A Cross-Cultural Analysis of Homes

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Abstract

This paper proposes a conceptual framework for analyzing social-psychological features of homes. Homes from various cultures are described in terms of two dialectic dimensions: (1) *identity/communality*, or the degree to which homes display the bonds between residents and their community and culture, and the uniqueness or distinctiveness of people from one another; (2) *openness/closedness*, or the degree to which homes portray how residents are open and accessible and also how they are closed and out of contact with others.

Résumé

Cet article propose un cadre conceptuel pour analyser les caractéristiques socio-psychologiques des maisons. Des habitations de diverses cultures sont décrites dans les termes d'une double dimension dialectique : (1) *identité/communauté*, ou point jusqu'où les maisons donnent à voir les liens entre les résidents et leur communauté ou leur culture, et l'unicité ou la distinction des gens entre eux; (2) *ouverture/fermeture*, ou point jusqu'où les maisons signifient tantôt combien les habitants sont ouverts ou disponibles et aussi combien ils sont renfermés sur eux-mêmes ou exclus du contact avec autrui.

1. Introduction

This paper[1] analyzes the home, an important environmental setting that has received relatively little attention in psychological research. Although considerable research is available for a variety of institutional settings, such as prisons, schools and hospitals, it is difficult to find systematic programs of environment-behavior research on the home as a social psychological setting. In this paper we propose a conceptual framework for analyzing social-psychological features of homes. The basic idea

[1] We are indebted to Lynn Liben, Nora Newcombe and Barbara Rogoff for their comments on earlier versions of this paper. This paper is based on a lengthier chapter, Altman, I. & Gauvain, M., A cross-cultural and dialectic analysis of homes, which appeared in L. Liben, A. Patterson & N. Newcombe (Eds.), *Spatial Representation & Behavior across the Life Span Theory and Application*. New York: Academic Press, 1981, 283-319. Readers interested in a more extensive discussion of the issues raised in this paper should refer to this chapter.

is that homes reflect the dialectic interplay of *individuality* and *society*, meaning that people are linked with and influenced by the larger community and, at the same time, people are separate from and independent of societal influences. We will propose that the individual/society dialectic is manifested in two subordinate dimensions that appear in home design and use, namely, identity/communality and openness/closedness. We will then apply this framework to the comparative cross-cultural analysis of homes. In so doing we hope to illustrate the possibility for systematic analysis of similarities and differences among cultures in the design and uses of dwelling spaces. Aside from Rapoport's analysis (1969a) of homes in relation to environmental factors and cultural variables, systematic comparisons of homes across cultures are rare.

2. Dialectic Dimensions of Homes

An assumption of our analysis is that homes mirror a wide variety of environmental and cultural influences, and that dwelling forms evolve in response to a variety of interactive forces. In this paper, however, we will restrict ourselves to the ways in which dwellings reflect the degree to which cultures and their members deal with the oppositions of individual needs, desires, and motives versus the demands and requirements of society at large. Individual forces are represented by the attempts of people to be unique and distinct, independent and free of the influences of others. At the same time, there are factors operating to make the person part of and at one with society, and that facilitate his or her identification with the community.

While societies probably vary in the extent to which individual versus societal factors predominante, we expect that both will exist to some extent in all cultures. Thus, it is not likely that one will find a viable culture in which there is total societal control of the lives of individuals, nor is it likely that one will find a society with complete individual feeedom. We do not assume, however, that social systems strive toward perfectly balances relationships between individual and societal forces. A range of possible relationships exist, any of which may be quite viable, as long as some amount of both oppositional processes exists in the system. Finally, we assume a dynamic and changing relationship between individual and societal factors. Thus, by virtue of external and internal factors (political, economic, social and environmental), there are likely to be shifting emphases of individual versus societal forces, on both a long- and short-term basis.

The individuality/society dialectic has many specific forms, aspects of which have been researched in social psychology, although not within a dialectic framework, e.g., independence versus conformity, competition versus cooperation self gain versus altruism. We propose that homes in a variety of cultures reflect in their design and use two specific aspects of the general individuality/society dialectic: (1) identity/communality, and (2) openness/closedness. We will illustrate these dimensions by discussing

three general areas of homes in different cultures: sitings and exteriors, entranceways and thresholds, and interlor layouts and use.

2.1. Identity/Communality

The home depicts the uniqueness and individuality of its occupants, i.e., their personal identity as individuals and as a family, along with their ties, bonds and affiliations with the community and larger culture of which they are part. Identity has often been used to describe modern American suburban homes, where people are depicted as searching for dwellings to meet thier particular individual and family needs, where they display their status, and where they decorate homes so as to make themselves distinct from others. Cooper (1976) emphasized the identity facet of homes in our society:

In the contemporary English speaking world, a premium is put on originality, on having a house that is unique and somewhat different from others on the street, for the inhabitants who identify with these houses are struggling to maintain some sense of personal uniqueness in an increasingly conformist world. On the other hand, one's house must not be too way-out, for that would label the inhabitant as a nonconformist, and that, for many Americans, is a label to be avoided. (p. 437)

Although emphasizing personal identity, Cooper suggests that the display of uniqueness operates within the bounds set by community norms. Thus, while features of American suburban homes may vary a great deal, they fall within the appropriate limits defined by the culture. We expect to find that homes in many cultures vary in th extent to which they differentially emphasize identity and communality, although both identity and communality should be present to some extent.

American middle-case suburban tract homes are usually located in the middle or rear part of a lot, with some separation between the home and a public street.[2] In may respects the location of the home and certain features of the front and exterior present ot others the unique, idiosyncratic and individual qualities of the residents. For exemple, landscaping the front yard is a traditional American vehicle for a achieving individuality and uniqueness. In addition, holiday and seasonal decorations are displayed in the front; the upkeep and personalization of the front is carefully done; trash and gardening equipment are usually stored in the rear, vegetable gardens rarely appear in the front yard, and so on. The identity theme is clearly illustrated by considering new American suburban communities where homes are often initially quite similar in design. Very quickly one sees homes repainted in different colors, decorations and facings that have no functional value are added to the exterior, and landscaping is individualized.

The fronts of American homes and vards not only express identity, but they also depict the bonds of a family with the community. This is especially evident in formal and informal projects involving neighborhoods,

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[2] Analyses of middle-class homes are based on our own informal observations and experiences with a limited range of such dwellings.

Fig. 1. Front facades of American suburban homes with planting, grillwork, decorations, awnings, and other displays. (Photographs by Jim Hoste).

such as cooperative gardening projects, and holiday decorating contests. Thus, the exterior of the home and the lot not only permit American sub-urbanites to achieve identity and uniqueness, but they also facilitate the display of community ties.
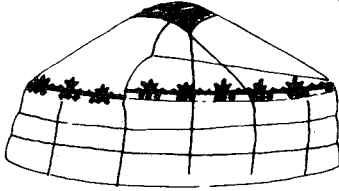
In some cultures bonds with the community are evident in the clustering of dwellings around a central courtyard or plaza. Pueblo Indians of the southwestern United States often live in terraced dwellings arranged on top of one another and face a central plaza (Rapoport, 1969a, b). Work, community activities and religious events take in the plaza, and the overall design of the pueblo reflects the unity of the residents with the community. At the other extreme, homes in parts of the Middle East and Asia portray few community bonds. These homes often present a blank wall to public thoroughfares. The absence of windows and the bare wall suggest little communality with the public at large or even with immediate neighbors.

There is evidence for both identity and communality in the home of other cultures. In Tarong, a kin-based hamlet in northern Luzon, Philippines (Nydegger and Nydegger, 1966), positioning a house away from the shared community yard would be considered antisocial and would deprive occupants of social interaction. People are proud of their shared yard, they sweep it thoroughly and keep materials and tools neatly arranged under their houses. As such, the residents of Tarong express their involvement with and pride in the community. However, the uniqueness and identity of a family is often reflected in the construction of individual homes. Although size is dictated almost solely by number of occupants, the quality of construction materials directly reflects a family's wealth.

As another example, nomadic North African Berbers pitch their tents in a sacred order — the *douar*, or circle — around which related families gather (Faegre, 1979). Wealthier and more important families have larger and more elaborate tents, thereby reflecting status and personal identity. Regardless of its size, however, the front of each tent faces the center of the *douar*, where the mosque tent is located. So, there is evidence of both identity and communality in the location and exterior qualities of homes in this culture.

Another example appears in the community design of the South Nias villages of Indonesia (Fraser, 1968). The chief's home is located at the upper end of the village and the commoners' dwellings are situated at the lower end, in accord with their conception of the universe as having an upper world and an underworld. In the center of the single streeet is a community plaza, which is a sacred place, and which is chosen by the religious leader as a central site around which the rest of the village is built. So, communality is represented in overall village design and in the location of dwellings. But so is individual identity. For example, the chief's dwelling is the largest and its exterior is richly decorated. Although most other homes are similar to one another, individualized totems and markers in front of dwellings reflect the unique qualities of their occupants. So, with respect to location and general exterior, we can see the interplay of identity and communality.
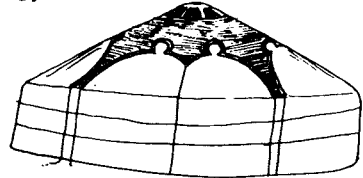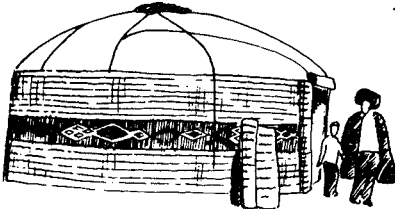
COVERING

The traditional yurt covering was always felt.

Up to eight layers of felt may be used in the wintertime.

KIRGIZ – a design in brown felt is sewn to the border of the white felt cover.

MONGOL – A colored "collar" is placed on the roof.

TURKMEN – reed mats on the wall with a woven band.
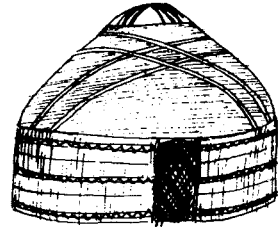
UZBEK – black felt roof with white bands. Reed mat walls.

CONTEMPORARY MONGOLIAN – canvas covered to protect the felt.

1. A white canvas is placed over roof.   2. Felt pieces on walls & roof.   3. Fitted canvas cover goes over felt & is tied down.

Fig. 2. Decorative coverings of yurts for different tribal groups.

A similar pattern appears with respect to the exterior of homes. Certain nomadic tribes of Central Asia live in dome-like structures called *yurts* that are covered by layers of felt (Faegre, 1979). These self-support-ing structures have a woven tension band of felt tied around the top of the dwelling. Some *yurt* dwellers weave intricate patterns on the band to denote a particular family, thereby reflecting unique identity. Tribes also decorate their *yurts* differently from one another. For example, the Kirgiz design includes a brown felt trim which is sewn to the border of a white felt cover, whereas the Uzbek *yurt* is covered with a black felt roof with white bands. Thus, the exterior facade of the *yurt* communicates both attachment to the larger community, and individual uniqueness.

Another example comes from the Bedouin nomads of Saudi Arabia and other parts of the Middle East (Dickson, 1969; Faegre, 1979). These people live in tents made of large strips of cloth woven from goat hair or wool. Communality and identity are reflected in several ways on the exterior of the Bedouin tent. Although the number and name of each strip is the same from group to group, the length of the strip depends upon the importance and status of the individual owner. The strips have

designs that are associated with a particular tribe or clan, but they also reflect the unique talents and embellishments of the women who weave the material. In addition, the *gata* — a curtain that separates women's and men's areas of the tent — contains elaborate woven designs. The front of this curtain extends beyond the tent opening and is positioned to face outward for all to see. Its design depicts tribal patterns, as well as the unique ideas of its weavers. So, again, one sees the interplay of both identity and communality in the exterior of dwellings.

One final example comes from the fronts of homes in the old section of Bergen, Norway, a traditional fishing port. Here homes are built of wood, are of similar style, and face directly onto narrow streeets. It is common for front windows to display attractive curtains and decorative items. Home ofter home has a similar display, perhaps reflecting community norms. However, one also sees considerable individualization of exteriors. Houses are painted different colors, some have ornate trimming around windows, the curtains are made of different fabric and have different designs, and front windows differ in what specific items are displayed.

In summary, the positioning and general exteriors of homes in a variety of cultures simultaneously reflect identity or uniqueness, and the bonding of people with the larger community. However, the examples presented above also suggest that cultures differ in the relative strength of identity or communality in home exteriors.

2.2. Entranceways and Thresholds

Throughout history thresholds and entranceways have had mythological and religious significance. Gateways and entranceways to the palaces of the rulers and to religious places often symbolized the boundary between the secular, profane world and the sacred, holy world (Raglan, 1964). According to Raglan (1964) thresholds to homes habe also assumed a sacred quality, as if they too were a separation between the harshness of the world and the warm protective haven of the home. Even today, many Jews afflux a *mezuzah* or paper scroll to the doorway of their homes and, upon entering, a pious Jew will touch the *mezuzah* in recognition of the sacred and holy quality of the place. Raglan observed that Teutons, Finns, Syrians, Egyptians, Persians and members of other cultures have held the belief that one must never step on the threshold of a home, but must always step over it. The reasons for such practices are numerous and include beliefs that spirits, souls, fairies, dieties or mysterious beings live under the threshold.

On the whole there are few religious or cosmological values regarding entranceways or thresholds in the suburban American culture. Of course, the decoration of front dooers at Thanksgiving, Halloween, or Christmas may symbolize earlier religious and cosmological values, but many such practices now have a secular and commercial basis. However, the American threshold and entranceway seem to reflect the interplay of identity/com-

munality. For example, one is apt to find several indicators of uniqueness and identity at the entrance to the suburban home in the form of carefully landscaped pathways, lamposts, decorative nameplates, elaborate door-knobs, knockers, lighting fixtures, large and elaborate doors, and some-times a family initial decoratively scrolled on a storm door. At the same, time, entranceways and thresholds also reflect community ties of the family with its neighbors and frieds. The care with which entranceways are treated symbolizes respect for visitors, who usually enter a home through its most important front door, whereas the family often uses side and rear entrances (Altman, Nelson, and Lett, 1972). Furthermore, the entranceway may be lighted at night, there is often a welcome mat at the doorway, and sometimes there are special decorations to symbolize the hospitality of the family toward friends and the community. Thus, the threshold of the American home simultaneously reflects identity and communality.

Thresholds and entrances to homes occur in different configur-ations across cultures. For examples, thresholds in family compounds in India and Mexico extend forward into the public domain and they often have a visible barrier, such as a gate or courtyard door, that sharply separ-ates public and family spaces. Even in parts of the United States and Europe, in congested suburbs and cities, fences, hedges and gateways are used to extend the threshold and to distinguish clearly the boundaries of the home from the community.

Entranceways to *yurts*, the dwellings of certain nomadic tribes of Asia, clearly depict identity/communality. The door, originally made of felt, was often elaborately decorated with detailed applique designs, and served as an important status symbol (Faegre, 1979). In more recent times, wooden doors have been frequently used and many are finely carved or are panelled. On the communality side of the dialectic it is con-sidered impolite to step on the threshold or to touch the tent ropes when entering a *yurt*. This custom emphasizes the importance of the entrance-way to the family and reinforces a community belief that the dwelling is a symbolic representation of the universe. As such, the *yurt* threshold conveys the sanctity of its inhabitants and of the community as a whole.

The Tlingit Indians of the northwestern American continent place carved totem poles with figures of animals, humans and mythological creatures in the front of their dwelling, often near entranceways. In some cases, the entranceway itself may contain detailed carvings. The figures on totems can represent symbolic and historical events unique to the life of the dwellers, indicating personal identity, and they also often portray events that apply to the clan or larger culture, thereby signifying com-munality.

Homes in Bergen, Norway, also reflect communality in that most people decorate their entranceways with large carved doors, shiny brass knockers and door handles, stone or wood carvings on the doorframes, and have potted plants and flowers flanking the entranceway and steps leading up the main door. Identity is evident in the fact that people

decorate and arrange their front area displays in rather different ways, with individualized flower arrangements, different types of door panelling and knockers, etc. Numerous examples of the display of identity/communality in and around entranceways can be found in other cultures.
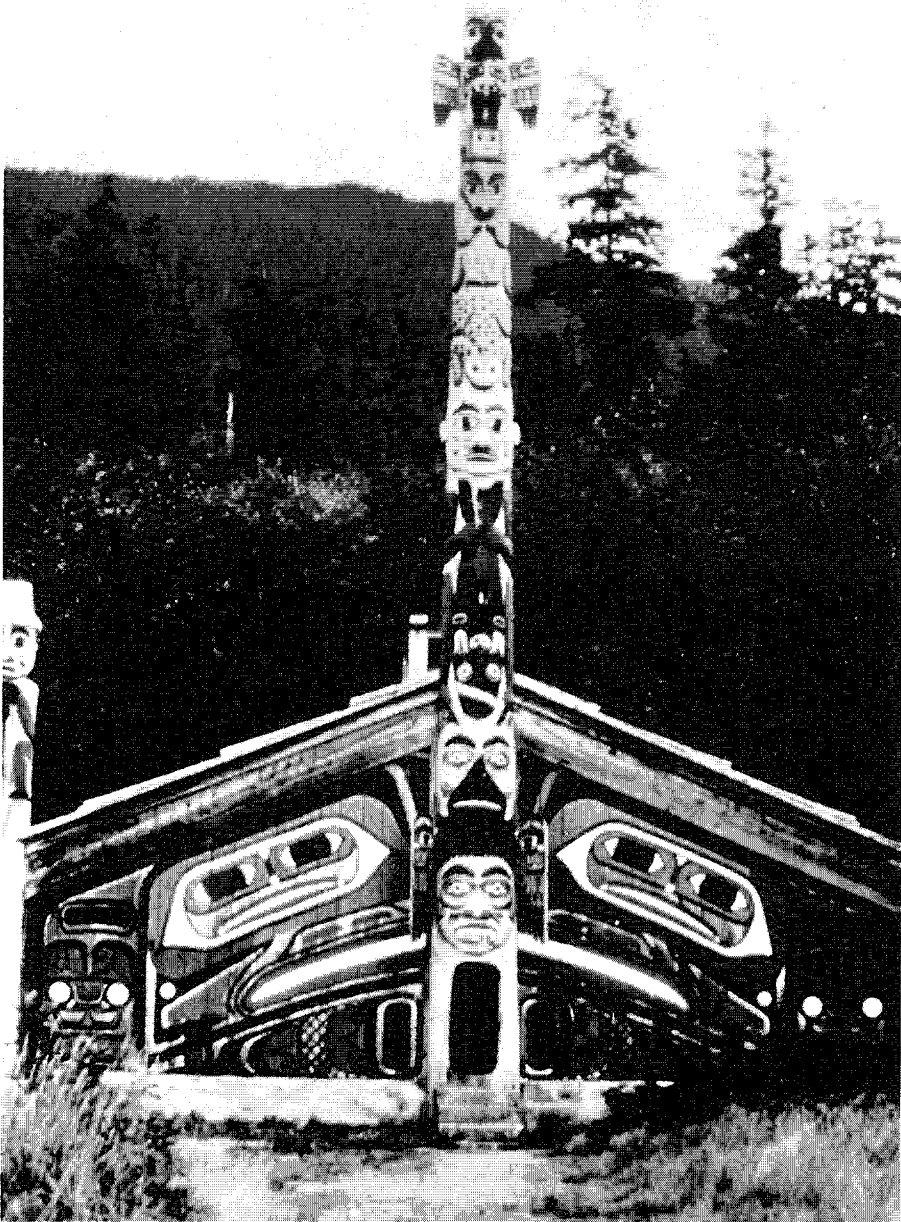

Fig. 3. Front facade of North American Tlingit Indian home with carvings of animals, humans and mythical figures (National Museum of man, National Museums of Canada).
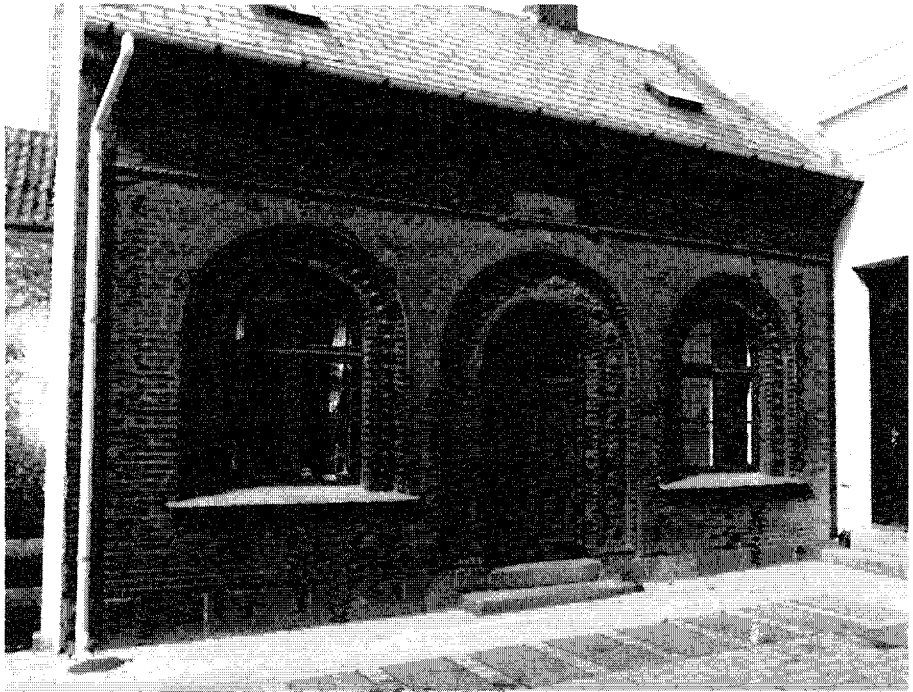
Fig. 4. Front facades and doorways of nineteenth century Danish homes with elaborate archways amd doors, window decorations, and displays. (Photographs by Irwin Altman).

2.3. Interior of Homes

Individuality is a pervasive feature of American homes. People seek spatial arrangements that are distinctive *vis a vis* their neighbors and that satisfy their individual family needs. Uniqueness is also reflected in the specialization of room functions. In fact, a family's identity is often symbolized by the number and variety of rooms in its home. It is also a practice for American suburbanites to decorate bedrooms in ways that display the sex, interests and individuality of the occupants (Rheingold and Cook, 1975). Individuality of family members is also evident in the primary users of certain rooms, e.g., a father often has a special room such as a study or workshop that he controls and that he may decorate or personalize (Altman, Nelson and Lett, 1972).

The decor and furnishings of American homes also symbolize the desire of occupants to differ from others. Many people organize the interior decor of their home around an ethnic or national theme. Furthermore, considerable time, energy and money is spent in decorating and cleaning the home, so as to present the image of order, friendliness and and uniqueness of the family's home environment.

Communality, is also present in homes in relation to family members and in respect to outsiders. Not only are there places that distinguish the individuality of family members from one another, but there are also communal areas where members come together as a family unit, e.g., the dining room, kitchen or family room. Sometimes family areas have decorations that display the family as a unit, for example, in the living room or family room one might see photographs of family members and relatives. While such places illustate the uniqueness of the family to outsiders, they also portray the bonds of family members with one another.

The interior of the American home also illustrates a family's ties with the community. For example, the role of societal norms is shown in the use of rooms for generally accepted functions. American suburbanites do not usually sleep in kitchens or dining rooms, nor do many people sleep in a single room. Furthermore, while considerable variation in decor is permissible, most middle class homes have similar furnishings and arrangements (Altman, *et al*, 1972). People also use certain places when entertaining outsiders. For example, living rooms and formal dining areas are used for special guests, not only to enable the family to present itself as a unique entity, but also to symbolize the importance of the guest of the family.

Although size, arrangement, decor and use of homes differ cross-culturally, identity and communality are evident in the interiors of homes of many cultures. In the village of Tarong in the Philippines (Nydegger and Nydegger, 1966), floor plans of homes are similar in the number and orientation of rooms. Furthermore, most households have the same amount and types of furnishings. However, individual wealth and personal identity are indicated by the quality of interior furnishing and, even though decorations in the main living room are limited, it is very important to a Tarongan that this place be attractive and comfortable, since this

is where guests are served. This area of the home is also a place of individual display. Walls often have photographs of family events and of family members, as well as certificates of achievement and pictures of political or other famous people. Therefore, along with communality there is evidence of individual identity in the Tarongan home.

In some cultures where homes are quite similar and reflect community norms, there are often subtle details that portray a family's uniqueness. Families in Justlahuaca, Mexico (Romney and Romney, 1966) live in similar one-room houses made of adobe. The interiors of some houses, however, are plastered and painted white, with a strip of color painted around the bottom. While this adornment is minor compared to the eleborate decor of American homes, it nevertheless is an expression of family identity and is especially significant since community bonds are so pervasive in home design and in other household practices.

The Japanese hamlet of Taira (Maretzki and Maretzki, 1966) has two types of houses: one is simple and small; the other is larger and more eleborate. However, the basic floor plan of both types is uniform. In spite of such communality, families express individuality by unique decorations of walls, such as the addition of paintings, scrolls, and photographs.

In another context, Dickson (1969) noted that the interior layouts of Bedouin tents are identical. The men's part of the tent, where guests
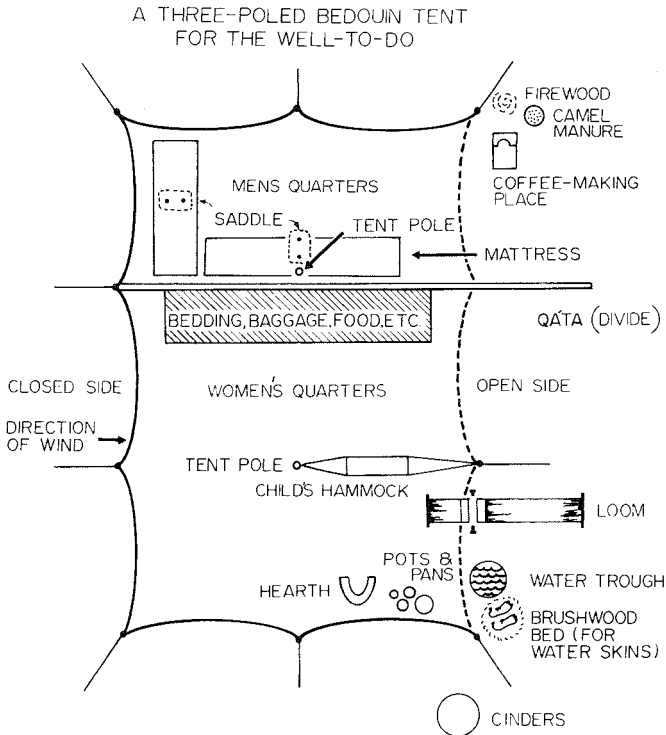

Fig. 5. Interior layout of the Bedouin tent.

are entertained, is always at the eastern end. Although it is common to have carpets and pillows on the floor, a fireplace in the center, and the man's camel saddle displayed prominently, identity is apparent in the elaborateness of the area and its decor, which reflects a man's wealth. The women's area it at the western end of the tent and is used to store food and cooking utensils. Even though women rarely see visitors and are usually working inside the tent, their decorated saddles are placed in a prominent position so as to be seen by passers-by. So, even in nomadic communities, one sees peoples expressing community bonds and individual uniqueness through the vehicle of the home environment.

A similar pattern occurs among the Tuareg, a nomadic people who dwell in the southern Sahara Desert. Most Tuareg skin tents are similar in color and shape, with low flat roofs to withstand sand storms (Faegre, 1979). But the interior of the tent epitomizes the blend of individual expression and community bonds. Almost every interior surface is decorated with displays of the weaving and leatherwork skills of the women. The fact that all the women work at adorning their tents suggests the community's acknowledgement of the importance of the inside of the tent.

This section of the paper described how a variety of cultures reflect the identity, distinctiveness and uniqueness of homes, along with communality, bonding and ties of people to their neighbors, community and culture. The existence of identity/communality is reflected in different facets of dwellings-location, exteriors, entranceways and thresholds, and interiors. In addition, the examples suggest that cultures differ with regard to the relative importance of identity and communality and the specific mechanisms for displaying identity and communality.

2.4. Openness/Closedness

A second facet of the individuality/society dialectic involves the degree to which homes emphasize the openness or closedness of occupants to outsiders. This dialectic draws on recent theorizing about privacy as a boundary regulation process (Altman, 1975, 1976, 1977); Altman & Chemers, 1980, a,b). According to Altman, privacy is a dialectic boundary process whereby a person is differentially accessible or inaccessible to others. This framework states that privacy is regulated by a range of behavioral mechanisms which include verbal and paraverbal communications, nonverbal behavior, and environmental behaviors such as personal space and territoriality.

We will propose that the home also serves as a behavioral mechanism that is used to regulate openness/closedness. Once again, we will assume that the home serves both openness and closedness, but to different degrees in different cultures.

2.5. Locations and Exteriors of Homes

The readily visible front yard of American homes makes publicity accessible part of the family's life and values, as displayed in their landscaping and general exterior. Yet the home is located toward the middle

or rear of the lot, somewhat separate and private from public thorough-fares. Furthermore, there are strong norms not to walk or even enter yards without permission. So, simultaneous with the openness and accessibility of family homes there is an element of separation and inac-cessibility. Compare this with parts of Canada and England (Cooper, 1976), where many homes are blocked from view by high shrubbery, trees and fences in the front yard, and where there is often a sharp demarcation between public thoroughfares and private property. Similarly, homes in the Middle East and elsewhere often present a blank wall to public thoroughfares, and information about family life is almost totally inac-cessible to passers-by.

In many respects the rear area of the American suburban home is a place for the family to avoid contact with outsiders. Rear areas are often treated as the personal domain of the family. Rarely is the rear area visible from the public street and it is frequently kept from public view through the use of high fences or hedges that surround the yard. Some suburbs even locate houses on adjacent lots in ways so as to prevent neighbors from seeing into one another's yards. A similar practice occured in 14th Century Moslem communities in West Africa (Prussin, 1974). Building codes required that entranceways to homes on either side of a road could not be directly across from one another. In addition, windows of upper stories had to be positioned so that people would not be able to see into neighboring dwellings.

Openness and closedness occur in a variety of forms in other cultures. Among the Nyansongo of Kenya, homestead separation and autonomy are highly valued, and neighbors are treated with suspicion (LeVine and LeVine, 1966). Homes are organized in clusters around kinship groups, and are separated from other clusters of homes by boundaries, hedges and trees. Individual homes within the group are dispersed to ensure separ-ation, but the network of paths in the cluster makes it easy to get from one house to another. However, paths between homestead groups are less accessible. From the yards of each homestead cluster one can see and be seen by passers-by on the main road and one can watch people of another cluster on the opposite hill. Thus, some accessibility exists, while the overall design of the community ensures residential separation.

In Tarong (Nydegger and Nydegger, 1966), a community described previously, neighborhood living groups are connected by footpaths, making homes readily accessible to almost anyone in the community. However, the paths near houses are under the control of residents and passersby are obliged to greet the houseowner by requesting the right to pass. Thus there is simultaneous access of homes along with individual ownership and the control over accessibility.

During the hot summer months nomadic Bedouins of the Middle East pitch their tents close together around limited water sources and leave the tents completely open, yielding close contact among neighbors. However, it is also customary to hang up wall curtains for privacy and to keep out wind and sand during stormy weather. An additional privacy

mechanism concerns rules about exposure of women to male outsiders. A visitor must approach a tent from the front and always on the men's or eastern side of the tent. In this way women can avold being seen or can adjust their facial veils (Dickson, 1969; Faegre, 1979). Furthermore, when male visitors are served food, women pass supplies over the tent divider without being seen (Cole, 1975).

In the small Okinawan hamlet of Taira, houses are so close that neighbors can hold conversations without leaving their homes (Maretzki and Maretzki, 1966). Furthermore, houses are easily accessible from the street and there are no formal rules about trespassing, so that people freely cross each other's property. Yet, some privacy is achieved since homes are often surrounded by trees, hibiscus hedges and fences. In addition, there are strong norms regarding personal property and stealing is almost unheard of in the community. So, even in an extremely open community, mechanism exist to permit control of access to individuals and to their homes.

Similar mechanisms have also evolved in certain Sea Dayak communities of Indonesia (Patterson and Chiswick, 1979), where many families live in a communal dwelling. In front of family apartments are a covered public gallery and an open deck that extend along the entire length of the long house. These areas are used by everyone, yielding extensive social contacts among residents. Yet, there are compensatory practices whereby people can regulate their dealings with others. For example, whenever possible, relatives occupy adjoining apartments, which permits people to regulate at least part of their daily lives in relation to outsiders. In addition, the deck and gallery are used differently during the day and evening. Although readily accessible during the daytime, gallery and deck areas become the territorial domain of apartment residents during the evening hours.

Thresholds and Entranceways

As discussed earlier, thresholds and entranceways have often had religious or mythological significance, and sometimes represent the juncture of the personal life of a family with the public world of a society. In the United States there is a strict privacy norm and visitors rarely cross the threshold of a home unless they are invited to do so. Inviting or not inviting entry to a home therefore serves as a clear indicator of the occupants' desire for more or less contact.

In some cultures the doorway assumes differential importance depending upon time of day. In the Colville Lake community of northwestern Canada, inhabited by the Hare Indian tribe (Savishinsky, 1974), house doors are never locked during the day and people freely enter one another's homes without knocking or asking permission. A similar practice occurs in the Javanese culture studied by Geertz (cited in Westin, 1970). However, at night, the doors of Colville Lake houses are locked, curtains are drawn, and the absence of chinmey smoke is a signal to not disturb the household.

Similar practices occur in several cultures. For example, in the village of Khalapur, India, members of the Rajput caste exhibit a blend of openness and closedness in relation to thresholds, entranceways, and their general living environment (Minturn and Hitchcock, 1966). Men's and women's quarters are physically separated, sometimes by large distances. Men's houses are typically located on a platform, away from pathways, and a roof porch is used for sleeping. Even though the platform can be seen by outsiders, it is a private that is used primarily by the occupants and their friends and kin.

Among the Rajput, women live in secluded kin groups, in courtyard areas surrounded by walls, with only a single entranceway into the courtyard. Except for the general entranceway there are no exterior windows or openings to individual dwellings. Each woman sleeps and sometimes eats in a small cubicle that opens onto the courtyard. Daily activities take place in the courtyard, so that women are continually observed by others. However, women can control their accessibility to others by going into their cubicles, or by other mechanisms. For example, eating takes place alone, either in a cubicle or in a corner of the courtyard, where it is perfectly acceptable to turn one's back to others while eating.

Another example is from the village of Tarong in the Philippines (Nydegger and Nydegger, 1966). Here, the front porch of the home serves as a focus of daily activity, and it is in constant use by family, neighbors and visitors. The porch is approximatively five to six feet off the ground and is reached by a bamboo ladder. In the evening or when no one is home, the ladder is pushed away from the porch, thereby discouraging visitors. Thus the ladder, a formal entranceway or threshold, provides cues to the community regarding the accessibility of a family to outsiders. A similar practice was exhibited by the Iroquois Indians of the United States, who wrote an extensive political constitution and code of personal behavior (Parker, 1968). One of their laws stated:

Certain signs shall be known to all people of the five nations which shall be noted that the owner or occupant of the house is absent. A stick or pole in a slanting or leaning position shall indicate this and be the sing. Every person not entitled to the house by right of living within upon seeing such a sign shall not enter the house either by day or night, but shall keep as far away as his business shall permit. (p. 57)

In Justlahuaca, Mexico, a similar cue at the entranceway to a house communicates family accessibility (Romney and Romney, 1966). In this community, kin groups live together in a compound that consists of dwellings surrounding a common courtyard. Individual homes have small boards or fence-like partitions for doorways. These are open during the day, but at nicht or when the family is away the partition is raised, reflecting the inaccessibility of the family to outsiders.

2.7. The Interior of Homes

In a variety of ways the American suburban home involves an interplay of openness/closedness. For example, family members usually have a primary territory (Altman, 1975), such as a bedroom, over which they

have considerable control. Doors can be closed to avoid contact, people do not usually intrude into others' spaces without permission, and there are strong norms about ownership and privacy (Altman, *et al.*, 1972).

The home is also used to regulate contacts with outsiders. In an analogy with the theatre, Goffman (1959) used the idea of front regions and back regions in homes. Front regions are like a stage, where actors present images they wish to convey. So it is in homes, where visitors are presented with certain styles of behavior by their hosts and where guests are restricted to certain parts of the home e.g., living room, guest bathroom, or the family room. Back regions of the home, such as bedrooms, are often unavailable to outsiders. These rooms are typically remote from public places and are often located in the rear or on the upper level of multi-story homes. It is acceptable that the back region, which is hidden from guests, may be in disarray and not at all congruent with the residents' front area presentation of orderliness.

There are examples from several other cultures that illustrate how homes are organized into front and back regions. Errington (1978) noted that the front area of the Buginese house was a public place where guests were entertained. The rear door and rear area were used by family members, and the front and rear areas were separated by a partition of woven cane or rattan and sometimes even had a sign above the doorway to the rear that essentially stated "off limits to guests." Gulick (1964) found a similar division in the homes of a Lebanese village. Here, the rear quarters were separated from the front by tall cabinets and curtains and, once again, guests were not permitted access to the back region. And, in Taira, Okinawa (Maretzki and Maretzki, 1966), the living room is located in the front of the house and can be opened to the outside by sliding panels along the entire front wall. However, even the simplest houses have a thin wall which separates the rear bedroom and kitchen areas from the front area. Alexander (1969) described homes in Peru as having a systematic gradation of accessibility. Formal guests were either kept at the front door or were permitted entry to the formal parlor, whereas friends were permitted to use the more informal living areas, such as the kitchen. Finally, in the case of American suburbia, the living room is usually accessible to visitors. It is typically centrally located, readily accessible to the front door of the home, and often faces the public street.

In some cultures, where extended families share a dwelling space and where contact with others is extensive, there are mechanisms that allow for control of social contact. In the Bedouin tent, the men's and women's sides are divided by a decorated curtain, the *gáta*. The women work in their section, which is further subdivided among wives, so that a woman controls her area (Cola, 1975). Male guests and older sons sleep in the men's section or outside the tent. Through these practices the accessibility of women to men outside their conjugal unit can be controlled.

Among the Nyansongo of Kenya (LeVine and LeVine, 1966) there are many proverbs indicating the importance of regulation of openness/closedness, e.g., "He who enters doors will be found with a swollen intes-

tine," and "Homesteads are secret hiding places." In this polygamist community, the homes of co-wives are separated from one another by at least one agricultural field. Inside the dwellings wives have a secluded area where the wife cooks and where the husband, wife and small children sleep. The house also has a public area that the usband uses to entertain guests and to store personal possessions. There is a separate entrance to the public room that keeps outsiders away from the wife's area. Thus this culture has an interior design that helps regulate the social accessibility of homestead members to others.

Among the Hare Indians extended families share a house which has only a single large room (Savishinsky, 1974). There is little opportunity to avoid others, yet there are rules which manage interaction. For example, family members rarely use each others' sleeping areas and the articles used to personalize these areas are never removed by anyone except the owner. Thus, by strict respect for personal territories some control of self-other accessibility is achieved. Similar practices occur in many communal living societies (Altman, 1977).

Taken together, the illustrations of home siting and location, exteriors, thresholds and interiors indicate how the dwelling is used to regulate the openness/closedness of residents. Thus, not only does the home serve as a vehicle for expressing the self as an individual and in relation to the community, but the dwelling serves as an important vehicle for people in cultures around the world to regulate their openness and closedness to others.

3. Directions for Future Research and Application

Social psychological research on homes is sorely lacking. Within the orientation of this paper there are four types of research that can be pursued: descriptive research and analysis, diagnostic studies, theoretical research, and applied research.

3.1. Descriptive Research and Analysis

While scattered information about homes is available in a variety of fields, data have not been collected in a systematic fashion, nor has research been sensitive to the dimensions of identity/communality and openness/closedness. Descriptive studies are needed to catalog indicators of these processes in homes of different cultures. Methodological techniques are also required to quantify oppositional processes and the relative strength of opposites. By so doing one can compare aspects of homes within and across cultures on their degree of openness/closedness and identity/communality.

3.2. Diagnostic Studies

Individuals, families and cultures exhibit many changes over time. Children grow, mature socially and eventually go off on their own, people

move to new environments, family members die, and extended kin groups come to live in a family dwelling. Cultures also undergo changes, sometimes gradually and sometimes suddenly, as in cases of forced resettlement of people by virtue of government policy, or rapid introduction of advances technology.

Diagnostic questions relevant to social change are numerous. For example, are there aspects of design and use of homes that differentiate successful and unsuccessful adaptation to new circumstances? Do different characteristics of these dimensions in the home contribute to successful or unseccessful adaptation to new settings?

3.3. Theoretical Research

There are several facets of our approach that give rise to basic theoretical questions. For example, how do homes in different cultures vary in the relative strength of oppositions on these dimensions? In what ways do other aspects of a cultural system tie in with home design and use *vis a vis* these dimensions? An even more fundamental set of questions concerns the amount of variance accounted for by the proposed dimensions. Are some oppositions more important than others? Are there other dimensions that should be used to study homes?

Other theoretical questions concern the relationship of the socialization process in a culture to its expression of identity/communality and openness/closedness. Also of importance is how families and cultures respond to normal life cycle changes. To what extent does the adaptive or maladaptive family or culture emphasize adjustments to one or the other dimension and to various poles of these dimensions? Is there an orderly process of adjustment to life cycle or cultural changes in terms of these dimensions?

3.4. Applied Research

Finally, there are a variety of applied research topics that can be studied from the perspective of this paper. In what ways should the design of homes in our own and in other cultures be guided by the processes discussed in this chapter? Specifically, in instances of planned environmental change is it possible to create alternative designs for housing according to these dimensions that will enhance adaptation to new circumstances? Are there educational and training programs that can be developed in connection with environmental design programs to heighten sensitivity to these processes?

It is fitting that this paper ends with research questions for the future, rather than with detailed studies and hypotheses. So it is that our approach should be viewed as primarily illustrative and heuristic. Our goal was to explore the possibilities and potentialities of a cross-cultural dialectic analysis of homes, and not to demonstrate unequivocally its worthiness.

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