51
17	Divorced	60	Masters	15	4	53	40
18	Single	65	Masters	7	1	51	53
19	Single	63	Masters	33	0	49	59
20	Divorced	42	Masters	3	1	54	55
21	Single	47	Bachelors	11	0	43	39
22	Single	29	Bachelors	4	1	59	64

Participants were asked to complete the Tennessee Self-Concept Scale to determine Identity and Total Self-Concept scores. Detailed descriptives are located in Table 4.2. Several *t*-tests were conducted to determine significant differences between this group of participants and a standardized sample published by the instrument's authors regarding their Total Self-Concept scores and Identity scores. Significant differences were determined regarding participants Total Self-Concept scores. This group

of female participants had a higher mean Total Self-Concept score than did female participants in the national standardized sample ( $t(982)=2.02, p<.05$ ). There were no significant differences of Identity scores determined regarding this group of participants and female participants in the national standardized sample.

**Table 4.2. Summary of Tennessee Self-Concept Scale Scores**

Variable	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Total Self-Concept (Participants)	22	39	80	54.1	9.2
Total Self-Concept (Standardized)	962	Unavailable	Unavailable	50.0	10.1
Identity (Participants)	22	31	80	52.1	10.2
Identity (Standardized)	962	Unavailable	Unavailable	49.9	9.9

### Findings related to Research Questions

#### Research Question One

What are the decision-making processes women use when determining how and where to express their identity through the interior design of their residential environment?

#### Construction of Identity Representation

One portion of the decision-making process is to determine how to represent one's self through the interior design of the home. Seventy-three percent of participants ( $n=16$ ) specifically addressed factors that contributed to this decision. For most participants the decision about how they would represent their identity was something that they did not consciously consider. While most of these women described objects and

other interior design features that were representative of their selves, these items were not consciously chosen for that purpose. One participant noted:

Again, I don't know if I consciously do that, if I consciously say, 'oh, I want this because it reinforces my idea of who I am.' I don't know that anything is that conscious. There are many things that I automatically say, 'oh, this is really me and I need to have this because it represents something that I love'...But when I put [pictures of people I love] up, I'm not consciously thinking what it reflects about me as a person. I know it's important to me and that's why I put it up (P10, IDN=59, TOT= 59).

Another participant agreed with this notion by saying, " I guess maybe subconsciously I do. I wouldn't say I make a conscious decision about who I am every time I make a purchase of a furnishing for my home. Subconsciously I do that without even thinking about it" (P1, IDN= 53, TOT= 55). As alluded by the previous participant statements, objects and other interior design features were used to represent these women's selves. In a discussion regarding the choice of items to represent identity, this participant stated:

I've always commented that I didn't decorate my house consciously; it was purely because my parents died. There were all these things that were part of my family that I wouldn't sell or give away, and so therefore my house is decorated to represent those kinds of family things (P1, IDN= 53, TOT= 55).

Although most participants discussed their unconscious or automatic representation of identity, some of the same participants also discussed their purposeful determination of identity representation. One such participant said:

Yes, I tend to really look at those things that go back to my heritage and my interests.... I tend to go back to what is really important to me and what I connect to.... It's really based around interests and those interests represent who I am (P4, IDN=51, TOT= 55).

In summary, the participating women did not consciously determine how they represented their selves in their home. They did consider the objects, furnishings, and other interior design features in their homes representative of their selves, but their

selection was not necessarily dependent on the conscious construction of self. A more detailed description of these representative objects will be reported following Research Question Two. As part of the decision-making process women use to determine how and where to express their identity in their home, it is important to understand how inherent the determination of identity is for these participants. They knew that they used objects and other interior design features to represent who they are, but for the most part, they did not consciously determine what they wanted to represent about themselves.

Although participants did not consciously determine how they purposefully planned to represent themselves, they were able to articulate items or design features that did NOT represent their selves. One participant described this phenomenon in a general sense: "It's because it doesn't fit who I am.... They were pieces that [my aunt] had done, they didn't represent me, therefore I felt okay shipping them on..." (P4, IDN=51, TOT=55).

Twenty-one participants (96%) discussed interior design features that specifically did not express their selves. These were primarily voiced in terms of design style. Participants said, "I don't like cold contemporary.... I don't like frou-frou stuff" (P15, IDN=54, TOT=60). Another said, "I don't like things that are formal. I wouldn't consider things that are cherry...because I think it's so formidable and formal. It's not me" (P13, IDN=31, TOT=39). Yet another said, "I see an image and part of it as somebody I don't see myself as. Somebody who is really into high tea and china and sort of older and traditional" (P8, IDN=58, TOT=57).

Other participants discussed the change that has occurred over time in the design features that represent who they are. While items may once have been representative of

their selves, because of changes in their identity and what they relate to, these same items are no longer expressive. One such participant said:

I used to have a lot of buffalos.... I had tons of buffalos because I was coaching a team, the Buffalos, for eight years. So I took all those down and gave them to my former secretary and had her distribute them because it lost its meaning (P11, IDN=58, TOT=64).

This was also the case in the sense of style. This participant said:

My mom gives me gifts and I bring them out when she comes because they are not my style. She thinks I'm still into country. I kind of got into that for a while, but she doesn't realize that they're not me anymore, so she gives me cute wooden things (P12, IDN=42, TOT=44).

As part of the decision-making process, participants were able to articulate that although they did not consciously consider who they were every time they brought something into their homes, they did consciously consider who they were not. This was an important step in their decisions about how they determined their expression of self.

### Connectivity

Participants consistently discussed objects, furnishings, and other interior design features that they felt a connection, or a connectivity, with as things that represented who they were. As an element of the decision-making process, connectivity was established as one of the determining factors of whether an object, etc. was important in their lives. In fact, one participant said, "If I don't have any memories connected to it then it can go without any problem" (P1, IDN=53, TOT=55).

Fifteen participants (68%) made reference to items in their homes that were connected to their selves. Most of those references specifically referred to items of family descent or with connections to their families. In an overarching statement that could describe many participants' views, one participant said, "I kept some of my parent's

things partly because I like them and partly because they were their things.... I suppose because of the connection” (P18, IDN=53, TOT=51). Another participant agreed in a sense by saying, “That connection...maybe it’s permanency, knowing you are not going to get rid of it unless it goes on to someone else in the family, where as other pieces might” (P8, IDN=58, TOT=57). Another described her determination of who she is by the connection to family and memories they represented:

In the sense that, this little desk here is one I had as a child, so I figure that’s me. This table was my grandmother’s table so I remember eating Christmas dinner at that table all the time. So all those things are me, and they’re me because of the connections they have (P1, IDN=53, TOT=55).

Yet another participant articulated a similar message:

So the quilts are family things. They are old and I put them up in lieu of putting up another kind of art on the wall, which I think would be less of who I think I am because there would be less of a connection to anything (P6, IDN=59, TOT=68).

Participants discussed connectivity in reference to place and life experience as well. One of the participants who often traveled said, “I got it in St. Thomas, Virgin Islands. There are all kinds of stories connected to this piece” (P16, IDN=51, TOT=45). Another said, “So everything that I value and that I put out there is connected to my personal experience (P6, IDN=59, TOT=68).

Connectivity to family objects and those that serve as reminders of places and experiences was an important portion of determining what participants would use to represent their selves. Some participants, however, also talked about using objects to create connections for other people—so that visitors to their home would experience a connection as well. One participant said,

I’m also a daughter and a sister and that is a big part of my identity. I am very connected to my family although they live 2,000 miles away in New

York and New Jersey.... One of the things that I pride myself on... a couple of years ago an uncle came to visit me that had never come to visit me in Colorado.... It's really important to me when people come to visit, especially my family, they see themselves in my house. It's really important to me. So before he came out I did a walk through to see what he would see when he came here and see if he would see himself here. Sure enough, he's in the picture of my four uncles up there, but his grandkids are on that refrigerator, so he would not only see himself, but his grandkids.... He would see his brothers and his brothers' kids and he would feel like he belonged here or he was connected to this place (P11, IDN=58, TOT=64).

Expanding upon that thought, another participant noted, "When [my grandchildren] do come...they love to come and see what they looked like when they were little" (P16, IDN=51, TOT=45). Beyond connections for family, one participant wanted her past co-workers to be able to see their contribution in her home. She said, "If I had someone here that had been part of that quilt in the bedroom, then I would make sure that they saw the



**Figure 4.1.** Example of connectivity for others (P19).

finished product and where it is now” (P19, IDN=59, TOT=49). (See Figure 4.1)

Quite a few (55%,  $n=12$ ) of the participants also discussed items within their home they do not feel connected to and therefore are not representative of their identity. Referring to gifts that the gift givers assumed were representative of her self, but in truth were not, one participant said:

I know the folks that gave me those African gifts. There’s a chance that they might come to a barbecue that I might have or something, so it’s really important to me for them to see themselves, and that would be a way that they would see themselves... [Otherwise] I would not display those two African faces for sure. I don’t have a connection to that. There’s some people who do (P11, IDN=58, TOT=64).

Another participant discussed objects she is not connected to in terms of those things she has connections with and are representative of who she is:

Things that don’t have connections probably aren’t me. So my sofas, I have no problem getting rid of my sofas. I don’t have any big connections to my sofas cause they are just things in my house. But the things that are me are the ones I have connections with (P1).

The idea that objects and other interior design features contain constructed connections is important when attempting to understand the decision-making process women use when deciding how and where to express their selves. Those connections shape whether a person will keep an object because it is meaningful or dispose of it when scaling down, moving, or changing one’s interior design.

### Home for Personal Satisfaction

Many of the participants emphatically stated that their homes were for their enjoyment and satisfaction, and that other people’s opinions either did not matter or were not as important as their own. This factor was important to the decision-making process that women used to determine how and where they would express their identity. These

participants tended to choose items to represent who they were with little regard for what others thought of them. Thirteen participants (59%) remarked that it was more important to create an environment that represented whatever they wanted it to, rather than to base these decisions on other people's opinions. A *t*-test was conducted to determine whether there was a difference between women whose own satisfaction was more important than others' opinions regarding their Identity scores, Total Self-Concept scores, or age, and compared to those who did not discuss this concept. No significant differences were found.

Participants were rather ardent when discussing this topic. One such participant said:

I've gravitated more towards surrounding my house with a feel that I like without respect to what other people would think about it. I've gotten, I guess, even more sure of my tastes or just more willing to indulge my own and to heck if somebody else doesn't like it (P15, IDN=54, TOT=60).

This concept was repeated by many of the participants. Most of them seemed secure enough with their identity that other people's opinions were less important than their own representation of self and personal satisfaction. Another participant said, "I think that I'm authentic and so it's like that wall of stuff may not be pleasing to anybody else, I think it's visually pleasing, so that doesn't bother me" (P1, IDN=53, TOT=55). Personal satisfaction was a major portion of the decision-making process for these participants. This woman stated, "I needed a new couch...and a male friend of mine said, 'don't get something that's too frou-frou.' I thought, 'why?' I'm the one who lives with them [the couches]" (P8, IDN=58, TOT=57). One participant was able to articulate her fear of a family member's opinion, but chose to represent her identity anyway:

I think I've even taken a bigger step this year than I ever have before with my new interest in metaphysical things and that kind of spirituality in that manner. I went to a metaphysical fair a couple weeks ago and had an aura portrait done. It's hanging in my bedroom, of myself. It was right before my sister came and she and her husband are very conservative, fundamental Christians, so I worried. I thought about taking it down. It thought, 'No, they're going to have to deal with who I am. They come to my home they have to deal with who I am.' She made her comments about, you know, don't throw your metaphysical b.s. on me and all, that kind of thing. I'm not throwing it on you, it's my home. And I thought it was kind of a neat reflection of me, in a different light, and so I left it up which is kind of a step for me (P2, IDN=43, TOT=50).

This concept of design for personal satisfaction was an important part of the decision-making process for participants. The opinions of friends and relatives were less important than participants' own representation of self. While determination of items to represent self was less of a conscious one, participants were able to effortlessly articulate that their own opinions were most heavily weighted.

#### Summary of Research Question One

Participants were relatively clear regarding their determination of identity representation: Decisions about how they would represent who they were, were determined on an unconscious level. However, although they didn't consciously consider who they were every time they made a decision regarding their expression of self, they were able to easily determine who they were not. This concept, termed "Identity...Not" (Freitas, *et al.*, 1997), was a common response and significant to the determination of identity representation. In its original reference, "Identity...Not" refers to a disassociation with a particular style of dress. In the present study, the concept is expanded to include interior styles or objects. Participants also were able to articulate that although they didn't consciously consider their identity when using or selecting an object for their homes, they did recognize that items with connections to family, friends, or memories were

representative of self. Alternatively, items without connections were not representative of self and could be easily discarded. Another portion of the decision-making process involved participants' personal satisfaction with their homes. Design for personal satisfaction and representation was more important to participants than the opinions of others. Therefore, the decision-making process included the subconscious construction of self, a clear understanding of what does not represent self, connectivity to objects as a determining factor of self, and finally, personal satisfaction above others' opinions.

### Research Question Two

What messages do women convey about their self and to whom are they conveying them to with the interior design of their residential environment?

#### Representative Objects

Although participants didn't consciously contemplate expression of identity through the design of their spaces, they were able to articulate that they do have objects that represent who they are. These objects conveyed messages to themselves and to others regarding personal characteristics, interests, relationships, status, and memories. While the specific messages related to each of these objects may not be directly representative of the participant's self, they do serve to communicate messages about what is important to the participant, therefore relating information about her self, characterized in one participant's statement: "Things that I love are things that are representative" (P13, IDN=31, TOT=39). These findings are categorized and presented below.

**Characteristic representation.** Each interview began with participants' descriptions of who they were, how they perceived others to see them, and how they wanted to be seen by others. This information provided the researcher with a basic understanding of the participants' personalities and backgrounds. In nineteen cases (86%), participants later referred to objects that were specifically representative of their personal characteristics. These references related to descriptions about who they were in terms of their career, family background or heritage, personality, religion or spirituality, and gender specific qualities (i.e., feminine). Participants chose objects to convey information about these personal characteristics to others as well as in support of their selves.

Career representation often was discussed. Several participants, for example, were grade or middle school teachers. These participants represented their teacher role with objects that reflected the learning environment or their love of children. One such participant said, "The middle picture was a gift to me, but again, it says a lot because it is an old schoolhouse.... That group of pictures says a lot about me and what is important to me" (P10, IDN= 59, TOT=59). This same participant also said, "Just the whole thing that teaching is so important to me. So I have certain items that are really very...if you walked in you would say, 'Oh, you must be a teacher.' It's obvious" (P10). Another who had recently completed a master's degree in reading said, "I love children's literature. I have a huge collection of children's books. I show all of that in the other room" (P9, IDN= 80, TOT=80).

Family background or heritage was also represented in the objects within participants' homes. Participants used objects that represented where their families

originated, their ethnicity, and the lives their ancestors led. One participant who exhibited many family pictures in the main areas of her home said,

Especially the pictures of my uncles. I like having them out. They are black and when I tell people I'm half-black they don't think there are black people in my family. But I'm like, this is my mom and these are my uncles. My mom is 'high yellow.' It's what they used to call her shade. The color of caramel, and so was my brother and my mom's dad. But my mom's mom and her sisters and brothers are black. A lot of people are surprised to see how dark my black side is. So I like to have that up there because it lets people know—yeah, I really am...you know. Even though I am light skinned, my roots are black (P11, IDN= 58, TOT=64).

Other participants discussed the use of objects to portray their families' places of origin both to themselves and to others. One stated, "Another piece I thought of and that is being Scandinavian, Norwegian in particular. So I have some things in the house that are Scandinavian in origin. It's a heritage thing I like a lot" (P1, IDN=53, TOT=55). Another said, "It would have to be the whistle from Sweden. It's just a little bitty thing, but it represents to me my whole family's history because my mother came from Scandinavia and her parents" (P2, IDN=43, TOT= 50).

Personality was often referred to regarding participants' expression of self. These personality traits either suggested a reflection of their feelings (i.e., cheerful) or their ways of being (i.e., whimsical). When asked how their homes or items within their homes reflect who they are, participants answered, "I think that it expresses that I'm down to the basics, kind of simple, kind of comfortable, relaxed" (P10, IDN=59, TOT=59), and "I think things reflect who I am, whimsical, love of nature and things like that" (P9, IDN=80, TOT=80). In a similar vein, another participant said, "I think my house tells other people how I view my life and my house is light and bright and cheerful. Right now is a really bright, cheerful part of my life" (P12, IDN=42, TOT=44). Still another stated,

“...revealing my personality, I want to be shown as a warm and whimsical and funny person.... With the lizards, with the horned toads, with the funny things around I communicated that part of my self that is whimsical” (P6, IDN=59, TOT= 68). In a different manner, one participant discussed her use of encyclopedias to represent her personality:

It had the whole Britannica and they are leather-bound and I like that because I am real inquisitive and like to know things. For me, that was a real artifact that I think was a good indicator of my personality. I’m like an encyclopedia. I feel like I have a real allegiance to encyclopedias because I feel like that I’m a warehouse of information, so that was a good way to show that” (P11, IDN=58, TOT=64).

Several people discussed how objects represent their religion or spirituality.

While one participant discussed more traditional religious objects as “important to me, something that represents who I am” (P22, IDN=64, TOT=59), another discussed objects as representative of her spirituality:

I also consider myself very spiritual in an eclectic way. I like the Native American spiritual stuff. I like metaphysical spirituality stuff, Easter theories and yet you know there’s tradition. You know that I was raised in a Christian home. I find as I get older trying to meld all those views together and express them in a comfortable open simple space (P2, IDN=43, TOT=50).

Finally, gender-specific qualities were discussed by some of the participants, referring specifically to the expression of their femininity. One participant said, “I guess I think of my bedroom...it’s kind of cream-colored eyelets and the drapes are a pink pastel and the cream. That’s more of my feminine side. I guess more of the little girl in me than the woman (P9, IDN=80, TOT=80). Another stated, “It is light and bright and it’s feminine. People tell me that I’m really feminine because I still wear dresses and I guess I have an old-fashioned influence” (P12, IDN=42, TOT=44). (See Figure 4.2.)

Participants used objects and other interior design features to express their personal characteristics to others and support them for themselves. Characteristic representation was achieved with objects that were representative of their careers, family backgrounds, personalities, religion, and gender.



**Figure 4.2.** Example of the feminine influence this participant identified with (P12).

Interest representation. Similar to characteristic representation, participants used objects to signify their interests to others and themselves. All participants ( $n=22$ ) referred

to objects and other interior design features that represented personal interests. In an overarching comment, one participant stated, “I love my house and I love thinking about it and I love talking about it. You ask how does it show ‘me.’ It shows my aesthetic, my interests, and my friends will enjoy it” (P5, IDN=56, TOT=57). Another, more direct, comment about how interest representation is a significant message came when one participant said, “It’s really based around interests and those interests represent who I am” (P4, IDN=51, TOT=55).

One participant who sung in a local group indicated her representation of this activity by saying, “...my posters from the Larimer Chorale. I’ve got a room downstairs with tons of posters because I sing in the chorale and they always have very artistic posters and so I put all those in the room in poster frames” (P1, IDN=53, TOT=55). In a similar manner, another participant said, “I have a Hamlet poster up and a Diego Rivera poster up which shows my interests in the arts” (P6, IDN= 59, TOT=68). Several participants mentioned representative objects that were indicative of physical or outdoor activities. One participant went into quite a bit of detail regarding the outdoors:

The two outside pictures are actually posters I had from a five-week trip I had in New Zealand, which also expresses my interest in being physically active and outdoors.... There are spaces that reflect my love for outdoors. So downstairs I have my backpacks, my tents, my camping equipment...but I would have photos of outside activities in an area of the house...that reflects other things about who I am.... I’m a real outdoors person and some of that is reflected in my home.... My home reflects the different sides of me—the more physically get out there and go do it and the more at-home domestic kind of person that I can also be (P10, IDN=59, TOT=59).

Another participant gave a similar example of interest representation of the outdoors:

“The extra bedroom, and other rooms have more books on nature and nature

photographs. That represents my love of the outdoors and the mountains and that side of me” (P9, IDN=80, TOT=80).

Participants had objects and other interior design features that represented other interests as well. Some considered their library-like rooms to represent their love of reading and academic endeavors. One such participant stated, “My back room is a reading room. I have reading stuff on the wall, books on the wallpaper. I read a lot. I think that flows through well” (P3, IDN=53, TOT=51). Another said:

Like I have to have that bookcase over there, and that bookcase at the top of the stairs. Because I have a lot of papers and books. I think having those as visible as they are, even though it is not my choice, I think conveys, ‘Oh she reads.’ I think that conveys she’s working (P11, IDN=58, TOT=64).

Interest in areas of the country was also discussed. One participant who had recently renovated her kitchen said, “I guess it kind of suggests outdoor tones, tans and browns, the coppery look. It made me think of the southwest, which I love. I love the desert area and I guess it made me think of that” (P21, IDN=39, TOT=43).

Relationship representation. Participants often referred to objects that represented the important relationships in their lives. These objects were either representative of relationships with friends or with family, or they served as reminders of relationships.

Sixteen participants (73%) mentioned objects that were representative of valued relationships with friends. Most often, the objects were photographs, gifts, or were symbolic of a particular relationship. One participant, describing a painting hanging in her living room, said:

And the picture is just a good piece of art, for one thing, and also my friend Dick gave it to me, and it was one of the things that he saw and he said [participant’s name] has to have this.... And so that makes it a very special piece” (P1, IDN=53, TOT=55).

Another participant had a picture drawn by her brother, but representative of her relationship with one of her friends:

It's a picture of two girls at a piano, one is playing the piano and one is singing and that always represented my friend and I. She played the piano and we always sang together. So it was a really meaningful picture (P7, IDN=45, TOT=45).

Illustrative of all of sentiments related to relationship representation, one participant noted, "I have a lot of possessions that are from friends and I keep those out and I have a lot of pictures of friends...and that portrays my love of my friends" (P12, IDN=42, TOT=44). Another participant also said,

They were given to me by somebody I cared a lot about at the time or have a special bond with, family, friend, or ex-boyfriend or boyfriend. It's more intimate to me than something I chose to decorate my home with (P22, IDN=64, TOT=59).

As previously mentioned, some objects were symbolic of a particular relationship. For example, when discussing a large painting on the wall of her living room, one participant said, "I chose that one because it represented so much of our relationship in regards to quilting and friends for a long time, having daughters and having plants" (P13, IDN=31, TOT=39).

Every participant ( $n=22$ ) also described objects that were representative of their valued family relationships. These included, as before, photographs, gifts, and items that signified those relationships with family members. One participant noted:

I see myself connected to family and so a lot of things in the house that either came from family or pictures of family. I have a lot of pictures around, more than I need in this house; but that family piece, I think, is an important one (P1, IDN=53, TOT=55).

At another point during the interview, this same participant added, “My mom did the paintings. They would be a part of my house because they are my family” (P1). Other participants also depicted objects that were meaningful because that were representative of family relationships. One participant said:

I also like stuff that is pretty, but I like stuff that has meaning. Stuff that my mother has made for me. There’s a cushion on my couch that she made. There’s an afghan, a summer afghan that she’s made. I have a couple of other afghans that are beautiful that she made that I don’t have out. I have other pillows that she’s made, but because it’s summer they are not out. They are wool, needlepoint. I do like—my mother gave me that Tree of Life—I like that connection with family (P5, IDN=56, TOT=57).

Another participant, discussing a number of quilts that were displayed in several areas of her home, said, “I think it gives me a sense of family, especially as a single person. The quilts give me some kind of very positive feeling of family around me” (P6, IDN=59, TOT=68). Objects that either portrayed family members or were gifts from family members were significant to this group of participants. These objects were representative of those relationships and therefore provided a connection for them.

While objects from family and friends represented those relationships to the participants of this study, objects served as reminders of relationships as well. Representative objects stood for particular relationships while other objects helped participants remember those important to them. Eighty-two percent ( $n=18$ ) of participants discussed objects that reminded them of relationships. When referring to several objects displayed in her dining room, one participant said, “They are not something that I would go out and buy in an antique store but I keep them because they remind me of my family and my grandparents” (P15, IDN=54, TOT=60). Another participant used objects displayed on her walls to remind her of past relationships:

And part of that I kind of figured out is that my walls have become my scrapbook. And I like to keep some things there because it reminds me of people or events or places. And if they're put away somewhere I don't see them and I don't remember those. Like on that wall it's got all sorts of things: the man, the farmer, it's made of dough, and a friend of mine who has since died of AIDS gave me those and so I always want to keep them because I look at them and I think of Alan.... And so a lot of things I have up on the wall are so that I remember them and see them often (P1, IDN=53, TOT=55).

This same participant continued later in the interview by saying:

...things that remind me of people, and so, it's like sometimes there will be named thing on the wall and you'll say, why in the world would somebody put that on the wall—because it reminds me of somebody, and so the nice...it makes me feel good, to look at it, and say, 'Oh I hadn't thought about that person for a long time'" (P1).

Yet another participant remarked (see Figure 4.3.):

The doils were a gift from my mom after my dad had died. She loved them, in fact. She gave me the girl first one Christmas. She bought it a month or so before Christmas and was so excited that she couldn't wait to give it to me. So we both like them and there's the part about the red hair and coming from a family of red hair. I think of her when I see them and how much she liked them... (P9, IDN=80, TOT=80).

In a similar vein, when describing a cradle made by her grandfather and brought to the United States on a ship in the late 1800s, this participant said, "When I look at that it reminds me of what our ancestors made and did and the fact that they are still standing or still holding together" (P4, IDN=51, TOT=55). Photographs were also used by participants to remind themselves of the people in their lives. One participant said, "It's just a family wall. I have pictures down here of friends and one of my sisters, and wedding pictures, just to remind me what's important" (P22, IDN=64, TOT=59). Another participant summed up the phenomenon of objects serving as a reminder of a person's relationship by stating:

...but if you have objects that are associated with people, it's almost as if those objects give substance to the relationship that exists in a way, so you surround yourself with those objects and you have little reminders of the people and little substantial bits of the relationship there" (P6, IDN=59, TOT=68).



**Figure 4.3.** Example of dolls that were meaningful because they represented family and a special relationship (P9).

It was evident from the participants' comments that objects serve as both a reflection of relationships as well as reminders of important people in the participants' lives. In both situations, objects take the form of photographs, family heirlooms, or gifts

from important people. As reminders, objects can sometimes embody a relationship and offer an opportunity for participants to think of those people.

Status representation. Certain objects conveyed status in one of two different ways. First, objects were representative of personal accomplishments for which participants were proud. Finally, some objects were representative of other people's accomplishments.

Participants were proud to show off their own accomplishments. The objects that represented those accomplishments conveyed a part of each participant's self by displaying her skills to others and reinforcing them for herself. Fourteen participants (64%) discussed objects representing their personal accomplishments. One participant who had been a professional woman's basketball player conveyed this sense of accomplishment when she stated:

Having the basketball [pictures] down here as opposed to close to my ego room is because most people don't go to my ego room—that's for me. I guess I did want to show off that I was a basketball star, too. It's not right in the way but most people who are here will use that small bathroom downstairs and will see those two pictures (P11, IDN=58, TOT=64).

Another participant expressed this sense of accomplishment when talking about her recent renovation of her kitchen:

...things that represent achievements and goals that I have set for myself that I have accomplished, like in the kitchen. Remodeling and restoring the kitchen was a big thing and so there are certain things in the kitchen that are important because that was not an easy little thing. It was a major decision (P10, IDN=59, TOT=59).

Twelve participants (55%) were able to communicate the idea of status in regards to other people's accomplishments. They were proud to reveal that they owned

something that represented a major or interesting endeavor. One participant remarked at how lucky she felt to own a particular piece of art:

I valued that piece so much because [A locally known artist] made it. It took lots and lots of time and creative energy. I was so gifted [sic] to get that piece. I value the effort that goes into artwork. Very little monetary reward. People are artists because they love to be artists, not necessarily because it's going to make them rich. I think I place pretty high value on art for that reason. I feel like it's a piece of someone's soul, the art that they do (P13, IDN=31, TOT=39).

Regarding a small desk right next to the entry of her home, another participant said, "My grandfather made the desk. He was a carpenter. His works are well known—even in the White House he has works" (P12, IDN=42, TOT=44). One more participant summed this theme up particularly well when she said (see Figure 4.4.):

The bat photograph that I have hanging on the mantle is by a good friend of mine that I really valued. I really pestered him for the photograph because I wanted to show people I have a friend who can do this. I like animals and here is a great photograph of a bat taken at one 10,000<sup>th</sup> of a second. My friend can do this (P6, IDN=59, TOT=68).

Evidently, this group of participants used objects to represent their own accomplishments as well as those of others. When representing another's achievement, they identified with the object in a way that portrayed their pride in knowing someone else who could produce such a piece.

Memory representation. Objects also were representative of memories, both of places or events, and of people. Most participants said something regarding the memories attached to objects, going so far as saying, "I think everything in here has some kind of memory" (P17, IDN=40, TOT=53) and that things have to "remind me of something good" (P6, IDN=59, TOT=68). Yet another participant summed up this particular phenomenon when she said, "And I like to keep some things there because it reminds me

of people or events or places. And if they're put away somewhere I don't see them and I don't remember those" (P1, IDN=53, TOT=55).



**Figure 4.4.** Example of participant's pride in a photograph a friend was skilled enough to take (P6).

Twenty-one participants (96%) discussed objects that remind them of places or events in their lives. Objects that had memories attached to them were very important to this group of participants. Travel memories were of a high priority, but participants also had objects that reminded them of the home in which they grew up as well as objects that were representative of significant time periods in their lives. One participant said:

Like anything I've picked up on a trip or in traveling, then when I see it, it reminds me of either the place that I saw or the circumstances under which I purchased it, it I guess it's kind of a memory thing that triggers that particular point in time and where I was (P19, IDN=59, TOT=49).

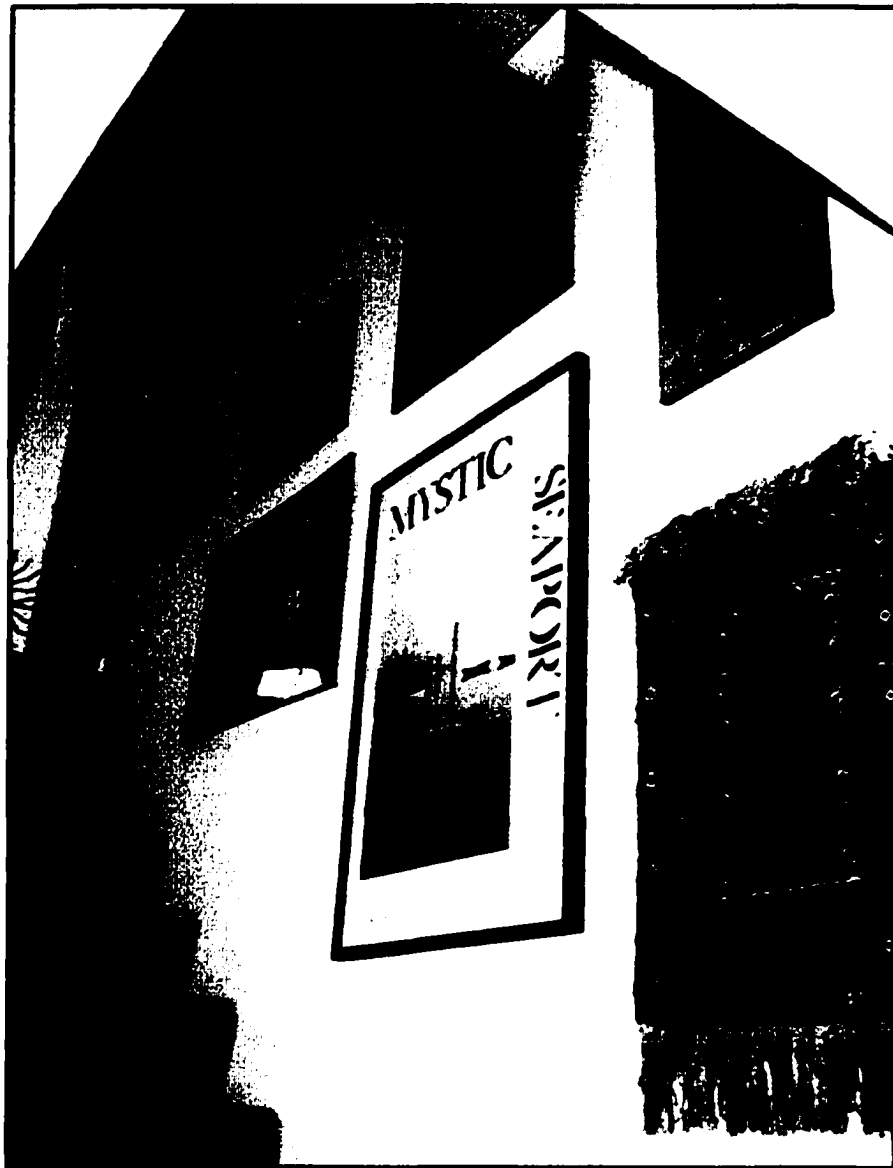
Representation of past travel experiences was often mentioned by participants. Regarding two large framed posters in one participant's living area, she said,

Well, it really represented two really incredible experiences on that trip that was outdoors and was fun...and those posters reflect those experiences, yet give a real feel for that country and they are both very different. They really represent that whole trip.... They were very different experiences, but that really represent the totality of that experience and what that country represents for us (P10, IDN=59, TOT=59).

Another participant, discussing the majority of the decoration of her guest bedroom, stated, "As a child my family lived overseas, so these are some artifacts from overseas, places where we lived and I've made four trips to Alaska, so these are the books on Alaska" (P9, IDN=80, TOT=80). Another participant who had traveled often and lived overseas in many places used objects throughout her home to remind her of these experiences (see Figure 4.5.):

Then I do like my souvenirs from overseas.... As you see I have most of my travel things here and everything that is on the wall, all the paintings and all the pictures, are from the places I have been. So I don't have anything on the wall that isn't reminiscent of something, someplace or thing I have been to (P16, IDN=51, TOT=45).

Participants used objects to represent other memorable times in their lives as well. One such participant, a former athlete, said, "It is my ego room so I usually iron in here in the morning. Stuff that reminds me.... I have a lot of trophies, but that is one that I won in Italy, so I like that" (P11, IDN=58, TOT=64). Another participant who had moved away from her hometown said, "Those are pictures of Seattle. My cousins said when I moved here that I should have something to remind me of my roots" (P18, IDN=53, TOT=51). Yet another participant had an entire room dedicated to her memories of where she grew up:



**Figure 4.5.** Example of participant's use of travel related posters and artifacts to remind her of past travels (P16).

This room is kind of my farm memory room. All the furniture in this room came from my grandfather's farm when he moved into a nursing home.... All the pictures on walls are the different family farms. My mother's family farm, my family farm that was my grandparents' who emigrated from Sweden was passed on to my brothers. So I have pictures of farms on the walls. The quilt was made by the women of my church that I grew up in. My mom bought it from the church bazaar, so I've consciously left this space as a collection of this from the country, from the farm (P2, IDN=43, TOT=50).

Objects also represented memories of people to the participants. They served to remind participants of the stories associated with people and the good or bad times when all together. One participant said:

My grandmother was also very...I guess that's part of it, the stories that you can tell through what the pieces are, more than what they say to anybody else. You can see the handle. Those weren't on there. She probably got it for five bucks and there's probably a story, yeah. 'I got that because it was going to be thrown away.' So she took it and it had the rack that goes up where you can hang the towels. So she didn't need that so she cut the wood to the size and made the handles (P7, IDN=45, TOT=45).

Another example came when one participant described a dining hutch in her kitchen:

Like this is, it's really cheap, it's made out of pine, but when I first moved into my first house and I had no money and there's this old couple across the road, and they came over or they invited me over one day and they said, 'Would you like to buy this hutch?' And of course I didn't have any money and so I said, 'I'd really like to buy it but I don't have any money.' And they said, 'What about \$25?' and I said, 'Yes, I will buy it for \$25.' And essentially they gave it to me. I don't remember their names, they are probably long since dead, but that was such a kind gesture that you want to sit there and say, 'I want to do that for somebody else who's young and struggling that you can sit there and say, 'Just take this, you know, because you need it and I don't need to be paid for it,' so it represented a behavior. Cause I sat there and said, 'I really don't have a good place for this, but somehow I don't want to get rid of it because I'll forget those people'" (P1, IDN=53, TOT=55).

Participants also used objects to remember activities that they did with friends and family members. One such participant said:

So looking at this table, it's not just the table, it's the hours spent going to auction sales, it's the hours spent, the three of us, and [my godparents] are elderly. Stripping this and refinishing it and varnishing it out in the hot and laughing and having a picnic on a blanket because we didn't have a table. They were older and it was kind of a challenge. So everything that I have tended to move along with me and keep has meaning to it" (P2, IDN=43, TOT=50).

All of the participants would agree that they convey messages to others and themselves with the objects they display and use in their homes. These messages relate to

their selves as they communicate information about who they are, their interests, where they have been, their family backgrounds, and the people who are important to them. While participants had been unable to articulate well how they determined the representation of their selves, they were able to easily describe objects that they knew were representative.

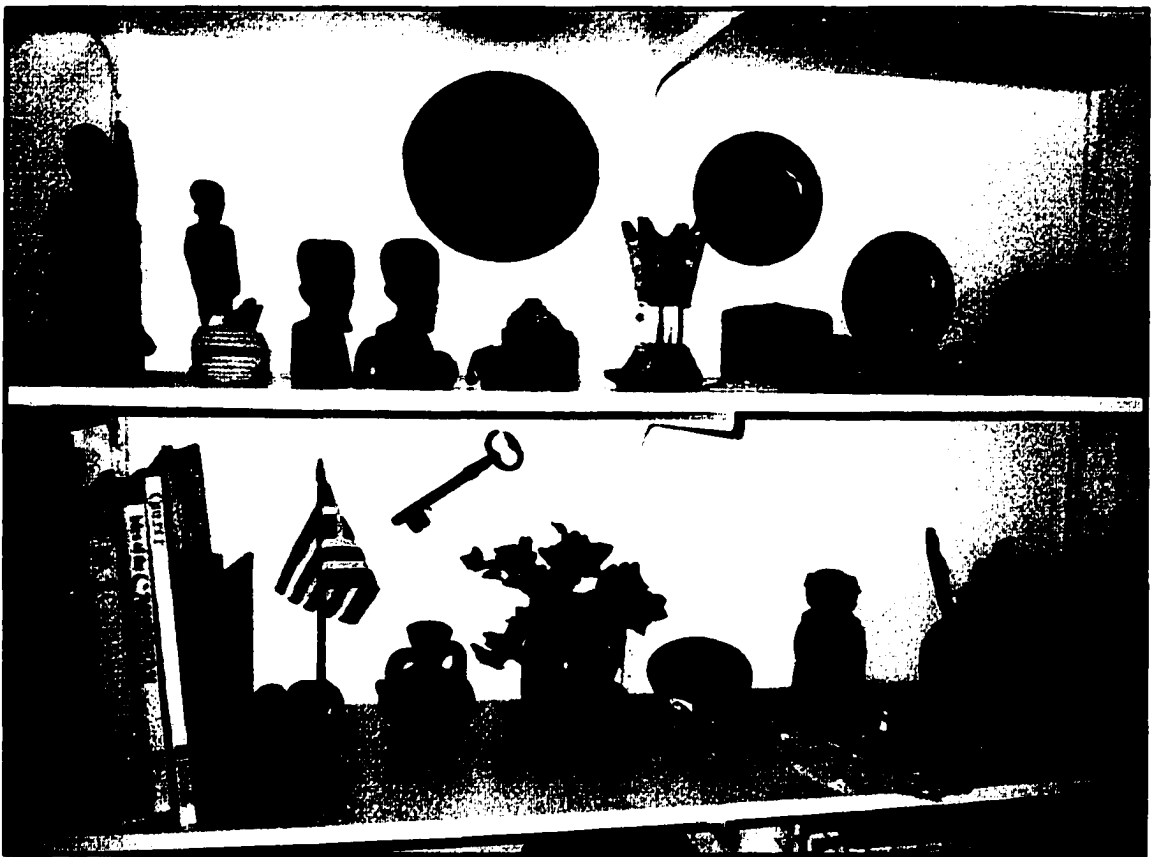
### Meaningful Objects

In a similar, and often overlapping, manner to representative objects, participants were also able to readily describe the objects that were more meaningful to them and why. To distinguish between the two concepts, all meaningful objects are also representative, but all representative objects are not meaningful. Participants had objects that communicated information about them to others and to themselves, but were not necessarily meaningful to them. However, some participants went so far as to say that they only displayed objects that had meaning to them, for example: “I like to have things that have meaning and not a lot of extra stuff that just occupies space” (P2, IDN= 43, TOT=50); and another: “I don’t have a lot of extra, but what I do have has a lot of meaning” (P10, IDN=59, TOT=59). Some objects were meaningful because they were symbolic of a particular time in participants’ lives; others because they were connected to a person or group of people. Only one participant described one of her meaningful objects as something that had significance because of the initial investment. Other items had relative little monetary value but were considered meaningful to their owners and were items that they would want to preserve in case of disaster (i.e., flood, fire, etc.).

Objects that were meaningful were usually ones that were symbolic of a time period in a person’s life or a significant person or group of people. One participant stated

that the most meaningful object in her home was a small key hung with other travel souvenirs (see Figure 4.6.):

That key that hangs there, that was a key to this old, old house that we lived in in St. Thomas and it was a very interesting old house. The doors were big old green things and that key was the key to the doors and the trouble was they never were locked anyway, so anybody could come in. We just had louvers on the windows. We didn't have screens or glass. There was just louvers, so they were all open. So that key reminds me a great deal of that particular time down there and it was the first big trip that I had taken. It was very exotic and very tough. Difficult with three little children. That key is the key to the first big trip and living overseas (P16, IDN=51, TOT=65).



**Figure 4.6.** Example of an object that was meaningful to the participant but was not necessarily communicated to others.

In a similar vein, another participant described a chair that had taken on significant meaning:

I mentioned that the rocking chair over there was my grandmother's and I can remember sitting in it when it was at her house and I can remember sitting in it when it was at my sister's house, because she had it before I did. I have a memory of rocking one of my sister's kids in it.... I had it covered, but I can still picture the old gold chair. My grandmother recovered it and it's one of those things that has to do with family. Yeah, those things are more important (P7, IDN=45, TOT=45).

Photographs also served as meaningful objects for participants, often symbolizing significant people. One participant used photographs of family members to signify her membership within the group:

Like the photos, part of the meaning is for me to surround myself with my family since I live so far away from them. That's important to me—so whenever I go in my house I see a member of my family. Being single and being so far away from my family—that's really important, too, so, so those things have meaning in that way as well (P11, IDN=58, TOT=64).

Like representative objects, participants used meaningful objects to convey messages to others and to themselves. These items served to remind them of important times in their lives, group membership, and significant people. They communicated to others what participants felt was important, whether it was their family, friends, or travel experiences.

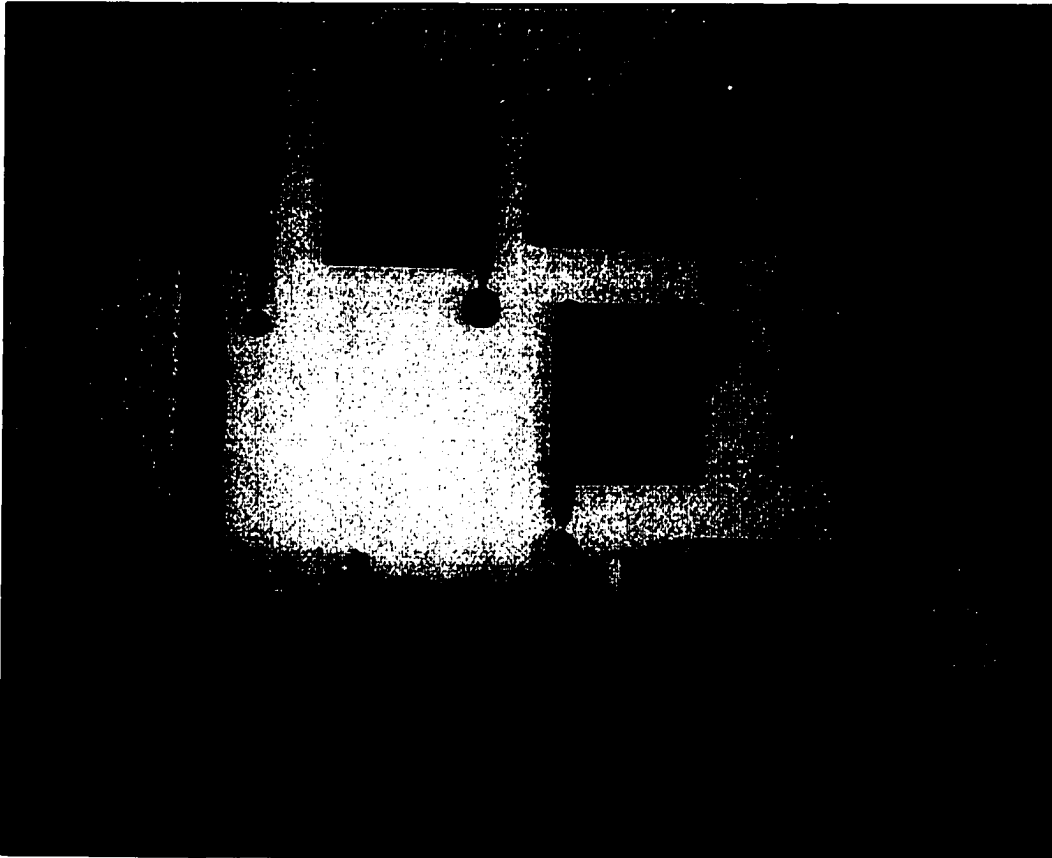
### Self-Reminders

While many of the messages that participants communicated through their homes were to others, to visitors of their homes, nineteen participants (86%) also used objects to support their identities to themselves. These reminders of self-identity were often placed in more private areas where visitors were less likely to travel.

Self-reminders represented accomplishments and reinforced participants' identities as someone who could do those things. One participant who was a former

athlete had a room she called her “ego room.” That room was primarily for her consumption and reinforced her identity as an athlete (see Figure 4.7.):

It is my ego room so I usually iron in here in the morning.... When I’m in this room I’m reminded where I’ve been and what I want to do.... Since I was a former athlete, there’s still a part of me that lingers on, so having things like the basketball out and the pictures helps me to remember who I am as a former athlete. Now I have to remember that I am an athlete because I haven’t done anything athletic since I have lived [here]. So it reminds me every year—you’ve got to do something. It was such a part of my identity for a long time as an athlete and coach.... I think it’s a boost to my ego when I need one. I’ll go in there and reminisce about my former life. I don’t do it very frequently, but it’s available if I need it...to me it is a reminder that I was an all-American. That probably more than any other place in the house conveys the message to me (P11, IDN=58, TOT=64).



**Figure 4.7.** Example of one participant’s “ego room” used as a self-reminder (P11).

Another participant also used objects in her home as a reminder of her accomplishments.

This participant said, “When I look at the teak wall over there it reminds me that I am

more competent than I usually remember that I am. So from that standpoint, it's a nice reminder that, 'hey, I can do this'" (P15, IDN=54, TOT=60). These examples indicate support of portions of the participants' identities that can sometimes be forgotten.

Objects and other interior design features also reminded participants of characteristics or family backgrounds that were more personal to them. One participant, describing an old chest her grandmother had altered, said, "So you know that doesn't make it an antique, but it is very much grandma. Make do with the things you have, use what you have. So in that way it reminds me who I am" (P7, IDN=45, TOT=45). In another reference to family, a participant discussed old photographs of her grandfather when he was still in Scotland as something "that does give me the grounding to who I was, who I am" (P4, IDN=51, TOT=55).

The objects that participants used as reminders of self were items that were either more personal to them or represented a part of their selves that needed reinforcement. These items served as messages to themselves and were important to their identities because they embodied portions of their selves that were vulnerable, even if only vulnerable to forgetfulness.

### Public and Private Messages

Participants were able to articulate certain messages as connected to public and private spaces. Bedrooms were specifically portrayed as being private and more personal spaces. Objects placed within the bedroom communicated messages back to the homeowners rather than to visitors. Consistent with previous work, the living room was referred to as the most public area of the home, however few people specifically discussed this room in that manner. Instead, most echoed the account of one participant:

“I guess the whole place is semi-private and semi-public [because I live alone]” (P6, IDN=59, TOT=68).

The concept of bedrooms as havens of personal space was discussed by sixteen participants (73%). Their image of this room ranged from a refuge or haven, to a softer, more intimate and feminine setting. Their sentiments extended from a desire for a “really restful, contemplative...kind of thing. Soothing.... I want to use it for rest” (P15, IDN=54, TOT=60), to a “little more intimate and a little more warm” (P7, IDN=45, TOT=45). Femininity was also an important aspect for these participant’s bedrooms. One such participant said, “I wanted it to be a little more feminine than the rest of the house because it’s my place” (P16, IDN=51, TOT=45). Another, who equated flowery with feminine, said, “I think upstairs is a little more flowery. I have flowers on my bedspread and my bathroom shower curtain. Yeah, I would say the upstairs is a little more flowery. I guess because that’s a little more personal” (P21, IDN=39, TOT=43).

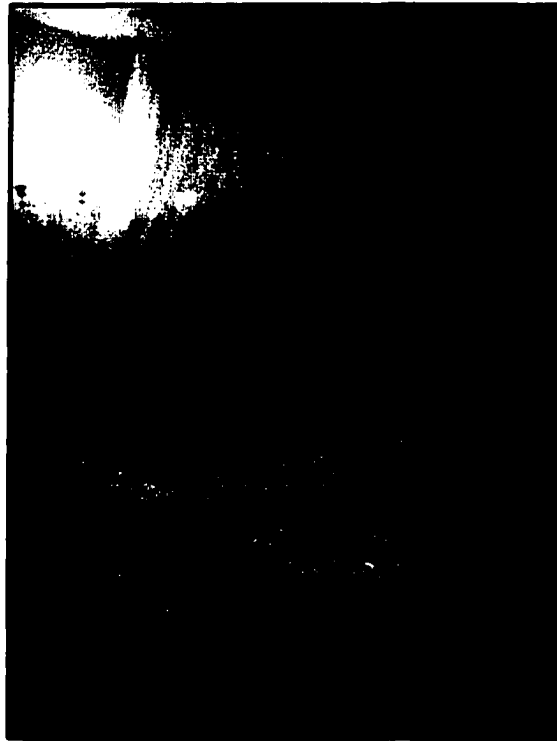
Participants also discussed the display of very personal objects or objects that communicated special things back to their selves as items that were specifically found in their bedrooms. One participant said (see Figure 4.8.):

I think my bedroom holds my most precious things because it’s a safe haven. It’s where you are vulnerable because you are asleep. I have pictures of my mom when she was young and pictures of those people closest to me. I love lights that have crystals, so I have a chandelier up there. I also have a romantic print of a man and woman that I’ve always loved. Maybe it holds my dreams. All those things that are magical in my dreams are up there. And the mosquito netting, it just makes it a dream atmosphere and then I have the old peignoir set on the mannequin up there. Very feminine, petite, makes me think of myself. Pampered (P12, IDN=42, TOT=44).

In a similar vein, another participant said, “Like in my bedroom, I have a little thing hanging on my wall that is just a written message about friendship. That’s a more

personal thing so it goes in my bedroom” (P21, IDN=39, TOT=43). Yet another said, “I really like my [bed] room. It’s a warm, cozy room and I read in bed at night. I love those things that are in there so I want them with me rather than spread out somewhere” (P20, IDN=55, TOT=54). One participant even put her personal items away when others came to stay in her room:

I have a little like an alter area, not religious, next to my bed. I have statuary and little token things. That’s probably the most personal. I know when I’ve had people stay in that room, I pick that up and box it and put it away. It’s like I really don’t want to share it with anybody (P17, IDN=40, TOT=53).



**Figure 4.8.** Example of participant’s bedroom where she keeps her very personal items close to her (P12).

This concept of personal displays specifically for self are important messages that help to support participants’ identities. While many of the other messages are to others, to visitors to the home, these are primarily aimed at self. They support participants’ most

personal aspects of their selves, and are placed in an effort to rejuvenate the participants' souls.

### Summary of Research Question Two

The participating women conveyed messages about who they were to themselves and others. They used objects to represent personal characteristics, interests, valued relationships, accomplishments, and significant memories of travel, personal experiences, and important people. The messages these representative objects conveyed were either direct symbols of participants' selves, or were expressive of notable areas of their lives and therefore symbolic of self. Representative objects and other design features conveyed meaning to visitors and served as reminders of self back to participants. These objects, especially the most private and personal ones located in their bedrooms, served to reinforce important aspects of participants' lives and bolster their impressions of self.

### Research Question Three

What methods do women employ to express their self with the interior design of their residential environment?

### Purposive Articulation of Self

Participants discussed their decisive communication of self with the use of specific objects and interior design features in their homes. Seventeen participants (77%) recalled their purposive articulation of whom they were and whom they wanted to be seen as. This distinction relates to their earlier descriptions of their identity and how they wanted others to view them. This specific expression was found to be a primary method of communication about their identities.

**One participant chose specifically to put photos of herself playing professional basketball in an area where guests would see them:**

**Having the basketball [photos] down here as opposed to close to my ego room is because most people don't go to my ego room—that's for me. I guess I did want to show off that I was a basketball star, too.... It certainly would convey a message to them—wow, she really was good (P11, IDN=58, TOT=64).**

**While that participant wanted to communicate messages about her former career, another wanted to communicate information about her life overseas. When asked whether she thought that a particular area of her home expressed something about her, she said:**

**Oh definitely. It tells the story of some of the places I've been and then these are my own photographs of places that I've been at.... These are all—this is Scotland, England, and this is basically New England. This is in Canada. This is Ephesus in Turkey, Mikonos, Santarini, and this is a little island I stayed at for quite some time, Patmos. This is Santarini, one of those Greek Isles.... Those are the things that I think express my personality, my philosophy, that kind of stuff (P16, IDN=51, TOT=45).**

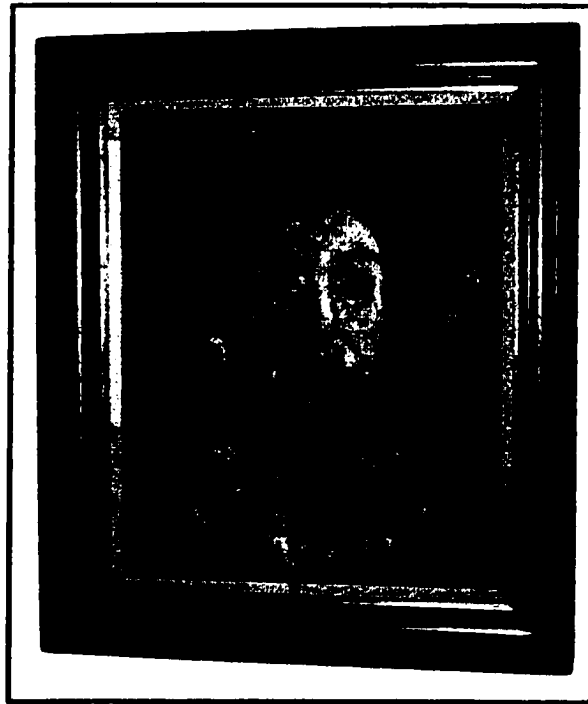
**Another participant, when asked what she wanted her home to express about her identity, said:**

**I would hope that it would convey my interests in the profession I spent so much time in and the travels I have been fortunate enough to be a part of. The historical pieces that I like, from my family (P19, IDN=59, TOT=49).**

**In a reference that specifically acknowledges the use of the home as a tool for communicating messages about self, this participant stated, “The part about wanting people to recognize that I'm a neat, interesting, clever person who is somewhat traveled, has a lot of interests, diverse.... I want people to recognize that from what I have in my house” (P6, IDN=59, TOT=68). While findings indicate that participants wanted to convey information about their personal characteristics and backgrounds, there was also some evidence that they also wanted their interiors to convey messages about who they**

wanted to be. Although only five women (23%) discussed their purposive articulation of a desired self, it is still a method employed to communicate self. In the most descriptive example, one participant refers to a painting hanging in her living room (see Figure 4.9.):

I think that the picture of Ethel, it kind of represents who I am or who I kind of like to be. I've always said I thought I should be like the Auntie Maime character.... Auntie Maime spoils the young kids, and is a little bit flamboyant. The book, 'When I'm Old I Shall Wear Purple,' is one I identify with. And so that [painting] represents kind of who, the way I like to see myself. I don't know if I'm really that way, but that's the way I like to see myself... kind of a little flamboyant, and kind of classy. More classy than I think I am, I strive to be classier than I am (P1, IDN=53, TOT=55).



**Figure 4.9.** Painting of Ethel—An example of the purposive articulation of a desired self (P1).

The phenomenon of purposive articulation of self is an important method in the effort to communicate self to others. The idea that these participants specifically considered what they wanted other people to learn about them is essential to the study of identity expression in the home. As previously stated in this chapter, participants rarely

consciously considered their “self” when choosing objects to display. However, it must be mentioned that there were quite a few emphatic statements about purposive articulation of self. In summary, while participants did not consciously consider their identity when purchasing or deciding to display objects, they did understand who they were and how they wanted to be seen. They then used that information to express their selves with the interior design of their homes.

### Message Communication

Participants conveyed the process by which they communicated important messages about their selves to others through the interior design of their homes. All (100%) of the participants made some mention of this process while discussing meaningful objects or items that were representative of self. Most people allowed guests to show interest in objects before they discussed the object’s significance, however, some used objects or other interior design features to achieve a particular response or placed objects in a particular location in an effort to attain a response.

Just as participants used objects to decisively communicate messages about who they were, they attempted to ensure this communication in order to stimulate questions about those items. One participant said:

I certainly want people to understand, but I wouldn’t have to say anything, that I was a college athlete. That’s implicit in the picture. They could ask about that and I would say it was the first professional league in the U.S. So I guess it stimulates the question that I could easily clarify and make sure people understand what that basketball background was (P11, IDN=58, TOT=64).

The communication of important messages was described as a responsive process: “I don’t force it on them. I let them bring it up and then I’ll talk about what they are paying attention to” (P21, IDN=39, TOT=43). Another echoed that thought with:

Where I would want to convey the message that this is important is again the family stuff and the farm. I'm introverted enough that I'm not going to push myself on anybody and I'm not going to share personal stuff unless somebody asks or I know they are open to it (P17, IDN=40, TOT=53).

Another concept that emerged was that there was consideration to project a specific image. Participants attempted to communicate, for example, a softer image or a vibrant personality, such as this participant's statement who, earlier in the interview noted that she was working at being a little softer:

There was a time when I just didn't have this many plants. I thought, 'well, what would help soften this so it wouldn't feel so austere?' So, I started picking up plants right and left and doing different... and then I realized the flowers would help, so I've thrown in flowers here and there. I think that's helped to soften it up considerably (P13, IDN=31, TOT=39).

Along the same vein, but on a different subject, another participant said, "Because of my love for ethnic textiles, I suppose that is something that I would communicate to people, whether orally or not, but at least visibly [they] would pick up that was important to me" (P19, IDN=59, TOT=49).

Participants also used objects and other interior design features to achieve a specific response in an effort to communicate who they are. One such participant said:

[My family] are all from that traditional farm kind of family thing, so I deliberately set out the Nexus magazine, the Healing Paths magazine, things like that. The metaphysical stuff I like to read. Maybe it was part of me to see if they took notice and say something about it (P2, IDN=43, TOT=50).

Another participant, who had purposely placed an old stove in the center of her living room in an effort to communicate her background, said, "A lot of them will ask about the stove.... I'll tell them it was my grandparent's and they had used it up until I was a little girl. Then I go into stories about my grandparents" (P21, IDN=39, TOT=43). Yet another used objects to introduce people to who she was:

Most of that gets communicated through the course of conversation. Most people that have come here have been surprised and inquisitive about the stuff that is around. In my experience of inviting people here for the first time, there's a lot of questions about things. Like 'where did that come from?' Most of my stuff gets people asking questions. That's an icebreaker and makes people feel more comfortable and more friendly (P13, IDN=31, TOT=39).

This conscious consideration of communication is an important method these women used to express their selves with the interior design of their homes. As presented earlier, these women considered what they wanted others to learn about them and displayed objects that communicated these messages. They then chose to attain particular responses from visitors to their homes by displaying items that conjured questions in particular locations where those visitors would see them.

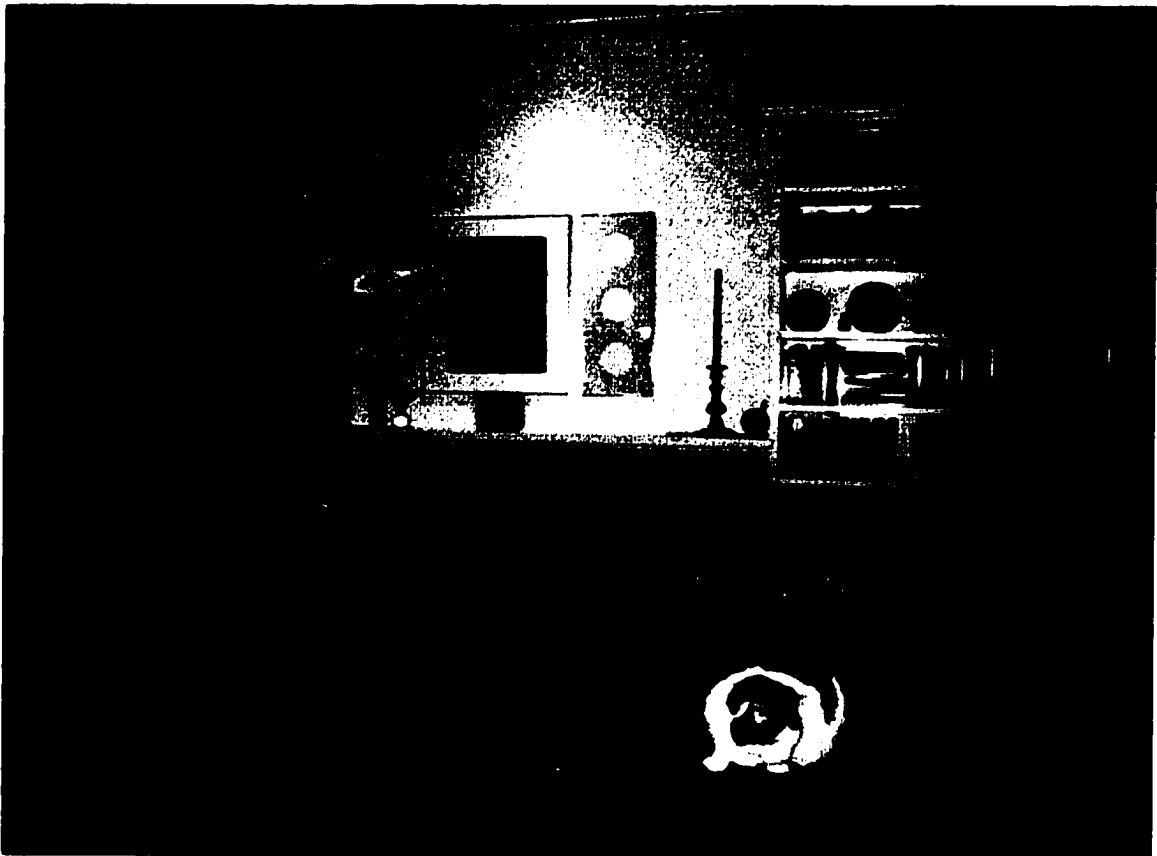
#### Determination of Object Location for Self Expression

Object placement or location emerged as an essential method of supporting one's self and communicating self to others. While all participants (100%) discussed aspects of object placement, much of that discussion was related to fit of objects with overall aesthetics and other design considerations (i.e., function, etc.). However, thirteen participants (59%) provided information about the placement of objects specifically in an effort to communicate to self or communicate to others. A *t*-test was conducted to determine whether there was a difference between women who specifically used item location as a method for communicating self and those who did not regarding their Identity scores, Total Self-Concept scores, or age, and compared to those who did not discuss this concept. No significant differences were found.

Object placement emerged as a method women use to support their own identities. Participants placed important items in areas where they could view them often,

or as discussed earlier in reference to very personal items, in areas where *only* they could see them. One participant had a rotating display on her fireplace mantle of pieces that were important to her and were reminders of recent events or people (see Figure 4.10.):

They move around, because so many of them are significant. Right now Mary is on the mantle because I want to look at her all the time. At night I read...on the black [sofa] with my feet up mean[ing] I am facing the mantle so I get to look at whatever is up there. I have the light to shine down on things there. It's a good viewing place for me to see the things that are so much of me (P5, IDN=56, TOT=57).



**Figure 4.10.** Example of object placement for personal viewing. Participant rotated special items on her mantel so that she could see them when reading on her sofa (P5).

In another use of the fireplace mantle for location of significant items, this participant said:

I thought the whole composition was very simple and represented important things to me like friendship, and my family, and doing a good

job for someone, and an artistic nature. That's kind of why that all went together the way it did (P13, IDN=31, TOT=39).

As indicated by the previous two participant statements, the living room is also an important place to display objects of a personal nature (as opposed to the bedroom). One participant also placed her more meaningful objects in the living room:

Probably the pieces that are in this room are by far the most meaningful to me and that's just because this is the living area, where I hang out a lot. If there were a pecking order that would mean they are in this room somewhere (P4, IDN=51, TOT=55).

It should be noted, however, that this same participant continued by describing significant items in her bedroom:

As you saw my grandfather's picture—those are those kinds of things that I can see first thing in the morning and last thing at night. The cradle is also in that room, the bedroom, also photos of the family. So it's just that kind of being able to connect back with family and to know that thick or thin, right or wrong, they are going to be there for you (P4).

These statements indicate support of previous findings that more personal, private pieces were usually placed in participants' bedrooms, however, participants used other commonly frequented areas of their homes for significant objects as well. These significant objects sustained their sense of self and reminded them of important aspects of their lives.

Objects and other interior design features were used to communicate participants' selves to others also. For example, one participant wanted to indicate a show of strength when visitors entered her home: "...when people are walking in I want them to see strong. This is a show of strength. Friends, family, nature" (P21, IDN=39, TOT=43). Another participant agreed by saying, "The placing of

the photos of my children on the mantle, I think that says to people how important they are to me” (P13, IDN=31, TOT=39).

Object placement was one of the methods participants used to communicate who they were to others and to themselves. They supported their identities to themselves by placing items of importance in areas where they frequented, and differentiated among these items in terms of their personal nature. Objects that were more personal often were placed in their bedrooms, whereas items that were significant in other ways were often placed in their living areas. Participants also placed objects in an effort to communicate significant items to others. This method of communication offered visitors the opportunity to view pieces of the owners’ selves by showing objects of significance.

### Summary of Research Question Three

Participants used a variety of interlinked methods to communicate their selves to others and also back to themselves. They understood the role that objects and other interior design features played in representing self and used those items to purposively communicate information about who they were. These items were displayed in a manner that created interest on the part of the observer which was presented in the form of questions. While participants did not actively approach visitors with unsolicited information, if questions were asked, participants took it as an opportunity to relay information about the meaning of those objects and therefore insight into their selves. Participants also used location of these objects to communicate information to others and to themselves. Items that were important for public consumption of self were placed in more public areas of the

home, whereas items that supported self were placed in private areas such as participants' bedrooms.

### Summary of Findings

Although the decision-making processes regarding the expression of self in the residential interior environment were at first based on an unconscious construction of self, participants understood and were able to articulate that objects with significant connections to people and events were representative of self. They also recognized objects that specifically were not representative of self (Identity...Not, Frietas, *et al.*, 1997), and that items without connections were meaningless and could easily be discarded. These items were identified as unrepresentative. Participants designed their homes specifically for their own use and were relatively unconcerned by the opinions of others—above all, personal satisfaction was essential in the design of their homes and it was most important that meaningful items, rather than purely aesthetic pieces, were displayed.

Participants used objects and other interior design features that were representative of different parts of their identity to convey messages about who they were to others and back to themselves. These objects were most often representative of personal characteristics, interests, valued relationships, status, and important memories, and in addition to communicating information to others, they also served to remind participants of special events, people, and accomplishments. Many of the messages to self were particularly personal and served to reinforce important aspects of participants' lives and bolster their impressions of self.

**These participants used objects to communicate specific aspects of their identity to others and to themselves. They displayed items in a manner that would solicit inquiry from visitors so that purposeful communication of self would likely occur. Messages to others were placed in more publicly viewed areas of the home such as the living room, whereas messages to self were placed in more private areas of the home such as the bedroom.**

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

This chapter first presents a brief summary of this study including its method and findings. All research questions are presented and discussed individually, incorporating literature reviewed in Chapter Two as well as the questions' relevance to existing theory. A theory and model based on the findings is presented. Finally, conclusive statements and recommendations for future research are offered.

#### Summary of Study

Design researchers have generally accepted that people express who they are, or their selves, through the interior design of their residential environments (Cooper, 1974; Cooper Marcus, 1995; Csiksentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981; Gunter, 2000). The interior design of the home represents "expressions of our image of ourselves, all are messages about ourselves that we want to convey back to ourselves" (Cooper, 1974, p. 131) and to guests of the home. Objects found within the home support people's own sense of self and communicate information about self to others (Csiksentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981). More recently, Gunter (2000) said that the home was a projection of self, and that "it transmits messages about us to the rest of the world and reflects back aspects of our defining characteristics on to us, providing clarification and reinforcement of our self-identity" (p. 157).

The present research employed a mixed method approach. The primary research design was based on Glaser and Strauss' grounded theory method (Glaser, 1978, 1992; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss, 1987; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). This method involves the systematic categorization of statements to understand and illustrate relationships between concepts. Through open, axial, and selective coding, the three steps of coding commonly used in the grounded theory approach, the researcher was able to identify, develop, and relate concepts in an effort to build theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The secondary research design was quantitative in nature. Data were collected with the Tennessee Self-Concept Scale, an instrument that provides a measure of self-concept and has been standardized on a national sample of more than 3,000 individuals between the ages of 7-90 (Fitts & Warren, 1996). This instrument provided a multidimensional description of self-concept, defined by Fitts and Warren (1996) as "who am I." These data were collected to support the interviews and provided a measure of the strength of each participant's sense of self.

Twenty-two women were interviewed in this study. The sample was acquired through word-of-mouth identification of women who fit the participant profile. Each participant was contacted via phone or email and presented with the interview procedures. Participants were single women who had either never been married or had been divorced for more the five years. They had professional careers including college educator, counselor, and veterinary technician. All of the participants lived alone and owned their own homes. Interviews were conducted in each participant's home at a time convenient for both the researcher and participant. Most interviews took place at the dining room table or living room sofa in each home. Participants were first asked to

photograph areas of their homes where they believed the objects and other interior design features represented them well. They were then asked a series of questions to attain an information-rich view of how they expressed their identity through the interior design of their homes (see Appendix C). Finally, participants were asked to complete a short demographic survey (see Appendix D) and the Tennessee Self-Concept Scale (TS-CS). Interview sessions lasted approximately 1.5 hours.

It was determined that there were significant differences between this group of participants and women who were represented in the standardized sample of the Tennessee Self-Concept Scale regarding their Total Self-Concept score. This group of participants had a higher mean Total Self-Concept score than did the women in the standardized group. When interpreting these scores, as well as the qualitative findings, it is important to recognize that this group of participants also was much more educated than most people within our society. The means indicate that they averaged above a bachelor's degree level, and 68% of participants had earned either a master's degree or doctoral degree. It also should be noted that participants with a higher Identity score and Total Self-Concept score tended to be much more articulate in their interviews about how they expressed their selves with the interior design of their homes. Their TS-CS scores indicated that they knew themselves well and were comfortable with who they were. Their responses during the interviews underscored this comfort with their selves.

Qualitative analyses were organized around three research questions:

1. What are the decision-making processes women use when deciding how and where to express their identity through the interior design of their residential environments?
2. What messages do women convey about their self and to whom are they conveying them to with the interior design of their residential environment?

**3. What methods do women employ to express their self with the interior design of their residential environments?**

Although the decision-making processes regarding the expression of self in the residential interior environment were at first based on an unconscious construction of self, participants understood and were able to articulate that objects with significant connections to people, events, and personal characteristics were representative of self. They also recognized objects that specifically were not representative of self, and that items without connections were meaningless and could easily be discarded. These items were identified as unrepresentative. Participants designed their homes specifically for their own use and were relatively unconcerned by the opinions of others—above all, personal satisfaction was essential in the design of their homes and it was most important that meaningful items, rather than purely aesthetic pieces, were displayed.

Participants used objects and other interior design features that were representative of different parts of their self to convey messages about who they were to others and back to themselves. These objects were most often representative of personal characteristics, interests, valued relationships, status, and important memories, and in addition to communicating information to others, they also served to remind participants of special events, people, and accomplishments. Many of the messages to self were particularly personal and served to reinforce important aspects of participants' lives and bolster their impressions of self.

Participants used inquiry solicitation and object location as methods of communicating messages about who they were to others and to themselves. They displayed items in a manner that would solicit inquiry from visitors so that purposeful

communication of self would likely occur. Messages to others were placed in more publicly viewed areas of the home such as the living room, whereas messages to self were placed in more private areas of the home such as the bedroom.

## Discussion

### Research Question One

What are the decision-making processes women use when deciding how and where to express their identity through the interior design of their residential environments?

Whereas findings from this study indicated that the construction of self was only involuntarily considered by participants, they also suggested that participants were able to articulate and identify those objects and other interior design features that were both representative of self and unrepresentative of self. Determining what is and is not evocative of self is an important contribution to understanding the decisions of women regarding self-expression in the home. Cooper (1974) recognized the difficulty of cognizant expression of self when stating, “on a less conscious level, I believe, man [sic] also frequently selects the house, that basic protector of his [sic] internal environment (beyond skin and clothing) to represent or symbolize what is tantalizingly unrepresentable” (p. 131). At first glance, the depth of participants’ perception of their expression of self was only rudimentary; however, if considered in terms of Belk’s (1992) concept of the Extended Self, these perceptions could be interpreted to represent a much deeper concept. Belk (1992) and much earlier, James (1890), said that what is seen as “me” also can be seen as “mine.” If we interpret this concept to mean that the construction of self could be achieved through identifying that which one owns, then although participants stated that they did not consciously determine their means of self-

expression, they did recognize those items that were representative. Thus, one might conclude that participants actively constructed their selves through their interior design choices. Participants who were able to identify objects and other interior design features that were representative of self were therefore able to identify and express self. This concept is also supported by Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton's (1981) findings that acknowledged that objects help people to construct, not just preserve, their identity. Participants used objects that were more personal to them or that represented a part of their selves that needed reinforcement, as reminders of self. They made decisions about how they would express their selves by choosing objects that supported their own concept of self. This is consistent with symbolic self-completion theory (Wicklund & Gollweitzer, 1982) which predicts that people who have an incomplete self-definition tend to complete this identity by acquiring and displaying symbols associated with the identity for which they are striving.

In a similar vein, participants identified objects and other interior design features that characterized connections with people or events as items that were representative of self. The connectivity that these items represented was a determining factor of the level of an object's importance as well as a significant segment of the decision-making process women used to determine how and where to express their selves in their homes. Belk (1992) also described this phenomenon in terms of the Extended Self when comparing the emotional attachment one feels for a set of family china with the functional involvement one feels for a recently purchased umbrella. Only items of symbolic value would constitute the Extended Self. Therefore, the findings of this current study help to

support Belk's concept, as it was only objects and other interior design features that signified connectivity that could be considered a part of the Extended Self.

Participants were easily able to identify objects and other interior design features that were not representative of their selves, or as Freitas *et al.* (1997) termed the antithesis of identity or identity *not* (sic). In a similar manner to Freitas' *et al.* (1997) disassociation with certain styles of dress, this group of participants disassociated with particular interior styles they did not consider representative of self. Participants remarked, "I don't like cold contemporary" (P15) and "[My mom] thinks I'm still into country...but she doesn't realize that they're not me anymore" (P12). These statements are easily compared by those presented by Freitas *et al.* (1997) in terms of style of apparel that are appropriate for a different type of person. This current study, then, serves to extend the concept of identity *not* [sic] from its original reference of one's disassociation with dress style (e.g., "that blouse just isn't me") to one's disassociation with interior style (e.g., "...but [the Ethan Allen furniture] wasn't really me" (P19)).

Another portion of the decision-making process included participants' desire to create a home primarily for personal satisfaction. Searing (2000) found that the overarching objective of interior designers was to create a home that was representative of its inhabitants, without as much regard for visitors' opinions. Rapoport (1982) also stated, "home is simultaneously a haven for withdrawal from society and a credential for esteem and the respect of others" (p. 13). In an effort to create this haven, people need a place to withdraw from society. Items displayed in the home help to create that haven. Eshelman and Evans (2002) stipulated that satisfaction with space occurs "when a residence is marked with the personality of the individual resident" (p. 6). The present

study served to bolster the arguments made by Searing (2000), Rapoport (1982), and Eshelman and Evans (2002), as many of these participants designed their homes with their own personal satisfaction in mind. The creation of a home that served their own needs and represented important aspects in their lives was more important than the opinions of others. When one participant described the group of objects on the wall that may have been unrelated to the casual observer, but represented valued relationships to her, she said, "...so it's like that wall of stuff may not be pleasing to anybody else, I think it's visually pleasing, so that doesn't bother me" (P1).

The concept of "home for personal satisfaction," however, also can be approached from the symbolic interactionist perspective. One of the symbolic interaction premises refers to the role of definition. An object is not simply defined by reality—it is what it is because that is what it is—but the meaning rather is socially constructed—it is what it is because that is the meaning that is understood by all of the people viewing it (Charon, 2001). Although it is the meaning of the objects as the owner defines them that is important, others viewing those objects must understand approximately the same meaning for the interaction to be meaningful. Thus, although the findings of this study suggest that home was primarily for personal satisfaction without as much regard for others' opinions, visitors to the home also should understand the meaning of the objects as defined by their owners to ensure meaningful interaction. The question is, then, if a person is living alone and cares less that other people understand the meanings of the objects within her home than she cares about her own personal satisfaction, then does the interaction have to be meaningful? Does her own sense of reality take precedence? This question might be better addressed in future studies with multiple household members

due to increased opportunity and importance of the occurrence of meaningful communication, rather than with single women who live alone.

### Research Question Two

What messages do women convey about their selves and to whom are they conveying them to with the interior design of their residential environment?

As stated in Chapter Four, participants used objects and other interior design features to convey messages about their selves to others and to themselves. These messages communicated information about personal characteristics, interests, relationships, accomplishments, and memories to others and served to remind participants of important people and the past. Searing's (2000) research indicated that objects reinforced the dweller's sense of self and helped to "define and represent who they are as well as what they stand for or believe in" (p. 109). Furthermore, those findings revealed "that domestic objects represent the characteristics of people, their interests, memories of their travel experiences throughout life, and relationships to family" (p. 110). In another, more comprehensive study based on interviews with 315 individuals in 82 families that specifically looked at the symbolism of domestic objects, Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton (1981) also found that domestic objects "help to define who we are as individuals" (p. 92). They found that people categorize objects in terms of memories and experiences, and in reference to self and to the family. Furthermore, Boschetti (1995) grouped objects into two categories from interviews with senior adults living in their own homes: (a) those representing connections with important people or events; and (b) those representing family history which were passed down through generations. Although the present study found objects to be grouped in a wider variety and in more specific categories than did these other, previously mentioned, studies, all serve to underscore

people's use of objects to represent meaning for self. The present study, therefore, serves to verify and validate prior findings.

The present findings reveal two primary messages with respect to messages communicated to others—thereby expressing self—and messages to self that serve as reminders and support of self. Participants were able to articulate messages that served to tell visitors to their homes about who they were, their interests, their accomplishments, and the important people and events in their lives. These messages were opportunities for participants to “practice” impression management and to project what Goffman (1959) would consider a “personal front.” These items of “expressive equipment” (p. 24) serve to give clues about the performer, or person projecting an image. In similar fashion, Kron (1983) found that homemakers personalize more when they are expecting visitors in an effort to “manage the impression they will give others” (p. 61). The objects and other interior design features in this present study assist to manage the impression that others would receive about whom the participants were and what they were all about. Gunter (2000), however, pointed out that “much depends on the inherent nature of our personality, however, and how comfortable we feel putting our inner selves on display” (p. 115).

One interesting concept that emerged from the present study related to objects that represented status. Although other authors found that objects were a means of expressing status, findings of the current study did not directly support those suppositions. While status was included within one of the categories of representative objects, it typically referred to objects that represented personal accomplishments and the accomplishments of others rather than objects that would convey information about social class or structure

(see Riggins, 1994). All of the participants in the current study indicated that they were confident enough with who they were to project that image to all visitors—there were not different messages to different types of people, and a display of opulence was not desired. Although socio-economic status was not measured in this study, it was evident that all of the participants might be considered “upper middle class” based on participants’ high level of education. None projected themselves as wealthy or poor. Regardless of participants’ apparent “upper middle class” stature, their homes reflected a tendency toward “homeyness,” a concept discussed by Costa and Belk (1990) and McCracken (1989). Both authors referred to people of lower and middle social classes as more likely to strive for “homeyness” in contrast to people of a higher social class (presumably “upper class”).

Belk’s (1992) concept that objects remind people of who they are was also supported by this study. Participants used objects and other interior design features to remind themselves of important relationships, past activities and events, and past accomplishments. Rose (1995) found that the meanings one gives to place, and thus the messages to self, are often so strong that they become an integral part of the self. This concept was exhibited by participant statements such as “...when I’m in this room I’m reminded where I’ve been and what I want to do...” (P11) and “Make do with the things you have, use what you have. So in that way it reminds me who I am” (P7).

Another interesting finding was the meaning of certain objects to self. Kron (1983) said that visitors do not know which objects hold the highest significance to their owner. Objects with purely personal meaning tended to be the most meaningful in the home. One participant exhibited this concept when she described the key to her old house

in St. Thomas, Virgin Islands. That key represented an adventurous time in her life and her first experience of living overseas. Although there were other objects that visitors to her home found more intriguing (see Figure 4.6), the key represented special meaning and a specific part of her self (P16). Again, examining the relevance of this issue to the symbolic interaction perspective brings into question the value of shared meanings within the home. For women who live alone and may or may not entertain often, the importance of communicating to others the most personal of memories or experiences through the interior design of one home may be diminished. It is evident the meaning to self that is most significant and symbolic to these participants.

### Research Question Three

What methods do women employ to express their selves with the interior design of their residential environments?

The primary method women used to express their selves in their homes was inquiry solicitation through object placement. The display of objects in public versus private spaces was often a consideration for this group of participants, although as they all lived alone, most viewed their whole home as semi-public and semi-private. Objects that communicated information about self to others were usually placed in areas of the home within the line of sight of visitors. This strategy aligns with Rapoport's (1982) supposition that for identity cues to be understood by others they must stand out from their surroundings and be redundant. Goffman (1959), when describing the setting in which interactions take place, cited the living room as a location for sign-equipment—items defined as leading to an automatic response to set the stage for interaction (Charon, 2001). This is also supported by several other studies regarding the living room. Living rooms were found to be “the place where the use of artifacts for the purpose of

impression management is the most obvious and deliberate” (Riggins, 1994, p. 102)

because it is the most public area of the home and where visitors are often received. The living room was also found to be:

the area where performances for guests are most often given, and hence the setting of it must be appropriate to the performance. Thus we expect that more than any other part of the home, the living room reflects the individual’s conscious and unconscious attempts to express a social identity (Laumann & House, 1972, p.190).

These concepts were validated by participants of the current study. One referred to public messages that were communicated when entertaining visitors in the public areas of her home (P3). Another placed prized collections in the living and dining rooms of her home in an effort to create opportunities for discussion about those pieces (P4).

Objects of very personal significance were usually placed in more private areas, such as the bedroom. Gunter (2000) previously established that bedrooms “are often the only place in the house, despite the lack of locks, [that] still require permission from the occupant to enter” (p. 107). Interior design textbooks support the concept of a private zone primarily for the home’s occupants (see Allen, Stimpson, & Jones, 2000). Kilmer and Kilmer (1992) said that “the bedroom has further become associated with being a very personal or private area where people keep their intimate or personal items, such as jewelry and other valuable or memorable keepsakes” (p. 211). While Kilmer and Kilmer (1992) did not specifically discuss the contribution of these objects to a person’s sense of self, this researcher will assume that these “personal items” and “memorable keepsakes” (p. 211) are examples of the representative objects found in this present study, and are placed in a person’s bedroom to cultivate and support self-definition. Participants offered many examples of placing highly personal objects in the private areas of their homes.

One stated, "I think my bedroom holds my most precious things because it's a safe haven. It's where you are vulnerable because you are asleep" (P12). Another said, "I don't have any pictures of my family anywhere except in my bedroom. Maybe that's because they are very important to me and I want them where they are in a more intimate setting" (P22). These two statements were typical from participants who defined public versus private spaces. As stated earlier, several participants declared their homes to be semi-public and semi-private because they were the only person living in the home. Future studies should explore this concept more completely.

Participants used objects that distinctly portrayed realistic or desired images of themselves for others to view as a method for communicating self to others. The use of photographs indicated places participants had been and people they knew. Other objects purposively signified personal interests or their careers. Participants wanted their objects and other interior design features to serve as a catalyst of interaction, such as in the case of the participant who placed sports photographs of herself in an area where visitors were bound to view them (P11). Although the meanings that an object can represent are socially defined, participants used objects that would serve as an obvious symbol of self in an attempt to ensure symbolic interaction. In this effort, placement of object was used to solicit inquiry in the hope that visitors would ask questions and the meaning of the object could be shared. For symbolic interaction to occur, the people involved must interpret the meaning of an object similarly. The inquiry solicitation acts as a channel for negotiation, thus ensuring shared communication (Kaiser, 1997).

## Proposed Grounded Theory and Relevance to Existing Theory

A grounded theory was developed through systematic analysis of the data through the constant comparative method (Creswell, 1998). This study explored how women expressed their selves through the interior design of their residential environments. This process is graphically illustrated in Figure 5.1. As an overview, it was discovered that through the identification of representative objects, women determined what they wanted to convey to others and to themselves. They used objects and other interior design features that specifically told stories about their personal characteristics, interests, accomplishments, memories, and significant relationships so that others would attain the view of self they wished to communicate. Location of objects was used as a catalyst to solicit inquiry from others in an effort to ensure a common meaning. These same objects, or others placed in more personal areas of their homes, also reminded these women of who they were, thus supporting and reinforcing their own idea of self. A more thorough discussion and an interpretation through existing theory are presented below.

### Objects' Contribution to Participants' Image of Self

Representative objects were the catalyst for participants' images of self. These objects and other interior design features served to reinforce messages of self about their personal characteristics such as occupation and religion, their interests, their memories of people and events that took place in the past, their personal accomplishments such as awards and success in competitive sports, and the valued relationships of family and friends. These objects offered opportunities for self-definition, and supported the self for which participants were striving. For example, if being a part of a family was an important part of who a participant thought she was, findings from the present study

established that she would often surround herself with pictures and mementos that represented her family. These objects then helped to complete her identity as a family member. These premises are consistent with Wicklund and Gollweitzer's (1982) concept of symbolic self-completion. The theory predicts that people who have an incomplete self-definition tend to complete this identity by acquiring and displaying symbols associated with the identity for which they are striving.

Participants used object location as a tool to support self-definition. Objects that were of personal significance were often placed in more personal areas of their homes or areas where they spend a majority of their time. Very personal pieces might be placed in a location only accessible to the home dweller. For example, Participant 7 hung a religious icon made for her by her sister in her closet. This piece was placed here because her religion was not something she wanted to share with others, but it was an important symbol of who she was and who she strove to be. This participant noted that she did not want the cross in a public area of her home because she had not worked out all of her belief structures about religion. However, she did want a daily reminder of her struggle with her religion, and her walk-in closet was the place she kept her most personal pieces. Furthermore, since her sister made the cross, it also served as a reminder of that relationship. Other pieces might be placed in more central areas but only communicate information to the resident. For example, a skeleton key hung amidst other travel-related items was often overlooked by visitors, but was the most important piece to Participant 16 in her living room. It represented her first time living in a foreign country, and how she struggled to raise her children without many of the comforts to which she was

accustomed. It reminded her of her personal strength and ability to overcome adversity in her life. This object served as an important role in reinforcing and defining who she was.

### Objects' Communication of Self to Others

Representative objects also were used to communicate participants' selves to others. Participants used objects and other interior design features to tell stories about their personal characteristics, interests, accomplishments, memories, and significant relationships so that others might attain the view of self these women wished to communicate. From a symbolic interactionist perspective, communication was achieved if a symbol was both delivered and then received so that the same or approximate response is evoked in the observer as in the self (Kaiser, 1997). To ensure that a common meaning was received by the observer, participants used object location to act as a catalyst to solicit inquiry from others. By placing significant pieces in public areas of their homes, participants created an opportunity for this process of meaning negotiation to take place. This was illustrated when one participant stated, "the part about wanting people to recognize that I'm a neat, interesting, clever person who is somewhat traveled, has a lot of interests, diverse.... I want people to recognize [those characteristics] from what I have in my house" (P6). Another placed photographs of herself playing professional basketball in a hallway that guests would often visit to purposefully seek comment about her athlete identity (P11).

Dramaturgy also plays a role in this Expression of Self process. Goffman (1959) spoke of the human tendency to seek out information about people within a setting in an effort to define the situation. The theory further asserts that people perform "impression management" functions in order to influence the observers' notions about who we are

and what we are all about. The present study revealed that as participants purposefully used the interiors of their home to communicate information about their selves, they were practicing impression management techniques in an effort to control visitors' notions about their selves. For example, one participant wanted to indicate a show of strength when visitors entered her home: "...when people are walking in I want them to see 'strong.' This is a show of strength. Friends, family, nature" (P21).

The Expression of Self model (see figure 5.1) illustrates the process that participants used to communicate self to others and reinforce their own concept of self to themselves. Central to this process is the role representative objects played in determining what aspects of self are being communicated. Object location was used as a catalyst to solicit inquiry from visitors, thus ensuring meaningful communication, an essential process explained using symbolic interaction theory (Mead, 1934). Visitors' impressions of participants' selves were managed by specific placement of objects and the overall design and presentation of the interior space. The idea that people used settings to gain an understanding of the situation and the actors (participants) is described by Goffman (1959). The present study also may expand the dramaturgical perspective through the concept that specific placement of objects is indispensable for this process to occur. Finally, as Wicklund and Gollweitzer (1982) explain with symbolic self-completion theory, through placement of objects in particular private or public areas of their homes, participants used these representative objects to reinforce and define their selves to themselves. For a graphic representation of this process, see Figure 5.1 for the Expression of Self model.

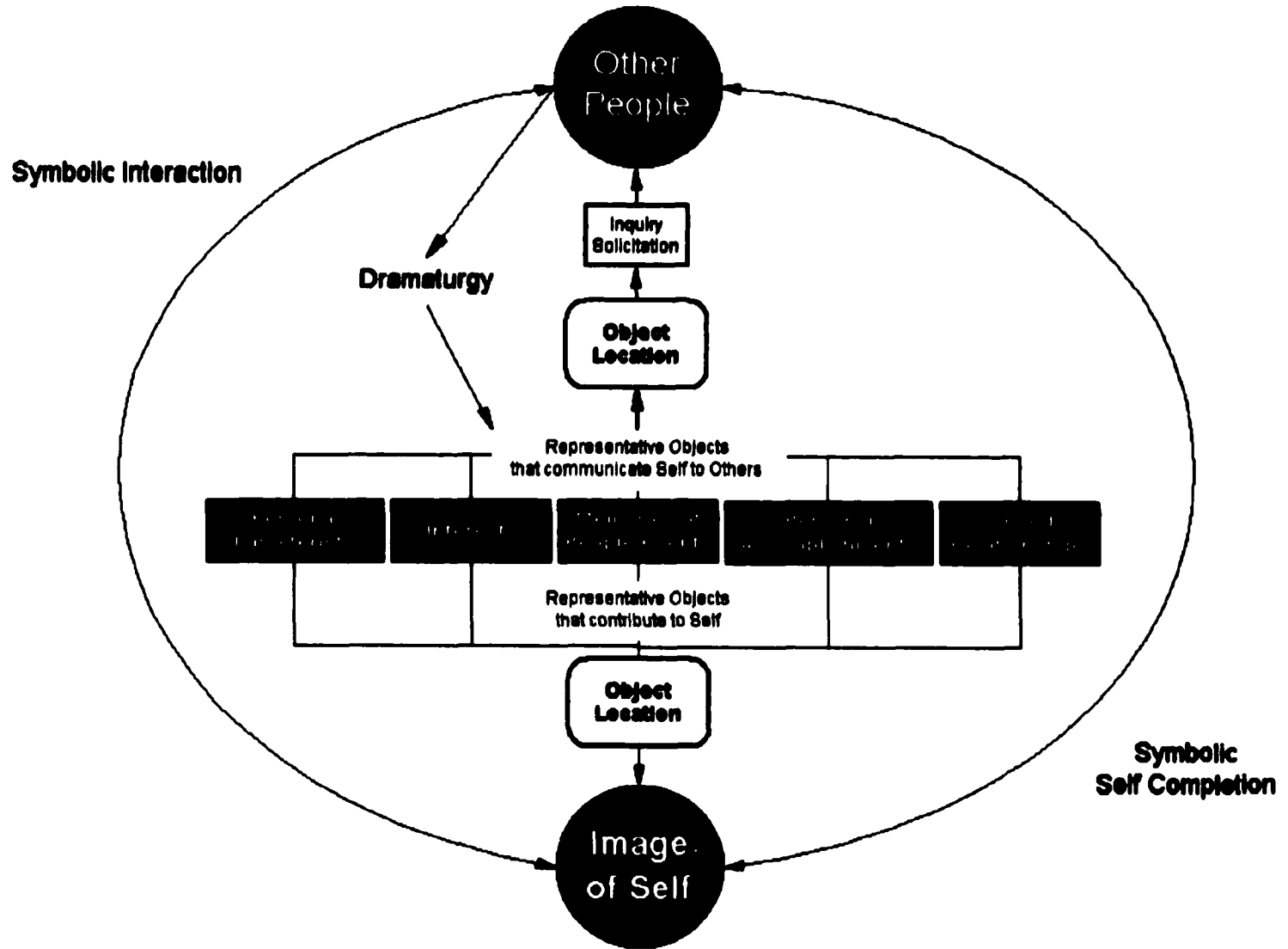


Figure 5.1. Expression of Self model derived from constant comparative analysis.

## Relevance to the Interior Design Profession

This study began when the researcher wondered, “How do interior designers negotiate their clients’ concepts of self so as to represent that concept through the design of their clients’ interiors?” While the present study focused on the residential interior environment, conclusions can also be expanded to commercial environments with a residential component such as adult/senior long term care facilities (e.g., nursing or group homes, assisted living facilities). Prior research indicates that interior designers must understand the role possessions play in transforming “an anonymous space into a place” (Boschetti, 1995, p. 10) and that “personal expressions of identity are important in fostering attachment to place” (Eshelman and Evans, 2002, p. 8). The present study serves to underscore these findings. It is essential that interior designers become cognizant and sensitive to their roles as purveyors of self. Their designs offer opportunity for communication of self to others as well as reinforcement of self to self. If the present research is plausible, interior designers must realize that it is their job to be more critical of the objects they display in clients homes. Objects should not be chosen for purely aesthetic or even functional purposes. They must instead look to each persons own items, areas of interest, and lives for opportunities to showcase who the client is, and realize that the designer’s role is to support and communicate the client’s self.

## Conclusions

Homes acted as the setting in which participants expressed who they were and what they were all about. Single women were conscious of the constructed meaning of the objects they chose to display in their homes, and used those objects and other interior

design features to represent who they were to others while reinforcing their identity to themselves. Decisions about self-expression were determined by distinguishing the objects that were representative of self and using them to communicate messages about personal characteristics, interests, important relationships, personal accomplishments, and significant memories. These women recognized the power of their environments to express their selves. They reinforced the notion that they chose objects that said something about who they were and only displayed items that were meaningful in some way to them.

Although participants did not articulate their expression of self in theoretical terms, symbolic interaction, dramaturgy, and symbolic self-completion were appropriate theories to explore with this topic. Participants used location of objects to solicit inquiry into their meaning from others. This process served as a catalyst for two-way interaction and the negotiation of the meaning of the objects and interior design features. Goffman (1959) illustrated the human tendency to seek out information about people within a setting in an effort to define the situation. Furthermore, representative objects reinforced participants' sense of self, a phenomenon explicated by symbolic self-completion theory (Wicklund & Gollweitzer, 1982). Findings indicated that the interior design of the home does in fact communicate information about a person's social identity, personality, and other personal characteristics. Participants specifically communicated messages in an effort to manage other people's impressions of who they are.

An element noticeably absent from the emergent data was the lack of participants' expression of status. While some objects were representative of personal accomplishments (e.g., trophies and photographs of Participant 11), there was no

discussion of purposeful communication of wealth or social class. It is this researcher's opinion that the absence of status expression might be due to participant gender. This concept will be interesting to explore in future research when men also are interviewed.

The purpose of this study was to determine how the interior design of the home offers opportunities for women to express their identity to others and reinforce it to themselves. It was established that women offer glimpses of the differing facets of who they are by using objects and other interior design features as a window into their selves. This critical issue became the essence of the present study. Participants purposefully chose items that illustrated particular characteristics and they attempted to ensure the communication of messages through inquiry solicitation when appropriate. Also important was the idea that objects also served to strengthen participants' own sense of self, often with object placement that was personally significant.

#### Recommendations for Future Research

Recommendations are offered to expand the current context of this research and examine additional groups to explore its relevance. Future research rooted in the qualitative paradigm is suggested to explore the nature of self expression in homes with multiple household members. When only one person lives in a home, there are limited opportunities to share messages and negotiate their meanings. This might include data collection from couples as well as single parents living with their children to facilitate an understanding of the complexities of self expression among several and different categories of people. The present study should also be expanded to include information from men who live alone in an effort to understand gender differences. From a

dramaturgical standpoint, it would also be interesting to talk with people regarding their process of collecting information about people when they are visitors to others' homes. Findings from this study must remain tentative at best until further research is conducted to test the relationships proposed and the insights gained. After additional qualitative data is collected, a quantitative instrument should be developed to test the theory presented in the present research.

This topic might also be addressed with practicing interior designers and clients of designers. The current study was originally developed when the question was raised regarding identity negotiation between designer and client. While it was determined that an underlying theory that examined self-expression in the home should be developed first, future studies might include information from practitioners regarding: (a) how they negotiate and come to understand their clients' selves; (b) what type of evaluation methods they use to ensure their clients' selves are represented; and (c) what methods they use to collect information about their clients' selves.

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## APPENDICES

## **Appendix A**

### **Human Research Committee Approval**

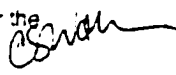
COPY



Office of Regulatory Compliance  
Office of Vice President for Research  
and Information Technology  
Fort Collins, CO 80523-2046  
(970) 491-1563  
FAX: (970) 491-2293

MEMORANDUM

TO: Gene Gloeckner, School of Education, 1588

FROM: Celia S. Walker, Regulatory Administrator for the  
Human Research Committee 

SUBJECT: **PROJECT APPROVAL**  
Title: Exploring Women's Expression of Self in their Residential Interior Environments.  
Protocol No.: 01-126H  
Funding Agency: N/A  
Funding Agency Deadline: N/A

DATE: June 19, 2001

I am pleased to inform you that the above-referenced project was approved by the Human Research Committee on June 11, 2001 for the period June 11, 2001 to May 2, 2002 with the condition that the attached consent form is signed by the subjects and each subject is given a copy of the form. It is the investigator's responsibility to obtain this consent form from all subjects. *NO changes may be made to this document without first obtaining the approval of the Committee. Approval is for 40 single women.*

A status report of this project will be required within a 12-month period from the date of approval. You will be sent a reminder approximately two months before the protocol expires. The Principal Investigator will report on the numbers of subjects who have participated this year and project-to-date, about problems encountered, and provide a verifying copy of the consent form or cover letter used. The necessary form (H-101) is available from the Regulatory Compliance web page (see below). Should the protocol not be renewed before expiration, all activities must cease until the protocol has been re-reviewed.

It is the responsibility of the investigator to immediately inform the Committee of any serious complications, unexpected risks, or injuries resulting from this research. It is also the investigator's responsibility to notify the Committee of any changes in experimental design, participant population, or consent procedures or documents. This can be done with a memo which completely describes the changes and their consequences (new consent form or cover letter, or altered survey instrument, for example). Students serving as Co-Principal Investigators may not alter projects without first obtaining PI approval. The PI is ultimately responsible for the conduct of the project.

This approval is issued under Colorado State University's OPRR Multiple Projects Assurance M-1153-01 issued August 1, 1996. If approval did not accompany a proposal when it was submitted to a sponsor, it is the researcher's responsibility to provide the sponsor with the approval notice.

Please direct any questions about the Committee's action on this project to me for routing to the Committee.

Additional information is available from the Regulatory Compliance web site at [www.research.colostate.edu/regulatory/](http://www.research.colostate.edu/regulatory/)

Attachment

cc: Lisa M. Vogel w/attachment

**Appendix B**  
**Consent Form**

COLORADO STATE UNIVERSITY  
INFORMED CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH PROJECT

**TITLE OF PROJECT: Exploring Women's Expression of Self in their Residential Interior Environments**

**NAME OF PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Gene Gloeckner, Ph.D.**

**NAME OF CO-INVESTIGATOR: Lisa M. Vogel, M.S.**

**CONTACT NAME AND PHONE NUMBER FOR QUESTIONS/PROBLEMS:**

**Lisa Vogel: (970) 223-7870**

**Gene Gloeckner: (970) 491-7661**

**SPONSOR OF PROJECT: N/A**

**PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH:**

**The objective of this research is to determine the decision-making processes women use when deciding how and where to express their identity through the decoration of spatial configuration of their residential interior environments.**

**PROCEDURES/METHODS TO BE USED:**

**All data collection will take place during a single visit to your home. Upon arrival, the researcher will ask you to take 3-5 photographs of areas of your home where you feel you have successfully expressed your identity (who you are and what you are about). Photographs will be taken using a digital camera which the researcher will provide and give you instructions to help you learn how to use. While and after you take these photographs, the researcher will ask you a series of questions to help her better understand the methods you use to determine how and where you express your identity in your home. These questions will only serve as a guide, and others may come up during our discussion. The interview process will take approximately 1.5 to 2 hours. The researcher will record all of her questions and your answers on a digital voice recorder. This information will later be transcribed onto the computer for analysis. Upon completion of the interview, the researcher will ask you to complete a standardized survey which will take approximately 10 to 20 minutes. This survey will provide her with measurable 'Identity' and 'Total Self-Concept' scores, as well as several reliability measurements to help her compare the data that she collects from all of the participants to other people who have previously taken this survey. All data will be preserved digitally and will be deleted when the project is complete. Digital data stored on the researcher's computer will be deleted after project completion, and all Compact Disks (CDs) containing digital data will be broken into pieces and thrown away.**

**RISKS INHERENT IN THE PROCEDURES:**

**Meaningful objects often have emotions inherently attached to them. While discussing these objects, you may experience some emotional stress. You may request a break or stop the interview at any time. It is not possible to identify all potential risks in research procedures, but we have taken reasonable safeguards to minimize any known and potential, but unknown, risks.**

**BENEFITS:**

**There are no known benefits to participation in this research, however, as compensation, the researcher will make available to you any digital photographs of your home or associated objects that were taken during the interview. Please let her know if you would like a copy of these.**

Page 1 of 2 Participant's initials \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

**CONFIDENTIALITY:**

**Only the researchers will have access to your identification information. A code (such as Participant A) will be assigned to you for reporting of the interview, survey, and photographic data. At no time will your name be attached to any of the data or this research. Please be advised that photographs and quotations (with no identifying attributes) may be used in research reporting including, but not limited to: journal articles, research presentations, and the dissertation itself. All of the survey data will be reported in aggregate form, and none will be associated with your name. All data will be locked in the Principal Investigator's office or the Co-Investigator's home. All of the data will be erased after the project and any reporting is complete.**

**LIABILITY:**

**The Colorado Governmental Immunity Act determines and may limit Colorado State University's legal responsibility if an injury happens because of taking part in this study. Claims against the University must be filed within 180 days of the injury.**

**Questions about subjects' rights may be directed to Celia S. Walker at (970) 491-1563.**

**PARTICIPATION:**

**Your participation in this research is voluntary. If you decide to participate in the study, you may withdraw your consent and stop participating at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.**

**Your signature acknowledges that you have read the information stated and willingly sign this consent form. Your signature also acknowledges that you have received, on the date signed, a copy of this document containing 2 pages.**

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant's name (printed)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant's signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Witness to signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

Page 2 of 2 Participant's initials \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

**Appendix C**  
**Interview Schedule**

## **Interview Schedule**

Let me first tell you a little about the goals of my research. I am exploring how women express their self or identity through the interior design of their residential environment.

- I want to determine the decision-making processes that women use when determining how and where they will express their selves.
- I want to understand the messages that women are conveying and to whom using their residential interior environments.
- And I want to determine the methods women use to express their selves with their interior environments.

I am going to be asking you questions about the objects, furnishings and other interior design features of your home. Those interior design features might include (among other things):

- Placement of walls
- Built-in furnishings
- Color schemes
- Groupings of items
- Lighting

First, I am going to show you how to use my digital camera. I would like you to take several pictures of areas of your home that you think particularly express your identity. I will look at those pictures to ensure quality and may re-take some of the photographs to make sure they print clearly. Also, I may ask to take some additional pictures of areas of your home that we discuss during the interview.

1. Tell me about how you see yourself.

PROBES:

- in terms of who you are and what you want to express about yourself.
- What kinds of adjectives would you use to describe yourself?
- How do you think others see you? Why?
- How would you like others to see you? Why?

2. How do you go about selecting objects, furnishings, and other interior design features (list of definitions) for your home that represent your identity?

PROBES:

- Are there layers or filters that you use to determine what you will bring into your home? Is this connected to your identity?
- How do you determine what represents your identity?
- What do you think about when deciding whether something will represent who you are?
  - Is this process a cognizant one?
- Purchasing vs. being given
- Do you search for advice from others? Who?

3. What image of yourself do you try to communicate through the interior design of your home? Why? How? (You may want to refer to the photographs that we just took.)  
PROBES:
- Is there a way that you place items to communicate certain images of who you are?
  - Is there a process that you use to determine how you will communicate this image?
  - Different parts of self in different spaces?
  - Different messages for different visitors?
  - Do objects...support messages to yourself? How?
4. Which objects, furnishings, and other interior design features are more meaningful to you than others? Why/what makes them meaningful?
- Do you communicate the significance of these objects to others? If so, how? If not, why not?
  - Is there a way that you place objects to communicate their significance?
  - Are there things about your self that you do not want to communicate through the interior design of your home? Why?
5. How do you make sure that visitors to your home understand the messages that you are trying to communicate?
- Are there objects where it is more important to ensure that messages are communicated?
6. What do you think has changed over time about the way you express yourself or who you are through the design of your home?

Next, I would like to ask you to complete this short general information sheet. It will provide me with general demographic information and information about your home.

I am now going to ask you to complete a standardized survey called the Tennessee Self-Concept Scale. I will not use the information it provides for any other reason than to attain a general Identity score and a Total Self-Concept Score so that I can compare my participant group to a standardized population group. In no way will it be used as a diagnostic tool and again, all individual results will be treated in a confidential manner.

**Appendix D**  
**General Information Survey**

**General Information:**

How old are you? \_\_\_\_\_

What is your occupation (i.e., college educator, lawyer)? \_\_\_\_\_

What is the highest educational degree you have earned? \_\_\_\_\_

What is your ethnicity? \_\_\_\_\_

How long have you owned and lived in your current home? \_\_\_\_\_ year(s)

How many homes have you owned and occupied (at the same time) prior to your current home?

Has anyone else ever lived in your current home with you?            Yes            No

If yes, who (generally, not specifically)? How long ago was this and how long did they live with you?

**Appendix E**  
**Coding Guide**

## CODING GUIDE

### 1. **Personal Identity**

#### 1.1. **Personal Characteristics**

Characteristics that describe the participant (i.e., ethnicity, type of job, religion/spirituality, personality, etc.)

#### 1.2. **Personal Interests**

Interests of a participant used to describe who they are (i.e., hobbies, traveler, etc.)

#### 1.3. **Personal Relationships**

Relationships of a participant used to describe self (i.e., the relationship with my family describes who I am, etc.).

### 2. **Desired View of Self**

References to the identity that participants wanted to project to others and support for self.

### 3. **Determination of Identity Representation**

Any reference to the process by which participants determine how/where/when they will represent their identities.

### 4. **Representative Objects**

Objects a participant uses to represent her identity.

#### 4.1. **Characteristic representation**

Objects that represent a particular characteristic (i.e., a cross to represent her religion).

##### 4.1.1. **Self**

Objects that represent characteristics of self.

##### 4.1.2. **Others**

Objects that represent characteristics of others.

#### 4.2. **Interest representation**

Objects that represent a participant's interests.

#### 4.3. **Relationship representation**

##### 4.3.1. **Valued Relationships**

Objects that represent the participant's relationships (i.e., photos of family members).

##### 4.3.1.1. **Friends**

##### 4.3.1.2. **Family**

##### 4.3.2. **Reminders of Relationships**

Objects that remind participants of a particular person (i.e., a gift from a friend who has since died).

#### 4.4. **Status representation**

Objects that represent a particular skill, boastful opportunity, or accomplishment.

##### 4.4.1. **Personal Accomplishments**

##### 4.4.2. **Accomplishments of Others**

(I.e., "I have a friend that can do this, etc.")

##### 4.4.3. **Other Status**

#### **4.5. Memory representation**

Objects that represent a memory of a specific place, event or person.

##### **4.5.1. Places or Events**

##### **4.5.2. People**

#### **4.6. Value or Belief Representation**

### **5. Identity Representation by Design Feature**

Interior design features help to define participant's identity.

#### **5.1. Color**

#### **5.2. Space/Room**

#### **5.3. Style**

#### **5.4. Configuration**

#### **5.5. Material**

### **6. Connectivity**

Connections with objects, furnishings, or other interior design features

#### **6.1. for Self**

(I.e., connections to family or personal experiences.)

#### **6.2. for Others**

Connections that others feel to the objects, furnishings, or other interior design features of participants' homes.

### **7. Non-Connectivity**

References to not having connections with an object, furnishing, or other interior design feature.

### **8. Image of Self/What is "me"**

Any reference to items that are "me."

### **9. Identity NOT**

Indications that an object, furnishing, or other interior design feature does not represent a participant's identity (i.e., "I do not like blue walls").

### **10. Meaning of Objects**

Any reference to meaningful objects

#### **10.1. Personal History**

#### **10.2. Objects as substance to relationships**

#### **10.3. Monetary value**

#### **10.4. Sentimental value**

#### **10.5. Meaning—Other**

### **11. Purposive Articulation of Self**

References to decisively communicating self to others

#### **11.1. Positive**

References of decisive communication of self

##### **11.1.1. Realistic**

##### **11.1.2. Desired**

#### **11.2. Negative**

References of decisive non-communication of self

### **12. Self Reminders**

References to objects, furnishings or other interior design features that help to support a participant's identity to herself.

- 13. Decision Making Process**  
Any reference to the decision making process participants used to determine what would represent self or would be brought into their homes.
- 14. Decoration for Personal Satisfaction**  
Any reference to the home as a place that will primarily satisfy the owner.
- 15. Communication of Significant Items**  
Any reference to participants' ability or likelihood of communicating the meaning of significant items to others.
- 16. Collections**  
Any reference to participants' collections.
- 17. Unique vs. Mass-Produced Items**  
Any reference to the preference or distaste for unique or mass-produced items, including their purchase or meaning.
- 18. Opinions of Others**  
Any reference to the opinions of others
- 19. Purchases vs. Gifts**  
Any reference to items that were purchased vs. items that were given to participants as gifts, including their importance.
- 20. Projection of a Feeling or Image**  
Any reference to the purposeful projection of a feeling or image of home (i.e., "I want my home to be comfortable").
- 20.1.       for Self**
- 20.2.       for Others**
- 21. Item/Object Placement**  
Any reference to how placement of items is determined
- 21.1.       Fit**  
                  (I.e., how items fit into the home).
- 21.2.       For Communication of Self**
- 21.3.       For Communication to Others**
- 22. Public vs. Private Spaces**  
Any reference to the use of public or private spaces within the home.
- 23. Spatial Qualities**  
Any reference to the use of space or specific ways of designing particular spaces (i.e., my bedroom is much more personal and so I've...)
- 24. Advice from Others**  
Any reference to advice sought or obtained from others about the decoration or design of the home.
- 25. Issues of Housekeeping**  
Any reference to housekeeping
- 26. Desire to Pass Items to Others**
- 26.1.       After Death**
- 26.2.       Currently**
- 27. House References in General**
- 28. Miscellaneous**  
Issues other than those characterized by parent categories 1-27.

29. ---

30. **Decoration without much consideration**

Any reference to the decoration of their homes without much thought behind it.

**Appendix F**  
**Example of Coded Transcript**

\*1 Is there a way you place things – a process to communicate that?

4 Not that I'm aware of. Obviously, my plants are placed where they can get light. 21.1  
I love green plants. I think they add a lot to the whole environment. Maybe they replace the goldfish or the dog, I'm not sure. I'm not really aware of any decision one way or the other. If I configure it this way it will present a more warm, cozy feeling. I just put them where feel comfortable with them and they seem to make sense to me. I've been 21.2  
known to rearrange afterwards, but I put them where I feel comfortable with them. If 20.1  
they feel comfortable to me where they are sitting, then that's by far the best majority of the reason that they stay there. I've had folks who have – not here, but in the townhouse, because of the way the room was configured – to at least one friend I had 18  
the room backwards. A large open room, but I had the dining area as you walked in and then the living room was beyond that by the patio door. In her mind it should have been the opposite way. I wasn't comfortable with that. To me it was very logical the way I had it. It followed my thought process not necessarily the most logical. Because you think, yes, walking into the living area is the most logical, not walking into the dining area. In that house that didn't make sense to me.

\*1 Do you communicate different parts of yourself in different spaces?

4 Probably not as much as I used to. Part of it is because things are starting to overflow. But I think now I'm tending to pick up or keep pieces that go back to those two core components of who I am. The rural, agricultural, southwest view. With those 8  
two more and more of what I'm picking up or decorating around goes back to those two. 6.1  
The office is probably the one room that is not true, because that's more to me it's kind of the business room, in terms of that's where I have my files, my computer, where my

textbooks and reference books are located. That's more the business, professional side is represented in that room because that is what happens in that room. So the rest of the house is pretty rural, ag, southwest based and probably that will overflow into the office one of these days.

\*1 Are there different messages that you try to convey to different visitors?

4 I think at one time in my life I would have said yes. Mainly because I think I was more concerned I guess – and it goes back to that insecurity and low self esteem at that point in my life where I felt like it was really important that people liked where I lived or was impressed when they walked in the door with whatever was there, whatever that might be. Now I'm feeling very comfortable with myself and if you walk in and don't like it then probably you're not going to hang around a lot with me because this is who I am. I feel much more comfortable with that. If I met someone who wanted me to totally redecorate around his or her scheme, probably I would say there's just not a lot of future here. It's been nice, but... Now I feel much more comfortable saying that, but again, it's a maturity issue and just feeling comfortable with whom I am, not to say I'm perfect. But the feeling that what you see is what you get and if you don't care for this environment, then we don't have a lot in common.

11.1.1

4.4.3

8

14

18

\*1 Which object, furnishings or design features are more meaningful to you than others and what makes them more significant?

4 One photo of the storytellers. I didn't include the cookie jar in that. It's just because I believe very strongly that a lot of what we know and who we are is communicated down to us by adults. I also believe, and based on personal experience, I've learned a lot from animals by watching them, by working with them, as a part of that

4.6

## **Appendix G**

### **Example of NUD•IST Report**

-----  
(15) Communication of Significant Items  
== No Definition  
-----  
--- ON LINE DOCUMENT: AnaleneCarlisle:IS-all  
--- Document Header:  
==Participant: 15  
  
--- Retrieval for this document: 2 units out of 138. = 1.4%  
\*IC Do you try to communicate the significance of meaningful objects to 126  
-- Text units 127-127  
IS: By pointing out certain things to them? No, I figure they can derive  
whatever conclusions they want if they express an interest in  
something, then I will tell them story behind it, like the story behind  
the wall. Normally, I wouldn't unless they remarked on it. 127  
(15) Communication of Significant Items  
\*IC Are there objects that are more important for you to communicate or 130  
-- Text units 131-131.  
IS: Occasionally I explain that this is a real Eames chair, not a  
knock-off because designers will appreciate and nobody else would. I've  
been know to do that - you know this is a real one and tell them the  
story behind it, when it was designed and stuff like that. Usually not  
People are free to draw what conclusions they want. That is all colored  
by their own personal filters anyway and own personal experiences 131  
(15) Communication of Significant Items  
(18) Opinions of Others  
-----  
--- ON LINE DOCUMENT: AngiePaccione-all  
--- Document Header:  
Participant: 11  
  
--- Retrieval for this document: 7 units out of 101. = 6.9%  
\*IC Any other things to say about who you are? 32  
-- Text units 33-33  
IS: The name plate Paccione. It's my step dad's name and I don't really  
get along with him, but it's symbolic of the Italian name, even though  
I'm half black and half Italian, that part is the Italian part for me.  
To most people it's an odd name - not odd, but unusual. It's not a  
typical name even in Italy. Most people haven't heard the name  
Paccione before. When people come my house they read that and it helps.  
Maybe because it prominently displayed and a lot of people want to know  
where the name Paccione comes from. That's my little Italian thing. 33  
(4 1 1) Representative Objects, Characteristic Representation, Self  
(11 1 1) Purposive Articulation of Self/Positive/Realistic  
(15) Communication of Significant Items  
\*IC What image of yourself do you try to communicate through the interior 58  
-- Text units 59-59  
IS: I think I do right now because I don't have that big of a choice  
because I have limited space. Like I have to have that bookcase over  
there, and that bookcase at the top of the stairs. Because I have a lot  
of papers and books. I think having those as visible as they are, even  
though it's not my choice, I think conveys - oh, she reads. I think  
that conveys she's working. I used to have the big bookcase, before I  
got both of the couches, down here and I really liked that actually. It  
had the whole Britannica and they are leather bound and I like that  
because I am real inquisitive and like to know things. For me that was a  
real artifact that I think was a good indicator of my personality. I'm  
like an encyclopedia. I feel like I have a real allegiance to  
encyclopedias because I feel like that I'm a warehouse of information,  
so that was a good way to show that. Those of the teams and myself  
playing certainly helps to show that identity. Especially the pictures  
of my uncles, I like having them out. They are black and when I tell  
people I'm half black they don't think there are black people in my  
family. But I'm like - this is my mom and these are my uncles. My mom  
is "high yellow" it's what they used to call her shade. The color of  
caramel, and so was my brother and my mom's dad, but my mom's mom and her  
sisters and brothers are black. A lot of people are surprised to see how  
dark my black side is. So I like to have that up there because it let's  
people know - yeah, I really am... you know. Even though I might skinned,  
my roots are black including these 59  
(4 1 1) Representative Objects, Characteristic Representation/Self  
(4 2) Representative Objects/Interest Representation  
(4 3 2) Representative Objects, Relationship Representation, Reminders of Relationships  
(8) Image of Self or What is "me"  
(11 1 1) Purposive Articulation of Self/Positive/Realistic  
(12) Self Reminders  
(15) Communication of Significant Items  
(21 3) Item or Object Placement, for Communication to Others  
\*IC Is there a way that you place items that helps communicate different 62  
-- Text units 63-63  
IS: I think that the whole Feng Shui stuff has dictated the placement of  
my things. I used to have this couch on that wall. I realized I was  
sitting there a lot and it was right in line with that door. That didn't  
feel good. I needed to be where I could see both. I think I have tried  
to use some of the principles of Feng Shui to determine some placement of  
big things like my bed. The other things I wish I had more purpose  
to them. Definitely the pictures on wall. I had seen pictures on the

wall going up the stairs as in most homes. I knew for sure I would have that. Having the basketball ones down here posed to close to my ego room is because most people don't go to my ego room - that's for me. I guess I did want to show off that I was a basketball star, too. It's not right in the way but most people who are here will use that small bathroom downstairs and will see those 2 pictures. It could be conversation starter as well as the Paccione sign could be a conversation thing.

- (4.4.1) /Representative Objects/Status Representation/Personal Accomplishments
- (5.2) /Identity Representation by Design Feature/Space or Room
- (11.1.1) /Purposive Articulation of Self/Positive/Realistic
- (12) /Self Reminders
- (13) /Decision Making Process
- (14) /Decoration for Personal Satisfaction
- (15) /Communication of Significant Items
- (21.2) /Item or Object Placement/for Communication to Self
- (21.3) /Item or Object Placement/for Communication to Others

\*Q Do these objects reflect messages to yourself as well as to other 68  
-- Text units 69-69:

11Q The ego room is mostly a message to me, although when I have company they will sleep in there. I guess I don't want to send messages and I don't have a whole lot of company, but it certainly would convey a message to them - wow, she really was good. But to me it is a reminder that I was an all American. I think everybody should have one. That probably more than any other place in the house conveys the message to me and to others. 69

- (11.1.1) /Purposive Articulation of Self/Positive/Realistic
- (12) /Self Reminders
- (15) /Communication of Significant Items
- (21.2) /Item or Object Placement/for Communication to Self
- (21.3) /Item or Object Placement/for Communication to Others

\*Q Do you try to insure that visitors understand what you are trying to 84  
-- Text units 85-85:

11Q Yeah, I suppose so. Again, with what pictures I have chosen to put on the wall, that conveys something. Even this arrangement is conducive, pretty open and comfortable for people to sit and talk. 85

- (15) /Communication of Significant Items
- (20.2) /Projection of a Feeling or Image/for Others

\*Q The African people - do you explain to people that those are not 86  
-- Text units 87-87:

11Q Usually, if they are here long enough. It's not like someone was never to ask. If I don't tell people will assume that it is. So I have thought about taking those down for that reason - it's actually uncomfortable to have them up there because if I have people come in that I don't know - like that yourself even - not that I don't know you, but people who don't know that they are a gift - they will make the assumption - oh, she's like got African pride. That has nothing to do with it. 87

- (9) /Identity Not
- (11.2) /Purposive Articulation of Self/Negative
- (15) /Communication of Significant Items

\*Q Are there objects that it is more important that the message is 90  
-- Text units 91-91:

11Q I'm thinking about the basketball picture and the rest of the pictures - I certainly want people to understand, but I wouldn't have to say anything, that I was a college athlete. That's implicit in the picture. They could ask about that and I would say it was the first professional league in the U.S. So I guess it stimulates the question that I could then clarify and make sure people understand what that basketball background was. Then the gorgeous pictures of Tony - those are selected on purpose. The one of Tony with the Corvette, that's actually his illegitimate daughter. So if Tony's family came out here, that picture would have to come down. Even though I love that picture, it would have to come down - if he was coming out by himself, no problem. The younger kid wouldn't even know about her. His wife does, but the kids don't. They would say - who's the little girl? And then I would have. It's prominent for me. I love that picture, but there's some real - there's some meaning that is not universal - (discussion about child). I think I want people to see those pictures and know about my family. That's important to me. 91

- (11.1.1) /Purposive Articulation of Self/Positive/Realistic
- (13) /Decision Making Process
- (15) /Communication of Significant Items
- (21.3) /Item or Object Placement/for Communication to Others

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\*Q What image of yourself do you try to communicate through your home? 47  
-- Text units 48-48:

18Q I really don't know that it's crossed my mind. 48

(15) /Communication of Significant Items

\*Q You've spoken a lot about your Swedish history, family - are you 49  
-- Text units 50-50:

18Q I don't think I've thought about conveying it to others. I just do it because I enjoy kind of looking at it. Some of the things I have around they sent me - I don't know that I consciously thought about it. 50

(15) /Communication of Significant Items