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COUCHED IN THEIR OWN TERMS: WHAT MAKES A LIVING ROOM?

by

TALYA B. RECHAVI

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Psychology in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

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THE CITY UNIVERISTY OF NEW YORK

Abstract

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Talya B. Rechavi

Adviser: Professor Leanne Rivlin

This study investigated people's experiences of their New York City living rooms. Guided by the "grounded theory" approach, the goal of the research was to discover the spatial and behavioral elements that make up living rooms. The study consisted of two components: (1) an empirical component, in which open-ended, in-depth interviews with 16 residents of New York City were conducted in their living rooms. Interviews were supplemented by observations of the furniture and decorations, as well as of other physical elements, such as illumination. (2) a study of historic developments that have affected living rooms from the 19th century to the present. This component included a review of existing studies, as well as selected magazines of general interest, from the start of the 20th century. In addition to serving as a space for entertaining, and for the possible convening of several household members, living rooms were found to afford physical and emotional comfort to individuals within a household. The study revealed that while many objects in the living room are used for display, objects in the living room can have deep personal meanings to their owners. Objects are used to regulate the degree of intimacy shared with outsiders through the stories conveyed about

them. Despite stylistic differences in arrangements and decorations, the living rooms studied replicate a prototype that reflects cultural values and technological changes. When compared with previous eras, both change and persistence in values and norms are observed. Hand in hand with a living room prototype, the analysis also yielded diversity in participants' experiences of their living rooms. Findings suggest this diversity can be attributed to the physical attributes of the space, living arrangements (e.g., whether people live by themselves or with life-partners), gender and personal life-experiences. These differences are also discussed in the broader historic context and in the geographic context of urban dwelling.

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents Leah and Yaakov Rechavi

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

What Prompted the Study

This study investigated dwellers' experiences of their living rooms. The study took place in New York City. The people who participated were neither poor, nor rich. No attempt was made to propose any statistically significant results, that is, results that can be generalized from the people who participated to all residents of New York City, or even to middle-class New Yorkers. Rather, an attempt was made to understand the different aspects of people's experiences of their living rooms, and more broadly, their homes, and to suggest how such aspects might be involved in such an experience.

The idea for this study came from the results of a previous investigation that looked at how people created their living spaces (Rechavi, 1996). Many of the participants lived in either studio apartments, or apartments they shared with other tenants. In the absence of separate rooms, or rooms that belonged only to them, the participants carved out a "walless living room" within their room. This was an area designated for entertainment and lounging, either of guests, or the participants themselves. This space resembled what in a house or an apartment with several rooms would be the "living room" and/or the "family room." Typically, these "entertainment and lounging areas" included a large piece of furniture used, at least part of the time, for seating, such as a sofa or just the bed. Usually, there was either an elongated table in front of the seating item, or a smaller "end table" beside it (such tables were sometimes improvised, made from objects such as carts or small refrigerators). These areas also gave the sense they were the crux of the room, and helped center the resident. As one participant in the study said:

> Because from here I can see my whole domain, I can watch TV, which I love to do, I can look out the window, which, I mean, there's not much to see, but that takes me out...It's just kind of nice to survey my domain, this is my home, and I'm happy, it makes me feel centered even though I'm not physically centered. It makes me feel OK and safe and at home. And I can relax.
>
> (Rechavi, 1996).

That these participants, living in one room, made a clear effort to create spaces that resemble a living room, frequently making use of improvisation and innovation, suggested living rooms are perceived as essential to the essence of the residence.

Yet, a 1999 article in the "House and Home" section of the New York Times claimed the living room was slowly disappearing and more and more people who build their homes were asking developers to forego the traditional living room (Iovine, 1999). "Its replacement?" asked an on-line CNN article, and continued to answer: "A zone that gets daily use in the form of internet browsing, television watching, eating, drinking, exercising or conducting business" (Formal living rooms bite the dust, after years of collecting it, 1999, ¶ 2), referring to, what is commonly known as, the "Great Room."

However, if living rooms are passing from the world, why is it that in every current issue of "Better Homes and Gardens" or "House and Garden" or "Good Housekeeping," articles and advertisements that depict highly traditional living rooms, fireplace included, are so abundant? Even when the particular lamp, or couch, or fireplace for that matter, are supposedly avant-garde, the overall layout is basically the same as it was in 1950. Similarly, why is it that a three-dimensional advertisement for a home mortgage and lending company, hanging from a building near Times Square, showed the to-be-insured home with a fully-furnished living room included (see Figure 1).

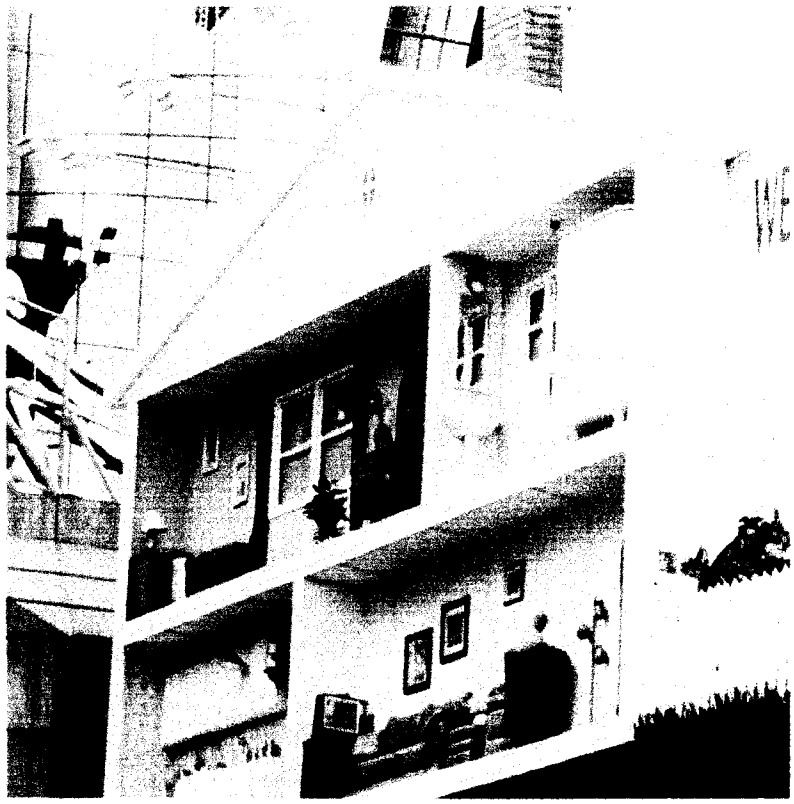

Figure 1. Model of a house showing a living room erected on a building near Times Square as an advertisement for the Washington Mutual lending company.

And in 2000, Lee Ming Wei, an artist, had an exhibit at the Isabella Stewart Gardner museum in Boston, Massachusetts. The exhibit was named "The Living Room."

I was curious to find out if indeed living rooms were pivotal to people's experiences of their homes. I wanted to know what was unique about living rooms. I wanted to learn more about what constituted people's experience of their living room and how it related to the experience of "home," as a whole.

But there was a personal investment in the subject as well: Upon moving to New York, I found I did not feel at home in this big city, not even in the apartments in which I

lived. Walking down the streets of the city, I would "voyeur" into people's living rooms because, for whatever reason, for me, this room, more than any other room in the dwelling, signified what home was about.

Still, I could have studied people's homes and included living rooms as part of the study. Why didn't I? There are two parts to the answer: one is that, although in the present study I focused on living rooms, I did include some investigation of other rooms. I was specifically interested in comparing the living room to other rooms.

Furthermore, previous studies have shown that a residence is a highly diversified space: Each of its rooms has different functions and is used differently. Not only do such rooms differ in the activities that take place in them (cooking, as opposed to sleeping as opposed to bathing), there are different qualities to these different activities taking place in the different rooms: some rooms offer activities that are more private, as opposed to those that are more public (e.g., Korosec-Serfaty,1984; Rybczynski,1986). Some rooms offer a greater element of control than other rooms, depending on who the occupants are and what the social arrangement is (Sebba & Churchman, 1983), and different rooms offer varying degrees of intimacy (Alexander, Ishikawa & Silverstein, 1977). Even within a specific room and/or area (either within a room, or where a residence is only one room), there are different objects having different uses and different activities taking place. The amount of diversity of objects and activities in living rooms has, in fact, been recorded by Wood and Beck (1994).

Results of previous research, including my own, convinced me that focusing on a specific room would allow for a level of detail and depth to emerge that would not be possible if the residence as a whole were chosen as the focus of the study.

Literature Review

This literature review is intended to give the reader a general understanding of those previous studies that have dealt with living rooms and with home in general. Such studies have served as a conceptual backdrop against which the findings from the present study were constantly compared and assessed. Subsequent chapters dealing with the empirical findings (Chapters 5 to 8) will provide a more in-depth coverage of this and additional literature. These chapters will show how the previous literature has shed light on findings from this study, as well as what the present study contributes to an understanding of those issues brought up in previous research. Since phenomenology serves as a conceptual basis for the current research, I will begin with an overview of some relevant aspects of that field.

Phenomenology

The term phenomenology has been given several interpretations. One such interpretation is "the appearance of things as contrasted with the things themselves" (Misiak & Sexton, 1973, p.2).

In 1907, Edmund Husserl gave a series of lectures in Göttingen, Germany, on phenomenology, or what he called "the science of cognition." During these lectures, Husserl proposed a method of investigation, whereby universal abstractions, or "essences" are revealed. The "raw" data for this investigation would not be objects assumed to be in the world (that being a world separate from people's cognitions and

outside of such cognitions), but rather the various elements that constitute what appears in cognitions, or "cogitatios." Husserl employed Descarte's method of doubting all that can be doubted, until truth appears as what cannot be further doubted. Husserl believed that the assumption that there are real objects in the world simply presented in our cognitions, and whose existence can therefore be inferred from what appears in cognition, is an assumption that needs to be doubted, or "bracketed." The one thing that cannot be doubted is what appears in cognition, since it is the first thing that appears to us, and therefore is what should serve as the primary data for investigation: "Every intellectual process and indeed every mental process whatever, while being enacted, can be made the subject of a pure 'seeing' and understanding, and is something absolutely given in this 'seeing.' It is given as something that is, that is here and now and whose being cannot be sensibly doubted." (Husserl, 1990, p. 24). What Husserl called the "natural sciences," which include the social sciences, assume the mind can contain valid representations of the world outside the mind. The natural sciences then arrive at conclusions about that world based on such representations. Since Husserl claimed such an interpretation is based on an assumption that cannot be accepted a-priori (the assumption that what appears in cognition is a valid representation of a world outside of the cognition), he strived for a truth that could be extracted from the basic data of the "cogitatios" and could be given by an investigation of these percepts, without using any prior assumptions.

Heidegger, who was a contemporary of Husserl, was interested in the problem of "being." As such, he did posit an a-priori assumption, that is, that human beings have a pre-conceptual awareness of their relation to the world, including that of other human beings. Heidegger's realm of investigation was broadened to include experiences that

involve acting in the world. Still, Heidegger strived to arrive at the core universal elements of being-in-the-world. He believed these elements are manifest in the concrete experience of the individual. While Husserl suggested to "bracket" the relation between the percepts and the world, it is exactly that relation – not only between percepts, but also between actions and the world – that Heidegger was interested in exploring (Schrag, 1967).

Misiak and Sexton (1973) made a distinction between philosophical phenomenology and psychological phenomenology. Philosophical phenomenology is aimed, in the tradition of Husserl and Heidegger, at reaching essences. Psychological phenomenology confines itself to the study of the consciousness and experience of human beings. In other words, psychological phenomenology is less interested in resolving basic epistemological and ontological issues, such as those with which Husserl chose to grapple. Rather than serving as raw data from which ontological truths are derived, for psychological phenomenology experience is the subject matter of investigation. Attempts are made to arrive at "essences." However, these are only essences of experience itself, and not necessarily essential truths about the world.

Several researchers have developed a specific interest in the phenomenology of space and place. Relph (1976), for instance, looked at the different types of experiences of place, and at the conditions that deem such experiences meaningful or meaningless. Bachelard (1969) and Korosec-Serfaty (1984, 1985, 1986) compared the different experiences offered by different rooms and areas within the home, and the effects of changing seasons on such experiences. Tuan (1977) dealt with issues of space and intimacy, and the experiential relations between time and space.

Such studies fall more into the category of psychological phenomenology than into the category of philosophical phenomenology, according to the distinction given by Misiak and Sexton (1973). In line with these studies, the present study does in no way presume to discover ontological "truths," but rather has, as its subject of investigation, people's experiences of their living rooms. Furthermore, this study is interested both in people's individual experiences, and also in extracting from individual experiences abstract categories, the dimensions on which individuals can then be located.

Phenomenology can also be said to have influenced the methodological approach chosen for this investigation, that of "grounded theory" (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The approach will be elaborated upon in Chapter 2, "Design and Methodology." At this point it will suffice to say grounded theory is related to phenomenology in that it prescribes a method of constant comparisons between observations (in the broad sense of absorbing information relating to a phenomenon), in order to extract abstract categories essential to the phenomenon observed. This method of comparison, was, in fact, suggested by Husserl.[1]

Some Aspects of the Experience of Home in Previous Literature

Most investigators dealing with home have honed in on one particular aspect of the home experience (e.g., Cooper, 1974; Dovey, 1978; Sebba & Churchman, 1983). It

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[1] It should be noted that there are particular phenomenological procedures, such as an examination of consciousness as it takes place without interpretation (Misiak & Sexton, 1973), that have not been applied in the present study.

has been suggested that the home serves as a center of human existence, both on an individual level and a social level (Relph, 1976; Tuan, 1977), as a sphere of control for the individual (Sebba & Churchman, 1983) and as micro-cosmos, reflecting in its physical structure and in its uses the most fundamental culturally-embedded truths about the world (Bourdieu,1977; Dovey, 1978). As a term that can encompass places of different scales, from dwelling to country, it has been suggested to be the place where we feel we belong (Hayward, 1975; Sixsmith, 1986).

According to Cooper (1974), the home one lives in reflects one's identity, both self and social. This process of reflection is achieved through the way people furnish and decorate their homes (as well, as through their choices of homes, when such a choice exists). The home reflects its resident's identity to the resident, and it communicates it to other people. In contrast, Pratt (1982) found the interiors of the home had different roles for two different Vancouver communities. In the more aristocratic and traditionally-based community, people used furniture and decoration within the home to convey a sense of social adherence with their community. In the nouveau riche community, residents used their homes as means of expressing their individual identities. Pratt claims the use of the home for self-reflection is in fact an "invention" of post-industrial society. Similarly, Hummon (1989) asserted that cultural and historic conditions have led to the connection between home and one's identity in American society.

Bachelard (1969) focused on the residence as a container of the self: "If I were asked to name the chief benefit of the house, I should say: the house shelters day-dreaming, the house allows one to dream in peace" (Bachelard, 1969, p.6).

Rechavi (1996) found that a sense of being sheltered is brought about more by

furniture, especially items for sitting or reclining, whereas reflection of the self is conveyed more through the decorative objects. This echoes Sixsmith's finding (1986) that the "belonging" experience" of home is separate from the "self-expression" aspect of home.

An example of a study that views home as encompassing different aspects is that of Rivlin (1990a; 1990b). Rivlin looked at the various roles of residences in the development of its inhabitants, especially children. Rivlin referred to the social, cultural and cognitive aspects of development impacted by homes, by making a comparison between the environments of homes and those of homeless shelters. Furthermore, rather than offering a somewhat simplistic, albeit elegant view of how the home educates its inhabitants (i.e., the home is a spatial representation of universal truths), Rivlin dealt with the various elements of domestic life that may influence the children who live there: these include the space itself, the objects in the space, the way people relate to these objects and the way people relate to each other.

The point of the article "What makes a home?" written by Lawrence (1987) is exactly to suggest "home" brings together cultural, sub-cultural and psychological factors, themselves affected by a historic dimension. Saegert (1985b) introduced the concept of "dwelling" as the active relationship between a dweller and her or his home. Saegert describes this relationship as:

> ...a more active and mobile relationship of individuals to the physical, social and psychological spaces around them. It points to a spiritual and symbolic connection between the self and the physical world that was overtly recognized in premodern dwellings and may now seem uselessly poetic or fanciful (pp. 287-288).

A different body of work on home has focused on the objects within the home.

For instance, Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton (1981) have found that women of all ages and men of older age have a preference for "objects of contemplation," objects that elicit memories and thoughts of others, whereas younger men have a preference for objects they use for activities, such as sports activities. Bih (1992) found both male and female Chinese postgraduate students living in New York had a preference for objects of contemplation, a preference Bih attributed to Chinese family values, as well as to the longing for family and friends abroad brought about by participants' physical distance from their homeland.

When the different studies presented in this section are viewed as complementing each other, the home emerges as a complex and rich setting, consisting of different psychological, cultural and social dimensions. Some of these studies even offer a historical perspective, offering an account of how and why such dimensions have changed over time. However, because most of these studies focus on one dimension, such as a psychological aspect, they do not explore the possibility that different dimensions (e.g., psychological and cultural) may be connected. The proposed study will attempt to capture the different aspects that comprise the experience of living rooms and the possible connections between these aspects.

In addition, many of the studies reviewed in this section have not investigated how the experience of "home" is translated to relations between particular types of objects and particular rooms. In so doing, the account of home given in these studies is, many times, not tangible. By focusing on the objects and activities in one particular room, the living room, it is hoped the proposed study will reveal how some domestic experiences are manifest in the concrete elements of space.

The Relationship between a Home and its Specific Rooms

A living room cannot be studied in limbo. It is a room within the home. But what is the relation between different rooms within a dwelling? What is the relation between living rooms and other rooms? According to Korosec-Serfaty (1984), we experience the home as a unified entity. This unified experience is due to the fact that the various rooms (and other sub-areas in the house) complement each other by being actually charged with opposing polarities (binary oppositions) of spatial location (upstairs-downstairs) psychological meanings (visible-secret), level of uses (work-leisure) and social functions (private-public). Furthermore, according to Korosec-Serfaty, meanings of spaces are drawn from their polarity with other spaces:

> ...visible spaces of dwelling draw their qualities, status and meaning from their relationships with the cupboards, closets, drawers, balconies, garages, attics and cellars which comprise the hidden spaces of dwelling...What is visible expresses the dweller, but it also conceals him. (Korosec-Serfaty, 1984, p. 304).

Korosec-Serfaty's study focused on the investigation of the relations between cellars and attics, and between these spaces and the home. Her study was a reaction, at least in part, to Bachelard (1969), who claimed a free-standing house, the "correct" kind of house according to him, is first and foremost a vertical entity. The various spaces in the house gain their different meanings from their location within this vertical hierarchy. The roof, according to Bachelard, is the rational element of shelter. The cellar is the irrational dark entity of the house. Korosec-Serfaty found in her study (1984) that, contrary to Bachelard's claim, the visibility-secrecy dimension, rather than verticality, is the main dimension that determines the meanings of the cellar and attic (as well as other parts of the home). Both the cellar and the attic are, in contrast to other spaces in the

house, secret.

When Korosec-Serfaty opposed the cellar and the attic to the visible parts of the house, she had the living room in mind:

> If it is true that the living-room, for instance, the most visible and most consistently shown of all private spaces, bespeaks the dweller, it does so in terms which certainly reveal the person's mode of being and dwelling, but it does so above all in socially acceptable terms (Korosec-Serfaty, 1984, p. 304).

Wood and Beck (1994) also used the system of binary oppositions to study the sub-divisions of a house, with the main focus on the living room of one of the authors. They found that when the architectural features of the house are divided into binary oppositions, this division does not fully correspond with the one achieved by dividing the family life that takes place in the home into binary oppositions. However, according to Wood and Beck, the house achieves its viability from the reconciliation between architecture and family.

Another author who looked at how homes were divided into opposing divisions is Bourdieu (1977). Studying homes in the town of Kabylia in Algeria, Bourdieu claimed these homes echoed the world according to Kabylia's culture, by reflecting those oppositions that exist in the Kabylian cosmos. Typically, these houses consisted of two rooms divided by a low wall. One room, that Bourdieu claims to represent malehood, reached ground level and opened to the outside. It is the room where people gathered, cooked and ate. The other room, claimed to represent femalehood, was sunken and was where the food and animals were kept, and where the residents slept and had sex: "Thus, the house is organized according to a set of homologous oppositions – fire, water; cooked, raw; high, low; light, shade; day, night..." (Bourdieu, 1977, pp. 90-91).

Bourdieu claimed that in a culture that is not literate there is more difficulty in retaining and communicating cultural concepts. According to him, in such a culture the practical experience with the domestic space allows for socialization and cultural education.

The previous examples have demonstrated the use of binary oppositions in the analysis of the meanings of domestic spaces. It is my belief, however, that the relationship between rooms, as well as between those rooms and the house as a whole is possibly more complex than can be described by binary oppositions. Furthermore, the "binary opposition" model views the meanings contained in a particular room as static, as if the rigidity of walls is translated into a rigidity of meaning. The proposed study will look, among other things, at the relation between the experience of the living room and the experience of other spaces within the home, and will provide an opportunity to assess whether the model of binary-oppositions is sufficient to describe the relation between spaces within the home, and whether meanings of spaces are constant or in flux.

Living Rooms in Previous Literature

Most of the previous literature on living rooms has dealt with differences between social sub-groups in the styles of their living rooms (e.g., Amaturo, Costagliola & Ragone, 1987; Laumann & House, 1970), or with differences between cultures (Bonnes, Giuliani, Amoni & Bernard, 1987). Such studies have rarely looked at similarities between the living rooms of different people. This is perhaps simply because it is easier to perceive differences than to perceive similarities: What is similar to us simply becomes that backdrop against which we compare everything that is not similar. And since it is difficult to perceive similarities, we find it hard to attribute what is similar to our own

shared culture. It is, on the other hand, not at all difficult for us to attribute what is different to a culture that is not ours. In the proposed study, similarities as well as differences between living rooms of different people and groups of people will be investigated.

The Use of the Living Room to Display Status

Most of the research on living rooms has looked at the different furnishing and decorating styles used by different social groups in their living rooms. At first sight, this seems to be an odd pairing. However, style was the dependent variable of choice because, as Laumman and House (1970) claimed, in such research: "...style and quality of the exterior and interior of a person's home are viewed as pawns in a Goffmanesque game of impression management" (p. 322). Such studies have, in fact, tested different theories, each suggesting a different finding regarding the differences in living room styles expected to be found in comparing different social groups. The studies that tested these different theories all share an a-priori assumption that the living room is the space within the home that will be, or even should be, used for display. For instance, Laumman and House (1970) brought to the test two competing theories. According to Veblen's theory, people of lower incomes simply follow the steps of the leisure class in an attempt to match up to its standards, including standards of style (Laumann & House, 1970, pp. 322-323). On the other hand, according to Riesman and Whyte, the upwardly mobile strata are actually freed from adherence to either their original group of social affiliation, or to groups of higher economic achievement, and therefore are trail-blazers of new styles (Laumann & House, 1970, p. 324). What Laumman and House actually obtained were

mixed results that gave partial support to both theories. They found influences of socio-economic position and mobility, as well as of values: The nouveaux riches, who were mostly Catholic and of southern or eastern European descent, tended to have "modern" styles in their living rooms, whereas, the established upper class, who were mostly of Protestant, Anglo-Saxon descent, tended to have traditional living rooms. At the same time, a different method of analysis revealed the Catholic upwardly mobile group did adhere to traditional styles. They also found that, overall, the more traditional sets of values, such as with regard to gender-roles correlated with a more traditional style. In the explanation of their results, Laumman and House (1970) made a distinction between two levels of economic "success" of the upwardly mobile, and assert the nouveaux riches (the wealthier among the upwardly mobile) turn to styles that are cutting-edge because they are not actually accepted as part of the upper-class, but still have a need to display their new status.

Pratt (1981) obtained results that would seem to support the Reisman and Whyte theory: She found that women who were of the well-established upper-class tended to furnish their homes in a traditional style, whereas nouveaux riches tended to strive for what they themselves claimed to be individualistic tastes. In terms of styles, Pratt's nouveaux riches homes were probably furnished according to, what Laumman and House would consider "modern" styles. The difference between the studies is that while Laumman and House's determination of style is only based on the observations of the researchers, Pratt actually asked her participants to define their styles and explain their choices. Pratt's explanation of her findings are very different from the one given by Laumann and House: According to Pratt, the well-established women, through their

traditionalism, reflected social cohesion and involvement. The nouveaux riches, on the other hand, were attempting to express their selves, as unique human beings. Pratt employs theories brought forth by such researchers as Bell and Sennett, who describe the development of a self-indulged self-centered human being that was the result of a split between the personal and the public domains during the 19th century. This split, the explanation goes, took place following industrialization. Whereas before mass-production, people were invested in their actions with and within society, mass-production led to a reduction in the need for social give-and-take and to an isolation of the self from others. In this world, objects, rather than actions, became the tools by which the self-centered individual expressed her or himself. The established rich, according to Pratt, simply maintain those values of a pre-industrial world.

In a study conducted in Naples, Italy, Amaturo et al. (1987) tested the hypothesis that conspicuous consumption – probably the most well-known of Veblen's concepts – for the socially mobile will be accentuated where there are discrepancies between different indices of achievement, such as income on the one hand, and education on the other. Again, taken for granted was the assumption that the living room is used as a stage upon which the achieved status would be displayed through objects and their arrangement in the space. Indeed, they found that the group whose income was high, had a high occupation prestige, but relatively lower levels of education, tended to have the most ostentatious living room objects. Participants whose education was highest, but whose income was not very high, had objects that were more "culturally" ostentatious.

Despite differences between their outcomes, the studies presented in this section are in agreement the living room is used to display status. By looking at the different

aspects that comprise living rooms, it is hoped the proposed study will reveal whether the living room serves only as a showcase, or whether it holds additional meanings to its dwellers.

Variations of "Living Rooms" in Different Cultures and Periods

The designation of spaces for the family to gather and spaces for hosting guests seems to be a salient aspect of homemaking in many different cultures. The solutions given to this issue, however, vary for different cultures. For instance, Bedouin residences in Israel (both tents and single story structures built before the 1960's) are divided into a family space (exclusive for the family) and a hosting space. The family space is considered the women's area and includes equipment for storage and cooking of food, and a sleeping area. The hosting space is considered the men's area and includes mattresses, a fireplace and coffee pots and cups (Sebba, 1991). In Japanese residences built before the second World-War, rooms for guests were separate from spaces designated for the family and were considered the best place in the residence (Omata, 1992). In the traditional Pueblo dwellings, there were two rooms. One was a living area where the family cooked and ate, but was also the space where guests were hosted, while the other room was designated for sleeping (Gauvain, Altman & Fahim, 1983). Alexander et al. (1977) found that various degrees of closeness of guest to the household may change the designation of rooms in Peruvian residences: The "sala" is a room for hosting when there are formal guests. Formal guests do not go anywhere else in the house. Intimate friends may enter any part of the residence, whereas casual friends do not enter the house at all. Gauvain et al. (1983) described neighborhood living rooms in Tarong Luzan, the Philippines, connected by footpaths. Neighbors who want to use the

footpath need to pass by the living rooms. They do so by greeting the owner and asking permission to pass.

A different type of cultural comparison is that between contemporary culture and the cultures of previous periods. Rybczynski (1986) provided a history of dwellings in Europe beginning in the Middle-Ages. Rybczynski suggested several "evolutionary" cultural shifts that have led to the contemporary living room. He claimed the separation between the public realm and the private domestic realm emerged in Medieval times, where many among new "white collar" professions (such as lawyers) began to work outside their homes. The translation of this change into architectural terms began during the 17th century in France. Whereas in the medieval bourgeois townhouse, the living quarters were comprised of one "hall," where all family members, servants and guests cooked, socialized and slept, in the 17th century French bourgeois *Big House*, the owners began to sleep separately in the *chambre*, and a separate area was designated for hosting - the *salle*. The notions of *privacy* and *domesticity* spread to other European countries during the 18th century. Jean-Francois Blondel, who was Louis XV's architect, as well as a founder of an architecture school, claimed the house should be divided into three parts: ceremonial rooms (appartements de parade), a formal reception room (appartements de societe) and private rooms (appartements de commodite) (Rybczynski, 1986).

Aries (1962) presented a different account of the events that led to the division between the private and public areas in the home, and hence, to the evolution of the parlor and later of the living room. For Aries (1962), the separation between the public and private realms (both in terms of home being private and the world outside it being public, as well as in terms of inner-divisions within the home) was the natural result of

the development of the family throughout the Middle-Ages, evolving by the 18th century into the domestically-oriented family, where children stay in the home until they are grown up, and where home is separate from the public arena.

According to Cromley (1990), during the early 20th century, when the first apartment buildings were developed in New York City, architects were confronted by the need to fit the private rooms and the living room (or other public rooms) into one floor. Cromley (1990) claimed that for the French apartment dwellers of early 20th century, the separation between the public and the private spaces was not as sacred as it was for their American contemporaries. According to her, one way to maintain a separation was to have hallways. With hallways, one did not have to go through private areas in order to arrive at public areas. In tenements, apartments commonly used by the working-class, hallways were abandoned so as to save space, reducing the separation between the public and the private. This feature of apartment buildings was considered morally dangerous to the middle-class. Therefore, when apartment buildings for the middle-class were first built during the late 19th century, it was important for developers to add hallways in order to attract potential buyers (Cromley, 1990).

The studies presented in this section demonstrate the influence of the cultural dimension, and of historic social and cultural changes on the physical arrangement of the rooms designated for entertaining and on the activities held in these rooms. They also exemplify that investigating domestic spaces may help reveal cultural values and norms.

None of these studies have focused on 20th century living rooms in the United States. It is expected that the archival study included in the proposed study will provide an opportunity to investigate cultural and other historic changes that may have affected

living rooms throughout the 20th century, as well as to investigate changes in the living room that point to possible cultural changes. In addition, although the proposed study does not include a cross-cultural comparison, it is hoped that similarities between participants may point to culturally based aspects of the living room, and hence may suggest certain values and norms shared by participants.

The Personal Significance of the Living Room

Perhaps exactly because the living room is considered the room where the dweller presents his or her desirable image to the world, it is rarely dealt with as a room that holds personal significance.

An exception is "Home Rules," by Wood and Beck (1994), where the story of the living room of one of the authors is told in great detail. Objects and their personal significances are described, as are the rules regarding things family members should or should not do. In their detailed account, the meanings and meaningfulness of the living room appear in great vividness. This lack of research on the matter of personal significance and meanings of living rooms leads to the following question: "To what extent, and in what ways does the living room, a room considered a public room in the home, hold personal significance to the dwellers of the home in which it is located." The proposed study will attempt to answer this question.

Summary

Research presented in the literature review suggests the dwelling experience is composed of various dimensions including cultural, social and psychological. It is not clear from these studies whether or not there are connections between the different dimensions, and if they do, what they are, and how does one dimension possibly affect another. Also, much of this research has not honed in on particular rooms within the home, and the reader is left to draw her or his own conclusions about how the experience of "home" is manifest in the actual spaces within the home.

Other studies on the dwelling presented in the review have looked at the relations between different rooms in the home and have suggested that the dimensions that make up "home," are played out in the dwelling in a binary fashion, where the particular meanings of certain rooms are opposed to meanings embedded in other rooms in the home. According to these studies the experience of the dwelling becomes a holistic one through the co-existence of complementary opposing polarities. While such studies do compare rooms, they do not investigate any particular room at a great level of detail. Furthermore, one is left to wonder whether the depiction of the dwelling as a unifying entity for opposing forces is indeed accurate.

The literature reviewed also presented studies focused on living rooms. These studies have used living rooms of different social groups in order to test various social theories. Such studies share the assumption that the living room is used to displays social status. In other words, it views living rooms as part of a social phenomenon. Such studies have neglected other aspects, such as the psychological aspect of the living room. Other

studies have focused on the cultural dimension of living rooms, again ignoring other possible dimensions. Studies that have looked at living rooms from a social or cultural perspective have emphasized differences between the living rooms of different groups of people and have neglected similarities among people.

The proposed study will examine the different aspects including the cultural, the social and the psychological, as well as other possible aspects that are part of, or have contributed to the living room experience. The proposed study will examine similarities, as well as differences between the living rooms of different people.

Research Questions

The initial goal of the research was to reveal the various roles of the living room, and to find out how these roles are reflected in the space itself through the actions residents take to arrange the space. It was believed that, in addition to interviews and observations, a study of the historic development of living rooms could help clarify its current roles.

The following questions were posed:

- What have been the different roles of living rooms throughout history and up until the 20th century?
- Have these roles been reflected in the space and the way it has been used, and if so, how?
- What are the various factors that shaped these roles?
- What have been the roles of living rooms during the 20th century?

- Have these roles been reflected in the arrangement of the space and the way it is used? If so, how?
- What are the various factors that have been suggested in the literature to shape these roles?
- What are the various factors that an empirical study suggests accounts for these roles?
- Are the roles of living rooms currently going through a change? If so, what is/are the change(s)?
- Are these changes reflected in the arrangement of the space and the way it is used, and if so, how?

Preliminary analysis of both archival data and data obtained from the interviews revealed that some revision of the initial research questions was needed. First, the "living room" is a term that began to appear only in the late 19th century. Hence, the historic investigation is limited to the 20th century history. Second, it became clear the notion of a "role" was misleading, since it implies the living room has a purpose, and a mission that was somehow assigned to it. Such a term does not leave room for an organic development of living rooms throughout history. It also disregards the involvement of different factors in determining what the living room looks like and how it is used.

At the same time, the preliminary analysis revealed that a great deal of information was emerging from the data obtained from the archival investigation, as well as from the interviews, concerning different aspects of the experience of living rooms. In light of the grounded theory approach of this study, the research questions were revised as follows:

- What are the different aspects that comprise the experience of living rooms?
- What is the relation between these different aspects?
- How have the aspects that comprise the living room experience changed over the years?
- What different factors have been involved in influencing these aspects, and in what ways?

CHAPTER 2: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Approaches

This research used a *grounded theory* approach (Strauss & Corbin, 1990), in that its starting point was not a-priori hypotheses, but rather the data collected. In accordance with the grounded theory approach, analysis of data yielded hypotheses for future research. The research was also holistic (Wapner, 1987) in that, rather than focusing on a single aspect of a domestic setting, such as territoriality or privacy, it set out to explore the various spatial and behavioral elements embedded in living rooms in order to suggest how such elements are connected and how they influence each other.

Research Design

The research consisted of two parts: (a) a review of archival material and (b) interviews and observations. The archival material studied included two magazines of general interest as well as one newspaper published over the past century in New York. The goal of the archival review was to learn about the development of living rooms from past to present. Existing literature on the history of homes and domestic technology assisted in the interpretation of archival data.

Open-ended in-depth interviews of participants were conducted in their living rooms, accompanied by observations. A content analysis was conducted for the data obtained from the interviews.

The results from the archival review and the interviews were integrated so as to

provide a comprehensive explanation of the phenomenon of living rooms.

Methodology

Archival Material

The intention of the archival review of periodicals (journals and newspapers) was to examine what historic developments, from 1900 and on, may have influenced current arrangements and uses of living rooms.

Initially, the archival review was to include six categories of periodicals: w*omen's magazines, home and garden, architecture, construction and home furnishing,* all of which contained material that dealt with dwellings. The categories were provided by the "Gale Directory of Publications and Broadcast Media," known up until 1990 as the "Ayer Directory of Publications." This is an annual publication providing data on circulation of periodicals beginning the late 19th century and serves advertisers who advertise in periodicals. The classification has changed slightly over time. For instance, in 1900 the category *women's publication* did not exist. Instead there was a w*omen's handiwork* category. Therefore, for 1900, the w*omen's handiwork* category was used.

Following a pilot-study of these five categories, it became clear three categories had to be abandoned: The *architecture, construction* and *home furnishings* were trade and technical magazines, the language of which required specialized training. Furthermore, books were already written on the history of architecture, design and construction so that there was no need to go back to these sources. In contrast, the *home and garden* and *women's magazines* were magazines of *general interest,* and it was therefore assumed they would, to an extent, reflect what was taking place in living rooms of different

periods, taking into account they were also a possible source of influence on dwellers.

These periodicals were highly influential throughout the 20th century. For instance, by 1905 the circulation of women's magazines was, on average, 64 million per issue. Even when television began to have a larger audience than the "old media" (magazines, newspapers and radio), women's magazines continued to have a large readership (Zuckerman, 1998).

One magazine was selected from the *women's publications* category, and one magazine was selected from the *home and garden* magazine.

In addition, a newspaper from the *daily newspapers* category was chosen. The selection criteria for specific publications within these categories will be described in a subsequent section. For the publications chosen, both articles as well as advertisements were reviewed.

Criteria for Choosing the Magazines

After selecting the *women's publications* and the *home and garden* categories for the study, several criteria were employed in order to choose a specific magazine in each category:

1. The magazine had to exist from the turn of the 20th century until contemporary times. If I were to begin a study with one magazine and continue with another, it would not be clear whether the differences found between the two magazines could be attributed to historic changes or to differences between the styles of the magazines. It should be noted that stylistic changes are also possible as a result of change in editorship or readership, but it was beyond the means of this study to

control this possibility.

2. The magazines needed to include a great deal of information on homes. For instance, "McCall's," which is included in the *women's magazines* category, focuses mainly on clothing and was, therefore, not a contender.
3. The magazines chosen needed to have a large circulation of middle-class readers. In order to compare the circulation, the "Gale Directory of Publications" was consulted. The magazine having the highest circulation for the longest duration and that answered other criteria was chosen.
4. Several magazines appeared both under the *women's magazines* category and the *home and garden* category. If a magazine were chosen to represent one category in this study, it would not be chosen to represent the other.

In the category of *home and garden*, two magazines were close contenders: "House Beautiful" and "House and Garden" (not to be confused with the similar name of the category). "House and Garden" was chosen because it had a slightly higher circulation over the years.

In order to make the final selection for the *women's magazines*, I corresponded with Mary Ellen Zuckerman, Head of the Marketing Department at the Jones Business School of SUNY Geneseo, and author of several books on the history of magazines in the United States, one of which was previously mentioned. According to Professor Zuckerman, "Good Housekeeping" was a good choice because of its high circulation in the big cities, hence "Good Housekeeping" was selected from the *women's magazines* category.

"The New York Times" was the newspaper chosen from the *daily newspapers*

category. The "New York Times" real estate section was reviewed. Since "The New York Times" of 1900 was not divided into sections, that is, there was no real estate section, the whole issue chosen was reviewed.

Choice of Years and Sampling of Months

Beginning 1900, the first year of every decade up until 2000 was chosen for the study. In each year, using a table of random numbers, four issues (months) of "Good Housekeeping" and "House and Garden" were sampled. For the "New York Times," four months from each year were sampled. Within each issue of the "New York Times," every "Real Estate Section" for each Sunday within that month was reviewed. In 1900, "The New York Times" was not divided into sections. Therefore, the 1900 issues of "The New York Times" were reviewed in full.

Procedure

Data collection. For each issue, both articles as well as advertisements deemed relevant were reviewed. An article or an advertisement was considered relevant if it contained an illustration of a living room, or if it contained in the title the words "living room," or if it contained material otherwise relevant to living rooms. An example of the latter would be an article on the introduction of electricity into homes. As shown in Chapter 3, "Some Notes on the History of the Living Room," a possible connection between electricity and the arrangement of living rooms was revealed.

Photocopies were made of relevant material, until they became redundant. Thus,

if photocopies of several ads for vacuum cleaners were already taken, no more photocopies of ads for vacuum cleaners were taken unless there was an additional interesting aspect in another advertisement.

In addition, notes were taken that dealt with changes from one year that was reviewed to the next year reviewed. For instance, it was noted that there was a plethora of ads for vacuum cleaners in 1920, but no advertisement for vacuum cleaners in 1910, and fewer ads for vacuum cleaners in 1930.

Data analysis. Although an initial analysis of archival material was conducted during the same time data from the interviews were analyzed, most of the archival material was analyzed after most of the analysis of interviews was completed. Categories that emerged from the analysis of interviews were used to analyze the archival material. In addition, the analysis of archival material yielded new categories.

Interviews, Observations and Supplementary Methods

Obtaining Participants

Sixteen participants were obtained by advertising the study at a graduate school, a work place, a rowing club and at a Jewish congregation, open to people of all faiths. The researcher was affiliated with these various settings. Participation in the study was voluntary. No financial incentive was offered. However, I offered to barter work with people who volunteered to participate in return for their participation. Three participants had indeed asked if I could help them with certain tasks. Work was bartered for one participant. Another participant eventually retreated from the request, and a third

participant has not yet contacted me in order to schedule work. A reminder was sent to this third participant.

Criteria for Selecting Participants

The initial selection criterion was middle-class participants who lived in the five boroughs of New York City. An attempt was made to have a similar number of male and female participants. The attempt was not fully successful, since women were more forthcoming. An additional selection criterion was added following analysis of the first several interviews. Analysis suggested that people who were living alone had a different relationship with their living room than people who were living with their partners. However, at that stage, most of the participants who were living alone had one-bedroom dwellings, whereas the dwellings of most of the participants who were living with their partners had more than one bedroom. This suggested that perhaps differences could be attributed to number of rooms. Therefore, additional participants were selected that were living alone in dwellings that had more than one bedroom, as well as participants living with their partners in one-bedroom dwellings. Appendix A provides data on demographics and dwelling situations of the participants.

Other Types of "Theoretical Sampling"

Strauss and Corbin (1990) have maintained that *theoretical sampling* is not restricted to participants, but can also be implemented for, what they call, incidents and events. Such type of theoretical sampling did, indeed, take place for this study: The

objects in the living room were compared with objects in other rooms. In addition, if a participant lived alone at the time of the interview, that participant was asked whether he or she had lived in the past with a partner. If so, the participant was asked if and how her or his current living room differed from the shared living room. Conversely, a participant who was living with a partner at the time of the interview was asked whether he or she had previously lived alone, and if so, did the current living room of the participant differ from the living room or living rooms she or he had when living alone, and if so, to specify how it differed.

Procedures

Data collection. When a volunteer for the study had contacted me, I gave the prospective participant general background on the study and the expected procedures for the interview and observations (of the living room). A meeting was set in the participant's residence.

Upon arriving at the participant's residence, I repeated the general information that had previously been given, and handed her or him the consent form (see Appendix B). After signing the consent form, I gave the participant a questionnaire with questions relating to demographics, as well as their dwelling situation (see Appendix C). As the participant filled out the questionnaire, I made a quick sketch of the living room (see Figure 2), as well as the whole apartment, or, in the case of a single-unit-house, the

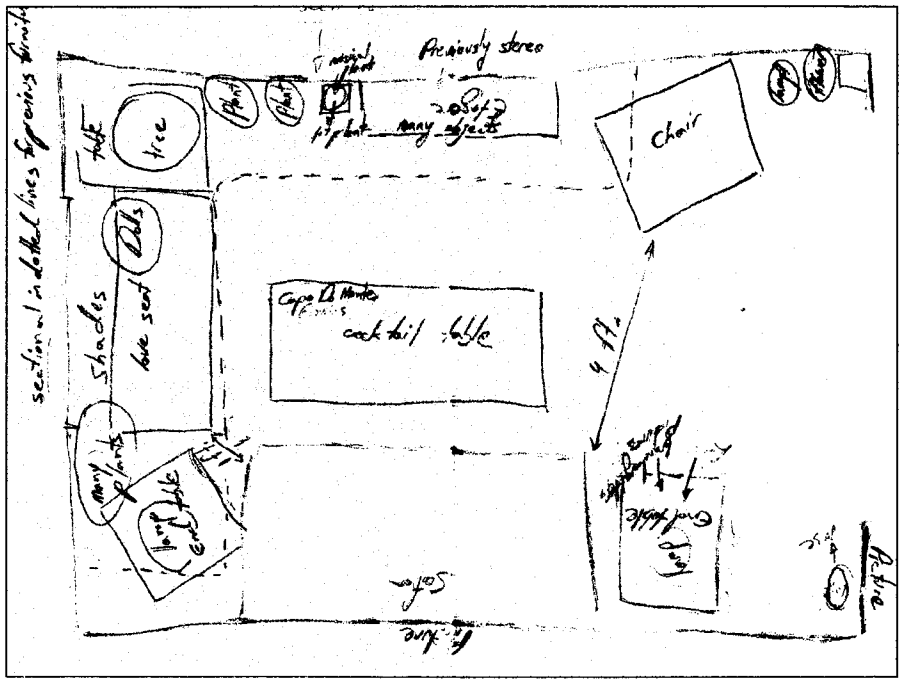

Figure 2. My working sketch of the living room of one participant.

floor where the living room was located. I also took still-photographs of the living room, attempting to cover all the areas within the living room (see Figure 3). A semi-structured interview (see Appendix D) was then conducted and tape recorded.

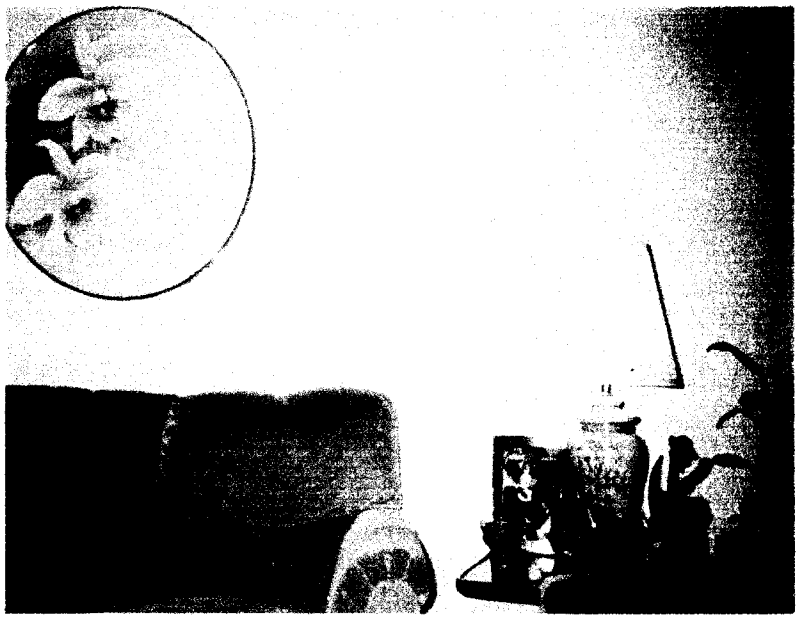

Figure 3. Still photograph of a section of the living room of one participant.

As the participant answered questions, I wrote follow-up questions that were asked at a later time during the interview. At an early stage of the interview I asked participants to take me on a "tour" of their living room. I asked participants to explain during the tour what various objects meant to them, where they had obtained them and so forth. I allowed participants to stop at any object they wanted to talk about. I sometimes asked participants about objects they did not mention themselves or about a certain pattern that emerged for the living room. In addition, the general arrangement of the living room was observed, as well as more personal "themes" that participants themselves had brought up, such as the inclusion of many items that had flower motifs. If interesting information resulted from observations, these were taken down as notes. When participants spoke about changes that they had made to the living room, they were

asked to point on the sketch I had previously where objects were previously located. Changes in locations of items were indicated by arrows that were drawn on the sketch. Furniture items that participants had had in their living rooms at one point in time, but that had since been discarded, were indicated by dotted lines (see Figure 2).

At the end of the interview I asked participants if they wanted to add any additional information they felt was important and if they had any remarks regarding the interview. The interviews lasted approximately one and a half hours, although some interviews were as short as an hour, and some were as long as three hours.

Following the first phase of analysis of an interview (subsequently described), the participant was contacted for a follow-up phone interview lasting typically between fifteen to thirty minutes. The follow-up interview included questions intended to clarify issues raised by the face-to-face interview with the participant at hand, as well as questions that emerged from analysis of several interviews. The follow-up interview could also include questions regarding words or sentences that were not intelligible from the recording. If needed, and following analysis of several more interviews, another follow-up phone interview took place. Again, these follow-up interviews lasted between fifteen to thirty minutes.

Follow-up questions added in-situ during the interview or asked during follow-up phone-interviews that were found to be potentially relevant to all participants were added to the remaining face-to-face interviews.

Data analysis. Data collected from interviews, observations and sketches were analyzed for their contents. The first stage of analysis took place for each interview after

it was transcribed. After a review of the analyses of several interviews, I decided which categories would continue to be researched and which categories were to be left for possible future investigation. Categories that emerged frequently for different participants were selected. Categories that appeared to relate to other categories and hence, to have explanatory value (Kirby & Mckenna, 1989), were also selected. For instance, "living arrangement" (e.g., if people were living by themselves or with a partner) was a category that related to "living room objects," that is, living room objects seemed to be influenced by the living arrangement.

The interviews that followed were analyzed using the categories that were previously selected. As analysis of the subsequent interviews revealed additional categories, interviews previously analyzed were re-analyzed, using these new categories. Also, the relevance of categories for analysis changed as the study progressed, so that some categories considered possibly important following one stage of analysis, were revealed, following subsequent analysis, as not so important. This circular process continued throughout the study.

An additional stage of analysis took place as the work was written and re-written. At this point new questions emerged that led to new analyses of all the interviews.

Finally, the meta-analysis yielded the "large picture:" a model that suggested what the main aspects of the experience of living rooms were, and how these different aspects connected.

Combining the Archival Study, Data from Interviews and Information from Existing Literature

The collection of at least some of the archival material took place at the same time the interviews were conducted, and at the same time existing literature was read. Possible categories emerged from each of the above components, guiding the analysis of the other components. For instance, the notion of "privacy" appeared in several articles that were looked at as the study was already taking place. Although these articles were already familiar to the researcher, the interviews that were analyzed led to a new understanding of the concept, or category of privacy, and led to original ideas regarding how privacy may relate to other categories. Interviews were then consulted, in order to check the empirical basis for these ideas. Guba and Lincoln (1981) have claimed that a triangulation of methods enables data collected through interviews to make sense. In this study, data obtained by every method helped further explain data that was collected through every other method.

CHAPTER 3: SOME NOTES ON THE HISTORY OF LIVING ROOMS

This chapter deals with the origin of the American living room, and the various mutations it went through, as well as with the effects of cultural, social, technological and economic changes throughout the 20th century on people's experiences of their living rooms. Where relevant, issues specific to cities will be presented.

The Origin and Evolution of the Living Room

Until the 19th century, the home of many middle-class Americans could include rooms such as a parlor, a drawing room and a library. Living rooms were not yet included in the vocabulary of middle-class home-building. According to "The Old House Book of Living Rooms and Parlors" by Grow (1980), during the latter part of the 19th century all the rooms on the first floor designated for entertainment were sometimes termed *living rooms* by architects in floor plans. When families in the mid 19th century were only able to afford one formal room, the plans for their house included a single *living room.* Why is it that floor plans began suddenly to include the term *living room*?

In his 1909 "Household Discoveries: An Encyclopedia of Practical Recipes and Processes," Sidney Morse explained that living rooms are rooms meant not only for entertainment, but also for use of the members of the household. In other words, by "living" is perhaps meant "everyday living":

> The old custom of setting apart a "best room" or parlor to

> be used only on special occasions, as for weddings, funerals, or the entertainment of company, is happily passing away. Only very wealthy people now have drawing-rooms reserved for state occasions. The present tendency is to call all the lower rooms of the house "living rooms," and to have all the members of the family use them freely (as quoted in Grier, 1988, 211).

One thing that we learn from this quotation is that the middle-class supposedly began to use all the rooms that were designated for entertaining for its own leisure. The other thing we learn is that the upper-class resisted this new trend.

Class and Language

Sidney Morse's above description of living rooms, from 1909 (Grier, 1988), also echoed by Grow (1980), suggests that architectural language was used by the upper-class to distinguish itself from the middle-class. Whereas the middle-class began using the term *living room*, the upper-class continued to use terms such as *parlor* and *drawing room.* By clinging to traditional jargon, the upper-class attempted to demonstrate its status. But by clinging to old terms, the upper-class was also clinging to a traditional life-style. Grier (1988) has claimed that during the 19th century, the upper-class proved its education and worldliness through minute subtleties in various objects. Thus, it was common to find a large number of seating items in a parlor, each slightly different in shape and used for different occasions. According to Petroski (1992), the desire to own a variety of objects was the result of the development of class distinction coupled with mass production during the 19th century. Cromley (1990) claimed that clearly designated rooms with their unique shapes reflected the search for specificity during the later-nineteenth century. When several rooms are termed living rooms, as in some floor-plans

of the latter part of the 19th century, it means that there is no distinction between these rooms, whereas, a *parlor* is slightly different in use from a *drawing room* and both are different from a *sitting room.* By using traditional terms, the upper-class was also signaling that the old order of things, whereby entertaining is an essential part of domestic life, highly tied to the place the family has in society, should be given a special and separate allocation within the home. Perhaps having less symbolic meaning, at the turn of the century *parlor* was still a code word that meant high-status for the middle-class as well, as is evident from a 1900 floor-plan of a Harlem railroad flat, of the dumbbell type (see Figure 4).

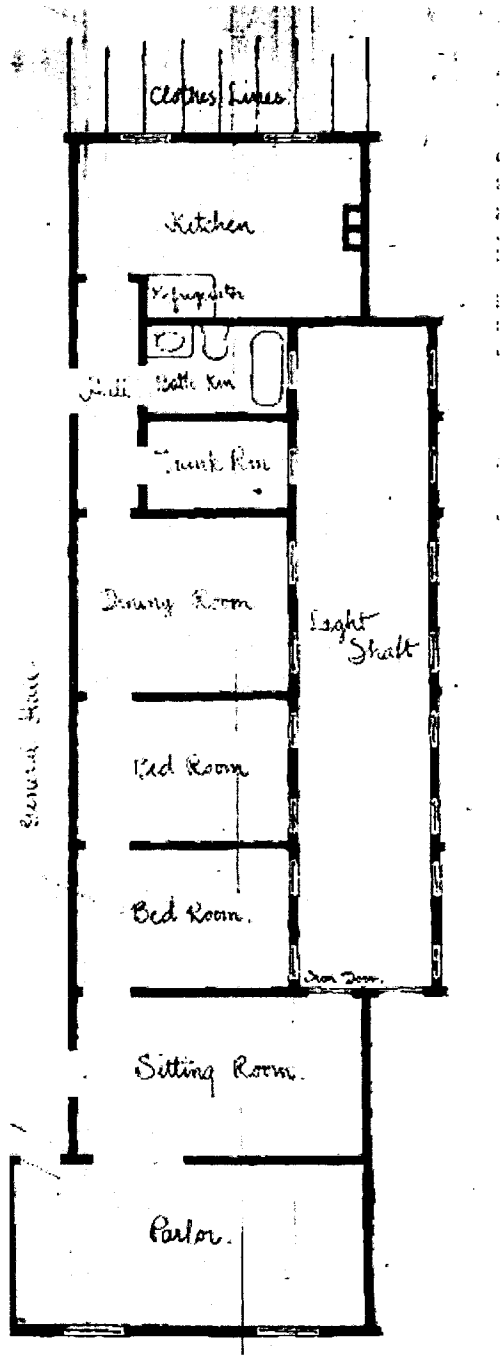

Figure 4. Floor plan of a Harlem apartment in 1901, showing both parlor and sitting room. *Note*. From "Aunt Sarah Visits a Harlem flat," by M. Pelton, 1901, *Good Housekeeping, 32* (2), p. 133.

The plan includes both a parlor – the larger front-room designated for entertaining – and a sitting room, designated more for the family and serving as a buffer between the parlor and the intimate bedrooms. As Cromley (1990) pointed out, whether these rooms were actually used according to the plan is another question. It is clear, however, that the intention was to create an incentive for middle-class people to purchase these apartments by calling one room a *parlor,* thus using upper-class terminology.

As previously explained, Grow (1980) claimed that the middle-class began to call all the rooms for entertaining in the first floor of the house *living rooms* during the second half of the 19th century. However, a review of floor-plans in "House and Garden" , "Good Housekeeping" and the "New York Times" reveals that although by 1930, parlors and drawing rooms have all but disappeared, the transition to living rooms according to these magazines, was, in fact, very gradual. Between 1900 and 1930 a variety of rooms could appear in floor plans. These included living rooms, drawing rooms, sitting room, parlors and combinations thereof. Thus, a floor plan could include both a drawing room and a living room.

Between 1930 and 1960, floor plans frequently included living rooms and dining rooms, but usually no other rooms for entertaining or for the family. In 1960 plans of dwellings, especially of single-unit houses, include rooms for family leisure, in addition to the living room. An example is the "family retreat" shown in Figure 5.

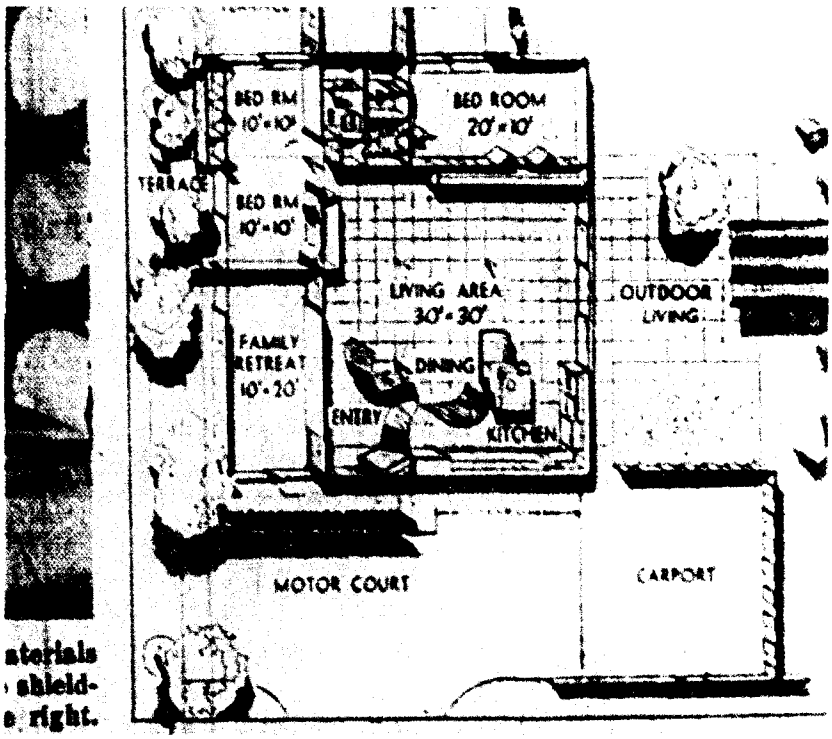

Figure 5. Floor plan from 1960 showing a living room and a separate room for use of the household. *Note*. From "Beauty and Permanence to Home Construction," 1960, January 24, *New York Times,* section 8, p. 1.

Does this signify the return of specificity by 1960? What happened between 1930 and 1960? Subsequent sections will try to answer these questions. However, it would be useful to first try to understand several developments that took place through 1960s.

Why did "Living Rooms" Gain Popularity with the Middle-Class?

Middle-Class Values

It has been suggested that as a result of industrialization, the work that men traditionally performed at home – various crafts and trades, were transferred during the 19th century to workplaces outside of the home, while the domestic work women

performed continued to remain at home (e.g., Cowan, 1983). The notion of home as a shelter men returned to after working in the tough outside world received momentum (Grier, 1988; Wright, 1981). It is possible that during this time period a moral dictum was added, whereby use of certain rooms by all family members became desirable as a way of bringing the members together. Thus, home not only sheltered the family, it helped bring the family together, and living rooms, as rooms where all members of the household could come together, were where such mending took place.

Necessity: The Waxing and Waning of the Middle-Class Dwelling

Grier (1988) claimed that rooms that served both guests and family were always common for households that could not afford a large number of rooms, whether working class or middle-class. It might prove useful, therefore, to assess whether there were changes in the size of dwellings during the 20th century and whether these could be related to the dominance of multifunctional living rooms.

During the late 19th century and early 20th century several factors may have affected the size of middle-class dwellings, especially in New York City, resulting in more middle-class dwellings with only one room for entertaining. Wright (1975) described a shift in norms during that time, whereby Victorian ideals of "bigness" for dwellings were replaced by much more modest and simple schemes and lots and houses were smaller. Indeed, many of the houses in "House and Garden" and "Good Housekeeping" of 1900 are relatively small in size, as seen in Figure 6, but some continue to be large, suggesting that the ideal of grandeur did not completely pass on.

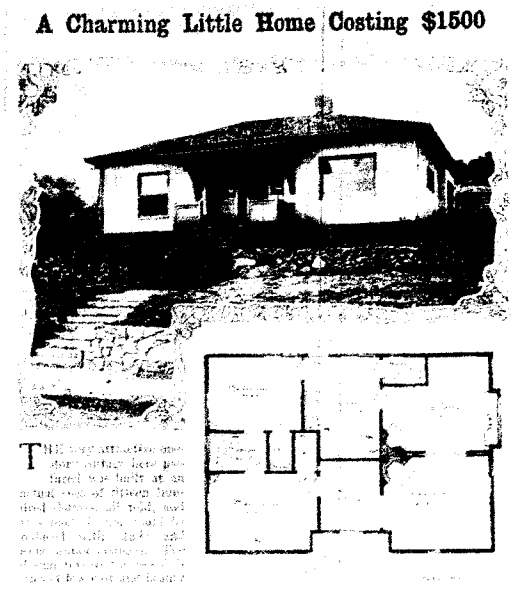
A Charming Little Home Costing $1500

Figure 6. A house of relatively small size exemplifying a trend during the 1930s and 1940s. *Note*. From "A Charming Little Home Costing $1500," 1940, *Good Housekeeping, 38* (1), p. 49.

But specifically in New York City, the real estate situation during the late 19th century further contributed to the decreasing size of free-standing or row-houses: Cromley (1990) claimed that in large cities such as Boston and Chicago, the relatively easy access to suburbs encouraged suburban development there during the latter part of the 19th century. However, in New York City the greater difficulty to access the suburbs led to increased development in the city. Increasingly dense, land became expensive, dwellings became smaller and the number of rooms decreased. By 1920, the development of private houses in New York City all but stopped (Cromley, 1990).

One way to cut costs was to build vertically. Once accepted by the middle-class (towards the end of the 19th century) an accelerated construction of apartment buildings in New York City lasted up until the Great Depression. However, although the apartment buildings constructed for the wealthy could include more than ten rooms, the apartment

buildings for the middle-class were many times smaller than private houses. They also lacked the land attached to private houses (Cromley, 1990). An advertisement for an apartment house in Manhattan claims that the apartments advertised are as spacious as a private house, suggesting that this was but the exception to the rule:

> Families accustomed to living in private houses, who want larger rooms than are to be had in the average apartment, who want plenty of light and abundant closet space, should inspect the apartments in the Hillcrest, No. 430 W. 116th St., between Morningside Park and Columbia University. (O'Reilly, 1910, p. 13).

In New York City, apartments, too, shrank in size as less land was available. A New York Time article from 1920 claims:

> The available land is almost all taken...accordingly, the inevitable development must be in restricting the size of apartments, in such a way as will meet all sanitary and fire laws, satisfy the tenant and afford general satisfaction and real hominess to the suites ("New apartment plan," 1920, p.1).

The innovative solution offered in the article was a "California type" of apartment, whereby drawer beds, to be used at night, were installed in the living room and dining rooms.

Another factor that may have contributed to the shrinking of American dwellings is the decrease in the servant work-force. "Good Housekeeping," as well as the New York Times had frequent articles dealing with the "servant problem" during the first decades of the 20th century. Zuckerman (1998) described how during the 1920s fewer advertisements in women's magazines depict servants and more advertisements show women engaged in house-work with the help of technological advances. Although even with servants it was a difficult task to manage large dwellings, without servants it was obviously far more difficult for the housewife to deal in large spaces with all the tasks

previously dealt with by servants. Both Cowan (1983) and Zuckerman (1998) agreed that technological innovations did not always mean less work in the home.

Still another factor possibly involved in the transformation of the home is the automobile. It has been suggested that beginning with the early 1900s, a large part of the spending of the middle-class household that could have gone toward furnishings was invested in the automobile (Grier, 1988). Similarly it is possible that although the automobile did not further decrease the size of the house, it might have limited the size of the house that the household could afford to build.

In addition, it is also possible that the fascination with the automobile that began at the turn of the century, and the modernity and freedom it represented took precedent over the introverted domesticity of the family, especially since the whole family could now supposedly convene in the car. Wright (1975) claimed:

> ...the rapid increase of automobile purchases during the 1910s furthered the separation of family members. There was no longer a central area in the house, and the house was no longer central to the family members. (p. 41).

The Great Depression furthered the trend of decrease in the size of houses. Floor plans in 1930 and 1940 clearly carry the signs of an economic slow-down, and there was even a stronger emphasis on small houses, as reflected in floor plans from that period.

According to an article in a 1940 issue of Good Housekeeping:

> As long ago as 1934 Good Housekeeping said 'What this country needs is a good five-thousand-dollar house,' and showed one designed by Stratton O. Hammon, architect, to prove the point. Others have agreed, and have acted, so that today, in many sections of the country, good small houses are being built for $5000 and less (Studio: Architecture, Building and Furnishing, 1940, p. 86).

Yet, by 1950 and during the decades that followed, a new trend emerges, whereby

dwellings show an overall significant increase in size.[2] The larger dwellings of 1950 and 1960 also seem to bring with them a separation between the room for hosting – the living room – and the room for leisurely use of the household – the family room.

In some ways, this new trend is reminiscent of the Victorian-era desire for specificity. However, the addition of the family room reflects a growing interest in family life. Whereas towards the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries this emphasis on the family everyday living resulted in the "invasion" of the family into rooms that were traditionally exclusive for entertaining, during the latter part of the 20th century a renewed interest in family life resulted in specific rooms for the family. Halle (1993) contended that family rooms or "dens" were intended to counter forces that pulled the family apart. In "Building the Dream," Wright (1981) claimed that the source of the "family room" was a specific interest in children, although she also adds that the room could be conceived as creating new children's needs, rather than answering them. She further claimed that this room reflected a growing expectation, during the 1940s and 1950s that mothers would devote a great deal of their time to children. In suburbs, the lack of accessible parks and playgrounds encouraged this expectation.

But what is also evident is an increased interest in experimentation itself. Thus, rooms with new names appear in plans of houses, such as a 1950 "Breezeway" and a 1960 "Recreation room" shown in Figure 7.

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[2] The New York Times, however, continued to include advertisements for smaller-size dwellings as well, demonstrating that this is not a clear-cut phenomenon.

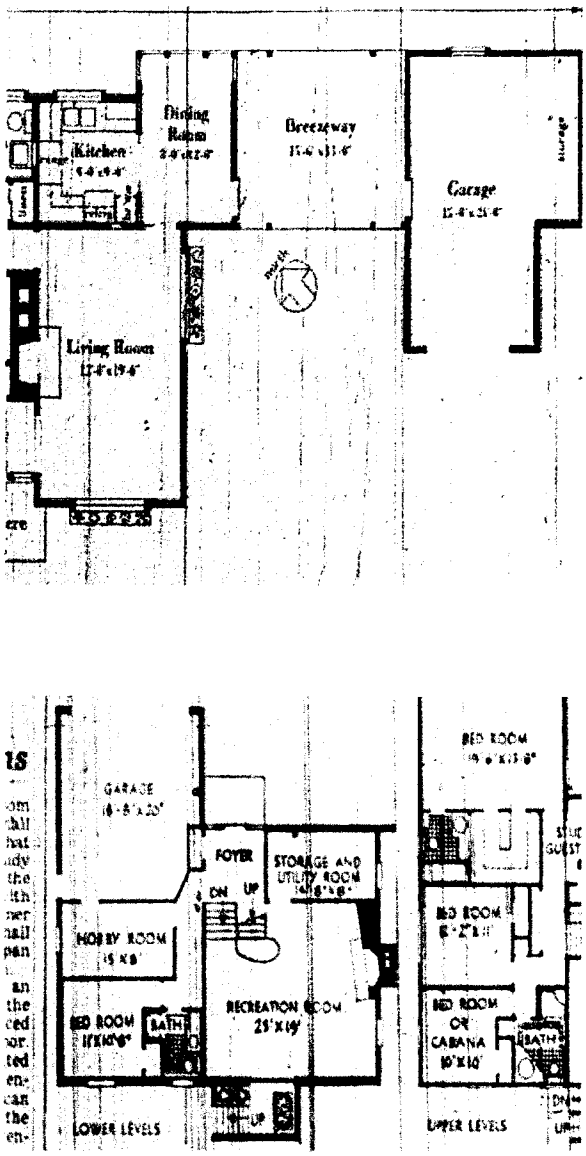

Figure 7. Two floor plans, one from 1950 on the top, and one from 1960 on the bottom, showing rooms for leisure activities with new names. *Note*. From "The Building Forum: Economy Plan for Good Living," 1950, *Good Housekeeping, 131,* p. 38, and "Long-Island South Shore Split-Level is a Design for Year-Round Outdoor living," 1960, July 10, *The New York Times,* section 8, p. 8, respectively.

These new rooms were, therefore, also a means of competing with other developers. What should be added, however, is that architects were using innovation very cautiously: Other than adding these new rooms, or new features, such as a sunken

living room, the dwellings did not change much in their design.

Technological Innovations that Affected the Interior Design of Living Rooms

From "Center Table" to Couch: How the Couch became a Focal Point in the Living Room

It has been claimed that the "Davenport," a sofa introduced during the 1910's, helped to create the living room (Grier, 1988). The "Davenport," shown in Figure 8, was a comfortable couch, something that was not obvious in preceding eras. It was also more affordable than other sofas, enabling it to gain popularity with the middle-class (Grier, 1988). As a sofa-bed, it was clearly targeted to the middle-class who used their living rooms as a room that provides sleeping space for guests.

Figure 8. A 1920 advertisement for a Davenport couch that included a day-bed. *Note*. From "Kroehler Daven-O," by The Kroehler Manufacturing Company, Chicago, Illinois, 1920, *Good Housekeeping, 70* (2), p. 82.

An editorial in a 1920 issue of Good Housekeeping claims the following:

> To test upholstered furniture, sit on it. If it is soft and billowy, yet firm and resilient, it is well built. Remember, it is the *inside* and not the *outside* of upholstered furniture that counts [italics by author]. Full of cushions and comfort and therefore full of down and luxury, a davenport is the best possible investment in the long run, for it knows no wear. (Crew, 1920, p. 53).

Most participants interviewed for this study said the one object without which the living room would cease to exist as such was the couch. Yet during the 19th century the couch was not such a central item in the parlor. When one walked into a 18th or 19th century parlor, or even an early 20th century living room, one would typically see immediately ahead and towards the center of the room a table underneath one chandelier or holding a lamp, as seen in Figure 9. The chandelier or lamp would often be the only source of the light in the room.

Figure 9. A photo of an early 20th century middle-class living room. *Note.* "A House at Wynnewood, Penna." 1902, *House and Garden, 2*, p. 498.

According to Cromley (1990), towards the end of the 19th century, many apartments in Manhattan were connected to electrical and gas pipelines. Electrical and gas lighting provided much more illumination for a much cheaper price than oil did. This, in turn, enabled the positioning of lamps and sconces in various locations in the living room. As Katherine B. Johnson said in an article she wrote in 1900:

> In all except the better class of very recently built houses, we find the center chandelier, under which light is disagreeably strong, while the corners of the room are in gloom. To correct this the chandelier is giving place to side lights, so placed that all parts of the room are equally well lighted. (Johnson, 1900, p. 58).

The center-table in the Victorian parlor was often used for reading. With gas jets or electrical sconces surrounding the room, the table could be technically moved to any corner that was illuminated. The couch during the Victorian era was perhaps used for reading during the day-time, but being further away from the source of light, it could not

be used for reading during the nighttime. Rather, chairs would be placed by the center-table. The connection of dwellings to gas and electrical pipelines enabled reading or writing in any part of the room that was illuminated. And once there was no need to place a table and chairs for reading and writing underneath a central lighting location, the table began to move away from the center.

In other words, the connection of homes to gas and electricity in effect facilitated a new interior arrangement of living rooms, whereby the center table with its lamp, no longer needed in the center, moved towards the couch. This change coupled with an increased interest in domesticity and the accessibility of plush and well-designed couches for the middle-class turned the couch into a visual focal point, as well as a center of activity in the living room.

In Figure 10, a photograph from 1920 shows a living room with a couch by the window and two tables: one with a lamp on it, between the couch and the recliner, another in front of the couch close to its right end. Also hardly visible is a standing lamp behind to the right of the couch.

Figure 10. Photograph of a living room in 1920, showing two small tables close to the couch. *Note*. From "A Little Portfolio of Good Interiors," 1920, *House and Garden, 37* (2), p. 42.

In fact, there could now be a coffee-table and an end-table or two end-tables. Set at one end of the couch or the sofa, the end-table continued to carry the tradition of a center table. It was the table on which the lamp was set, as well as books and magazines (see Figure 11).

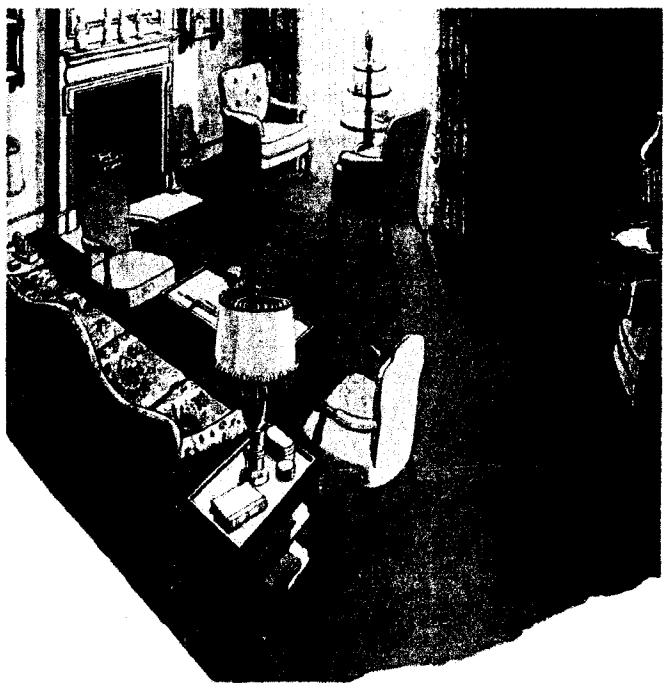

Figure 11. Illustration of a living room from 1940, showing an end-table with books on it. *Note*. House for all Americans, 1940, *House and Garden, 78,* section 2, p. 15.

To what extent the center-table was used during previous eras for writing and reading or as a facade for sophistication is hard to say, just as it is difficult to judge, in contemporary times, whether the coffee-table books and magazines are actually being read, or are just intended to create a certain impression. It is possibly a combination of both. In any event, when reading takes place in the living room, it is most likely to take place on the couch or on a recliner, not on an upright chair by a table. And part of the experience of reading in the living room is the comfort that the couch or recliner affords. But, as will be discussed in a subsequent section, the couch was not always comfortable, and being comfortable was not always considered desirable.

From Fireplace to Radio: The Radio as a Focal Point in the Living room

The fireplace was no doubt a visual focal point of Victorian parlors. In 1902, Guy Kirkham wrote:

> There may be several fireplaces in the house, but *the* fireplace is in the living room, and not tucked meanly into a corner, at variance with the rest of the room, but at the center of one side, where all may gather freely 'round. It holds the place of honor, and should show the best we have, and there should be nothing fussy or trivial about it. (Kirkham, 1902, p. 410, italics by author).

According to Rybczynski (1986), during the mid 19th century, central heating had already existed as a domestic technology, yet the symbolic value of fireplaces delayed the acceptance of central heating in homes. Cowan (1983) added an economic perspective, claiming that up until the First World War, central heating was the most expensive of the home improvements because of the high price of the furnace itself and the labor and installation costs of pipes, radiators and vents. In any event, after the First World War there was a building boom of new housing that included central heating. In current issues of "Good Housekeeping" and "House and Garden," illustrations of living rooms with a fireplace are still popular, even with the advent of more efficient heating technologies, demonstrating the success and centrality of the fireplace as a design feature of homes, as well as a status symbol. Nonetheless, by 1930 fewer fireplaces are seen in advertisements and articles than in previous eras, and some photographs and drawings in these magazines suggested the absence of fireplaces from living rooms.

It is likely that following the Great Depression, the fireplace, as a design feature, became a luxury not readily available in many of the apartments the middle-class was moving into. But in addition, there were new innovations that could now become focal

points in living rooms. Phonographs, or record players, were already in use, probably in homes of the more affluent, by the late 19th century, but a new attraction was the radio. The radio entered domestic use in the 1920s (Halsey, 1985). A new technology that symbolized hope for a better future, combined with a recessed economy, may have led to a 1940 article. The article entitled "Musical Selections" taught its readers about the different types of radios and phonographs. It included illustrations, such as the one shown in Figure 12.

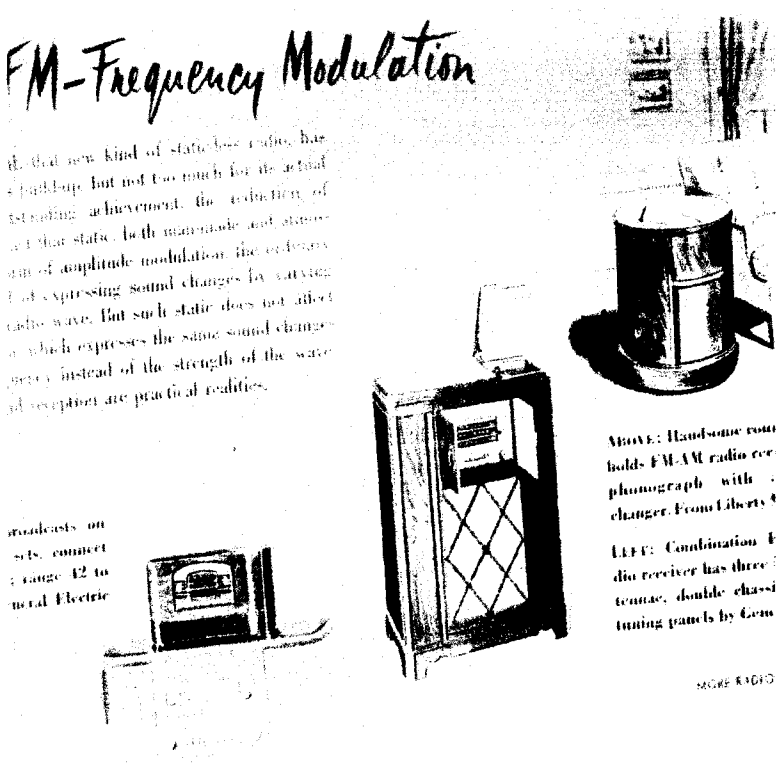

Figure 12. An article on radios in "House and Garden" magazine showing several designs for radios and radio-cabinets. *Note*. "Musical Selections," 1940, *House and Garden, 78,* section 2, p. 39.

The article began with these words:

> It used to be that buying a new radio was a simple matter of paying your money and taking "this year's model" – awful to look at but powerful, full of tubes and best to be had, at the time. Now it's not nearly so simple, because now you can have just about what you want, but you have to decide what it is ("Musical selections," 1940, p. 39).

Not only were there a variety of radios, but there were a variety of design "solutions." In some cases, the radio was ensconced in a richly designed cabinet. In other cases the radio, or parts of the radio, were becoming visible. The decrease in size, the improved design and the collaboration with the furniture industry was intended to bring the radio into the living room and give it at least the same place of honor as the phonograph had. Once the radio did become more agreeable in appearance and even attractive on its own, it not only entered the living room, it became a visual focus and an activity center for the household. The era of the "entertainment center" had arrived. The fireplace was not displaced, but its place in the living room may have become less central. Well known are the short movies showing the family galvanized around a radio during the Second World War.

The popularity of the radio may have also coincided with other popular modern tools of the time – the automobile, as well as the airplane. All were advances that supposedly connected the family, now frequently living in the suburbs and isolated, with the larger world.

Following the example of radios, special cabinets were built for television sets, or cabinets for both radios and television sets. In the following example shown in Figure 13, the company that manufactured the radio and the television also manufactured the cabinet. We learn from the advertisement that:

> Here is the exclusive Caperhart Symphonic-Tone System – giving you your true-timbre tone that has made the name

Caperhart world-famous for a generation...And here, too, is Caperhart's authentic styling and luxurious master-crafted cabinetry!..You can have television with your phonograph-radio or television alone...(Caperhart-Farnsworth Corporation, 1950, p. 4).

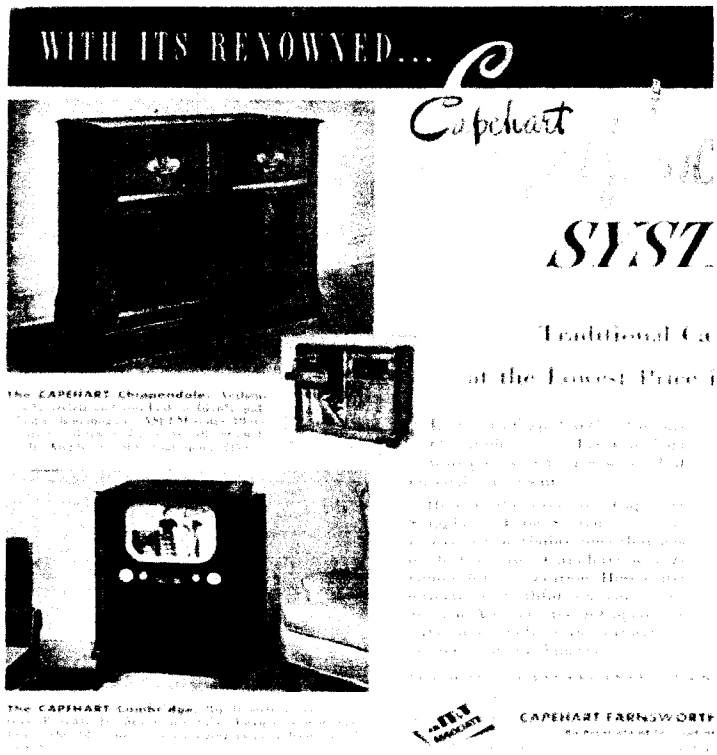

Figure 13. A 1950 advertisement for an early entertainment system manufactured by the Caperhart-Farnsworth Corporation. *Note*. From "Caperhart Symphonic-Tone System," by The Caperhart-Farnsworth Corporation, Fort Wayne, Indiana, 1950, *House and Garden, 97,* p. 4.

In many articles and advertisements in "House & Garden" and in "Good Housekeeping" from 1950 and until contemporary times, it is not clear in what room the television is located. Sometimes the illustration does not show much of the background of the television at all, as seen in Figure 14.

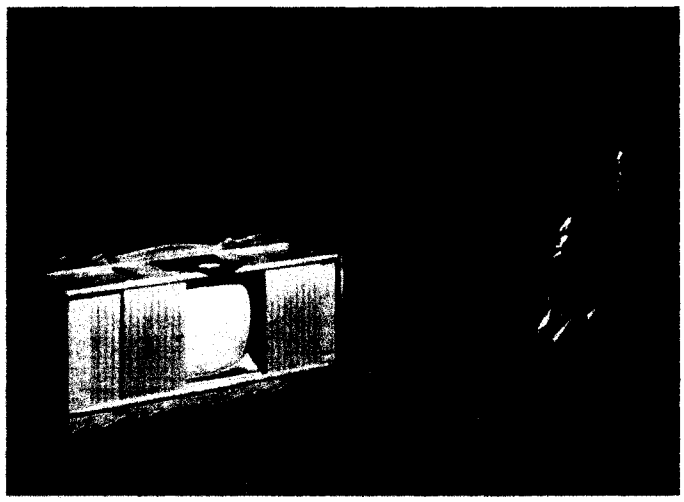

Figure 14. A 1960 illustration of a couple watching the television in an advertisement for the Magnavox television. *Note.* "Magnificent Experience," by The Magnavox Company, Fort Wayne, Indiana, 1960, *House and Garden, 117,* p. 25.

This suggests that the television set never became a standard item in the living room as the audio systems did. Since family rooms became popular in the 1940s, it is possible that advertisers might have left it to the members of the household to decide whether to locate the television in the living room or in the family room.

The Living Room as a Mirror of Cultural Values

When Did the Couch become Comfortable?

Rybczynski (1986) claimed that prior to the 17th century, the connection between physical comfort and seating was not even considered. Seats were of wood, with no upholstering, and the height of the back had to do with status, rather than with comfort. According to Grier (1988), by the early 19th century upholstered seating items were already in existence and were expected to provide some measure of comfort. At the same

time, they were at the center of a curious debate regarding the moral future of American middle-class: Pleasure and indulgence were traits the social critics, whose audience was the middle-class, attributed, with a certain disdain, to the upper-class. Overindulgence in pleasures of the body was considered detrimental to the moral spirit. The middle-class was expected to have "Republican virtue," the fusion between religion and modest domestic family life that would have consequences for the future of the republic. The following quote from Harriet Beecher Stowe's 1852 "Uncle Tom's Cabin," given by Grier (1988), exemplifies how even sitting had consequences:

> A small flagged-bottom rocking chair, with a patchwork cushion in it, neatly contrived out of small patches of different colored woolen goods, and a larger sized one, motherly and old, whose wide arms breathed hospitable invitation, seconded by the solicitation of its feather cushions, a real comfortable, persuasive old chair, worth, in the way of honest, homely enjoyment, a dozen of your plush or brocatelle drawing-room gentry (as quoted in Grier, 1988, p. 162).

But while social critics tried to warn the middle-class of the dangers of overindulgence, other forces were at work. For one, the cost of production of upholstery and of the spring coil dropped. In addition, there were new marketing ploys, such as buying with credit, exchanging goods and free deliveries. Furthermore, in various settings that the middle-class frequented, such as steamboats, railroad cars, hotels, and photography studios, such upholstered items were being promoted (Grier, 1988).

If there was some unease among the middle-class about the morality of comfort during the 19th century, that sense has completely disappeared in contemporary time according to results obtained from interviews with participants in this study. Not only was the couch usually considered the most pivotal object in the living room, it is the object participants associated most with both physical and emotional comfort.

Furthermore, comfort was the most prominent feeling that was brought up with regard to the living room, either as what participants in the present study actually felt, or as what they expected to feel. It seems as though the couch, especially with the advent of the Davenport, not only brought the notion of comfort into the living room, but with it, an expectation of comfort in the living room was planted. The more couches became comfortable, the more this expectation grew, until a full association was created in the public between couches and comfort.

Cleanliness

In a letter written in 1900 by the Philadelphia Medical Journal stated that:

> At a recent meeting of the Boards of Health of Pennsylvania, Dr. Benjamin Lee emphasized a truth to which insufficient attention has been paid. Women, he said, are born sanitarians, whereas men must be taught...Women, by office and evolution, are the housekeepers and health officers of the family. Let them become publicly and officially our health officers and sanitary managers ("Home duties and pleasures," 1900, p. 98).

Wright (1975) explained what factors have helped establish the importance of cleanliness in the domestic arena. One reason Wright enumerated is the germ theory that became widespread during the late 19th century and that encouraged strict cleaning standards in the home. Dust, she says, was at the time also blamed for many diseases and led to the decline of the extensive use of fabric throughout the Victorian parlors.

Several authors further described the connection that was made during the 19th and the early 20th century between cleanliness and morality (Grier, 1988; Wright, 1981; Zuckerman, 1998). Grier explained that the geographic division between home and the

workplace, beginning with industrialization, created a sense of the workplace being in a world beyond, where physical and moral dangers lurk. The home was the safe-haven and the wife, the keeper of that haven. Cleanliness of the domestic surroundings came to symbolize a moral cleanliness.

During the late 19th century, the job of keeping the home clean changed for the middle-class because of the shrinkage of the servant work-force. While in 1870 half the wage-earning women were domestic servants, in the following years with less immigration (many of the live-in servants were single women immigrants) and the expansion of industrialization, white women began to leave domestic services in favor of work in the industries. In the decades that followed, income taxes and social security rendered domestic services even less attractive (Cowan, 1983). Indeed, this desertion of domestic service became such a burning "servant problem" or "servant question," that a review of The New York Times reveals that it had been one of the subjects included in its index during the first decades of the 20th century.

Even with servants, women eventually had to direct and supervise the various chores that servants performed, including cleaning, cooking, setting up for entertaining and so forth. Overseeing the servants work was a full-time job in itself. But when housewives needed to take on the tasks previously performed by servants, it necessitated a great adjustment. Zuckerman (1998) claimed that as this happened, housewives turned to women's magazines to find help in this process. Marketers used this opportunity to promote those products that supposedly helped middle-class women in their new housekeeping tasks.

When viewing this shift from the use of servants to the use of appliances, it

almost seems to be the obvious progression of events. Supposedly, what other option was there? According to Cromley (1990), there was in fact another option. Between the mid 19th century and the early 20th century middle-class families with moderate incomes who could perhaps afford servants or sophisticated furniture, but not both, could opt to live in "apartment hotels." These apartment hotels are somewhat similar to the contemporary concept of assisted living, but were not reserved for a certain age-group. These were apartment buildings that had collective services, such as cleaning and cooking. Sometimes there was a central kitchen, where one's personal servant could do the cooking, and in some of these apartment hotels there were nurseries. Cromley claimed the values of the times conflicted with the concept of apartment hotels, eventually rendering them obsolete. For instance, travelers living in these buildings were considered to be "inappropriate" company for the women and children. Likewise, while private servants needed to at least be supervised, centralized services took work away from housewives, creating a temptation for women to look for occupation elsewhere (Cromley, 1990).

Just as apartment hotels eventually failed at least in part because of cultural values of the era, such existing values contributed to the success of domestic appliances, and were magnified in the media in order to promote these appliances. According to Wright (1975), advertisers stressed the connection between morality and housekeeping.

Furthermore, Cowan (1983) explains that the aggressive marketing of these appliances eventually encouraged households to discharge of their servants. Vacuum cleaners, washing machines and other technologies were eventually used by the housewife, increasing her work-load.

One invention that was pivotal in promoting home-technologies was the alternating-current motor, developed by George Westinghouse in the late 19th century, initially with the intention of manufacturing motors for trains, especially streetcars. Since few American companies owned patents for electrical equipment, it was feasible to standardize electrical equipment, thus lowering the cost of production of electrical goods (Cowan, 1983). The lowered prices enabled electrical equipment to enter the domestic domain, and by the 1920's electric appliances for domestic use were becoming prevalent. Cleaners with suction were already available, but they were operated by a hand pump, and needed two people to operate. The invention of the electrical vacuum cleaner was enabled by the development of small motors that could be inserted into domestic equipment coupled with the connection of dwellings to electricity. The early forms of electric vacuum cleaners were electric fans hooked up to carpet sweepers (Cowan, 1983). The first electric vacuum cleaner was patented in 1901 (Rybczynski, 1986). A review of "Good Housekeeping" and "House & Garden" reveals that a major marketing battle for domestic technologies, mainly vacuum cleaners and washing machines, was in full swing by 1920. This explosion of advertising for new domestic-technologies has no parallel a decade earlier. Advertisements ran mainly for vacuum cleaners and washing machines.

A typical advertisement in "Good Housekeeping" was obviously trying to make the claim that vacuum cleaners are indeed reliable pieces of equipment, respectable enough to clean even a living room carpet: A Hoover vacuum cleaner is positioned in the most respectable room in the residence – the living room, on a carpet right in front of what is the most adorned item in the living room – the fireplace (see Figure 15).

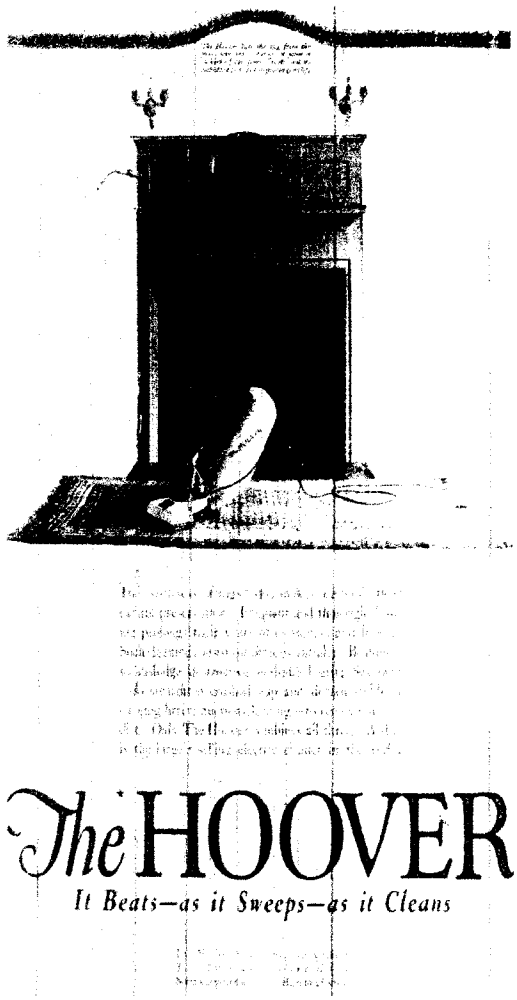

Figure 15. A 1920 advertisement for a "Hoover" vacuum cleaner, showing the vacuum cleaner in front of a fireplace. *Note*. From "The Hoover: It Beats – As It Sweeps – As It Cleans," by The Hoover Suction Sweeper Company, North Canton, Ohio, 1920, *Good Housekeeping, 70* (2), p. 104.

In such advertisements, the vacuum cleaner was depicted mainly in the living room. There are several plausible reasons for this. First, the living room, being the most public room, is one of the rooms that the readers are most likely to see in a magazine, since the more private rooms were considered too intimate a space to view for someone who is outside of the household. In addition, Victorian standards of design dictated that the entertaining rooms had many dust-catching items: upholstered furniture, carpets,

curtains and other fabric covered furnishings. And although the massive use of fabric was slowly declining, still the living room contained the bigger share of fabric in the dwelling that could not be easily washed, unlike the bedroom fabrics that could be washed thoroughly. Hence, the aid of the vacuum cleaner was needed most in the living room. Finally, the location of the vacuum cleaner in the living room represents the expectation that the living room be the cleanest of the rooms, an expectation that was reflected in some of the interviews conducted for this study. In these advertisements features attractive to women were emphasized, such as the fact that "The Eclipse vacuum cleaner weighs only 10 pounds, so light that you can carry it from room to room and upstairs without fatigue" (Eclipse Machine Co., 1920, p. 202).[3]

The emphasis on domestic cleanliness was both harnessed and further promoted by advertising campaigns for various home appliances and innovations, and it continued in subsequent decades. Through the use of perspective, the cleanliness of a carpet is stressed in an advertisement from 1950 for a supposedly easy-to-clean carpet (see Figure 16). The advertisement gives the perspective of a guest walking into the living room of "Mrs. Christine Osborn" of Fort Worth, Texas. What the guest sees is the immaculately clean carpet leading to the self-secure host, exactly the scenario that women of that era were expected to wish for. This advertisement also carries a message about a certain desirable balance between comfort, on the one hand, and cleanliness on the other. It suggested that the easy-to-clean carpet allowed the comfort without the compromise of cleanliness (Wunda Weve, Berlug Mills Inc., House and Garden, March 1950, Vol. 97, p.

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[3] It has been brought to my attention that a current advertisement also stresses the light weight of the vacuum cleaner that is being marketed.

53).

Figure 16. A 1950 advertisement for a carpet, showing the housewife in her immaculately clean living room. *Note*. From "Formal or Friendly Rooms...Large or Small, You Can Work Wonders with Wunda Weve," by Berlug Mills, Incorporated, Greenville, South Carolina, 1950, March, *House and Garden, 97,* p. 53.

Wright (1975) claimed that high standards of domestic cleanliness for the housewife persevered well into the 1970s, standards the advertising industry continued to employ. The current study suggests that while this is true, a slight and gradual decrease in these norms has been taking place. In 1950, though perhaps in the family room and not in the living room, a short article is written about "Telemites." It says:

> Telemites more lovable than termite, can also be more destructible. With sticky hands they drag heavy chairs over

> your carpet to their favorite spot in front of the television set. Innocently they grind gritty shoe soles into upholstery fabrics, or bang heels against chair legs as the hero gallops across the TV screen ("How Crump Hassocks stopped telemite damage: In the home of Mrs. Maynard P. Smith, Richmond, Virginia," 1950, Vol. 98, p. 266).

A 1960 advertisement for a carpet shows children playing in the living room. Two of the children are sitting on the floor, while a third, who is possibly sick, is lying on the couch. The housewife looking at this advertisement is left to imagine all the dangers – from the healthy children, as well as from the sick – that await the carpet (see Figure 17).

Figure 17. A 1960 advertisement for a carpet showing children playing on the living room carpet. *Note*. From "Firth," by the Firth Carpet Company, New York, New York, 1960, May, *House and Garden, 118,* p. 41.

There are several ways in which these two examples are a novelty. In previous decades, children were not shown in living rooms, the carpet was not sat on and such dangers to cleanliness were not presented. There are two messages carried in the

advertisement. One message is that this carpet is tougher than ever. But the other message is that it is all right to be more relaxed about one's behavior in the home, even in the living room. The comfort-cleanliness balance became tilted a little more towards comfort.

As will be described in Chapter 8, "Values Embedded in Living Rooms," interviews currently conducted with participants indicated that, even today, comfort sometimes clashes with cleanliness, but also that there is a gradual loosening of cleanliness standards.

Gender and Leisure

By looking at how women were portrayed in magazines and newspapers during the different eras, we can learn how attitudes and values that relate to women and gender differences changed over time. After the kitchen, the domestic spaces that serve most as a spatial context for various advertisements and articles are the so-called public spaces in the home. As explained earlier, one reason is that any other space would be considered too intimate for the reader to read about or to view.

The previous section discussed the historic developments that led to the assignment of the upkeep of the home to women. But what is also informative is what women did not do in living rooms in previous eras and began to do in later times. At least until 1940, it was rare to see women depicted in "Good Housekeeping" or "House and Garden" taking part in leisurely activity. In fact, they are not depicted sitting on a couch unless a man is seated as well. When they are seated, far from leisurely, women's postures are rigid. But mostly women are seen as performing some task in the living room, or as about to perform a task. An example is given in Figure 18.

Figure 18. A 1940 advertisement for a mirror showing a housewife arranging flowers in her living room. *Note*. From "How to Tell a Good Mirror Before You Buy It," by the Pittsburgh Plate Glass company, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, 1940, *House and Garden, 78,* section 2, p. 48.

"Mrs. Christine Osborn," shown previously in Figure 16, would not be sitting comfortably on her couch if it were 1940. But even in 1950 it was not clear that woman's place was in the living room (if she were not working in it). Loyd spoke about "the sexual division of space" (Loyd, 1975, p. 10) . A 1950 advertisement (shown in Figure 19) for a washing machine shows a stack of plates separating the living room from the kitchen. The housewife is shown in the kitchen cleaning the dishes. The husband, on the other hand, is in the living room comfortably sitting on a recliner and watching TV with his

two children by his side. The title of the advertisement reads: "Please...let your wife come into the living room." (Hotpoint Automatic Electric Dishwashers, 1950, p. 53).

Figure 19. A 1950 advertisement for a dish-washer showing the housewife cleaning an endless heap of dishes in the kitchen, as the husband and children are watching the television in the living room. *Note*. From "Please...Let Your Wife Come into the Living Room!" by Hotpoint Incorporated, Chicago, Illinois, 1950, *House and Garden, 98,* p.53.

Here we see the two coexisting standards of the time. On the one hand, it is the woman who performs domestic tasks. On the other hand, the living room is beginning to be a place where she, at least occasionally, enjoys some quiet moments with her family. In a New York Times advertisement from 1950 for apartments in Brooklyn, a similar uncertainty about woman's place in the living room is reflected: The husband is sitting watching the TV. The child is placed right by the TV set, as if he were perchance passing

by. The wife is standing behind the husband, as if she was in the midst of performing some task and could only take a moment or two to join him.

By 1960 a drastic change has taken place, reflecting a corresponding value change. In an advertisement for a "TV dream lounger," shown in Figure 20, a woman is seen lounging (in somewhat formal clothes) comfortably in a posture in which women were not seen during previous eras. It should be noted that its name, "TV lounger," meant that the woman depicted would be lounging for a while, a point emphasized by the soft-drink bottle held in her hand.

Figure 20. 1960 advertisement for a recliner, showing a woman reclining. *Note.* From "If You Like Comfort, You'll Love TV Dream Loungers by Dean," by Dean Industries, Chicago, Illinois, (July, 1960), *House and Garden, 118,* p. 17.

Of course the advertisement reflected either the manufacturing of a product geared by its dimensions especially towards women users, or the discovery by the

manufacturer that women could now be added as another population that would be likely to use the product. Nonetheless, this would not happen, nor would such an advertisement be placed, if a corresponding change in the role of women were not already in place. It can be assumed that women did lounge on couches in living rooms before the 1960s. But the fact that the readers witness this behavior means that it no longer took place "behind closed doors," so to speak, and that the living room was becoming more of an overt territory for woman too. It also reflects the fact that work is no longer the only thing women are openly engaged with in the home, nor is the home the only place where women are expected to work.

Changes in how women were depicted in magazines began, according to Zuckerman (1998), in the 18th century. During the late 18th century and the early 19th century, all of the magazines dealt with the suffrage movement, some offering a more positive view, some a more negative view. "Pictorial Review," run by a male editor-in-chief, supported the movement and published articles on the achievements of the feminists through the mid-twenties. In an attempt to keep a "balanced" opinion, Good Housekeeping eventually supported the suffragists, but needed a "social housekeeping" (Zuckerman, 1998, p. 89) rationale for its support, according to which women can apply the same talents used for the home to alleviate social problems (Zuckerman, 1998). Whether this was done out of sincere feelings or as a strategy to increase circulation is not relevant. What is important is that the suffrage movement created pressure that had an actual outcome in terms of the content matter included in a publication. This pressure did not just exist in the form of a zeitgeist, but also in the form of letters, suggestions and written contributions (Zuckerman, 1998).

After the Second World War, women's magazines voiced mixed opinions on the issue of whether women should keep the jobs they had taken over during the war or whether the men returning from the war should go back to these jobs. There were some articles that supported the right of women to keep their workplace, whereas other articles claimed the men should be able to reclaim their jobs. In the 1960's and 1970's women began to climb up the editorial hierarchy of the women's magazines. A senior editor at "McCall's" magazine, who was told in the late 1960s by the President of the magazine that a woman could never become an editor-in-chief, became the editor-in-chief of "Ladies Home Journal" in the 1970s. And in 1970, a group of women activists had an eleven-hour sit-in at the office of the editor of the "Ladies Home Journal" (a male, at that time), which resulted in the creation of an eight-page supplement written by the women activists. The editor-in-chief also promised to make changes to the content matter of the magazine (Zuckerman, 1998).

The changes were by all means slight and not unequivocal, as can be seen from two advertisements from the 1970s for the "La-Z-Boy" recliner. In one advertisement, both a man and a woman are depicted sitting in the recliners. But while the man is lounging with a newspaper in his hand, the woman is parenting her daughter who is sitting next to her on the recliner (see Figure 21). The same year, La-Z-Boy produced an even more traditional image, showing a man comfortably reclining holding a pipe in his hand, while his wife, standing, is holding a book smiling to her husband. It seems as though the wife is about to hand the book to her husband. The title of the advertisement reads: "So nice to come home to" (see Figure 22).

This mixed message continued through 2000. Some images have continued to

show women in more leisurely postures, other images still show women working in the living room. Sometimes women are depicted by themselves (whether at work or at leisure), at other times they are depicted sitting by a male partner or a child.

Figure 21. Advertisement for a recliner showing a woman sitting with her daughter, and the husband reclining. *Note*. From "Styled for Family Comfort. La-Z-Boy Reclina-Rocker," by La-Z-Boy Chair Company, Monroe, Michigan, 1970, *House and Garden, 137,* p. 31.

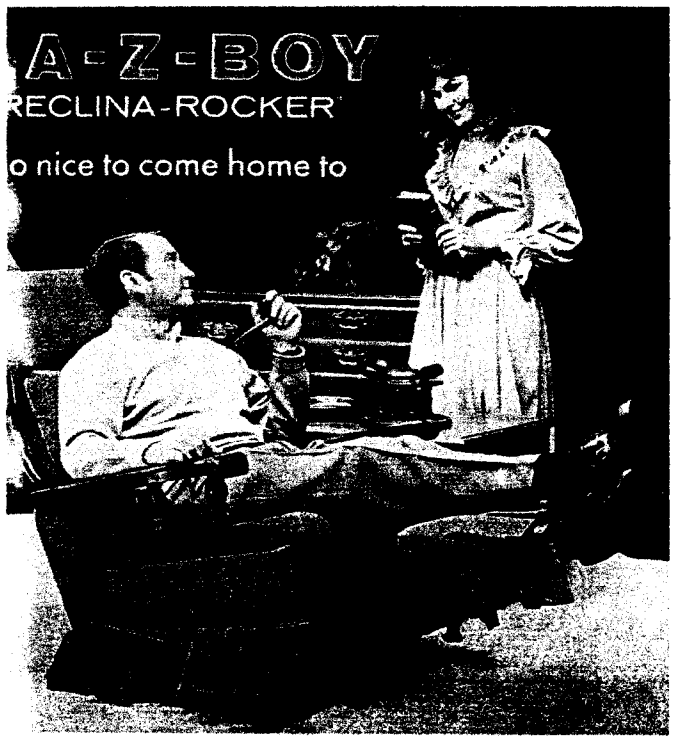

Figure 22. A 1970 advertisement for a recliner, showing the husband reclining and the wife standing. *Note*. From "La-Z-Boy Reclina Rocker: So Nice to Come Home To," by La-Z-Boy Chair Company, Monroe, Michigan, 1970, *House and Garden, 137,* p. 85.

Summary

This chapter discussed historic developments that have helped shape the present-day living room, in its arrangement, uses and experiences. These historic developments include changes in middle-class values, economic events, and technological innovations. This provides an understanding that present commonly acceptable design features, uses and even experiences, such as will be discussed in the following chapters, are not independent of historical events and changes. At the same time, this chapter demonstrated that certain factors, such as culture and economy are always involved in the making of

living rooms or any other domestic setting, even if their effects are not always visible. It is exactly the historic perspective that allows the influence of such factors to emerge.

CHAPTER 4: PLACE AND PARTICIPANTS

The Geographic Context

At the time that I had conducted the interviews, all but one participant lived in New York City. One participant lived in New Jersey in a row-house. The neighborhood she lived in looked very much like other middle and upper-middle class neighborhoods in New York City. The dwellings observed for this study were highly diverse. There were several apartments, some in buildings that were built before the World-War II, some after the war. There were two row-houses, one that could be considered a brownstone, that is, a more upscale dwelling. There was one industrial floor converted into an apartment and there was one single-dwelling house in Staten Island. This variety is typical of housing in cities where different residential development ideas were implemented at different periods. For instance, as explained in the previous chapter, apartment buildings were introduced to New York City at the end of the 19th century as a way of overcoming the high cost of land at a time when the city was becoming more densely populated and land for development was becoming sparse (Cromley, 1990). Indeed, because New York City is a densely built city, many of the dwellings in it are smaller than can be expected for people of a similar income in suburban and rural areas. In addition, New York City offers many opportunities for entertainment outside the home, something that is far less accessible in suburban and rural areas. The combination of a small number of rooms in many dwellings, coupled with city-life may have resulted in a lowered need to have a room designated exclusively for entertaining, and may have led to a "New York City dwelling culture" that prefers a multi-functional living room over a separation between

the living room and another room for leisurely use of the household. Such a dwelling culture may explain why all but one participant who participated in this study did not have a family room.

Also typical of New York City, especially in apartment buildings or dwellings that are surrounded by taller buildings, is the blockage of sunlight. Furthermore, in row-houses, common in Brooklyn and Queens, sunlight can only enter from two sides of the house. The importance of light for inhabitants of New York City will be further discussed in a Chapter 5, "Objects and Other Physical Elements in the Living Room," the section "Illumination."

A Brush-Stroke Description of Participants' Living Rooms

The following is a summary of my impressions of the participants that were formed following the interviews. In order to maintain anonymity, some details about the participants were omitted. At the beginning of each summary, a short phrase attempting to capture the most central feature of the participants' experience of their living rooms is presented in bold.

After completing the summaries, they were sent to the participants for their reactions. Corrections were made, based on these reactions. Some of the participants have since moved out of their apartments. Others have made changes to their living rooms. At least one participant has gone through a life-changing event. Still, I decided to describe my impressions in the "present" tense. Only things participants had told me are recited in the "past" tense.

Jennifer

"An altar to WASPdom" and a "den."

An "altar to WASPdom" is what Jennifer called the bar in her living room. Yet, it also seems to be emblematic of the living room as a whole. Jennifer explained that she felt a need to counter-balance her "Queer" lifestyle through the traditional look of her living room. This look is achieved through furniture, some pieces of which are heirlooms from her family, and some pieces of which resemble items her family had. The arrangement of several seating corners, with lamps set on end-tables, is also reminiscent of Victorian arrangements she had seen growing up. Jennifer's living room is filled with decorative items, some from her family, such as an old wine decanter and lamps, some she had found on the street and some artwork she had done herself. One wall is covered with photographs, mainly of herself with family and friends. Jennifer continues her Southern upper-middle-class traditions by entertaining often. Twice a year more than one hundred people will attend her parties. Once a week the living room is also where smaller circles of friends frequently congregate. At the same time Jennifer also called her living room a "den." Almost every evening, Jennifer curls up comfortably on her couch and watches the TV. During times of emotional distress, lying on the couch and watching TV is a main source of comfort for her. Judgmental of herself, Jennifer added she feels proud to entertain, but she relates a sense of torpor to lounging and watching TV.

Jan

"The incomplete haven."

The living room, more than any other room in Jan's apartment, is filled with meaningful objects: a big painting done by a friend, a replica of Buddha's foot other friends had brought from a trip, a framed painting of a tree she had cut out of a calendar, and that brought memories of a tree she had planted in Prospect Park, Brooklyn. The living room is a place where many good things happened for Jan. It is the room where she watches TV, talks on the phone, meditates, entertains and has people sleep over. Once or twice she had given friends reflexology and massages there. On the one hand she loves to spend time in it, calling it her "haven." She loves to turn a chair towards the window and look outside, especially when it rains heavily. She loves to watch special TV shows. She loves having friends over. On the other hand, she feels she does not have the know-how, or the skills needed to complete the decoration of the living room, and she is not comfortable asking friends to help her. The incomplete state of the room is something that seriously troubles her.

Jackie

"There are all the reminders that I was that person also."

Jackie's living room is filled with furniture of immense significance for her. Many of the furniture items in the living room are from her grandparents' house, where she moved, as a little child, after her parents had both passed away. Not a day passes

without these items reminding her of her childhood and her growing up with her grandparents, "like part of that house is still with me," she said. She remembers in great detail the location of furniture items, how they looked and how they were used in her grandparents' house. Such is a corner table that had trick-boxes on it and a little toy her grandfather would play with her over and over. Such is also the rocking chair her grandmother used to sit on, looking out the window and making comments about passing neighbors. Jackie said she is happy to be reminded of that childhood home. There, she said she found "a lot of my security and the sense of being loved from my grandfather, and I felt safe there, even though my childhood was very traumatic and with a lot of loss." Jackie and her husband frequently entertain guests in their living room, usually after having served dinner in the dining room. A late owl, Jackie also frequently sits at nighttime on the living room couch and reads. Sometimes, after having a fight with her husband, the living room is where Jackie goes to and sits by herself. In such moments, the living room, opening up to the rest of the apartment, enables her to be by herself, yet, at the same time, remain connected to her home and her marriage.

Jake

Not a sentimental room.

Jake is married to Jackie. Jake emphasized how limited his use of his and Jackie's living room is. Other than entertaining, he uses the living room to watch TV on weekend mornings, when his wife is still sleeping. The only other use he mentioned was picking a

book or a CD from the bookshelf, and taking these to read or to listen to in another room. Still, Jake is very proud of the mantle-piece, the fireplace and the wood-work of the bookcase in the living room. The achievement is more about a successful collaboration between him and his wife, representing the positive aspects of his marriage, rather than about the financial state that allowed them to invest in these furnishings. But other than that, the living room does not evoke strong emotions in Jake. At the same time, there are certain objects in the living room that are very significant to him. He spoke about two leather chairs his father, now deceased, used to have in his office, saying they brought up memories for him. In fact, listening to the recording of the interview, it became obvious that his voice became deeper and quieter when he spoke about the chairs. I learned from Jackie, Jake's wife, that when she and her husband came to see the apartment, Jake, looking out of the living room window, realized, to his amazement, that the building across the street is where his father's office used to be, the same office from which he had gotten the two leather chairs. Perhaps feeling it was too personal, Jake decided not to tell me about it.

Sandy

"This is my showcase."

The living room is Sandy's pride and joy. She said that with no objection from her husband, she alone decided what pieces of furniture to buy, what objects to display in it, and how to arrange the room. Sandy's living room has a sofa, a love seat and an armchair. The sofa faces the étagère, where knick-knacks and photos are displayed. Such

items are also placed on the coffee-table (or the "cocktail table" as Sandy also calls it) and the end-tables. Also set on the end-tables are small bowls filled with candy. The display is both for her guests as well as for herself, she said. There are many plants by the windowed wall and a flower-motif runs throughout the living room: a painting of flowers above the sofa and several decorative items in the shape of flowers, including her pottery collection. Sandy loves to entertain, and her living room is used solely for that purpose. In fact, the foyer of her Queens apartment has been converted into the family room, complete with a couch and a TV, to avoid wear and tear of the living room furniture. Sandy takes upon herself the hosting of her and her husband's families during most of the year's holidays and the special occasions. During those events, guests use the living room and foyer as one continuous space, with seats set up in both rooms. The food is then arranged in the kitchen as a buffet, and the guests carry the food into the living room and foyer. In addition, she and four of her friends meet every week to play mah-jongg. Once in every five weeks, it is her turn to host her friends in her living room. Although Sandy herself called the living room a "showcase," it is clearly not meant to be just a showcase for guests, and some of the items in it have strong sentimental value for her, such as photographs of her family. The photos are placed in front of some crystal pieces. When Sandy showed me her living room, she moved photos of her grand-daughter, so as to reveal crystal pieces, saying: "Did you see how much nicer this looks? That's the way it should really be...but I like the pictures."

Michelle

A room for objects of "particular preciousness."

Michelle has knick-knacks throughout the apartment, but she claimed those that were in the living room were of particular "preciousness" to her. She chose to allocate these objects of particular "preciousness" to the living room because it was the room she managed to keep the least cluttered and had the "biggest unbroken wall spaces," so that "you can see the art in it most vividly." The objects in Michelle's living room reflect a large array of interests: Objects of "ritual-art," as she called it, especially, but not exclusively Judaica, artwork, and crafts-work in general. Some of the objects are from different parts of the world, many of which are presents. She said she liked objects that resemble what the local people would have, such as the Swedish crystal candle-holders she had bought on a trip. Michelle has a large number of books in her living room, as well as throughout the apartment. Many of these were books she had carefully chosen and later indexed from her deceased uncle's collection. We laughed when I realized she was telling me about an uncle of hers from whom she had gotten a foot-locker, all the time standing above the foot-locker and looking at it as if it were the uncle himself. The living room is also where Michelle sorts the heap of clean laundry that she throws on her couch, both because the couch is a convenient spot to do that on, and because the closet is in the living room. Michelle uses her living room for occasional get-togethers with good friends of hers, especially during the Jewish holidays. She also had two big gatherings to mourn the passing away, first of her aunt, a year and a half later, of her uncle. Although guests were disbursed throughout the small apartment, the living room was the center of

these events.

Anita

A room to sprawl in.

The thing Anita loves to do most in the big Victorian living room is to sprawl on either one of the two blue couches she reveres. She said sprawling was one of the things she loved to do most in the world, and in her childhood home, every room was for sprawling. Anita spends time lounging on one of the couches mainly on mornings when she does not go to work, and on weekends, reading the paper and eating breakfast. In addition to the couches, there is a piano, an entertainment center and several chairs and tables in the living room. There are few knick-knacks, and most of the decorative objects that are more meaningful to Anita are in the dining area. Anita feels the living room is the most unfinished room in the house. She said it was the "dumping ground" for hand-me-down furniture she and her husband had no other place for. Lighting sconces are bare and the ceiling light is covered with a lantern not to her taste, despite the fact both she and her husband have dealt with lighting in their professions. Anita thought proper lighting would make the living room feel much cozier. The living room is very long and narrow, having been built as a 19th century parlor. Anita finds that because of this unusual shape it is difficult to get guests to convene in the living room. Instead they end up in the kitchen-dining area. At the time of the interview, Anita was expecting her baby. She thought once the baby was born, the uses of the living room would change, and much of the time that

would be spent in the living room would be with the baby.

Steve

The "Me" living room

Steve takes great pride in his living room. He said that he succeeded in decorating and arranging the room through no easy feat. The big sectional couch was moved several times until the current arrangement was selected. Shelves were custom-made to fit in a certain area and surround an aquarium. They were arranged so as to leave empty wall spaces for wall-hangings. Books were arranged by theme, and only certain knick-knacks, mostly presents, were put on display. The rest of the presents were put away in a closet. Big posters of the "Star-Wars" trilogy were framed and set on one of the walls. Plush cushions were thrown on the couch. Special efforts were made by Steve to create a living room that was "him," as opposed to the living room in the previous apartment he had shared with his former lover: a living room and an apartment he had felt were a compromise of both his and his lover's tastes. Steve also attempted to create a space that was less cluttered than his previous living room. The previous living room he had shared with his lover was laden with knick-knacks, most not at all to his aesthetic taste. Steve said he likes the high energy of New York City, but at the same time he likes to balance his life through the quiet and relaxing environment his apartment offers to him. When he gets back from work, Steve loves to sit and relax on the couch and then eat his dinner on the couch watching the TV. Steve likes the fact that although he is tall, the couch is long enough to enable him to take naps on it.

Malia

"A sacred spot."

Malia is very happy with her current apartment, where she lives by herself. She is especially fond of the very bright living room: a south-facing window-wall, opening to a balcony and an east-facing picture-window in the living room "that in the morning the sun pours into this room and it is unbelievable. It's just so light and wonderful." She is also on the seventeenth floor, and has an unblocked view of the Manhattan skyline, including the Empire State building. In fact, not wanting "a speck of light not to come in," there are no shades, blinds or curtains on the windows. Having a view of nocturnal Manhattan, Malia spends most of her after-work domestic waking hours on the couch in the living room. After preparing food in the kitchen for the next work-day, that is where she will usually end up, reading, writing personal journals, meditating, or just thinking. She will do mundane things there, such as flossing her teeth, or exercising her injured knee. She will make most of her phone-calls in the living room, sitting on a Queen Anne chair, "looking at the Empire State and the sky." And on weekends, she will eat her breakfast there and enjoy the sunlight flowing into the room. The few decorative objects, scattered around the room, are very meaningful to Malia. On a piano are displayed a bowl of shells that she collected with her daughters in the Caribbean, and a piece of pottery made by one of the daughters. Malia also has a painting above the couch that she had received as a high-school graduation present. Although she likes it a great deal, the memories it brings up are not necessarily all happy ones. She describes the girl in the

picture as "waifish," and sometimes, looking at the picture brings up painful memories from her own childhood. These memories elicited, make her realize some of the "old" feelings are still there, and there are unresolved issues for her.

Dianne

A real living room

Growing up, Dianne always wanted a living room like she saw in her friends' homes. Her mother did not want company, and left what would have been the living room bare, except for plants. It was especially important for Dianne to have a couch like every other living room she had seen had: "because I didn't have a living room growing up, it was really important to me to have one, like I really want a living room, and I want people to be in my living room, and I want to use my living room as a living room." Dianne had spent a great deal of time looking for the right couch, with the right "mush factor." She was very happy finding the one she now has. Dianne mostly uses the living room to lounge on the couch, "kind of catty-corner it" and do some less intense reading for graduate school, or watch TV. She said it's where she does her "veging." Dianne occasionally lights a fire in the fireplace and lies on the couch watching it. It feels "so romantic," she said. Decorative objects are in the bookcase, on the mantle-piece and on the window sill. Many of the decorative objects remind her of people that are important to her. She has a shell a lover gave to her during a walk on the beach. She has a vase that was given as a present from another lover, and a present from a friend who "would give you the shirt off her back if she could." She has a photo of her nieces and nephew and a

photo of her grandparents, which she said brings up memories for her every day as she goes into the living room. The two parakeets are housed in the living room because, having two windows, it is the most well-lit room in the apartment. In addition, the parakeets are sociable birds, and the living room is where they would most likely find company.

Nan

The "Us" living room

It was only after I had already turned the tape-recorder off that Nan shared with me that coming out of poverty and the painful divorce of her parents, her home, which she shares with her husband, is extremely important to her. Photos displayed throughout the living room, many of which have captured special moments with her husband, reflect how important her marriage is to her. In addition to those photos that were displayed on surfaces, many more photos are stored in a chest also used as a coffee table. About once a month the chest is opened, and she and her husband look at pictures. "All we have to do is open it, and then there is his entire history, my entire history and our entire history right there," she said. Even in those photos where her husband is absent, she can "see him," as if her were present in her life, even before she had actually met him. Nan said the photos are also important because they reflect having achieved financial security after having grown up in poverty. Additional photos of her larger family remind her of the complicated relationship she has with some of her family members, for whom her new economic situation has caused them to drift away from her. She said the photos help her

continue to feel connected to her family that she loves dearly. Every day, after her husband comes home from work, she and he spend most of the evening in the living room, catching up on daily events and eating with the TV playing in the background, or frequently watching videos.

Ruby

A "heimish" living room.

Despite the fact that the living room is not highly used by Ruby, it does contain and display objects that are incredibly meaningful to her, many of which Ruby has collected over the years. "The ever-important chachkes," as she calls them. These include objects that belong to Ruby, her life and her identity, objects that belong to her partner with whom she lives, and objects that represent the partnership. There are photos of friends and dogs on various furniture items. Two dog beds, one for each dog and a dog-toy-bucket are stationed in the living room. The books in the bookshelves are mainly Ruby's. She has a very strong connection to these books. Many of these books have, in her words, informed her life and shaped her mind. Ruby has her own agenda books and journals on the living room bookshelves. After she had escaped her abusive and dysfunctional childhood home, a friend of hers, in an act of tremendous courage, got into the parents' home and took the journals. No less incredible is the story of sketch-books with lithographs of dogs that resemble her own on the cover, displayed in the living room: A woman was being gang-raped in Prospect Park, Brooklyn, as Ruby was passing by. Ruby, attempted to stop the rapists "and horrible things came of it." A friend of the

woman who was assaulted honored Ruby by sending her a sketch book as a present. By sheer coincidence, the lithograph resembled one of Ruby's dog. During a trip to another state, Ruby walked into a food co-op and found another sketch-book of the same artist with a lithograph of a dog. This time it resembled Ruby's other dog, and Ruby has them now both in her living room. Ruby's living room starkly contrasts with her description of her parents' living room: "There was so much dog lick in the windows, you actually couldn't see out. The shades were so faded, they were yellowed and crumbled and shredded, from where the dogs that were also chaotic and out of control clawed things." She said that her parent's home was not "heimish," meaning, in Yiddish, homey, something she has created in her own homes. Ruby herself, other than entertaining and occasionally spending some moments with her partner on the couch, mainly uses the living room for her daily early-morning yoga, as well as for working on projects, when her time allows, by the work-desk.

Pat

A live room

Pat's living room is the room that prepares her for her daily departures, and embraces her on her returns. Before going to work, Pat sips her cup of tea on her living room couch. In the winter she gets to "curl up under the spread just to get a couple of extra minutes." Pat has a deep interest in and love of animals, something that is clearly reflected in her living room: books on various animals and wildlife, a stuffed armadillo on the day-bed, a wooden sculpture of a fox on a shelf she had built for it, a lamp-shade

painted with figures of fish, clawed feet that once belonged to a piece of furniture. Though not a Southerner herself, Pat also has a love of the South. She travels several times a year with her mother to the South, and likes to go to fairs there. Hence the armadillo and several other objects that she had gotten in the South. Pat's living room gives the sense of being alive. It is rich with objects that relate to various interests of hers, as well as to various connection to and interaction with people: a music box from her grandmother, a table done by a preaching artist, collages done by her friend, a poster of Frederick Douglas done by her aunt, a day-bed that was thrown out by a neighborhood church that she beat a competing neighbor to.

Mark

Trying hard to "make it feel like a living room."

Mark feels about his living room, as he does about the whole apartment, that it is a "make-do-situation." He feels that much as he tried to give the room a semblance of a living room, he could not fully succeed because of built-in features of the room: a closet out of ply-wood protruding into the living room space, a dropped ceiling and walls painted with a white squiggly design. Still, Mark's living room is laden with a great deal of artwork. Some of these are religious articles that serve to Mark as reminders of Puerto Rico, the country where he spent his childhood. Mark also has artwork that especially touched him, such as a piece done by a former student of his that deals with gayness, as well as his own artwork. Objects Mark has in his living room also include presents from

lovers. To him these elicit memories not only of particular relationships, but of the experience of "having related," as he feels that intimate relationships are complex and complicated. Mark uses his living room mostly to study or to take intermissions from study, during which he will nap or watch TV. The TV also serves as his company when he has his meals, sitting on the couch.

Seth

The living room that is yet to be.

Seth's living room is sparsely decorated, although it is clear he tried to turn it into an aesthetic and homey living room with a "personal touch." He said he displays in his living room only objects that reveal those parts of himself he is willing to share with his guests. Other, more intimate objects, are in his study. Some of the objects, mainly presents and photographs, serve to remind him of his ties to friends and family, especially in light of the fact that, having moved to New York City from his home-town, he does not get to see them often. A big fan of the former Celtics basketball player, Larry Bird, Seth has a doll of his displayed in the living room, a last remnant of a collection of basketball players' dolls. In addition to the Larry Bird doll, Seth is aware that there are other objects in his living room that maintain his connection to his childhood. Seth thought with time such objects might be removed from the living room. It is, therefore, fitting that Seth calls his living room a "transitional space." Seth's living room is also where Seth sleeps. Before going to sleep, he throws the clothes he wore on a pile that accumulates. In addition to his own doing, the ceiling is peeling .The untidy and unkempt

condition of his living room is one reason why he does not invite guests very often. At the time of the interview he had plans of creating a separation between the entertaining area and the sleeping area by adding a sleeping loft to the living room. He also had a creative idea of placing a small dining table underneath the loft, by the window, so he could have breakfasts there, as well as "candle-light dinners" with a prospective girlfriend.

Alex

Flimsy but cozy.

When moving into the rented apartment of his then girlfriend, now wife, the room that had previously been rented by a roommate was empty. This was the room that became the living room, and it was also the room to which Alex moved many of his belongings. In its arrangement and decoration Alex said it resembles the living rooms of his parents and grandparents: an old, densely decorated "old fashioned" living room with several seats and lamps. For Alex, this arrangement gives the living room a cozy feeling. Many of the furnishings now in the living room are either from Alex's family, or relate to his family. They include his grandmother's piano, photos of his parents, a family upholstered chair and a late eighteenth-century desk. Alex has a strong attachment to many of the family heirloom items. Often, these items elicit thoughts about his family members and about how these objects were used by them. Such is a desk that was used by his grandmother. He remembers not only her sitting by it, but also what was in the desk. The objects also elicit thoughts about how his life differs from that of his parents

and relatives. On the one hand, he is happy to have a life unlike the very set and risk-averse life-style of his family. On the other hand, he feels some aspects of his current life, especially his living conditions, are not up to par with those of his family. Alex feels that in many ways the living room is unfinished: a window stripped of its woodwork, a work-desk fashioned from a door, laid out on a file cabinet and some crates, stucco-like walls that are peeling, wooden floors that have been painted over and are chipping. Alex uses the living room mainly to study. That he does either on the couch or working on the computer by the desk. He also uses the room to relax and to read for his leisure on the couch. He and his wife mainly hang out in the kitchen when they are together, but his wife sometimes joins him in the living room to watch TV or listen to music. The living room is also where he and his wife sit, in order to resolve issues.

CHAPTER 5: OBJECTS AND OTHER PHYSICAL ELEMENTS IN THE LIVING ROOM

Introduction

Researchers in the past have presented different systems for categorizing meanings of objects. For instance, Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton (1981) offered two broad categories: objects whose significance is in their practical uses, and objects whose significance is in the thoughts they evoke. Oury (1987) applied Jung's theory to propose five meaning dimensions: Introverted-extroverted, thinking, feeling, sensing and intuiting. Each of these researchers contributed to our understanding of the meaning of objects in our lives.

When dealing with objects, the current study differs in two ways from the studies cited: First, these studies focused on domestic objects that were considered the most significant or cherished. An underlying assumption in the current study is that objects can still be meaningful even if they are not the most significant or cherished objects. Therefore, an attempt was made to find out what is the experience of objects, some of which may be very significant and some of which may be less significant. Second, unlike these studies, the current study was interested in focusing on a certain space within the residence, and finding out what is unique about the experience of objects located in that certain space, that being the living room.

For the current study participants were asked to take me on a "tour" of their living rooms and talk about the objects: furniture, books and decorative objects on bookshelves, wall-hangings and so forth. Participants were also asked what their most significant

objects were, and where they were in the residence. In addition, I asked participants to describe any underlying differences between objects that were in their living room and objects in other rooms. What participants told me about the objects in their living room were stories. These stories could be interesting or dull, long or short, happy, sad and sometimes both. The stories could have various aspects to them: Where did the object come from? Do they like it or not? What was the circumstance under which they obtained it? Why did they display it? And so forth.

There are Several Aspects to the Experience of Objects

A Single Object can be Experienced in Several Ways

Bih (1992) claimed that any single object can have several meanings. Indeed, the interviews for the present study contain endless examples of a single object eliciting a variety of experiences: such is Steve's couch. It is extremely comfortable for Steve. It is a purchase that Steve is also proud of. It carries memories of making love on it. It is where Steve relaxes. It is also where Steve has guests sit.

Seth has a small Goofy statue in his living room. Goofy is a character Seth has always liked. It is also a present from an ex-girlfriend, and he says it's the only thing that still connects him to her. But it is also a prop that Seth put in the living room to add color to it.

The following story that Mark had told me about a present – a statue of a woman with a baby - that he had received from his lover demonstrates the different memories and emotions that can be elicited by a single object:

> ...we were like walking around a flea-market here in the city and there was something about the tenderness that, it's not the tenderness, but it's, there was something, she was so peaceful, holding on to that baby...there was like a very peaceful oneness, being-withness, that struck me very much...and I was completely, you know like: "Oh, my god, I love this..." partly it was close to Christmas [laughing], so it was partly kind of like sending a message like if you're really shopping for a gift, like this could be one, but actually there was a lot of time in-between that moment and Christmas and he got it. He went back, later on he went back and he got it, so I think it was, to me it's kind of like a memory of, you know, and I really loved him, and I still do, but then I was romantically very much in love with him, and it was this moment of having been recognized, me having been recognized in a relationship and that the fact that he had gone to get that meant that I had been recognized, so it's kind of like, it's a reminder of you know, there are moments when you will be recognized in ways that are accurate and that I appreciate so, I, that's why I keep it, but was that your question?

A Single Object can Elicit both Positive and Negative Emotions

Several researches have shown that objects sometimes elicit negative experiences. For instance, Oury (1987) investigated objects that participants liked, as well as objects participants disliked or feared. Bih (1992) showed that, under certain circumstances, domestic objects sometimes elicit negative emotions. For Taiwanese students that came to the United States to study, objects they brought from home sometimes also carried painful thoughts about the distance from home and family.

Findings from the current research suggest that experiences of objects can be positive, negative or somewhere in between. The feelings brought up can be strong, weak or, again, somewhere in between. In other words, experiences have an affective component. This component can be described as having at least two sub-dimensions,

these being the positive-negative dimension and the intensity dimension. Even more important, because an object can evoke several experiences, there can be a plurality of emotions regarding those different experiences all elicited by the same object.

It should be noted there is always a danger of over-simplification when a clear-cut characterization of a phenomenon is suggested by using categories or dimensions. It is, therefore, not asserted that the above dimensions fully describe the experience process. Rather, it is suggested that these dimensions represent basic elements of the experience.

An example of how a single object can elicit both positive and negative feelings is the following: Malia has a painting above her living room couch. She loves the painting a great deal, but at the same time, as a present for her high-school graduation, it occasionally brings up painful memories of her childhood.

Nan has photos of herself and her husband at events shared with her larger family. Nan is very happy to see her husband and herself in those photos. The feelings brought up regarding her family are more complex. On the one hand, she is happy to see her family in those photos, but she is also saddened to be reminded by these photos that she is paying a price for the improvement in her economic state – her family members who have not been so fortunate have now distanced themselves from her.

The Reasons for Displaying an Object Affect how it is Experienced

By looking at unfavorable circumstances, one can get a glimpse of how circumstance alters the experience. There were occasions where the unpleasant aspect of the experience of an object could be attributed to the circumstances that led to having the object displayed in the first place. For instance, several participants have mentioned

having or having had displayed in the living room objects given to them as gifts and that they do not like. In those cases, participants felt they needed to have these objects visible for the benefit of the people that bought those gifts. For instance, when I asked Sandy whether she displayed some of the presents that she and her husband had received out of obligation to the people whom had given the presents, she bit her lips, and laughingly admitted that was the case. Dianne spoke about a mirror that an ex-lover had made for her and that used to be in the living room "because I knew she worked hard to make it for me," and she had wanted to show her appreciation for the mirror. However, not all of the participants are motivated by a sense of obligation to display objects they had received as presents and that they do not like. Some said they, in fact, will not have displayed anything not to their liking or taste.

There were also cases where participants, who were living with their partners, agreed to display objects that were significant to the partner, but that they themselves did not in particular like, or at least not to the extent the partner did. Such were books of Ruby's partner, displayed together on one shelf with her own books. Ruby said that was "a bit of a stretch" for her. Going over the different objects in her living room, Anita skipped a certain painting. When I asked Anita about it, she said it was a painting her husband had picked and is one that she likes, but doesn't love.

A stool in Jackie and Jake's living room was not only experienced differently by each of them, but given different explanations for its presence in the living room. For Jake, the stool was a handy means of reaching up to books in a bookshelf. Jackie was unhappy about it and claimed they were "stuck" with it after having agreed to keep it temporarily for a friend who never came back to claim it.

Linear and Cyclical Changes in Meanings

Some changes in meanings of objects follow a linear progression of time. Once such changes occur, there is no return to a previous state.

One example of such a change is Michelle's description about things she had inherited from her deceased aunt and uncle:

> But I remember really much more periods of time that I was much more actively aware of these things that had become part of my day-to-dayness, and the honor of having those things. It's not just because I like having those things with their memory, but there's something about the significance of the relationship that existed that got me to a place where these things are living in my house anyway.

Michelle described a change that has taken place with time and is permanent.

Another example is the research by Turan (2002), who has found that objects that Greek and Turkish forced refugees have taken with them, after being forced out of their homelands, continue to embody old stories and also gain new stories following the relocation. Again, this is an example of a permanent change in the experience of objects.

On the other hand there may be cyclical changes in the experiences of objects. For instance, people can enjoy watching the television in the living room but feel embarrassed when guests visit and see the television in that location.

Where, in the Residence, are People's Most Personally Significant Objects

Previous research has focused on objects that participants have considered to be their most significant or cherished objects. The approach for the present study was

slightly different. Participants were requested to talk, at their discretion, about the different objects that were in their living rooms. There was no direct request to cover all the objects. For instance, participants were not asked to talk about each and every book that was in their book-case. The question was usually posed as: "Do you mind if we take a walk around the living room with the tape and go over objects, and you can describe what they are, where you got them from, what they mean to you?", or: "Now, actually, if you can take me on a tour, and go over some of the objects you already told me more specifically their story, but some of them you still haven't." What was found, using this method, is that objects do not have to be the "most" significant in order to still be very significant.

Later in the interview, participants were also asked what objects were the most personally significant to them, and in what room were those objects located.

The answer to these questions revealed that the specific location of people's most personally significant objects depends on what the objects are and who the person is. When these objects have a highly intimate or secretive nature, they are usually not in the living room. Instances include Jackie's personal photographs, Dianne's most cherished stuffed animal from her childhood, and Mark's love memorabilia.

Exceptions are photographs of family members and loved ones. These are likely to be found in the living room, as frequently as they are to be found in other rooms in the residence.[4] There are additional exceptions. For instance, Alex's most personally

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[4] Halle (1993) makes a distinction between formal and informal photographs and claims that the more informal photos are more frequently placed in informal rooms, such as the kitchen or bedroom,

significant objects are heirlooms from his family, located in the living room. There are several reasons why these are in the living room: First, they are large furniture pieces (a piano, a secretary desk and a chair). Of all the rooms in the small apartment, it would make sense they would fit there best. In addition, Alex located most of his personal belongings in the living room when he moved in with his wife because prior to the move his wife's roommate had occupied the living room and it became available for furniture once the roommate had left.

Still, for people who are collectors, objects that are most significant to them are scattered all over the residence. A subsequent section will discuss such cases.

What is the Significance of Living Room Objects

As noted previously, although not usually the most significant, objects in the living room can still hold deep meanings for their possessors. For instance, although Jackie's most significant objects are in her study, the emotions brought up when talking about furniture pieces from her grandparents, now in her and her husband's living room, were incredibly strong. She described how the furniture items bring up daily memories of her grandparents, and of being secure and loved by them after having lost her parents:

> I guess I got a lot of my security and the sense of being loved from my grandfather, and I felt safe there, even though my childhood was very traumatic and with a lot of loss, and I was very nervous that I was gonna loose things, he provided a home for me where I felt totally loved and encouraged and secure and the objects that were there

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whereas more formal photos, like that of a wedding, will be located in more formal spaces, such as the living room.

> [some now in her living room] made me feel that that's still part of my identity. And they're a connection to them and to my past and my life now is completely different than my past life, and so having the connection that reminds me of the past life is good.

Jackie's objects are reminders of being loved and cared for, even in face of adversity. They are also reflections of Jackie's identity in its evolution, and they connect her to the different worlds she has been living in. They also bring these memories and perceptions into the actual physical space, endowing the living room with Jackie's emotional life.

And although Michelle claimed her most important objects are in her bedroom, she still contended that objects of "particular preciousness" to her ended up in the living room. Similarly, Mark described in great detail a reaction to a photo – now hanging in his living room of a young child, of dark skin, whose face was painted white, or how he brought a piece of sidewalk – now in the living room - all the way from Barcelona.

The "Intimacy" Border

Alexander et al. (1977) spoke of an "intimacy gradient" (p. 610) within a residence. According to him, a dwelling should be able to give its residents different levels of intimacy, by locating rooms at differing distances from the world outside the residence. If such an intimacy gradient exists, it is expected that the objects in the living room, the room considered less intimate, will not be intimate objects. Indeed, findings from the present study indicate that objects considered intimate will not usually be displayed in the living room. When I asked Dianne why she chose to locate her most significant object – a stuffed animal from her childhood that was especially dear to her –

in her bedroom, she explained it was not because it was a childhood-related object, but because the stuffed animal was too personal. Dianne added in the follow-up interview that the stuffed animal has an intimate aspect to it and that not everybody needs to see it.

In fact, Dianne provided an "operational definition" of intimate objects: These are objects the stories of which will be told to only a select audience. The bedroom is where only very select guests will enter, when it is not for putting the coat on the bed or going to the bathroom. Likewise, most guests will not be entertained in a study. It makes sense, therefore, that the more intimate objects will end up in those rooms and not in the living room.

Korosec-Serfaty (1984) claimed that the living room serves as a place of display. But in so doing, in displaying what one wants to display, it serves to hide those aspects that one wishes to conceal. In her words:

> If it is true that the living-room, for instance, the most visible and most consistently shown of all private spaces, bespeaks the dweller, it does so in terms which certainly reveal the person's mode of being and dwelling, but it does so above all in socially acceptable terms. What is visible expresses the dweller, but it also conceals him. Being both a visage and a mask, its function is to keep the outsider at a distance (p. 304).

Korosec-Serfaty claimed that the guest is kept out of spaces that are more private than the living room by providing a display that creates a depiction of the dweller that is intended to quell the curiosity of the guest.

However, guests, having experienced hosting in their own homes, are fully aware there are secretive aspects to their hosts' lives and it is an accepted, and even expected, norm that these aspects will not be manifest to guests, and therefore tucked away in spaces other than the living room. Furthermore, although to an extent what is displayed in

the living room may act to mask what is not displayed there, the living room has a more straightforward function of serving as a buffer zone, fully to the awareness of guests. It may operate as a kind of drawbridge, that when brought up, separates guests from spaces that contain intimate objects, or traces of intimate, or even everyday, mundane activities, by simple virtue of it being physically surrounded by walls and doors that separate it from the rest of the dwelling. One should be reminded that the presentation of spaces within the residence, for middle-class families, that were separate from private spaces, took place at a time when a great deal of entertaining took place in the dwelling (Busch, 1999; Rybczynski, 1986).

However, as will be suggested in the following section, the living room, as a drawbridge, can also be lowered to allow guests to share intimacy with its dwellers.

The "Intimacy Gradient" of Object Stories

Findings from the present study indicate that gradients of intimacy are created not only by a physical separation between rooms and within rooms, but also by the stories that the residents choose to tell about the objects. In other words, the same object can display one aspect of the resident's life that the resident chooses to reveal to certain guests, and another aspect to other guests.

As a "neutral" investigator who promised to keep the participants' anonymity, I heard some of the more secretive stories objects had to tell. Such, for instance, was the story that Dianne told me about the "mangy looking" stuffed animal that was in her bedroom: As a child, this was the one stuffed animal that she used to cry to when distressed. Dianne considered this stuffed animal her most personally significant object,

and did not have it visibly located in the living room both because of its "looks" and because it is too intimate an object. The same objects, by telling different "stories," create different experiences of the same space. By choosing what stories to tell, the resident defines to what extent the living room is an intimate space at a given moment. Altman (1975a) defined privacy as a control of access to the self through the use of several possible mechanisms, such as behavioral and environmental. Altman dealt with mechanisms that regulate actual physical closeness. Choosing what story to convey about an object is a mean of regulating emotional closeness.

Researchers have, in the past, debated what domestic objects display: Do they display the social status of the resident (e.g., Amaturo, Costagliola & Ragone, 1987; Laumann & House, 1970)? Do they display people's inner-selves (e.g., Cooper, 1974)? Findings from this research suggest that a single object may display all of these, but what the viewer sees depends on what the owner is willing to show. As described earlier, the living room is probably not a room where great secrets lay because it is still considered to be one of the most "public" of rooms, in the sense that it will host people of different degrees of closeness to the resident, including the most distant of guests. Nonetheless, it does seem to contain objects, each of which may carry stories of different degrees of intimacy. These different layers of intimacy are reflected, so to speak, onto the space that is the living room. The living room itself then comes to simultaneously carry different degrees of intimacy.

The Living Room as a "Showcase"

Participants were not asked directly whether they used their living rooms as a

showcase. They were asked if the objects there were displayed for their benefit or for the benefit of guests. Usually participants said the objects were there both for themselves and for guests. One participant, Seth, said one reason why he had two objects in his living room was to impress guests. One was a chess-board that displayed his intellectual side; the other were photos of his second cousins that, in addition to the fact that they represent loved ones, also displayed his affection towards children to guests. This coincides with Sandy's claim that she had tried to make a "showcase" out of her living room.

It is possible that Seth's use of objects to display aspects of himself he is proud of is not unusual, and that many objects in the living room are used to create a certain impression on guests, since it is a room used frequently for entertaining. The fact that aesthetic value was among the criteria determining what objects will go in the living room supports the notion that the living room is used to convey an impression.

Participants frequently suggested, in one way or another, that it was important for them to create an aesthetically appealing living room, through the objects they had there. Jennifer spoke about

> ...having pretty and nice things around because they're pretty. People like to see pretty things and I feel, I guess that makes people happy to see pretty things.

Michelle spoke about the living room having the most "unbroken wall spaces," making the art in it most visible. Jan was extremely unhappy about the carton boxes in the living room, and at the same time made clear attempts to create a beautified living room, with art on the bookshelves, more than in her kitchen or bedroom. Jake claimed that one criterion for choosing objects that would go into the living room are the nicer objects, and Seth said that he used certain objects displayed in the living room to add color to the room (something he had not attempted to do in his work-room).

The aesthetic condition is also fulfilled through order and cleanliness. Several of the participants mentioned that the living room is the room they try to keep the most tidy and clean.

It is possible that the attempts to keep the living room cleaner and less cluttered, as well as having many "pretty" objects are part of the same phenomenon. Several of the participants have in fact either asked if they should resist cleaning up their living rooms before my coming to interview them (so as to keep the living room as "naturally" looking as possible), or said, somewhat apologetically, upon my entering their living room, that they did clean a little before I arrived. Seth claimed that part of why he does not invite guests too often is that he, indeed, does not manage to keep his living room clean enough.

Several of the participants complained about certain unappealing aspects of their living room. Such was the case with Jackie and Jake. Both complained the windows were not finished and the couch was past its time. Alex spoke – somewhat amused – about the makeshift table made of a door in his living room, and Seth complained about the peeling ceiling in his living room (saying that was another reason why he did not invite guests too often).

That several participants brought up the issue of the aesthetic appeal of their living rooms, regardless of whether or not they themselves frequently used the living rooms, further supports the notion that the living room is indeed arranged and decorated with an eye to creating a positive impression on guests.

The Experience of Comfort

Jennifer describes how she feels in her living room in moments of emotional

distress: "...it's like a warm, safe place for me to isolate and numb out by watching TV."

Comparing her current living room with her childhood porch, Jackie says:

> I guess the comfort that I derive from this living room is more like the porch in a place to go, to be alone with my thoughts, but yet still very connected to my home and the people in it.

Nan describes feeling comfortable, homey and at peace in the living room, and Steve repeatedly used "relax" and "relaxing" to describe his living room experience.

When participants described how they felt in their living rooms, there were certain descriptors that were frequently used. The most common descriptors were "comfortable," "cozy" and "relaxing."

Even more interesting, most participants who had mentioned feeling comfortable attributed the experience of comfort, both physical, as well as psychological, to their couches. This was, in fact, one of the strongest findings in the study. At the same time, there were several participants who also claimed that decorative objects made them feel comfortable. For instance, when I asked Pat what made her comfortable in the living room, after she had described feeling that way, she said:

> Probably, I guess the things I have, I feel are comfortable, or things that I find beautiful that make it a nice environment for me to be in.

Cooper (1974) suggested that when people feel threatened by the outside world, either because they indeed live in a threatening world, or because they are psychologically unstable within, the home takes on more of the role of a fortress. In the present study many of the participants – most of them economically secure, living in relatively unthreatening neighborhoods and, mostly leading what seemed to be healthy, stable lives, did regard the living room as a space within the home that provides a sense

of, if not shelter, being held, nested, comforted. These experiences could not have taken place without the presence of those very objects in the living room that provided a sense of comfort.

Comfort and Objects of Relatedness

It is indeed interesting that much of what is displayed inside the living room are, in fact, representations of what is outside of the living room, outside of the residence. In accordance with an abundance of literature (Bih, 1992; Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981,; Kalymun, 1983; Oury, 1987), many of the objects in participants' living rooms displayed their connections to the outside world: to people loved, to places and subjects of interest, to enjoyable events, and so forth. Any single object can be meaningful to the dweller. But also important is the sum of such meaningful objects that gives the dweller the sense of "affluence of connections" to the outside. The sum of these objects portrays not the world outside, but rather the "good world," the world that has been and is supportive of one's existence.

It is possible that the sense of comfort described by participants in their living rooms is not only a result of being safely tucked "away" from the world, but actually also a result of continuing to be connected to the world, and especially to those parts of the world that they wish to be connected, through the objects that embellish the living rooms. Such objects of connection are another way in which people can be by themselves, or even alone in the living room (or other rooms where such objects are displayed), and not feel alone. It is also possible that, especially for people who are more isolated in the world, be it because they do not have a partner, or because they live in an isolated area or

simply because of who they are, such objects become extremely significant not only by allowing one to keep feeling psychologically connected, but also by offering a sense of comfort and, hence, making the space within which these objects are displayed become a source of comfort.

Gestalt

Objects in a setting are not just a collection of things haphazardly scattered in the setting. The sum of the objects arranged in the room is, indeed, not equal to a simple addition of each individual object. A unique experience is created by a certain collection of objects, arranged in a certain way. Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton (1981) proposed that domestic objects form a gestalt for its residents. Ittelson (1973) claimed that the gestalt, or what he calls "systemic relationships" between components and events in environments, is one element that contributes to the ambiance or atmosphere of the environment. Such ambiance, he said, is "difficult to define, but overriding in importance." (p. 15).

In the present study, in addition to speaking about the individual objects in the living room, participants also spoke about the overall outcome of these objects displayed in a certain way next to each other. But the gestalt is not just about style or taste, it is also about the experience and the meaning that is conveyed, not just by this particular object or that, but by having a whole array of objects.

Although different people may have similar types of objects in their living rooms – a couch, some chairs, a coffee table, some lamps, decorative objects – each living room has its own unique collection of individual objects – the specific couch, the specific

chairs, etc. – unlike objects in any other living room.

The individual objects found in a living room, arranged in a certain way, create a whole and unique experience of the living room. Jan's painting on the wall, together with the green couch and the two recliners, with the carton boxes by the window and all the other objects in her living room, create a unique space that only Jan has.

The Cultural Component of the Living Room Phenomenon

In none of the living rooms observed for the present study was there a refrigerator in the living room. In Senegal, according to a friend who has visited frequently, it is common for middle-class people to have a refrigerator in the living room. As will be elaborated upon in Chapter 7, "The Concept of the Living Rooms," there seems to be clear cultural specifications regarding the kinds of objects that should be in the living room and the kinds of objects that should not be in the living room. Couches should be in the living room. When they are not, we, the observers, will immediately catch that something is outstanding and we will search in our minds for an explanation. The walls and shelves should be decorated with art work. If they are not, we can expect a reaction such as Sandy's to her next-door neighbor's living room:

> I stood there and my mouth must have opened up, and she came back and she says to me: 'I guess you noticed'. And I was embarrassed, I didn't know what to say to her. There wasn't a picture on a wall, nothing on a table, not a knick-knack, not anything. And I said to her: 'Lucy, how come you don't have anything?'"

There are objects that culture dictates should not be in the living room. Ruby describes her partner's reaction to a sexually explicit photograph that she had put in the living room:

> Like some of my stuff that was too sexually offensive to her and she said: 'I really don't want to look at that', and I figured out a place that I enjoyed and where she doesn't have to feel bothered by it.

But an object need not be offensive to someone in order for it to be unacceptable as living room matter. The refrigerator is one example. A door resting on a plastic box and bricks used as a desk, such as Alex had and felt uncomfortable about is another example. The process whereby one culture suggests what objects should and should not be in living rooms is beyond the scope of this work, but the issue is brought up in Chapter 7, "The Concept of the Living Room."

In any event, the similarities found between participants in terms of the object categories that are in the living room are indicators of the limitations set about by culture. It is further suggested that within the universal repertory of possible ways of experiencing objects, culture defines what experiences are acceptable in what settings.

Hypotheses Regarding Group Differences

Several researchers have looked at how specific populations and sub-groups experience objects. For instance, Oury (1987) found that most important for women were more personal objects, whereas most important for men were things of the wider world. Bih (1992) showed that immigrants have a unique experience of objects they bring along with them from their homeland, and that the meanings of these objects change as a result of the immigration.

In the next section group differences that were found for participants in the present study will be presented. These results should be regarded as hypotheses that could be tested for significance upon further investigation.

Objects of Significance and Gender

This section deals with significant objects, regardless of their location within the residence. Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton (1981) claimed that the most cherished objects for women are "objects of contemplation," such as a China set bringing up memories of the grandmother from whom the set was received. The same is true, they maintained, for men of older age. For younger men, the most cherished objects they said, are "objects of action," such as a fishing rod. For all of the participants in the present study, male or female, apart from one male, the objects they claimed were most significant to them were objects of contemplation: photographs, journals, heirloom objects, and so forth. Only Seth claimed that his most cherished objects were the recordings he made of his own music. It could be debated whether these recordings should be considered objects of action or objects of contemplation, or both.

A coincidence helped explain why Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton's findings (1981) were inconsistent with the findings from the present study: Sitting one day in a New York Japanese restaurant, I realized that the chef had pictures of his family hanging on the wall of his work-space. This made me realize that when people spend long hours at work, at least some of their objects of contemplation are at work and not at home. It is possible that many of the male participants in Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton's study worked in settings outside of their homes, whereas many of the female participants might have been "housewives", working at home and hence, spending most of their waking hours at home. Since Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton conducted their research on domestic objects, it is possible that, as the men's objects of

contemplation were at their work places, the objects "left" for them to cherish in their homes were objects of action. In contrast, all of the male participants in the present study had office spaces in their homes. Furthermore, several male and female participants said their most cherished objects were in their office spaces in the home. In all cases, these were objects of contemplation.

Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton (1981) also claimed that for men, objects are more means of "individuation," that is, one is defined through the use of objects. An example would be the use of toy guns as a way of supposedly defining one's malehood. Results of the present study do not indicate that for the male participants in the present study, objects – those located in the living room, as well as ones that have been mentioned as located in other rooms – are more tools for individuation than for the female participants in the present study. Objects were almost always described by participants, female or male, in terms of how they brought up thoughts and memories of others as well as other places and events. And cases where the use of objects was described as participating in the process of self-definition were as frequent for women as they were for men, be it Seth's guitars, Dianne's paintings (in this case the means of individuation is actually the brushes and paints), or Nan's computer.

"Me-objects," "Us-objects" and the Living-Arrangement

Some people live alone, some with their partners, others have roommates. Some people have children, others do not. Some live in collective housing. Horwitz and Tognoli (1982) made the observation that most literature on home has focused on nuclear families and has ignored other living arrangements. Their own study dealt with the home

experiences of people who were living alone. Cooper (1974) made a comparison between the homes that housed nuclear families and communes. Weisner and Weibel (1981) investigated the relation between home environment attributes (to what degree the environment was stylistically non-conventional, the decorative complexity, child-orientation and variety of books) and life-style (heterosexual legally married couples, couples that were not legally married, single parents and people in communes), and Saegert (1985a) compared the housing needs of single women and those of married women as well as of households with and without children, and described how these two groups have been dealt with by policy makers, various housing agencies and organizations involved in housing and urban development.

The present study included participants who lived with their partners, as well as participants who lived alone. No attempt was made to find how differences in life-style affect certain a-priori variables. In fact, no assumption was made regarding expected differences between people who live with their partners and people who live alone. Nonetheless differences did emerge. Participants in the present study who were living with their partners had many more objects in the living room that represented the partnership –"us-objects"[5] than did participants who were living alone, even when the participants who were living alone had partners or lovers (who were not living with them). For instance, many of the objects that Alex and his wife had in their living room were souvenirs from their shared travels to Mexico. And Jackie claimed that most of the knick-knacks in the living room represent her partnership with her husband.

Participants who were living alone, on the other hand, had many more objects that

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[5] Drawing on Jungian Psychology, Cooper (1974) suggested the term: "collective family self."

related to their own personal experiences in the living room than participants who were living with their partners.

For instance, Steve compared a previous living room that he shared with his lover with his current living room (that he does not share):

> Because this is MY space, I bought the apartment myself, especially after the break-up where it was all about compromise, about what you could do and couldn't do and how we were going to decorate and stuff, everything was a compromise, but this is mine, so I get to do whatever the hell I want in here, because I get to decorate it however I want, because there's nobody else that can say: "Oh, you know you should do that or we need to do this or that or the other thing."

Ruby described a previous living room where she had lived alone as having had a more personal feel than the current living room that she shared with her girlfriend:

> I think I was expressing myself a lot in the other space. The artist within me came out in that space. What I did with flowers, what I did with hands on the wall, what I did with lighting.

Findings, however, also suggest that displaying the partnership does not necessarily exclude individual representation. There seems to be diversity in the extent to which the self will be presented in a partnered situation. Although Ruby's previous living room had a more personal "touch," still she had many highly personal objects in the living room that she shared with her partner, such as her personal journals or a collection of hers. On the other hand, Jackie who lives with her husband Jake, says that objects that are personal are not in the living room, but rather in a room that serves as her office space.

Whereas Jackie made a clear distinction between objects that represent herself – "me-objects," and objects that represent the partnership – "us-objects," not all

participants who live with their partners are even capable of making that distinction, regardless of how long the partners have been living together. Jackie's husband, Jake, said that after twenty years of marriage, he cannot even make the distinction between objects that are personal and objects that represent both of them as a couple. For him, at least some of the me-objects are also us-objects.

"Collectors"

Three of the participants in particular, Jennifer, Pat and Ruby, have a large number of objects that they have come to possess over the years. Some of these items have been collected off the street. Some are art-work they have acquired or were given as presents, as well as their own work. These include furniture as well as decorative objects. Pat likes to purchase items that she finds during her travels to the South, and says about objects that she has: "If they're not from my neighbor's garbage, a lot of them are from down South." Ruby said about the objects that she has in her living room: "Trash-pick, trash-pick, everything's trash-pick." The way all three treat their domestic spaces seems to be different from other participants: The objects seem to create a flow between the rooms, rather than defining the rooms. Photographs or art-work will be found equally throughout the residence, rather than be displayed mainly in the living room. Possibly because they accumulate a large number of objects, a main criterion that they use to decide where an object should go is the "right" wall-space, rather than a specific room. As Pat said:

> I don't think there are differences. I mean, I think, you know certain things that I like, and I find a place for them in my home. I mean things that I've collected or, whatever,

> that for whatever reason touch me or I feel that I want it as part of my, my home or my life, then, I mean, I'll get it and I'll find a place for it, where it seems like it fits. And some of them have ended up here, and some of them have ended up other places.

Different Couples Have Different Ways of Negotiating the Arrangement and the Decoration of the Living Room

Findings from the present study suggest there is no one uniform way in which couples deal with deciding how the living room should be arranged and decorated.

Ruby gave examples of both agreements and disagreements over how the room is to be decorated and what objects it should contain, or even where to place objects. In one case, her partner "vetoed" an object Ruby had suggested be placed in the living room. Anita described having heated arguments with her husband – both of them with professional experience in the design field – over the decoration and arrangement of their house at large, and Jackie claimed that possibly they have procrastinated on looking for a new couch in order to avoid conflict.

In Sandy's case the solution was rather simple: With her husband's blessing, she was completely and exclusively in charge of the decoration of their living room. She did allow into the living room two decorative items chosen by her husband, but all other items were chosen by her. Mark and Steve both described having had difficulties in reaching an agreement with their previous partners in their shared dwellings. Mark described having had fights with his lover with whom he previously shared an apartment regarding things his lover would leave out on surfaces. Steve felt he needed to compromise his own aesthetic desires, and possibly his own self-identity. Both Mark and Steve ended up separating from their respective partners. Although it is far-fetched to

claim that Mark and Steve could not continue living together because they could not find a compromise that was acceptable to both of them, it is possible their inability to negotiate their spaces was indicative of the difficulties in finding common-ground in their lives.

Other Physical Elements

Previous literature on domestic settings has mainly focused on objects. Ittelson (1973) points out that environments are multimodal, that is, they stimulate different senses. Yet, elements such as illumination and sound have rarely been dealt with in the exploration of "home." Outstanding examples are Korosec-Serfaty 's study (1984), in which light and temperature were found to be pivotal to the experience of spaces, and Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton's study (1981), in which participants frequently discussed lighting. Also, less analytically, Wood and Beck (1994) described such elements as sounds from "Star Wars" emanating from the speakers in the living room or the light penetrating through the sidelights of the front door. The following section focuses on these physical elements that are not objects but nonetheless help form the experience of living rooms.

Sound

Several participants mentioned different sounds they heard or wanted to hear in their living rooms. Some of the sounds participants described were unique to particular residences, such as sounds created by certain neighbors. In some cases, the sounds heard

depended on what the particular participant attended to. There were also similarities between participants, such as music produced by a sound-system. Still, what music was heard was particular in each case. These findings suggest not only that the living room experience is affected by the sounds that reach it, but also that there are "living room sound experiences" that are shared among different participants, as well as experiences that are unique.

For instance, Nan liked the sounds of the children playing in the nearby playground when sitting in the living room. Jan described how, as a child, she and her father would play the piano together in their living room. She said she somewhat missed the sounds created by the piano and mentioned that it is nice to hear the neighbor upstairs playing her piano.

As mentioned previously, several of the participants have music systems in their living rooms. I did not systematically ask all of the participants how they use their music system. According to some of the participants, when by themselves, they are actually not in the living room when they listen to music or talk-shows emanating from the living room music system, and they use the sounds as a background for doing things. Michelle, for instance, uses the music system in the living room a great deal, but said it is a "funny thing" because she uses it mostly while working in other rooms. Steve, likewise, listens to music mainly when he is doing chores, and not necessarily in the living room. Dianne said she only listens to music when she is cleaning, or sometimes for guests. In fact, she said she preferred to have quiet when possible, because of the street noise.

However, there are uses of the music system other than as a backdrop. For instance, Pat dances to music in the living room. Sandy, on the other hand, decided to

banish the music system from the living room altogether.

When entertaining, some of the participants liked to have music on depending on the occasion and who the guests were. As Michelle said:

> It depends where they are and it depends who they are. I'm not, I always have a feeling of, I'm always a little unsure, because in certain ways music is really nice, and in other ways it can feel like it can sometimes interrupt conversation.

Sounds that participants have alluded to are not always pleasant. Both Michelle, as well as Alex mentioned the street noise that enters their living rooms. As many times the "front rooms," the rooms facing the street, are, in fact, chosen as living rooms, street noise in the living room should not be an uncommon phenomenon.

Illumination

Similar to results obtained by Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton (1981) on people's dwellings, illumination of the living room was frequently mentioned in the present study. It should be noted that both studies focused on urban dwellings. This suggests that while illumination of the home may be extremely important for its dwellers, regardless of location, sunlight becomes even more precious where it is not easily achieved. The taller a building, the greater the number of hours it blocks sunlight, when it is in the path between the sun and another building. But even outside of Manhattan, row-houses – houses that are attached to each other – are a common domestic dwelling solution. Because row-houses are attached to other houses, they can only get sunlight from two directions. Sunlight in New York City dwellings is a rare commodity both because sunlight is many times blocked by buildings and because it is a city that is

overcast many months during the year.

The following sections will deal with sunlight and artificial illumination respectively, as well as with what is viewed through windows.

The Origin of Large or Double Windows in Middle-Class Living Rooms

As mentioned previously, it is frequently the "front room" that is chosen as a living room. When it is the "front room," the room intended according to architectural plans to serve as a living room, it will likely have large windows. An interesting question has to do with the origin of assigning large windows to living rooms. Although it is beyond the scope of this research to answer this question, there are several related plausible explanations: As Busch (1999) noted, socializing used to be a much more domestic affair during the 19th century than it is today. Some of that socializing was done during the daytime. Some forms of entertaining could have been conducted during the daytime hours. Such were the "morning calls," brief social visits that were a very salient part of Victorian social life (Grier, 1988). Large windows would allow sunlight into the room where the guest was entertained. Also, as described in Chapter 3, "Some Notes on the History of the Living Room," household members sometimes used the center-table in the 19th century parlor to read, write or sew, or do embroidery. Since artificial illumination was very costly, it may have been important to make use of every bit of possible sunlight admitted. This was even more the case for less affluent households that had fewer rooms and who used their parlors, and later their living rooms, even more frequently for activities other than entertaining (Grier, 1988). It is especially true for the working-poor whose dwellings often consisted of only two rooms, one being the

bedroom, the other being the kitchen-living room (Cromley, 1990). Such apartments are abundant in New York City, and its contemporary tenants are not necessarily poor. Sometimes in these apartments, the bedroom has no window at all, and sunlight only comes in through the kitchen-living room.

But there may be alternative explanations not related to illumination; Cromley (1990) made the argument that during the 19th century, balconies were not popular in cities in the United States for moral reasons, that is, it was not considered acceptable for the lady of the residence to make a public appearance before people passing on the streets. The large windows may have come as a replacement for the balconies, creating a safe connection with the public street-life. Furthermore, Grier describes how lavish fabrics became desirable during the Victorian era (1988). Large windows may have actually been used more as an opportunity to put up curtains, than to admit light, and as sunlight was harmful to the fabric covering chairs and sofas, the curtains were in fact often drawn to protect the entertaining room or rooms from sunlight. All of these explanations are not mutually exclusive, of course and the existence of large windows in the living room, or at least windows that are larger than those in other rooms, may have been the result of combined factors.

Sunlight

Many of the participants in the present study referred to the amount of sunlight admitted into their living rooms. Several said they chose the sunnier room to be the living room. For participants in the present study, natural light seemed to be a precious commodity, not easily found in the residential areas of New York City. One of the first

things that Jackie mentioned when describing the living room was that it was sunny. She said she liked the fact that it made the living room, as well the rest of the apartment the living room opens up to, seem "bright and airier and cheerier."

Malia found a celebration of light in her living room that had what she referred to as a "picture window" – a wide window, as well as a sliding glass-door. She referred several times to the experience of having a flood of sunlight in the living room and said: "So my feeling, the main thrust of this room is space, light and air." Nan explained that she wanted the sunnier room to be the living room because: "It makes it feel homey to me. It makes it feel open, I love light."

Malia described how her mother had used curtains in the living room to actually block the sunlight so as to protect the furniture. Sandy, the only participant in the present study who was in her early 60s, was the only participant who had vertical blinds blocking the sun most of the day. Both examples suggest a gradual shift away from concern for furniture decay and a growing trend to treat sunlight as desirable, possibly because the price of furniture decreased relatively as furniture-making became less labor-intensive (Grier, 1988), and as the furniture itself became less elaborately designed.

The desire for the living room to be the best lit room does not necessarily reflect an extensive daytime use of the living room. For instance, Seth, in explaining why he chose the "front room" as the living room, said: "And this room, you can't tell now, because it's dusk, but when there's sunlight, it's [a] much more cheery room, it's just a nicer place to be, so that's why I decided to make this into the, into the more living room area." However, most of Seth's use of the living room is actually during the night time. Nonetheless, Seth does make use of the living room during the daytime on weekends. It

is possible the desire for sunlight in the living room corresponds with using the living room for relaxation. As Anita said: "Saturday and Sunday I like to lie on the couch cause the sun comes through the window." But another plausible explanation is that the living room is a room we frequently pass through or pass by, as opposed to bedrooms that we go into mainly at nights and do not frequently pass by. Living rooms are usually located in the front of the residence, near the entrance and the kitchen, and usually open up to additional spaces, whereas architects intentionally locate the rooms that are designated as bedrooms in a more secluded area of the dwelling, as explained in the previous historical account (assuming the bedroom does not hold additional functions, such as an office space and the dweller actually chose to locate the bedroom in the "back" of the dwelling). Hence, a living room that receives sunlight allows the inhabitants to enjoy the sunlight, even when they just pass by or through it.

A Room with a View

Sunlight is not the only reason why participants like to have a lot of window space in their living rooms. Several of the participants mentioned with great joy the views they get from their living room, and described how much they like those views. Malia described how she can see the Manhattan skyline from her window, and how she loves to look at that skyline, not only during the day, but also in the evenings when she gets back from work. Sandy described how, when she does open the vertical blinds, she can see the snow in the winter and the blooming tree in the summer. Jan loves to go to the window and look out into the greenery of the backyards, and even more so when it rains. Michelle described how she lay back on the couch on weekends, preparing for the upcoming week

while having a view of "an expanse of sky," and really loving it. As with the sunlight, the location of living rooms in many residences allows the dwellers to enjoy the view seen from the living room window even when they are passing by or through the living room. In addition, it is possible that the desire for a view goes hand in hand with spending time in the living room for relaxation.

Artificial Illumination

As with the sunlight, many of the participants referred to the artificial illumination of the living room. A low level of artificial illumination seemed to be associated with a sense of coziness.

Jennifer claimed that candles feel warm, and that she sometimes lights candles and dims lights in anticipation of guests. Both Anita as well as Malia spoke about the desire to have "cozier" artificial illumination. Anita said, in fact, that the living room will not feel cozy without proper illumination. When I asked Malia what would be her wish from a genie, one of the things she mentioned was the artificial lighting, saying: "I'd like, I actually like lighting, and I think it can give a room some drama and some softness and just sort of evoke feelings." It was evident that the right amount and type of artificial illumination was important for many of the participants.

Of course, artificial lighting also has a practical side to it. Malia wanted illumination that would not only add drama and be soft, but would also enable her to read comfortably. Michelle complained about not having enough illumination and sometimes lit candles because of that and not only because the candles give a "warm" feel to the living room. Alex made a comparison between living rooms of some people that he

knows and his childhood living room:

> Like I know people, for example who have living rooms where they don't have any lamps next to the places where you sit, so you sit there, you can't read, there's no light. There's some kind of, there some dim thing, or a lamp way over there in the corner, but it's not enough to, what's that about [laughing]?

And Seth has a floor-spot that he uses both to "work with mood and stuff," but also to improve the illumination in his living room.

CHAPTER 6: WHAT TAKES PLACE IN THE LIVING ROOM

Introduction

One can go to the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City and see reproductions of various living rooms styles during the Victorian era, roughly covering the 19th century. We can see sofas and chairs, various bric-a-brac on top of mantles, mirrors, chandeliers and rich drapery. But more importantly, our imagination is spurred to fill those rooms with people, walking about, sitting, looking out the bay windows, conversing on a group of chairs, perhaps having fights.

Some of the things that happen in the living room are rare, unusual and significant in and of themselves, such as a holiday party. Most of the things that happen in the living room are mundane. Such everyday events owe their importance to their repetition and consistency.

The previous section has focused on the importance of the objects and other physical elements within the living room for the dwellers. The current section will focus on the ways dwellers use their living rooms and actually interact with the objects within the living room. An attempt will be made to understand the various activities that take place in the living room, how these activities are experienced, and what is the importance of these activities in people's lives.

It will focus on one room, in this case, the living room. Because of the focus on one room, the level of detail offered in this chapter will be greater than has usually been the case in the study of domestic uses. Furthermore, rather than focusing on one type of activity (e.g., social), the various types of activity will be investigated.

The Meaning of Action

Although the objects people have in their living rooms do give us a glimpse of what experiences people have in their living rooms, we cannot really fully guess what those experiences are, or understand how meaningful they are (or are not), without knowing about what goes on in the living room. For instance, Michelle described two occasions where she held Shivas (the Jewish ritual of friends and family of a deceased getting together in the residence of the next of kin in order to mourn and honor the deceased) in her apartment:

> I've had lovely, I had very very, actually lovely is an insufficient word. I've had very very powerful gatherings here...this is the space that was bursting with people who came to accompany me through this life-cycle moment. And had nothing to do with entertaining, quite the opposite.

Sometimes the activities that take place in the living room are less meaningful. For instance, Jake uses the living room mostly on weekends, watching videos while his wife is still asleep. Other than that, he said he sometimes takes books from bookshelves that he reads in another room. Particularly on vacations or business trips, he takes some of the materials for the business trip, or compact disks that he listens to in the bedroom. "That's about it" he says.

There are two main themes to this chapter that will be described in subsequent sections. One is that there are three main clusters of activities that take place in the living room, that were shared by the participants in the present study. It will be claimed that the experience participants have of their living rooms in New York City is, in part, a result of the coming together of these three very different, and even paradoxical clusters of

activity.

The other theme is that although participants share these activity clusters, the experience each participant described was particular to each one because, when going into details, each participant actually also did idiosyncratic things. And even when two participants acted in ways that looked very similar, the experience of these acts could still be different because they meant different things to each one.

The Three Main Clusters of Activity

The current study suggests there are three common types of activity that take place in the living room. One type of activity is getting together with people who are not members of the household; the other is almost antithetic to the first, "being with oneself." The third is spending time with people who are part of the household. This cluster also seems to be antithetic to being with oneself.

Previous literature offers a framework that is applicable to the residence, and that is the distinction between private and public. In accordance with this literature, several participants have mentioned that the living room is one of the more public rooms in the residence. Yet, findings from the present study suggest that the private-public dimension is not sufficient for fully describing what takes place in the dwelling. The first problem encountered with the public-private distinction is its ambiguity. What privacy are we referring to: the privacy of one partner who goes to a room to be alone after a fight, or the privacy of both partners when alone in their own living room? Indeed, Westin (1967 in Proshansky, Ittelson and Rivlin, 1970, p. 177) made a distinction between four states of privacy, two being solitude and intimacy.

Furthermore, a look at the three clusters found in the present study suggests that at times the living room can be a place of intimacy, meaning a place where members of the household spend time with each other. It can also be a place of "solitude," where a person is uninterrupted by others. However, rather than using "private" or "public," "intimacy" or "solitude," it is suggested that the clusters hereby presented offer a categorization that is more representative of the descriptions given by the participants.

It is also suggested that a close look at the "getting together with others" cluster indicates that what is considered a public activity can, in fact, many times entail a sharing of one's private life. Similarly, an observation of the "being with oneself" cluster indicates that what are considered private activities many times involve, in fact, a relating to others and to the world outside the home.

Goffman (1959) suggested that spatial settings are divided between "front regions" and "back regions." He further claimed that the spatial boundaries between front regions and back regions create a divide between those behaviors that he termed "performances," and non-performance behaviors. Front regions set the stage, so to speak, for performances. Using his terminology, it is suggested that the living room can be both a front region, as well as a back region at different times.

Getting Together with Others

As Busch (1999) explained, in the past much more socializing took place indoors than in the present. This explains why, for the upper and even middle classes during much of the Victorian era, there would be several rooms dedicated to hosting and entertaining. For the 19th century working-class in New York City (who had their own

tenement apartments, and were not servants) this socializing frequently took place in the kitchen. It was the space where the family convened, ate, bathed, and where guests were welcomed (e.g., Cromley, 1990).

In the cities, as more entertainment was provided outside of the residence and as land became more expensive, as the servant market declined, and, especially as the economic situation deteriorated during the 1930s, not only did residences of the middle-class become smaller, but fewer rooms were allotted for entertaining. At the beginning of the 20th century, we find commonly only one or two rooms designated for entertaining.

Most of the participants in the present study get together with at least some of their guests, and at least on some occasions, in the living room. Indeed, the living room was not the only room where guests were entertained. Many times other rooms, especially the kitchen, were involved. No matter where the entertaining took place, be it in the living room or in the kitchen, almost every hosting event involved eating and drinking. Hence, serving food did not determine where the hosting took place. Why food and drink has become an essential component of entertaining is an interesting question in itself for research.

In any event, the location of entertaining for participants in the present study did seem to depend on the particular guests, the occasion, the size of the living room, the number of other rooms in the residence, the function of other rooms, and on the particular participant.

One might suggest that guests will get-together in the kitchen if a meal is served and there is no dining room. However, Jackie and Jake, who host their closer friends in the kitchen, do have a dining room. Pat's mother frequently visits Pat. When she does,

mother and daughter will gather in the kitchen, regardless of whether or not a meal is served.

In some cases, the degree of closeness to the residents seemed to be a determining factor. Some participants, like Michelle, Jackie and Jake, and Pat, host some of their closer guests in the kitchen. This replicates similar findings by Giuliani (1987) in Italian residences. Such kitchen-hosting of closer guests seems to be limited to a small number of guests – up to four. This is not a clear cut rule, and as explained above, many factors determine where guests will end up.

It is possible that in those cases where the kitchen is chosen for entertaining closer guests, residents feel it is a more intimate, less formal space than the living room. Jake, for instance, explained: "...if we have some better friends who we know better we may go directly into the kitchen and actually basically meet with them there and talk in the kitchen at the kitchen table not here. So, in a way, this [the living room] is slightly more formal."

That the kitchen is a less "formal" space really means that the host-guest rules of engagement are less rigid than in the living room. This makes sense, since the kitchen is not a room whose primary function is entertaining. The kitchen is a space where much of the everyday activity of the household takes place. It is likely that most of the rules that pertain to behaving in the kitchen are rules that apply primarily to the household everyday behavior.

The use of rooms other than the living room for entertaining is not only common with a small number of closer friends. It is also common when there are a large number of guests that cannot be contained at once in one room. For instance, during their

Christmas parties, Jennifer opens all the spaces in their apartment, apart from the bedroom, for their guests, including the kitchen, hallway, and office spaces. On holidays, when Sandy and her husband's family congregate at her apartment, even the bedroom will be used, but only by the younger generation who go to watch videos there.

For smaller residences, one does not even have to reach big number of people for rooms other than the living room to be used. As Mark said:

> I mean I've invited twelve people who literally were on top of each other, you know, you can throw a swell party in here, all you need to do is invite ten people and it's like crowded.

Whenever guests were entertained in the living room, sitting was involved, usually in a semi-circle. Frequently, participants described bringing in additional chairs into the living room and pulling chairs, closer to the couch than they are arranged daily. When guests left, chairs were taken out, and repositioned farther away from the couch. Participants always described some eating and drinking involved. From participants' accounts, conversation was pivotal to entertainment. For instance, the pulling of chairs closer to the couch was described as a mean for enhancing conversation. The importance of good communication between hosts and guests and among guests is also reflected in Michelle's deliberations on whether or not she should put music on when guests are over. Participants also described entertaining activity that does not necessitate communication: Seth, Jennifer, Dianne and Ruby have had friends over to watch special TV programs or to watch videos.

The "Intimacy" Dimension of Get-Togethers

Within the category of get-togethers, it is possible to discern a dimension of

intimacy. The big parties given by Jennifer, where she probably does not know a large number of the guests showing up, or has superficial knowledge of the guests, are on one end of the spectrum. On the other end are smaller get-togethers with friends and family, such as Pat being visited by her mother or Steve inviting his close friends.

The "big group" get-togethers may reflect more a desire to display oneself through the home, or a desire to bring about a social happening – a type of creative act, of making things happen, and of actualizing one's social skills, such as is reflected in Jennifer's description of having people over:

> I'm sort of proud of my house, and I like entertaining. ..So yeah, I feel proud of the fact that I, I and that I can create this atmosphere that people find comfortable... I try to bring out the best in people.

Whether categorical or dimensional, it is suggested that the living room is used more as a "show-room," a "front region" (Goffman, 1959) for the bigger and less intimate get-togethers, and not so much for the more intimate entertaining. That is possibly why Steve had no problem having close friends and family over after six months of being in his apartment, but felt the living room was not ready yet for a party.

It should also be noted that intimacy does not necessarily entail a small number of people. For instance, the Shivas held in Michelle's apartment, previously described, are an example of a "big group" get-together that was about intimate sharing. Michelle made clear that although there were many people in those gatherings, the people who had come, had done so to share an event of great personal importance in her own life.

Re-Arranging the Living Room for Entertaining

There are various changes that people will put into the living rooms in

anticipation of guests. Especially common was the adding and re-arranging of chairs for entertaining. Cleaning and tidying was also frequently mentioned by the participants as a change done to their living room in anticipation of guests.

Jennifer described other ways in which she re-arranges her living room when she entertains:

> Also for entertaining, lighting is really important for me, and I'll do lower lights, like lower voltage bulbs in the lamps, and I'll always have candles and usually flowers, cause they seem to be nice pretty things that people like.

These are changes that are done out of aesthetic considerations. But these are not just changes that simply reflect Jennifer's aesthetic taste, they are intentional changes fully related to the occasion of entertaining, intended by Jennifer to please her guests, and possibly also to display her taste to her guests.

Many of these changes create the impression that the participants indeed try to put on a show. While this is possibly true, it also seems as though the changes to the décor and setting of the living room have another outcome. Cleaning a little, moving chairs, making room for food, setting out flowers and candles, making all these changes that will last slightly before guests arrive, and slightly after guests leave also signifies that the occasion is special. The re-arranging of a living room for guests is a ritual for special occasions, signifying an outstanding, special event, one that has special meaning.

Some Negative Experiences of Get-Togethers

In the process of analyzing the data, it became clear that just as there are different experiences for objects, there are different experiences for activities.

Sharing one's life with others, displaying one's achievements to others, the

actualization of one's social-skills are examples of positive experiences of get-togethers. However, some participants have also described negative entertaining experiences. Pat, for example, talked about her fears of entertaining. Although most other participants did not describe such fears, and it is possible that some do not experience those fears, it is likely that Pat's fears are not uncommon, even if experienced with less intensity.

For instance, "hostess anxiety" is a concept that was suggested by Pat to describe how she feels about having guests over. She did not know exactly what to attribute it to. Pat rejected the suggestion that I made, that perhaps she felt incapable of adhering to the hosting standards set by her mother. Instead, Pat explained that her mother had always cooked for an entire family. Therefore, preparation of food for a group of guests was easier for her mother than it was for her.

Another participant, Michelle, described a similar experience:

> I grew up in this very 1950's house, even though I was in the mid-Sixties, and so there's a piece of: 'Oh, am I competent if my house isn't always really neat?'...like this is, in certain ways this room becomes the litmus test of 'Did I do it OK?', and I have all this stupid shit about 'Can I entertain?'

Nan too described having uncertainty as to what adequate hosting would consist of. Her solution was to make preparations that were above and beyond what is usually necessary. Explaining that her mother was embarrassed to have guests over, she said:

> My whole ideas about how to entertain or how to set a home up have been very obscure to say the least...which is why I go overboard usually when we do have guests...because when we know he's [a friend] coming, he puts his order in. Asked what he would like to have for dinner. And if he wants lasagna, I'll make the sauce, I'll make the lasagna, I'll spend the day cooking, that's fine by me, I'll do it before he gets here, and then to spend the day entertaining, I can't find the middle ground when it gets to

that.

Pat also claimed to be "a little private," and thought that might be another reason for her fears of entertaining. The importance of maintaining a separation between public and private settings in the home has been previously described. It is possible that Pat is more private than other people, but it was not uncommon for other participants to shut doors of their other rooms during the interview. On several occasions they eventually offered me a tour of their home and would open doors, but only after some "ice-breaking" had already taken place.

The Common and Idiosyncratic Aspects of the Experience of Get-Togethers

According to Goffman's theory (1959), one can predict what pattern of behavior will take place in the living room when guests are entertained. This assertion creates the impression of uniformity of people's hosting behaviors. Indeed, for an outsider looking at different people entertaining, there are many common themes. Some of these themes have been previously described. These common themes of behavior also suggest that there are similarities in the experience of entertaining, in how the hosts actually feel about the hosting.

But as has also been shown, there are idiosyncratic differences in the experience of hosting: what can be a highly pleasant and invigorating experience for some, can be anxiety-ridden to others. Furthermore, the cause of enjoyment, and therefore incentive, can be different for different people, as is the cause of anxiety.

Nan's moderate anxiety from get-togethers stems from a lack of confidence in what it would take to please the guests. For Nan's mother, the sense of anxiety from

hosting related to feeling embarrassed about her living conditions. Seth, too, felt uncomfortable about get-togethers, in part because of the unappealing state of his apartment, and in part, because of his own contribution to this unpleasing state. For Dianne's mother, a complete avoidance of hosting to the extreme of having only plants and no furniture in the living room might have stemmed more from relational difficulties.

Being-with-Oneself

By "being-with-oneself" is meant an activity that is performed by oneself and excludes the need for interaction with others. During the 1960s and 1970s work has been done to provide a framework for understanding the connection between space and the desire to be alone. Much of this work was aimed at defining a-priori concepts such as privacy, territoriality and control. Pivotal was Westin's attempts to define privacy. According to Westin, privacy is the ability of individuals, groups or institutions to determine the amount of information about them that is communicated to the world (Westin, 1967 in Proshansky et al., 1970).

Accepting the assumption that the goal of behavior is to answer psychological needs, environmental psychologists were trying to understand how the environment is used to fulfill the need for privacy. For instance, Proshansky, Ittelson and Rivlin (1970) claimed:

> It should be evident at this point that the individual's need for privacy can be regarded as a learned motive...The person – at least in a complex industrial society – needs to be alone when performing certain bodily functions. A physical setting that permits him to be unobserved becomes a significant need in its own right. (Proshansky et al., 1970, p. 171).

Altman (1975a), attempting to make the connection between environment and behavior, suggested that territory is one of the mechanisms used to achieve privacy. Wolfe and Laufer (1974) suggested that privacy has dimensions, one of which is the ecological-cultural dimension. They claimed that "privacy can be understood in terms of the structural, ecological and meaning properties of the physical setting that circumscribes human behavior" (p. 31). These studies were extremely helpful in creating conceptual "baselines". When findings from the present study were compared with these baselines, it became clear that (a) what takes place in the living room can be at times public and private, that is, the division of the residence into rooms does not fully correspond with a "public-private" dimension, and (b) what takes place in the living room can be best described as three clusters of activity, each of which can have its own public-private dimension.

The following section will attempt, to explain what is meant by 'being-with-oneself', but more importantly to describe what experiences it entails.

To give an example of how previous researchers provided a conceptual baseline, "being with oneself" was compared with Westin's typology of privacy. Westin suggested four types of privacy: solitude, intimacy, anonymity and reserve. None of these types correspond fully to "being with oneself," but the type that comes closest is "solitude." According to Westin, solitude means being free from observation of others (1967 in Proshansky et al, 1970). While "being with oneself" is similar to Westin's definition of solitude, it is also different. "Being with oneself" does not entail that the person is in fact alone, or that he or she is free from being observed by others. It means that a person has the freedom to be involved in activity that does not necessitate interaction with others. In

other words, one can sit in the living room and read a book at the same time that one's friend or child or lover is in the same room, being involved in whatever activity they choose to partake in. Bakos et al. (1979) coined the term "parallel use" of space (p. 10) to mean different activities that different people can partake in simultaneously within the confines same room, without interfering with one another. While "solitude" connotes a separation from, "being with oneself' stresses connection (with one's own thoughts) rather than separation from the outer world, especially since psychologically, as some subsequent examples will show, it can still mean being connected to other people. Of course, for some people "being with oneself' is more readily achieved when they are physically by themselves.

Examples of research that has looked at "being with oneself' includes Bachelard's work (1969) that deals with the dwelling as a place for daydreaming, and as such as a place of self-growth. Likewise, Korosec-Serfaty (1984) discussed the importance of spaces within the dwelling where secretive thoughts, essential for the development of the self, can occur. However, Korosec-Serfaty actually implies that the living room, as a room for display, is not a place where such processes are prevalent.

Findings from the present study suggest the living room can actually be one of the most pivotal spaces within the dwelling where one can find shelter and comfort. Participants have described reading, watching the television, looking out the window, thinking and writing in the living room. This study suggests that daydreaming frequently takes place in the living room, and that it is a place to just be, and possibly to think about the future and "become." It was also a theme that was repeated by most of the participants. Pat described coming down in the morning before going to work, and

coming home from work to have her tea in the living room. Nan spoke about spending time alone in the living room, sometimes looking out the window, hearing the children play in the nearby playground. At nights, Jackie sometimes spends time by herself in the living room, but at the same time not feeling secluded from the rest of the apartment. She explained that she would have a similar feeling if Grand Central Station were empty of people and she would be sitting in the middle of it and daydreaming, where there would still be a potential for people entering. In fact West (1985) found that an ideal situation for older people in shared housing is when residents have the opportunity to go "back and forth between connection and solitude." (p. 311). In a study on public spaces, it was found that people used the steps to the New York public library – a very public space, by all means – to be by themselves (Carr, Francis, Rivlin & Stone, 1992). In a study on the effects of changes in the design of a mental hospital, one of the places that afforded patients a semblance of privacy during the daytime, was, in fact, the public solarium that incorporated a private area where people went by themselves to look out the window, sit and think, or cry (Rivlin, Proshansky & Ittelson, 1969-1970)

It is suggested that exactly because the living room is a room where some "public" life either occurs or can occur, it can sometimes provide a space where one can be with oneself without feeling alone, and where, as Jackie said, she could be by herself but still feel connected to her home. This could probably also be true of the kitchen, and less true for a bedroom that is more isolated: both in the sense that it is frequently being geographically a less central room, as well as in the sense of it being less a center of activity. However, it is assumed that whether or not a living room can allow a person to enjoy being with oneself in the presence of another depends on whether or not one's

experiences with household members in the living room are positive. If it is a space where fighting between a couple is frequent, it would probably not be perceived as a comfort-zone, perhaps not even when one's partner is not at home. Castelino-Pinto (2003) has indicated that this is the case in extreme instances, such as when a woman has been repeatedly battered by her husband. She gave, for instance, the example of a woman who, several years after evicting her battering husband, does not have a couch and curtains in the living room because of the memories of having been repeatedly raped by her husband on the couch and his ripping up the curtains.

Private Thoughts and Objects

An indication as to what participants think about when they are in the living room comes from the objects that are there. For some of the participants, every time they go into the living room objects bring up thoughts. Seth said:

> I think probably every day these, some of these objects, they, at least they remind me of the trend of my life as an adult, because a lot of things I've had, even the plants I've had for many years now. And some of the things are more like family objects, and some of them are more like things that I've chosen and just sort of, had myself, books, books, a lot of the books remind me of when I bought them and times I spent reading them.

Although not all participants are necessarily spurred to contemplation by objects in their living room, findings suggest that objects, at least occasionally, constitute part of the "being with oneself" experience in the living room. In fact, it is quite possible that "being with oneself," whether physically or psychologically, is a state that encourages this kind of pondering brought up by objects. Possibly, when one is not focused on another person, there is a higher likelihood for the gaze to wander around the room,

attach itself to a certain item, and begin the process of contemplation.

So while "being with oneself" may mean being physically alone in a space, mentally it may entail a strong element of connection to the world within, as well as outside the home. Therefore, there may be, in fact, two ways in which the living rooms brings the world beyond the home into the home: one, by actually having the people that one chooses to have entertained in the living room; the other by having the people, or places or events that one chooses (and sometimes does not choose) to be allowed into one's thoughts, as one is comfortably lounging on the couch, peering out the window.

The Idiosyncratic Aspects of the Experience of Being-with-Oneself

Following a review of literature from various fields, Wolfe and Laufer (1974) claimed "Thus, the word "privacy" appeared consistently but with many meanings in the literature of environmental psychology, architecture and planning" (p. 30). An additional example of the ambiguity of privacy comes from the different ways in which participants' talk about their desire to be with themselves in the living room.

Jackie, whose living room opens up to the rest of the apartment, likes the fact that she can go to the living room to be by herself and at the same time continue to feel connected to her home: "Yeah, it's withdrawing but not isolating, I guess. It's a solitude but without having to isolate." According to Jackie, her solitude means withdrawing for a while from her husband.

Ruby too lives with her partner. The instances during which she goes to the living room are also related also to the presence of her lover, but these occasions are more about the need to be undistracted by her lover that leads her to the living room – when her

partner is not in the living room:

> The times that I will come in the living room is if I'm having a phone conversation with somebody and it gets hard, and I either need to not hear what else is going on in the house or I need to give really critical attention, I will come in here and sit in here on the phone.

Ruby also added that choosing the living room to take phone calls depends on where her partner is at the time of the call, therefore the living room is only one of the rooms where she could take those calls.

In any event, the need to withdraw from another person within the household is either non-existent or minimal for people living alone, although there can still be instances where a person living alone will feel the need to withdraw from the presence of other people who are visiting, be it a lover or a family guest staying over for the weekend. But there is another type of withdrawal that can take place in the living room described by Steve:

> But I also like to be comfortable and very kind of relaxing cause this is my space, this is what buffers me from the hustle and bustle of New York City.

Here, the withdrawal is from the world outside the dwelling.

Jan had previously lived in situations where she could not completely withdraw in a very physical way from the outside world, since she was both living with other room-mates and living in much noisier quarters. When I asked her what the living room was for her, she said it is her "haven," and then explained:

> I have privacy, but I also have a space to invite people here. It's a wonderful opportunity or balance between complete isolation, I mean, I can completely be alone here, have no music, nothing on, close the blinds and meditate my brains out if I want, or I can invite people over. In fact, one day, somebody stopped by unannounced, I mean that's unheard

> of in New York, a friend was in the neighborhood, and I was so thrilled, because the sense of neighbors to me means so much, so I like that...

For her, the withdrawal, similar to Steve, is about withdrawal from the outside world. But at the same time, Jan, similar to Jackie, wants a space where she can withdraw but still feel connected. Different from Jackie who speaks about a connection to the rest of her apartment, as well as to her husband, Jan speaks about maintaining a connection with the neighborhood.

These examples demonstrate that, even within the category of "being with oneself," there is a wide range of experiences. This variety seems to be affected by people's living arrangement (whether they live with someone or alone), with the unique idiosyncrasies of household interactions, with previous dwelling experiences, and most likely with people's accumulated life experiences.

Sharing Space

Studies that have dealt with how one person relates to another person within the domestic setting have mainly focused on issues of territoriality (e.g., Altman, 1975b; Peled & Ayalon, 1988; Sebba & Churchman, 1983). Territoriality deals with the question of whom does a delineated space belong to. But for the most part, sharing is not the impetus of studies on domestic spaces used by several people. Perhaps in countries of the Western Hemisphere, the cultural emphasis on individualism is such that people's relations to others are expected to include some form of conflict or struggle. Indeed it is curious that some of the person-environment research on residences tend to ignore the social give and take between people and stresses largely the push and pull. This section

will focus on how people share the use of their living rooms.

When the time dimension is added to domestic spaces, what is revealed is that the same space can serve different people at different times. Just as different partners have different solutions for the decision-making process regarding the decoration and arrangement of the living room, results of the present study also suggest that partners have different solutions regarding their use of the living room at different times. For Alex and his wife the solution was almost pre-determined by his wife's previous living arrangement. Alex moved into an apartment that his wife had already been renting. Before his moving in, she had had a roommate. Since Alex had several belongings from his previous apartment, he had moved most of those belongings into what used to be the roommate's room. Before Alex had moved in, his wife would not go into the roommate's room, and got used to using other rooms in the apartment. When Alex moved in, she continued to use the same spaces that she had previously used, and now mostly uses the living room at nights to watch the television that is there, and when Alex and she want to bring up a special issue to discuss.

Ruby and her partner have only one desk in their apartment and that desk is in the living room. Her partner uses the computer on the desk daily to go online. She herself only uses it occasionally to work on her studies or to finish work that she brought home from her job.

Jackie uses the living room to be by herself, usually at nights, to read, or less frequently, after a fight with her husband. Jake, her husband, uses the living room during weekend mornings to watch the television while his wife is asleep, or to take a book or a compact disk that he will use elsewhere in the apartment. Jackie's frequent use of the

room may – without her even intending so - have been acting as a signifier of the room being her "turf." Yet another solution for time-sharing the living room is demonstrated by Nan and her husband. He works a nine-to-five job, she is a student. She can, therefore, be by herself in the living room, and she frequently does, during his work hours. As these examples show, there is a wide range of arrangements for people to be by themselves in the living room in a partnered situation.

Overt and Covert Territory

Churchman and Sebba (1983) found that when asked "To whom does each place in the apartment belong?", living rooms of Israeli families were considered as belonging to the whole family in 96 percent of the cases.

Results from the present study indicate that in terms of actual use, although the living room is a space where guests may be entertained, as well as a space where people of the household may share time together, it may also be used by the individual household members to be by themselves. Furthermore, results suggest that the living room is regularly used more by one of the partners living together. If amount of use is an indicator of whose territory the living room is, it might be said that the living room is more the territory of one of the partners, despite the fact that it is the room designated, supposedly for the public, for people outside of the household.

I would suggest the possibility that the living room is overtly a shared territory, but covertly more the territory of one person. That is, partners will deal with the living room as if it belongs equally to both of them. Discussions on how to arrange and decorate the living room might sound as if the living room is for both. However, in an unspoken

way, partners will covertly agree that the living room is more the living room of one of the partners. The overt or covert asymmetric use of the living room by one of the partners could actually render the living room uninviting for the partner whose territory it is not, further turning it into a room that is more the territory of one.

"Alone-Together" and "Together-but-Alone"

Anita said that sometimes she and her husband: "just spend some time" in the living room. Steve described watching the television and videos with his lover in the living room, as does Dianne. Some participants, as I have mentioned previously, invite friends over to watch certain televised programs. People sometimes do things that they could do by themselves, such as watching the television or reading, in the presence of other people. It is possible, however, that the presence of a lover, a friend or friends modifies these experiences. In other words, being in the physical space alone or with another person changes what Barker (1968) called the behavior-setting, or what Wapner (1987) termed the "person-environment unit of analysis." That is, while the physical aspects of the living room remain the same, and even the activity is the same, whether or not a partner (or close friend, or child) is present changes the experience of the activity. To give a metaphorical example, it is similar to the experience of going to a coffee shop or a movie and being surrounded by people. The importance of other people to the essence of the experience as a whole becomes clear when, for instance, one walks into a coffee shop or movie-theater and finds it empty.

An opposite type of experience is also possible: One where people try to come together, but remain separate. In Jacque Tati's comedy-film from the 70's: "Mon Oncle,"

a "modern" household is depicted. In the film, the wife tells her guests that the minimalist-furnished room is all about "communicating" (thereby supposedly explaining the bareness of the design). Yet when the couple sits to watch TV (in their separate seats), they face not each other, but the TV set. Both fall into silence as their program comes up. We then hear the presenter of the program saying that tonight's episode is: "Think about yourself." For Tati, watching TV is not an "alone-together", but rather a "together-but-alone" activity.

Spending Time with Members of the Household

Spending Time with a Partner One Lives With

Most of the participants described spending some time in the living room together with their partners or lovers with whom they share their dwellings. The amount of time spent with one's partner, as well as what is done with the partner, varied. This variation seemed to be a result of different factors, including, for instance, the layout of the living room, or how much time is spent in the kitchen.

Jake and Jackie hardly spend any time together in their living room, unless when entertaining guests. Anita and her husband spend more time "hanging out" in their kitchen than in their living room, but still seem to spend more time in the living room than Jake and Jackie. When they do use the living room, they chat or just "kick back." Alex and his wife also use the kitchen to spend time together more than they use the living room. But when a special issue needs to be dealt with, they will go to the living room. Alex explained that the living room, and not the kitchen, will be used for special discussions because his wife tends to get distracted and there are fewer distractions for

her, such as food, in the living room. Ruby also gets together with her girlfriend in the living room – other than entertaining – mainly to talk about special issues. However, she said that many times the request of one of them to go to the living room to talk, is actually a concealed attempt to have some closeness.

In contrast to these previous examples, Nan and her husband share most of their domestic time together in the living room. They catch up on the daily events, eat and watch television programs or videos. It is something they do together every day, and it seems to be the space where their bonding takes place.

Other than Nan and her husband, all the couples participating in the present study who live together spend more time together in the kitchen than in the living room. One plausible explanation is that when one, or both, of the partners work, the dinner takes a large amount of the shared daily time. Therefore, it can be expected that couples who live together congregate wherever a meal is served, that frequently being the kitchen, if the kitchen is spacious enough to have a table and chairs in it. In Nan's case, dinner time is actually spent in the living room since both she and her husband very much like to eat as they watch the television, located in the living room:

> When we're together, we eat in here...He'll sit here, I'll sit next to him, we have this little, what do they call? dish towels that we put over us so we don't make a mess, and we'll watch TV, usually like "Friends" and "Frasier"...and then we clean up together..."

Also, as previously suggested with regard to entertaining close friends, the living room can sometimes be perceived as a more formal room, a room that suggests more rigid rules of conduct than the kitchen does, and might therefore feel less comfortable for everyday communication with one's partner. At the same time, as has been previously suggested, the living room is many times perceived as very comfortable for people to be

by themselves.

The Idiosyncratic Experience of Spending Time with Other Members of the Household

The examples of the couples living together previously described suggest that while there are some similarities in the ways different couples use similar spatial settings, in this case the living room, there is also great variety in how different couples use and experience this setting. Each of these couples, when together in the living room, act in ways that are unique to their partnership and residence, and have a different experience of being together.

The Three Clusters of Activity and the Existence of a Family-Room

In New York City, because of space limitations in many dwellings, especially in apartment buildings (Cromley, 1990), the family-room is not readily found. The only family-room observed in the present study was originally a foyer.

One of the main differences that emerged from the participants' accounts of their childhood homes was the difference between living rooms in dwellings that included family-rooms and living rooms in dwellings that did not include family-rooms. When a family room is included in the dwelling, there is a tendency to locate more personally significant objects, such as family photographs, in the family-room, and a tendency to locate more objects whose main value is decorative in the living room. Those participants who described having a family-room in their childhood also described a distinction between the types of activities done in both rooms. With a family-room, members of the

household sometimes spend time together in a family-room, but less so in the living room. With a family-room, a member of the household might go to the family room to be alone, but will not usually go to the living room for that purpose. Guests, on the other hand, are invited into the living room, but usually not into the family-room unless there is a large group of people and the space provided by the living room is not sufficient, or when the guests are children.

Seth gives a vivid description of his childhood living room, as being the room of get-togethers, and the family-room as the room of being-with-oneself:

> ...and actually only guests, non-frequent guests, more formal guests came through the front door. Everybody else used the back-door, and you came into the kitchen and dining room and then you went downstairs to the family-room if you were just gonna hang out, so that [the living room] was really like a formal area, and that was not uncommon for my friends, it was all, it was, a lot of people had it like that. You came in and it was like for entertaining, and we would, that's also where the Christmas tree [was].

And Steve also described his current living room feeling more like a den:

> I grew up, with, my parents had it, all of the family friends had it, the living room that no one used, with all the nice furniture, and no one ever sat in there, and I'm like: 'It's such a complete, utter waste of space.' cause essentially this is more of a den, or a family-room, than a living room, even if I had that space, I would still use it. Cause, I mean, what's the point of having all this furniture, this great furniture and stuff if you're not gonna use it?

Other Activities that Take Place in the Living Room

Having Guests Stay Over

Because many people living in New York City have arrived from other areas in the U.S. and abroad, it is not uncommon for its residents to have family and friends from the hometowns or homelands. Furthermore, New York City is a big tourist attraction, and as such, even born and bred "New Yorkers" may receive many out-of-town guests. And when there is only one bedroom in addition to the living room, the couch seems to be used as the guest-bed.

Indeed, several participants who have one-bedroom apartments have described offering their living room couches as a bed for guests who stay over. Ruby, whose couch opens up to, in her words, "a beautiful queen-size [bed]" had a guest stay over for three months in the living room. She admitted that it is:

> A funny thing for a one-bedroom apartment, to give somebody housing for three months, but you can see from the layout that you actually can have separated space, so we gave her the living room.

Upon moving to a new apartment, Michelle had to decide which room would be her bedroom and which room would be her living room. She ended up choosing the room that was adjacent to a bathroom to serve as the living room, so that when guests came from out of town, they could sleep in the living room and she would not have to worry about guests walking through her bedroom to the bathroom.

Steve had his mother sleep on his sectional couch, and Seth had family and friends from out of town stay in the living room. Sometimes, as has happened for Steve,

if there is more than one guest at a time, a sleeping bag may be used as well.

Having guests over could be an example of a disruption of people's daily experience of their living rooms. Although participants were not directly asked about how having guests over affect their experience of the living rooms, no participant suggested that having guests stay over was a disruptive event. Usually it seemed as if overnight hosting in the living room was a pleasant event, adding to the overall experience of relating to the world that takes place in the living room. At the same time, it is likely that disruptions sometimes did occur, and that these instances were simply not mentioned by the participants.

Work

Several of the participants used the living room to work in. There were several ways in which the living room could be used for work. One type of "work" was going over paperwork and paying bills. Both Jennifer and Alex have desks that are used exclusively to pay their bills. Several participants who study at home and do not have an "office" type room, have a work-desk with a computer on it in the living room.

Those participants who had a work-desk in the living room tried to create a distance and a visual separation between the work desk and the sitting area. In Mark's case, the desk is clearly set apart from the couch-coffee table-television cluster by a separate wall, despite the fact that his living room is very small. Mark also claimed that, given a choice, he would never have an office space in his living room as he does. Alex located the work desk at the entrance to the living room, whereas the couch is located close to the window on the far end of the room. In between the couch and desk are

bookcases, arranged in a way that the visual focus of someone sitting on the couch is not set towards the desk. He also mentioned he would have preferred to have a separate office. Ruby described having created a visual "barrier" between the sitting area in the living room and the work-desk. The couch was oriented so that it faced away from the desk:

> ...but if I'm in the middle of working on stuff on my desk and people come over, I really much prefer for them to be oriented to the social space of the living room and not my bills or my writing or whatever I'm composing on my desk, so it keeps it very, it's sort of a very natural way of creating a barrier, without saying: 'Don't go over there', or using a screen, or building a wall of plants or something. It just encourages you to go toward the cozy, comfortable, circular sitting space.

Participants seemed to locate the work-desk in the living room mainly because no other room in their residences had enough space. But there were additional reasons. Mark, for instance, said that he had tried having the work-desk in the kitchen, but it was too dark and hence depressing to work in there.

A desk was not the only work-space that participants have described. Alex, for instance, frequently used his couch to do study-related readings, although he also read for his own leisure on the couch. Even Nan, who had an office in the house, used the couch both for leisure reading, as well as for study-related reading. As has previously been described, Michelle used her couch on Sundays, preparing for her work-week, and did so lounging. Dianne too studied on her couch, as long as it is not "too intense." Dianne did, what she called, her "intense" reading either at the kitchen table or in her office. Michelle and Dianne's examples suggest that working on the couch is somewhat of a hybrid experience – one that combines work and relaxation.

Intellectual work is not the only type of work that has been described to take place

in the living room. One participant, Jan, although rarely, gave massages and reflexology treatments in her living room, and her massage table, in fact, was located in the living room.

Group Differences

The following describe differences found between participants in the present study, as well as expected differences the findings did not support.

Childhood Experiences

Two participants – Steve and Seth –who grew up in a suburban area, described growing up having a family-room in addition to the living room. Steve claimed that his living room was more like a family-room in the way it was used, that is, as a place to relax and be-with-oneself. Seth said he would have liked to have a separate family-room for relaxing and being by himself, in addition to a living room. Steve, it should be noted, stressed that even if he were to have a family-room, in addition to the living room, he would still want the living room to be used by the household, and not just as a room for guests. This is not to suggest that someone who grows up in a dwelling that has both a living room and a family room will choose a similar arrangement in his or her maturity. Rather, it is to suggest that a family-room is more likely to become incorporated into one's concept of home if one actually had the experience of a family-room. It is also suggested that the repertory of activities included in one's concept of a living room is likely to be affected by whether or not one grew up in a dwelling with a family-room.

How Much Time Participants Spent Working Outside their Homes

The amount of time a participant worked did not determine the amount of time spent in the living room. Although most of the participants who worked part-time used their living rooms on a daily basis, some of the participants who worked full-time did so too. Malia, who worked full-time, used her living room every evening after coming home from work to relax, meditate, read or think. Likewise, every evening that followed his work-day, Steve used his living room to lounge on his couch. There are participants who worked full-time and did not use the living room that often.

Number of Rooms

Although it seems predictable that with few rooms the living room will be used more and with more rooms the living room will be used less, this was not the case for the present study. Michelle, who had only one bedroom, spent little time in the living room. Alex, too, had one bedroom and spent little time in his living room. Jackie had a large apartment that includes six rooms and still used the living room on a daily basis.

Type of Activity

The amount of time spent in the living room did seem to correspond to the type of activities that participants took part in, and what rooms accommodated these activities. For instance, at the time of the interview, Michelle spent much of her domestic time working at her desk located in her bedroom. Other people who worked at home

sometimes had their desk in the living room, and hence would spend time working in the living room. Jackie, who liked to read in evenings outside of her bed, spent time in her living room, since the couch offered a cozy corner.

In any event, the amount of time spent in the living room does not necessarily correspond to the quality of time spent in it. Most of the participants in the present study described having a many highly desirable and fulfilling moments in the living room regardless of how much time they spent there.

CHAPTER 7: THE CONCEPT OF LIVING ROOMS

A friend of mine had suggested the term "recipe" to describe the fact that there were certain items common to the living rooms that were observed for the present study, and there were certain rules about how the living rooms should be used. The recipe for the American living rooms was both similar to and different from the recipe for the Senegalese living rooms, according to my friend's account of her trips to Senegal, and these were both similar and different from the recipe for Bedouin "hosting place" described by Sebba (1991). The similarity and difference was evident also with Victorian parlors in the United States, as described by Grier (1988).[6] The recipes are conceptual ideas that are common among people who share a certain culture. The examples above suggest that these recipes, or concepts that people have on how domestic spaces are arranged, decorated and used, contain aspects unique to their culture, as well as aspects that may be shared with other cultures.

How Did the Notion of a "Recipe" – a Culturally-Based Concept of the Living Room – Emerge from the Data

Participants were asked to step outside of their living room for a moment, then return and say what, in their opinion, needs to be taken out of the living room to make it

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[6] Reproduced Victorian parlors can be seen in existing mansions that were reproduced, such as "Glenview," which is part of the Hudson River Museum in Yonkers, New York. Models of such parlors can be seen in museums, such as the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City.

stop being a living room. Usually participants answered – without hesitation – the couch. For instance, Michelle's answer was: "My immediate answer would be the couch." Jackie said: "Wouldn't be a living room without a couch and chairs," and Malia's answer was:

> Oh...[surprised by question], I guess it would be the couch. Because where would, I need to stretch out on the couch and read and I think that the couch would be, that's the key thing, because the rocker is fine, but it's the couch that's most comfortable and that I can stretch out on.

Indeed, the living rooms observed for the present study all included a couch or a sofa[7] placed along one of the walls. All of the participants had at least one more item that could be sat on. What these items were, or how they were called varied: recliners, armchairs, rocking chairs, love seats, a "chair and a half," a Queen Anne chair or just chairs. Apart from one participant, all of the participants had a low table or box in front of the couch and/or a low square table at one or both sides of the couch. Participants usually called the table in front of the couch a "coffee-table", or said it was "used as a coffee-table." The table beside the couch was usually called an "end table." One participant had bought a fire-bench with the intention of using it as a coffee-table. Instead, the fire-bench ended up being used by guests to sit on. The coffee table and/or end-tables were usually closer to the couch than any of the other items in the living room. Most of the participants also had a lamp standing on and end table or nearby. Other optional items included small tables, bookshelves with books, shelves, chests, entertainment "centers," or just TV's and/or a music system. Knick-knacks were usually scattered along surfaces provided by bookcases, shelves and tables (see figure 23).

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[7] Participants in the present study used "couch" and "sofa" interchangeably, in agreement with the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (1992).

Not every living room shares these features. A friend of mine had, in her living room, two black leather recliners with black stools facing a television set. The chairs were set in the approximate center of the room, as if floating on the white wall-to-wall carpet. On the wall behind the chairs was a bookcase. These were the only furniture items in the room. Other than books and CDs in the bookshelves there were beer steins – the only knick-knacks in the living room. There was one black and white poster on a wall. This was an unusual arrangement. My friend explained that her mother was a collector of

Figure 23. Living rooms of four participants.

second-hand items. The house she grew up was so laden with knick-knacks, and not necessarily of the highest quality, that she decided that her home would be as free as possible of decorative items.

Although the basic layout of living rooms shared by participants in the present

study is less than a century old, we think of it as one that has always existed, and it is the layout that we expect when we go into a living room. If we do not find it, we are usually surprised. In some cases, our previous acquaintance with the dweller already raises expectations for the unusual. Such would be the case, for instance, of a younger person who has rented her or his first apartment or someone who has taken on a particular philosophy of life.

One could claim that the basic recipe of a couch with the coffee table or end table and additional seats is simply an arrangement that is conducive for hosting and entertaining, and since the living room is the room where entertaining takes place, it is only natural that this should be the recipe for the arrangement of the living room. All of the participants have entertained people in their living rooms (although many also entertain in other rooms, most commonly, the kitchen). When participants described what guests did in the living room, the descriptions always incorporated sitting as well as eating and drinking, and discussion among guests was implied. Therefore, places to sit and places to put drinks and food seem to be necessary. However, when we look more carefully at how the living room is actually used by hosts and guests it becomes clear that the "recipe," that is the furniture in the living room and the way such furniture is arranged, is not optimal for entertaining: Many of the participants actually draw chairs or other seating items closer to the couch when guests come over and pull the chairs away from the couch after the guests leave. Therefore, a better arrangement for entertaining would entail greater proximity between the couch and other seats.

Furthermore, if one thinks of two guests sitting on a couch, their body needs to take a twisted posture in order to converse easily with each other or. And while the

coffee-table and end-table are usually used to serve food and beverages, the height of these tables is not necessarily the most convenient for eating or for drinking. It is not uncommon to see guests placing plates on their knees. Many times guests, according to the participants, walked over to another room to take food and bring the food back into the living room, yet the coffee-table blocking the couch is certainly an obstacle to walking to and from the couch, especially since that couch cannot be moved back as chairs can.

While the desire to facilitate entertaining might, in part, be accountable for the way living rooms are arranged, it seems likely that there are additional reasons. As will be further discussed, participants even seemed to share certain feelings their living room either brings up, or is expected to raise.

If indeed such a "recipe" exists that is so consistently used by the different participants, it certainly differs from some of the "recipes" used in other places in the world, indicating a strong cultural factor. That means there may be cultural values that are common to the participants in the present study. That may also mean that certain changes, such as technological developments that took place in America (and other places where similar living rooms are to be found) may have affected how living rooms currently look in those locales. In the words of Gauvain et al. (1983):

> The home is a window to a culture in that it displays religion and cosmology, sex roles, family organization, and a variety of aspects of a culture. However, homes also often serve as vehicles of cultural change, as people incorporate new technologies and new lifestyles in their dwellings and thereby actively institute cultural change in their everyday lives. (pp. 180 – 181).

The Aspects of the Concept

Results indicate that middle-class Americans' shared concept of what a living room is about and ought to be, includes not only ideas about what a living room should look, but also what should be done in it (and what should not be done in it), and even the kinds of feelings that it should raise. In fact, it is probably the case that any built environment we are familiar with raises expectations for certain furniture and objects, certain behaviors and certain feelings. Franck (1994) suggested the term "type" to mean a "category of places that we group together" according to certain similarities (p. 345). She further claimed that attributes of types include form, use and meaning. Spivak (1973) proposed the term "archetypal places" that incorporate a complete set of behaviors and answer specific psychological needs. He went further to suggest that while archetypal places are universal, subsets of archetypal places are culture-specific.

Participants gave considerable evidence as to what they think should happen in a living room (and either was or was not taking place in their own living room). One activity that participants alluded to was entertaining. Jackie, for instance, said that she couldn't conceive of a residence without a living room because she could go to withdraw from Jake in other rooms, but the living room was intended for entertaining. Coming from Jackie this was an interesting statement since she and her husband are among the participants who do entertain also in the kitchen. In other words, although entertaining may, in reality, take place in rooms other than the living room, conceptually, living rooms and entertaining are intertwined.

Jake, Jackie's husband, placed in the living-room bookcase those personal objects he thought looked nicer, as well as those he thought might be interesting for guests to

look at, whereas the objects that are not pretty or might not be interesting to other people are not in the living room. It is clear that in Jake's mind, the living room is the room where at least some of his guests will be hosted. After Sandy said she would have to take the couches out of the living room to make it stop being a living room I asked, provocatively, if people are born with the idea that living rooms should have couches. Sandy answered:

> Somebody must have, somebody four million year ago, I mean five thousand years ago, in the Garden of Eden, must have said: 'Come, we'll sit here and talk, and we'll sit on a couch and a chair' and it evolved.

One might claim it is obvious that people's concept of a living room includes entertaining. A living room is, one might claim, the residential space where entertaining takes place. In fact, although the definitions given by two dictionaries of a living room are functional, the exact function is not agreed upon. According to the "New Merriam-Webster dictionary" (Mish, 1989), the living room is: "a room in a residence used for the common social activities of the occupants." (p. 431). The "Oxford Advanced Learner's dictionary" (Cowie, 1992), on the other hand, defined the living room as a: "room in a private house for general use during the daytime." (p. 730). Together, both definitions seem to complete the functional aspect of people's concept of a living room, both as the main space within the residence where entertaining is to take place, as well as the room for the use of its occupants.

Participants also seemed to share an expectation regarding the type of experience or "feel" the living room should elicit. It was very common for participants to bring up characteristics such as cozy, homey and comfortable with regard to the living room. This experience type was brought up as something that did characterize their living rooms or

as an aspiration for their living room.

Even more interesting is the connection participants made between certain physical elements within the living room and this experience type. For instance, it was very common for participants to attribute the experience of comfort – both a physical and a psychological one - to the couch, and as has been suggested previously, the couch seems to be the main item without which a room would just not be a living room.

While feeling comfortable was mostly attributed to the couch, coziness and feeling "warmth" was mostly attributed to illumination.

In any event, the fact that it was common for participants to attempt to create a certain similar type of experience in the living room once again suggests that they share a concept of the living room that includes this experience type.

Concept Development

The previous section dealt with the commonsense notion that people shape their living rooms – as well as other rooms in their residence – according to existing ideas about how their living rooms should look and with at least some expectations as to what they will do in their living rooms and even how they would like to feel in their living rooms. But how is it that people have concepts of certain spaces? What is the process through which different people develop such similarities in terms of what they expect to find in a living room, what they should and should not do in the living room – depending on whether they are the occupants or guests – and, even what they should feel in living rooms.

Interestingly there has been very little literature dealing with this question for

domestic spaces. Exceptions are the works of Bourdieu (1977) and Grier (1988) and to some extent, Dovey (1978). Bourdieu (1977) and Dovey (1978) discussed the role of the dwelling in acquisition of knowledge about the world outside the dwelling. Implied in their work is a process of learning about domestic spaces and the ways in which they are used. However, their focus is not on the acquisition of knowledge about spaces, but rather on acquisition of knowledge, in general. For Bourdieu and Dovey, learning about domestic settings is only a tool for acquisition of knowledge about the world.

Grier (1988) has, in fact, offered several sources for Victorian middle-class acquisition of concepts of parlors. Grier suggested that people of the middle-class had many opportunities to see parlors that were similar to the ones owned by the upper-class. She mentioned that exhibits that were popular during the 19th century and the daguerreotype salons where families went to have their photos taken were set in the fashion of lavish parlors. Ferries and train cars were also furnished in ways that resembled the parlors of the upper-class. The writings of the social critics, many of them in women's magazines, were another source of influence on the design of middle-class parlors (Grier, 1988).

Wood and Beck (1994) suggested that, through the objects in them and the ways in which these objects are arranged, rooms serve as mnemonics of behaviors that take place in them and especially of specific rules of behaviors (dos and don'ts).

Cooper-Marcus (1995) showed how people bring into their current dwellings those elements that remind them of their childhood homes. What can be implied from Cooper-Marcus's study is an extremely crucial point in understanding the concept of home. Through her participants Cooper-Marcus told us that what people try to recreate

through such objects is not an exact replica of their childhood homes, but rather a certain atmosphere or quality that they remember.

The current study shares a similar finding. Some of the objects participants had in their homes were objects they actually remember a family member using. Jackie, who grew up with her grandparents, describes her grandmother's rocking chair, now in her own living room:

> Rocking chair. I love the rocking chair. It was in the front window in the front porch of my house. My grandmother, my most vivid image of my grandmother is sitting rocking in the chair looking at the window and commenting on the neighbors.

Yet, sometimes an object is not from one's childhood home, but still can be reminiscent of that home. Alex described why his current living room is "comparable" to his childhood living room:

> Umm, because it has these, partly because it has these family pieces in it. I, yeah [pause]. It feels like there's a continuity, even though these were not the pieces that were in my own family's home, but they're like things that were.

It is possible that atmosphere, as Jackie and Alex's descriptions suggest, is created neither by specific objects alone, nor by the arrangement of these objects alone, but by the objects, their arrangement and the ways in which they were used and by whom. The "home" these objects elicit in our minds is a home with people in it. Our concept of living rooms contains notions not only about what objects should be in the living room, but also how the living room should be used because we have images of living rooms with people using them.

Even when people do not have nostalgic memories from the particular homes in which they grew up, it is still possible that the formation of their concept of living rooms

and "home" had begun in their childhood through homes of friends or homes that they saw on the television and so forth. An example is Dianne who did not grow up with a room that functioned as a living room. Dianne did, however, observe living rooms in homes of friends. For Dianne it became extremely important to have dwelling with a room that had the elements of a living room.

Different Styles, Same "Recipe"

As described in the literature review, several researchers have looked at the differences in the way people of different classes or different backgrounds furnish their residences (Amaturo et al., 1987; Laumann & House, 1970; Pratt, 1982; Weisner & Weibel, 1981). Such research created the impression of vast differences between social groups in the ways living rooms and homes at large are set. Furthermore, such research not only suggested such differences between social sub-groups exist, but that they are meaningful as well. For instance, Laumann and House (1970) suggested their findings were instrumental in understanding processes of conspicuous consumption for the middle and working class, and Pratt (1982) claimed her findings reflect affects of industrialization on people's own identities.

An alternative explanation is that the results of above studies, important as they may be, stem from a focus on style and not on basic layouts. Furthermore, it is possible that when looking at style, one may find great differences between the living rooms one grew up in and the living room one has, as well as great differences between people of various socio-economic backgrounds, or even between the living room one had ten years ago and the living room they now have. As Sandy explained why she replaced all the

furniture she had had in her living room after thirty years – she wanted a living room that was "with the times." But, as previously described, beyond stylistic differences between participants, they all shared a basic "recipe," that is, certain basic furniture items arranged according to a similar layout.

Possibly because a great portion of the interviews held with the participants in the present study dealt with the reasons they decided on a certain arrangement, as well as on the ways in which they used their living rooms, they became aware, not only of differences between the living rooms they had and those they have seen in other homes, but also of the similarities between their living rooms and living rooms that they had encountered in their childhoods.

The Sources of the Living Room Concept

For the present study participants were asked where they thought their concepts of living rooms originated. Participants were offered several choices to choose from. These included: childhood memories, stores, TV programs, magazines, books, other people's homes or any other sources they could think of. As shown in table 1, many of the participants thought their ideas about living rooms originated in the homes in which they grew up.

Table 1. The frequency of sources of the concept of the living room suggested by participants.*

Source of living room concept	Frequency
One's own childhood home	7
Other people's homes childhood and adulthood	3
Professional magazines	2
TV series	1
Movies	1
Professional books	1
Fictional books	1
The "media"	1
Department stores	1
Father's furniture store	1
Model houses	1

This leads to the issue of socialization. Some of the literature that has dealt with domestic spaces looked at how such spaces act to socialize the occupants to certain behaviors and values. For instance, Bourdieu (1977) claimed that, especially in illiterate cultures, the interactions between people and their homes embody the concepts critical for survival. Dovey (1978) proposed that the process through which the meaning of "home" is established mirrors the acquisition of meanings of the environment in general. One's experience with home, according to her, helps establish those meanings.

The home in which one grew up, or other homes a person observed and experienced, can provide the basis for acquiring the concept of the living room (or any other room in a dwelling). But such homes only act as conveyers of a social construct.

In addition to homes people grew up in, other sources of influence were mentioned, such as other people's homes, televised shows and books. These sources of influence may be assumed to have at least some effect not only on styles, but also on people's basic concept of living rooms. Several participants refer to some form or another of the media as a source of influence on their concept of living rooms. For instance, Seth became aware of the effect of televised programs on him because of his special circumstance. He explained that coming from a suburb in the Midwest, his notion of a New York City living room as a multi-functional room stems from television shows. Seth's concept of home, formed growing up in the Midwest, included both a living room and a family-room. Not having enough rooms to accommodate both a living room and a family-room, in his New York apartment, Seth's previous concept of the living room was inadequate. The televised programs that depicted young adults living in New York apartments helped Seth form a new concept he felt was fitting for his life in the city.

The "recipe" may have been greatly affected at different periods in time by the images that were portrayed by different media. Zuckerman (1998), for instance, has shown that advertisers have become increasingly powerful during the 20th century in the decision making process regarding the edited content of women's magazines. In other words, the media not only reflects existing concepts (and by "concept" is meant more than style), but also actively affects these concepts. The images portrayed in different forms of media, through advertisements as well as through content matter, have promoted not only certain products (e.g., comfortable couches), but also certain values (e.g., cleanliness, Wright, 1975).

Another possible source of influence on the "recipe" is the stores that sell exactly those products that are marketed through the media. Indeed, one participant described going to stores to find out how people furnish and decorate their homes. This example demonstrates that stores are not only used to sell furniture and other domestic products, but also to actively promote them by creating homelike arrangements of these products. It also demonstrates how people may sometimes be unaware of the attempts of stores to influence them. That in itself is proof of the success of such marketing tools.

Rosch's Theory of Prototypes

Among the theories that try to explain the cognitive process through which people develop concepts, of particular relevance is Rosch's prototype theory. According to Rosch (1975), members of "real" categories, that is "concepts designable by words in 'natural languages'" (Rosch 1973, p. 329), as well as members of artificial categories, differ in the extent to which they are considered typical. Participants in her study were

asked to rank the members of natural categories according to how typical they thought the members were. For instance, when participants were given a list of vegetables, they ranked peas as being a very good example of a vegetable and celery as not being a good example of a vegetable. She named the most typical member of a category a "prototype." Rosch and Mervis (1975) further found that there is a greater likelihood for the typical members of a category to share attributes with other members of the category than there is for atypical members.

The "recipe" can be considered a prototype. In accordance with Rosch's theory, there are living rooms that are more typical than others, and these will share more elements with other living rooms than living rooms that are less typical. It is possible that when people imagine a "living room," they think about a prototype. And although one person's ideal living room may differ from another person's ideal living room, it is exactly the notion of a prototype that suggests we will still find resemblance in the ideal living rooms of different people that share a similar culture.

Idiosyncratic Influences on the Living Room Concept: People's Life Experiences

Ruby escaped a dysfunctional family, the chaos of its home reflecting the chaotic family life. The home she currently set up with her partner is very orderly and clean. Ruby also became an outspoken lesbian and feminist, something reflected in the books on the living room bookshelves, as well as other objects strewn around the room. So while the furniture and layout of the room follows the "recipe," many of the objects in the living room reflect Ruby's unconventional life.

On the other hand, my friend, who also grew up in an abusive home, and whose

living room was laden with cheap second hand objects her mother collected, chose to have very few objects, including furniture, in her own living room.

For Jennifer, a lesbian who was deeply involved in the gay community, the concept of a living room is exactly of a very conventional living room, one in which the style of furniture and in layout are very similar to what she has seen growing up. Such a living room, according to Jennifer, balances her unconventional lifestyle (unacceptable by her family's standards), a balance that is important to her.

Jackie's experience of actually having lived in an old Victorian home for several years may have spurred her passion for Victorian living rooms. The living rooms of participants who have become collectors over their lifetime were also outstanding – possibly not so much the living room themselves, but rather the relations between the living rooms and other rooms. For "collectors" there seemed to be less of a distinction between objects (other than furniture) in the living room and objects in other rooms. The location of objects seemed to be greatly determined for them by available wall-spaces. In other words, their concept of the living room as a unique space has become more fluid and the objects seem to create an almost seamless connection of rooms.

While almost all participants saw the couch as central to their notion of what a living room is about, for Dianne, who grew up in a home where the living room was not used as such, a couch is even more central to her concept of a living room and her concept of a home.

So although participants did seem to share a "recipe" of the living room, one that consists of basic ideas regarding what objects should and should not be included in a living room, how they should be arranged, what can be done in the living room and even

how someone should feel in the living room, there were still differences between how each and every participant thinks about living rooms, differences I believe were created by the accumulated life experiences of participants.

CHAPTER 8: VALUES EMBEDDED IN LIVING ROOMS

According to Rivlin (1992), how a living space is laid out and how it is furnished, as well as how different parts of the dwelling is used, transmits cultural teachings on such matters as class-based and sex-based differences. Similar claims have been made by other researchers, such as Bourdieu (1977) who studied dwellings in Kabylia, Algeria and Grier (1988) who wrote about parlors in the United States during the Victorian era, as well as Wood and Beck (1994) who wrote about the living room of one of the co-authors.

Cultural values and norms promoted through the living room "recipe" were not easily apparent in the current study. As mentioned elsewhere, it is difficult for someone who is from within a culture similar to the one studied to observe such values. This is because the observer shares many of these values that have become so much a part and parcel of the observer's being they become invisible to him or her.

Only through a comparison with cases that are different do such values begin to stand out. To a certain extent, such a comparison has indeed become available in the present study. It is the comparison between what has emerged from the data collected through the interviews with the participants, and the historical data from the magazines and newspapers beginning in 1900 that were investigated for the present study, as well as the analysis offered by researchers who have investigated domestic settings of previous eras.

Entertaining as a Value

First, a point should be made regarding the existence of a room dedicated to entertaining (even if it is has other uses). Although this has not been the gist of the present study, the literature reviewed suggests that dedicating a space within a place of abode for hosting or entertaining is a phenomenon that is very prevalent throughout the world. Gauvain et al. (1983) reviewed places of abode in different locations of the world that demonstrate this phenomenon. One possible explanation as to the origin of this phenomenon has to do with hosting as a necessity when there is a large traveling time between settlements (Sebba, 1991). Another possibly related source of this phenomenon has to do with the conduct of trade within the confines of one's residence, as was the case in medieval Europe (Rybczynski, 1986).

The importance of hosting during the 19th century, in European countries, as well as in the United States, is evident through the multiplicity of rooms in upper and middle-class residences that were dedicated to different forms of entertaining – more formal and less formal or for the men separate from the women, as described by several authors (Cromley, 1990; Grier, 1988; Rybczynski, 1986). Also documented is the attempt to set aside a space for guests even when it meant less room for its occupants (Grier, 1988). Giuliani (1987) and Grier (1988) both described a similar phenomenon taking place in Italy and in the United states: during the late 19th century and early 20th century, it was common for the urban working class to live in apartments that had a kitchen and a bedroom (in the United States these were the tenement apartments). Giulaini (1987) and Grier (1988) further claimed that frequently when an urban working class family could afford an apartment with an additional room, that room would be set aside for formal

entertaining (such as baptism) and the family would continue to convene in the kitchen. Grier (1988) attributed the dedication of a room for rituals in the United States (and one can assume the same would be true for European countries) to rural life, where public gathering places were frequently so remote as to deem them inaccessible. Many of the ritual events were, therefore, held in people's homes.

Results of the present study suggest it was indeed important for participants to have a room that was designated for entertaining. The desire to create a positive atmosphere for guests was one that repeated itself. For instance, Jennifer explained:

> So yeah, I feel proud of the fact that...I can create this atmosphere that people find comfortable and yet, I mean, I hesitate to use the word cause it sounds like I'm bragging, but people have used the word elegant, and certainly we aren't talking about the elegance of like, you know, I mean this junk comes from the Salvation Army or the street, you know, but still, there's a, I try to create a sort of an elegant atmosphere. An atmosphere in which people feel not only comfortable, but also kind of elegant themselves. And sort of, I, I try to bring out the best in people when they're here, and the environment helps me to do that, and it's extremely important to me, it's so important to me to have this environment and to be able to entertain in it. And if I didn't have a home that I could do that in, I would be very unhappy.

Throughout the study participants indicated they invest a great deal in attempting to please their guests. Participants especially tried to stimulate conversation with and among guests. As previously mentioned, there seems to be a tendency to move chairs closer to the couch when guests are over, in order to facilitate conversation.

Busch (1999) suggested that domestic hosting received more attention during the 19th century and in previous eras than it currently does because in previous times there was less entertaining outside of the residence. Another alternative explanation is that up until the latter part of the 19th century many of the household chores, including those

involved for entertaining, were performed in middle-class households by servants, possibly making entertaining less strenuous than it is today. Furthermore, for the large number of women currently employed outside of their homes, time spent at home is a precious commodity. For women who work outside the home, entertaining may have a lower priority. Sandy's example seems to question that explanation, since she works full-time and still maintains that entertaining is "her life."

In addition, as was the case with some participants in the present study, domestic entertaining is sometimes discouraged by the extended travel time from one place to another in a big metropolis such as New York. Traveling from one part of the city to another can sometimes take more than one hour in each direction. Also, New York City is a magnet for people from different parts of the country, as well as the world, hence many of its residents are geographically remote from friends and family. The fact that most of the participants in the present study shared a strong desire to designate a space for entertaining, even when entertaining was not frequent, suggests that entertaining is not only something that people like to do – although it is that too – and it is not only part of people's concept of what a living room is about, it, but it has become part of the concept of living rooms because entertaining in one's place of abode is a value in itself, a value highly revered in this society, as well as others.

In Hebrew there is an expression, the literal translation of which is "bringing in guests." But it means the shows of honor that are offered to guests when they are invited into a person's home. Such shows of honor include showing the guest to a place where she or he can sit and relax and have food and drink, possibly indeed remnants from times where traveling was long and wearing. As was recently pointed out to me, given

distances in the Greater New York area and the travel time, it may be part of contemporary culture, as well. Food and drink were always included in descriptions of entertaining guests given by participants in the present study. Possibly not consciously, showing our guests to the couch and offering them food and drink are still shows of honor.

Cleanliness as a Value

Not unrelated to the importance of entertaining as a domestic activity is the issue of the cleanliness of the living room. When I spoke to participants prior to the interview itself, several of them asked whether they should or should not tidy up their living rooms in anticipation of the interview. Some participants referred to their difficulties in cleaning up their living rooms for guests since they used their living rooms for a variety of activities. Seth, for instance, slept in his living room, and so it is where he would usually have a pile of clothes. He also conceded he does not keep his home very clean and what was observed was the result of many hours of cleaning, adding that perhaps it would have been preferable to observe the living room as it was "normally" used. He said his lack of cleanliness added to a sense of embarrassment he felt about his living room, in addition to the shabby paint situation of the room. Michelle explained she was happy she had arrived home fifteen minutes before the interview because it gave her opportunity to move the "last three days-worth of dirty clothes" from the couch to the bedroom, and probably do some additional tidying up.

As previously explained, several researchers (e.g., Goffman, 1959; Korosec-Serfaty, 1984) suggested the living room serves as a place where dwellers try to create

certain impressions on guests. Cleaning and tidying up the living room may be one mean for creating a positive impression. The question remains of what kinds of impressions do occupants try to create and why. A tidy and clean living room can convey to visitors that its host or hosts are tidy and clean people. But why is that important?

One answer is that domestic cleanliness is an appreciated value in itself. Chapter 3, "Some Notes on the History of the Living Room" describes the historic events that led to the elevated importance of cleanliness in the 19th and 20th centuries.

Results of the present study suggest domestic cleanliness is still an issue that attracts attention. However, it also suggests that in reality there may be – and may have always been – different standards for different rooms and for different occasions. Seth and Michelle's moving the dirty laundry from the living room to the bedroom and the remarks made by participants regarding preparations they made before my arrival suggest it has become especially important for occupants to present a clean "front." The living room is one main space within the home where that clean front will be maintained, at least for the duration of guest visits. In fact, not needing to have the living room constantly clean is possibly the result of the reduced domestic entertaining in current times.

Several of the participants made comparisons between their living rooms and the living rooms of their parents that signified their standards of cleanliness were more lax than those of their parents; Michelle described her childhood living rooms as being pristine, unlike her own living room that, according to her, felt homier exactly because it was not as pristine. Steve mentions putting feet on the coffee table in the context of what his mother did not allow:

> ...and one of the reasons of having the ottoman instead of a regular coffee table is that you grow up: "Get your feet off the coffee table [mimicking his mother's voice]!" whereas with an ottoman, I mean the ottoman is meant for you to stretch out, but the ottoman is for putting your feet up on...

Jennifer's coffee-table, that she says is "a piece of junk," enables her not only to put her own feet on the table but also to invite her guests to do the same, something doubtful her parents – according to her descriptions of her upbringing – allowed.

Sandy who was in her early 60s, describes how she keeps her living room clean:

> ...and this is work to keep these tables clean. This does not happen, you know, like overnight. I have to clean the ta -- I do them every week, I clean the tables, with you know, like Windex and stuff, and I wipe them and...all the knick-knacks and the stuff like that that's over here I physically bring them to the kitchen and wash them every, not every week, you have to be crazy, it doesn't get that dirty, but as far as I'm concerned, if crystal doesn't shine, I just don't like, it's like not having clean windows.

While it is questionable whether the younger participants in the present study adhere to Sandy's tough cleaning standards, the sample in the present study was too small to propose any significant differences between generations. Furthermore, it is hypothetically possible that the difference between Sandy and the other participants, as well as between some participants and their parents actually represents an income difference. As people reach a certain age, they tend to make more money which enables them to invest more in furniture that may be taken care of in a more meticulous manner. They may also afford professional cleaning help. Steve, whose income increased in the last couple years, for instance, found an original solution to the "feet-off-the-table" dilemma. He bought an ottoman instead of a coffee table that he uses as a coffee table.

There is not enough empirical evidence in the present study to suggest what values are promoted through domestic cleanliness. Do we still connect cleanliness of the

home with cleanliness of the mind? Does it symbolize being functionally adequate? Indeed, as a following example will show, when a household is dysfunctional in many ways, this may also express itself in the lack of domestic upkeep. Cleanliness, therefore, is not just a symbol. It is also an outcome. Our quest for domestic cleanliness is a quest for proof that a household is functional. Ruby's current living room (as the rest of her home) was one of the cleanest I came upon. Ruby described the childhood living room in the house she grew up as a dirty and chaotic room that reflected the neglect of her dysfunctional parents.

Is it All-Right to Feel Comfortable?

There are cases in which participants made a reverse connection between cleanliness and comfort. That is, they suggested that when a living room is "too clean," it is no longer comfortable. Such was Michelle's suggestion that her mother's living room was so "pristine," it was no longer inviting. This also relates to the question of whether or not there is a family-room. When a family-room does exist, a separation exists between a space for relaxing and feeling comfortable and a space that is more for show. In such instances, as was the case with Sandy, there will be no conflict between the desire to feel comfortable and the desire to keep up appearances as the two will take place in separate spaces. By simply reviewing quotations of other authors whose investigations were to be published in the same edition where her own article was published, Werner (1987) noted that rooms that were messier were also rooms that were more comfortable.

In the present study, most of the participants described having felt comfortable in their living rooms, a feeling that was usually attributed to the couch. The notion of comfort was very frequently referred to by participants, as something they felt, wanted to

feel or hoped their guests felt. When participants were asked if by comfort they meant a physical sensation or a psychological feeling, they always said they meant both.

In any event, as described in Chapter 3, "Some Notes on the History of the Living Room," the findings support the notion of a shift in middle-class values throughout the 20th century, whereby the conflict between physical indulgence and moral standards present for the Victorian middle-class (Grier, 1988) seems to have subsided. In fact, the dictum for moral "purity" may have in itself weakened.

Achievements as Values

A great deal of literature has dealt with homes as symbols of status (e.g., Amaturo et al., 1987; Cooper, 1974). It is almost unquestioned that dwellers use the objects in their homes, especially in their living rooms, to display their financial achievements. Indeed, drawing on work with abandoned buildings that became low-income co-ops, Saegert (1985b) maintained that much is missed when housing is dealt with as simply representing the status of its tenants. The huge efforts that tenants of the buildings she studied made to restore these buildings, suggests psychological investment to be far deeper than a desire to climb up the social status ladder. The present findings did not yield much evidence that participants were indeed trying to display their socioeconomic status. Nan was possibly the only participant who spoke directly about her desire to present to her guests and to herself the fact that she has overcome poverty. However, it was clear that although Nan now had the ability to "show off' her recent status, she and her husband were not interested in furnishing their living room in a pretentious or even lavish manner. It just was not a focus in their lives. Participants did speak about pride in

their living rooms, but this pride did not always stem from a financial situation. Jake's pride in his living room and home seemed to relate somewhat to the financial situation of him and his wife, and more than that, to a successful collaboration between both of them in deciding how they wanted to furnish their home, in having found solutions they were both pleased with, as well as with having been able to follow-through on their decisions. To Jake, his home symbolized his successful marriage. This was true for Nan, as well. Seth revealed that one reason why he had a chess-board in his living room was to display his "intellectual" side. While other participants were less forthcoming with such information, my observations did create the sense that an attempt to display "intellectual status" was common for many of the participants in the present study, and it was at least partly for this reason that books were put on open shelves in the living room. While all of the participants are of middle-income, most have been academically trained at a certain point in their lives. Possibly when academic achievements are more impressive than economic ones, it is the intellectual status that will be displayed more than the economic status.

In two cases, Jennifer and Alex, various heirlooms from their upper-middle-class families were displayed in their living rooms, despite, and possibly because of the fact that their own means were more modest than those of their parents. They displayed not their own socioeconomic status, but the status of their forefathers. Such was a piano that belonged to Alex's grandmother, or a bar that belonged to Jennifer's family. Jennifer had a round table that her family called the "Italian table." This was a table she had gone through the trouble of driving to another state to get. It seems as though all participants shared the value of achievement. What that achievement was, though, varied.

CHAPTER 9: META-ANALYSIS

The living room is a complex phenomenon, interweaving unique life experiences, cultural values shared with others, social situations, economic circumstances, spatial attributes and technological changes: It reflects the distinctive nature and circumstances of individuals or partnerships. It reflects the consistent and changing nature of culture. Objects and uses demonstrate that, as a social setting, it is both where the public and the private co-exist. It is a room affected by the layout of the residence, as well as by the larger scale environment within which the residence is located. Innovations in household technology also affect the living room, to the extent of altering its interior design. These different factors sometimes interact, making even more complex the phenomenon of living rooms.

The Living Room Reflects Individuals and Individual Relationships

Each living room observed for this study was unique, reflecting the stylistic tastes of its dweller, or dwellers. More importantly, there were particular meanings the various objects in the living room held for its owner or owners. Even objects similar to ones found in other living rooms, such as tables or couches, sometimes had very idiosyncratic meanings attached to them. Activities common to many participants, such as entertaining, also held individual meanings, in addition to those meanings shared with others.

The living room reflects the particular circumstance of the residents, including their living arrangement: Participants who lived with a partner had in their living rooms

more "us objects", objects that reflect that relationship, than participants who lived alone. Participants who lived alone (even when they had a partner they were not living with) had more "me objects," objects that reflect them as individuals.

If a couple shared the dwelling, their particular relationship was manifest in the living room in the objects displayed and in the ways in which the living room was used. Some couples had an equal role in choosing the objects displayed in the living room, others did not. Some couples used the living room as a place to spend time together on a daily bases, others rarely did so. Some individuals living with partners spent a great deal of time in the living room by themselves, others did so very infrequently.

The Living Room Reflects Consistencies and Changes in Culture

The "recipe," that is, the formula for objects, uses, and even experiences expected in living rooms, demonstrates the consistent nature of culture. One of the more interesting findings of this study is that while there are stylistic differences between individual living rooms, many of them share a similar recipe for decorating, arranging, using and experiencing the living room. It dictates a fundamental layout that includes the couch, the coffee table and additional seats in a certain arrangement. It also dictates the range of objects that are acceptable for the living room. The objection of a partner of one of the participants to the placement of a sexually explicit photograph in the living room demonstrates one cultural boundary.

The recipe suggests that the living room is first and foremost a room for entertaining, but also a room that can be used, otherwise, by its dwellers for leisurely activities, or for certain shared activities. The recipe even includes an expectation that the

living room be a cozy, comfortable and relaxing place. This recipe is the physical manifestation of cultural values, norms and aesthetic notions that are transmitted from one generation to another. According to the participants, the "recipe" is promoted from one generation to another mainly through living rooms experienced or seen in childhoods, but also through televised programs, magazines, books and stores.

Changes in cultural norms and values are brought about by social events and processes throughout history. Some of these changes are gradual and take years or even decades to become apparent. An example of a shift in culture is that of gender-roles. Gender-roles have affected the ways that men and women have used living rooms. At the beginning of the 20th century, middle-class women used the living room for their own leisure far less than men, according to advertisements from that time. In these advertisements men are usually depicted sitting down and women are usually depicted as performing a task. In later years, there are more and more depictions of women sitting and enjoying leisurely moments in the living room. The living room, as a room that is enjoyed now by both sexes as a place for relaxation and leisure, is a reflection of changes in cultural values brought about by the actions of women throughout the 20th century.

The Living room is Both a Public and Private Social Setting

One of the popular notions about the living room is that it is a public setting within the residence, a place for entertainment of outside guests. While this is true, this study revealed that living room is also a place where some very private activities occur. It can be both a room for entertaining, as well as a safe haven, offering a place for relaxation and comfort.

The commonly accepted assumption that the living room is a public place has led many researchers to incorporate an underlying a-priori assumption about living rooms: that the objects in it are used as displays for visitors. This study has revealed that while many objects are indeed placed in the living room on display, they may, at the same time, have deep personal significance. The deep personal meanings objects in the living room contain, are, however, only told to those with whom the dweller wishes to share such meanings. Hence, the living room can serve as a spatio-social drawbridge lowered for only certain guests. It can allow some guests into the dwelling and into the lives of its dwellers; other guests may be allowed to see only what is displayed in the living room, but are not revealed the deeper meanings that are embedded in it, and in its objects.

The Living Room is Affected by the Physical Context

Each living room is set within a particular physical space and a particular settlement type. The specific physical attributes of this space (and of adjacent spaces) can determine what is in the living room and what is not, as well as what activities take place in the living room and what activities do not. These attributes include size, shape and layout, such as location of windows and radiators. Participants' decisions as to what objects can go into the living room and how best to arrange these objects, were at least to some extent based on these factors. Activities are also influenced by the physical attributes of the living room. A living room that is large enough can incorporate activities that would not be otherwise possible. Participants who had small living rooms ended up with even a small company of guests disbursed throughout their residence. Living rooms that are too large can become uninviting for certain activities. A participant who had a

large, Victorian living room could not get guests to congregate there, despite her best efforts, and they ended up staying in the kitchen-dining area instead. Windows with a view may entice dwellers to spend more time in the living room.

The physical attributes of the residence may affect the location of the living room as well. The decision to place the living room in one room and not in another may depend on location of windows, bathrooms and kitchens. Participants described having deliberations regarding what space in the dwelling would best serve as a living room, based on such factors. Physical attributes of spaces that the living room opens up to can also affect the arrangement of the living room: For instance, dwellers may not want guests to see everything that goes on in adjacent spaces. Whether the dwelling includes enough rooms to also have a family room may affect the living room. Where family rooms do not exist in the dwelling, living rooms are likely to contain more personally significant objects, and are likely to facilitate more individual activities.

The physical attributes of the living room and the dwelling are not independent from the larger geographic context either. When the residence is located in a densely populated city, there is greater likelihood that it will be smaller than a residence of the same monetary value in a less densely-populated settlement. Hence, as a broad generalization, the more populated the geographic locale, the smaller the living room, and the greater chance of there not being a family room.

Domestic Technology Helped Shape the Living Room

The advent of new technologies, as well as the gradual disappearance of old technologies, has long been known to affect the home. The living room is no exception.

The connection of many dwellings to gas and electrical pipelines at the beginning of the 20th century enabled greater flexibility in the positioning of lamps and sconces in the living room. This, in effect, reduced the need for a central light source above a center-table. Once lighting could move away from the center of the room, the center-table with its lamp began to disappear and the couch pushed along the wall with the coffee-table in front of it, along with lamps on small tables on either side of it, began to emerge as a focal point in the living room. Strengthening the trend to allocate furniture groupings near walls and away from the center of the room was the radio, an appliance that connected to an electrical outlet in the wall and entered domestic use in the 1920s. After the First World War, as central heating in apartments began to replace fireplaces, the seating grouping centered on the radio replaced the fireplace as yet another focal point in the living room.

The Different Factors that Affect the Living Room also Affect Each Other

The various factors that affect the living room do not always do so independently of each other. Rather, they frequently affect each other. For instance, individuals have their own tastes and notions about what a living room should look like. However, cultural norms and values create the boundaries (the "recipe") within which individual tastes are usually displayed. Similarly, while individual circumstances determine whether or not an individual will live by herself or himself, or will share a dwelling, cultural values dictate what is usually acceptable within the different circumstances. For instance, cultural values dictate that when a couple shares a residence, the living room is expected to display their bond through "us-objects," and to exhibit fewer objects that reflect their

lives as individuals.

Another example of an interaction between factors that affect the living room is the interaction between culture and technology. For instance, with the disappearance of the fireplace, a focal point in the living room was lost. The radio, set in its beautifully designed cabinet, replaced the fireplace as a focal point. However, the radio may not have gained its central position in living rooms had there not been a growing emphasis on family life during the 20th century. This emphasis allowed the radio to become a magnet, pulling family members into the living room.

Qualifiers

The findings presented above were derived from research of archival material as well as interviews and observations with participants. Guided by the "grounded research" approach, a process of comparison across participants, circumstances, rooms and time-periods, served as the basis for analysis. The interviews were done with a limited number of participants who are not necessarily a representative sample of middle-class New York City dwellers. The participants were either people living alone or with their partners, but there were no families with children, or shared housing. Indeed, the participants were neither very poor, nor extremely rich. The study did not look at all the possible different dwelling types in New York City and it did not include a comparison of such residential types. Future research is needed to make further comparisons that can shed light on additional factors that may influence living rooms and that were not addressed in this study.

CHAPTER 10: REFLECTIONS ON THE LITERATURE AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The Relationship between the Public and the Private in the Home

Previous literature has suggested a dichotomous relation between the public and the private aspects of home. Studies that have applied the system of binary oppositions claimed that the division of the home into rooms corresponds with a division into various physical, social and psychological oppositions, and that each room has another room that serves as its "mirror image" (e.g., Bourdieu, 1977; Wood & Beck, 1994). Thus, Goffman (1959) opposed "front regions" with "back regions." Korosec-Serfaty (1984) suggested there are rooms that contain the more secretive aspects of domestic life as opposed to the more formal rooms, first and foremost the living room, that portray a visible image intended to mask the secrets contained in other rooms (Korosec-Serfaty, 1984). Yet, the present study found that a living room can be both a public and private space, under different circumstances and at different times. Although the living room is used for entertaining of guests, it can also be used by family members to get together, and it can be used by household members to spend time by themselves and take part in very private activities such as reading a book, looking out a window or even just sitting and thinking. Furthermore, results of this study suggest that some objects that are in the living room relate to the lives of the dwellers and help elicit memories and thoughts about loved ones, places that the dwellers have been to or perhaps would like to go to and things that the dwellers have done. In so doing, such objects enable the dwellers to be in the living room by themselves but feel connected to the world outside. Similarly, events that take place in

the living room with other possible members of the household and friends create life memories that can be retrieved by the dwellers when they take time to be by themselves in the living room. In other words, the "public" is brought into the living room through objects and events, enabling the dwellers to have a "privacy" that entails a connection to the outside world in one's inner world. This finding suggests that the notion of privacy and "publicness" in the home, and especially the assumption of a dichotomy between privacy and "publicness" needs to be questioned and further explored.

Previous studies have found that public spaces are many times used for private activities, such as the steps of the New York Public Library (Carr, Francis, Rivlin & Stone, 1992). Easy access from public areas to private areas was found desirable for people of older age living in shared housing (West, 1985). In many post World War II houses and apartments living rooms frequently open up to, or allow partial view of other spaces, such as the kitchen, the foyer and corridors. It is suggested, as one participant claimed, that this spatial and visual connection enables the dwellers to engage in private activities in the living room while continuing to feel connected to the rest of the dwelling and to the activities of other members of the household. Future research may shed light on both the actual physical connections and the psychological connections (e.g., through objects that elicit memories) between private and public aspects of settings, and on the effects of such connections on the well-being of the users.

The Use of the Living Room for Display

Previous studies have assumed that the living room is used for display of its inhabitants and especially their social status to guests. Such studies include the ones that

have been mentioned in the previous section (e.g., Goffman, 1959; Korosec-Serfaty, 1984). They also include studies that have tested social theories on communication between social classes and the effects of social mobility (e.g., Amaturo et. al, 1987; Laumanan & House, 1970). Such studies assume that the objects that are in the living room are a means for dwellers to communicate their status to the outer world. Such studies have ignored the possibility that objects in the living room can have personal meanings to its dwellers. The present study found that although the most personally significant objects that are in the home are not in the living room, objects in the living room can still be very significant to its dwellers. Participants have recounted how such objects, such as presents or photographs, bring memories of loved ones and of important events in their lives and have many times alluded to the significance of such objects. In addition, the present study showed that objects can have simultaneously several layers of meanings and functions. Thus, any one particular object in the living room can serve as a decorative object, as an object that represents that status of the dweller, and as an "object of contemplation" (Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981). The previous section described the potential involvement of the presence of such meaningful objects in the private activities that may take place in the living room.

The Concepts of Domestic Spaces

Alexander and associates (1977) have offered the term "pattern" to suggest an aspect of built settings that answers a certain set of universal psychological needs and facilitate certain social situations. Franck (1994) discussed "types" of settings that include certain objects, afford certain uses and elicit certain meanings. Alexander and Franck,

however, seem to emphasize the universal similarities between such patterns and types. Spivak (1973) suggested the notion of "archetypal places," settings that incorporate certain behaviors and answer certain psychological needs. Spivak, however, also added that archetypal places may have culturally-specific sub-sets. For instance, the archetypal place of sleep, while universal, will still have cultural variations.

All the living rooms observed in this study shared a basic common layout, certain basic uses and certain types of experiences that they elicited. The "recipe" was coined as a term that means a common prototype of a setting that includes certain objects, uses and experiences and that has a cultural basis. In line with Spivak's work, the present study suggests that although other cultures do have domestic spaces designated for the entertaining of guests, each culture has its own "recipe" that deems this space different from a similarly designated space in other cultures. The shared cultural basis can account for the similarities between living rooms that are seemingly different when style or taste is used as the criterion for the comparison, but become curiously similar when the layout, uses and experiences are assessed. What are perhaps more interesting than the common setting-types (e.g., a "living room") that appear in a particular culture, are the cultural values that are reflected in the "recipes" for such setting-types and even more so, the effects that the translation of cultural values and norms to the "recipe" have on the experience of physical settings. Researchers in the past have looked at the connections between culture and the design and use of domestic settings (e.g., Grier, 1988; Loyd, 1975; Wright, 1981). However, such studies, as well as the present study, have not fully explored the psychological outcomes of this connection. Future research is needed to further explore the connection between the cultural aspects of home, the physical aspects

and the psychological aspects.

Furthermore, previous studies that have dealt with types of architectural settings (e.g., Alexander et al., 1977; Franck, 1994; Spivak, 1973) have not related these types to their conceptual formation, that is, they have not dealt with the cognitive aspects of these types and they have not dealt with the question of how the cognitive representations of such types are created. In the present study, participants were asked where they thought their concepts of living rooms had originated. Most participants thought their concepts originated in the living rooms they had seen growing up. Additional sources suggested by participants included the different media, books and stores. These suggest a process of learning that is mediated through various channels. What may also help shape the concepts formed are the limitations and affordances set by the physical layout of the dwellings, such as the common size and shape of rooms that people come across throughout their lives, as well as the availability of particular pieces of furniture, different materials, colors of various materials and so forth. Future research is needed that will investigate the process of learning that takes place for built environments and the relative and cumulative effects of the different learning sources.

Hypothesized Design Implications

Some of the suggestions for future studies that have been presented in the previous sections can serve as a basis for specific hypothesized design outcomes in homelike settings, such as in shared housing, group homes and nursing homes.

For instance, it would be interesting to test the hypothesis that providing opportunities for private activities in public spaces, either by using a time-share policy, or

creating private nooks would prove beneficial to the residents and users of such settings exactly because public spaces are not isolated. Nooks, for instance, have been found to be highly attractive for residents of group homes (Bakos, Chapin & Kahn, 1982). It is also hypothesized that in such dwellings, incorporating objects that are both decorative, as well as personally meaningful in the public spaces, such as objects that are owned by the residents, or objects that were made by the residents, will have a positive effect on the quality of life of the resident. In addition, if a culturally-based "recipe" for domestic settings exists, it is suggested that in the creation of homelike environments, the introduction of elements of a culturally-based "recipe" in terms of objects and uses can prove beneficial to the users. Especially in cases where the residents, as a result of dementia, are no longer capable of identifying personal belongings, it is hypothesized that the inclusion of objects that relate to the culture of the residents, such as books in the language they speak, or a certain arrangement of furniture, will have a positive effect on the users.

Additional Suggested Studies

As explained in Chapter 9, "Meta-Analysis," the participants in this study all belong to the middle-class. It is possible that the experiences of the living room described by the participants are different from the experiences of people who are very poor, and the experiences of people who are very rich. Living rooms may be used and experienced differently at different stages of life, and the presence of people of different ages, such as children, may also alter the experience of living rooms for other people who are younger or older. In addition, findings from this study suggest that living rooms in dwellings that

have a family room, or any other room used for leisure activities of the household, are different from living rooms in dwellings that do not have a room for leisurely use of the household, in terms of the objects in the living rooms, and the ways living rooms are used and experienced. The likelihood of having a room designated for leisurely use of the household in a middle-class dwelling is higher in suburbs, rural areas, and in upper middle-class and upper-class urban dwellings. Furthermore, because there have been fewer opportunities for entertainment outside the home in suburban and rural areas than in the cities, domestic entertaining has traditionally been more developed in suburbs and rural areas (e.g., Cromley, 1990). It can, therefore, be hypothesized that differences will be found between urban and suburban or rural homes, and between middle-class dwellings and upper-middle and upper-class dwellings, not only with regard to the living room, but also with regard to other spaces within the home where entertaining of guests, as well as leisure activities of the household, take place. Similarly, differences between middle-class dwellings and lower-class dwellings should also be investigated.

For the present study, participants were asked what they felt about their living rooms, what they thought brought about such feelings and what the living room meant to them. Using this method, I found that the living room was frequently referred to as a "haven," a "den," a place to withdraw. This aspect of the experience of living rooms, as well as of the home at large, has been neglected in much of the psychological literature. It is suggested that there has been an oversight of this and other experiences of domestic settings simply because participants were not asked about these experiences in most of the research on home. Instead, a-priori assumptions about the roles of domestic settings have guided researchers to either observe the settings, without questioning the

participants at all, or to ask specific questions about uses. Examples of exceptions are the works of Cooper-Marcus (1995), Rivlin (1992), and Sixsmith (1986). In any event, findings from the present study have demonstrated that when participants are asked about their experiences of a setting, various experiences and meanings are elicited that would not be otherwise revealed. This suggests that more research that incorporates questioning participants on their experiences can contribute to an understanding of the essence of home.

Finally, the present study demonstrated that an investigation of a particular room within the home can yield important findings and can challenge existing notions about that room and about the home in general, such as that the living room is only used as a stage for performances. It has shown the importance of certain aspects of domestic life that have previously been neglected, such as the living arrangement. It suggests that similar studies of other rooms in the home may also prove beneficial.

APPENDIX A: DEMOGRAPHIC AND DWELLING INFORMATION FOR PARTICIPANTS

(continued on next page)

	Age	Household Income	Occupation	Partner in residence	Ages of children in residence	Type of Dwelling	Number of Bedrooms	Rent/ Own/ Co-Op	Length of Residence in years	Length of Future Intended Residence
Jennifer	37	27K	Non-profit Executive Director	No	--	Apartment	2	Rent	5	For several more years
Jan	42	30K	Development Associate at a Library	No	--	Apartment	1	Rent	2	As long as can afford
Anita	33	N/A	Production Manager	Yes	--	Brownstone	2 (+ one floor rented out)	Own	4	For foreseeable future
Jackie	45	130K	Researcher	Yes	--	Loft	3	Own	12	For foreseeable future
Michelle	35	N/A	Rabbi	No	--	Apartment	1	Rent	4	One more year
Sandy	N/A	N/A	Secretary	Yes	1 adult	Apartment	2	Rent	39	Several more years until move to retirement community
Malia	57	75K	Attorney	No	--	Apartment	2	Co-Op	15	"until death"

	Age	Household Income	Occupation	Partner in residence	Ages of children in residence	Type of Dwelling	Number of Bedrooms	Rent/ Own/ Co-Op	Length of Residence in years	Length of Future Intended Residence
Dianne	33	30K	Ph.D. Student	No	--	Apartment	2	Co-Op	1 ½	Indefinitely
Nan	N/A	N/A	Ph.D. Student	Yes	--	Duplex	2	Rent	1 ½	Several more months
Ruby	37	100K	Librarian	Yes	--	Apartment	1	Co-Op	2	2 more years
Pat	36	30K	Instructor	No	--	House	2	Own	5	Indefinitely
Jake	52	130K	Executive	Yes	--	Loft	3	Own	12	For foreseeable future
Steve	30	50K	Ph.D. student	No	--	Apartment	1	Co-Op	½	Indefinitely
Mark	41	22K	Ph.D. Student	No	--	Apartment	1	Rent	3	Until he finds a better paying job
Alex	50	55K	Ph.D. Student	Yes	--	Apartment	1	Rent	6	1-2 more years
Seth	29	50K	Ph.D. Students	No	--	Apartment	1	Rent	5	2-4 more years

APPENDIX B: CONSENT FORM

My name is Talya Rechavi. I am a student in the Environmental Psychology Program at the Graduate School and University Center at the City University of New York (CUNY).

I am the principal investigator of this project, called "How a place comes into being: The case of living rooms in New York City." This is a research study on how people create their living rooms, what experiences they have in their living rooms and how they use them.

I would like permission to interview you about your experiences.

The interview will take about an hour and a half and will be followed by two phone calls that will last about 15 minutes each to clarify some issues that may have come up during the interview.

With your permission, I would like to tape this interview so that I can record details accurately. All information gathered will be kept strictly confidential. The tapes will only be heard by myself and my advisers.

In order to have a visual record of details, I would also like your permission to make a quick sketch of your residence that would show where the different rooms are located (but not what is located in the rooms), and a sketch of your living room that would show where the main objects (such as the sofa, tables and the TV) are located. Finally, I would like your permission to take photographs of your living room. You may decide whether you are also willing to allow me to include these sketches and photographs in future reports and presentations.

At any time you can refuse to answer any question I ask you. At any time you can decide to end the interviews (whether conducted in person or on the phone). You can ask me to not take a sketch of your living room or your house and to not take photographs of your living room.

If you experience some discomfort in answering questions related to your personal life and the life of the people with whom you may share your residence, let me know and I will skip that question.

I may publish or report results of the study, but names and any identifying characteristics of participants will not be used.

Please let me know if you would like a copy of the study and I will mail it to you. I am expecting to complete the writing of the study within two years.

If you have any questions about this research, you can call me at (718) 769-1757, or my advisor, Professor Leanne Rivlin, at (212) 817-8726.

If you have questions about your rights as a participant in this study, you can contact Hilry Fisher, Sponsored Research, Graduate Center/City University of New York, (212) 817-7523, [redacted].

Thank you for your participation in the study. I will give you a copy of this form to take with you.

Please indicate the following: (circle the correct answer)

I agree to be interviewed	Yes	No
I agree to have this interview audio-taped (taped on a tape-recorder)	Yes	No
I agree that a sketch of the living room be made	Yes	No
I agree that a sketch of the residence be made	Yes	No
I agree that photographs of the living room be made	Yes	No
I agree that a sketch of the living room be included in a report or presentation	Yes	No
I agree that a sketch of the residence be included in a report or presentation	Yes	No
I agree that photographs of the living room be included in a report or presentation	Yes	No

Participant's signature _____ Date _____

Investigator signature _____ Date _____

APPENDIX C: QUESTIONNAIRE

Date:

Resident background information

Age:

Gender:

Identity self-marker:

Household income:

Occupation:

Partner?

Partner living in same residence? Y/N

How many years with partner?

Number of children:

Ages of children:

Ages of children in residence:

Rent/Own/Co-Op

If own, how much paid for residence?

What is rent or maintenance?

Length of residence:

Length of intended residence, from date of interview:

Residence background information

Type of residence:

Number of rooms and description of rooms:

Approximate size of the residence:

APPENDIX D: INTERVIEW GUIDELINES

No right or wrong answers

- Describe room
- Go over objects (walk around the room with participant and let participant lead)

Instead of asking participants to show and describe objects, pose it as: "take me on a tour of the room."

- What objects do you keep for aesthetic reasons? For sentimental/emotional reasons? What are the sentimental reasons? What objects do you keep because you feel obliged to display them? Are there other reasons why objects are displayed in the living room?
- Where are your most personal objects?

Give examples of what these objects are.

- Are there systematic differences between objects displayed in the living room and objects displayed in other rooms?
- Can you name different parts of the room? Probe: "conversation area," "lounging area," etc. Can you tell me what an "x-area" is like? What would you liken it to?
- Can you describe the different things you do in the living room, and how is it used for each of the activities (at different times, occasions)?
- Would you prefer separate rooms for different uses?
- Frequency of different uses vs. importance of different uses

Provoke by challenging need for the uses mentioned (I want to get at the source of uses,

such as hosting)

- Why can't other rooms accommodate same uses?
- Would you say that the uses of the living room are less, same or more clearly defined than for other rooms? Why?

Decisions regarding arrangement

- How room was rearranged over time
- Who made decisions?
- If and how does arrangement facilitate uses?
- What feelings come up? What makes that?
- If could change, what would that be?
- What changes do you plan to implement in the future? What does the implementation depend on?
- What makes it a living room? When would it stop being a living room (what would need to be taken out or arranged differently)? Ask them to step out of the room for a second and then stand at the entrance to the living room, looking in, as they answer.
- Significance vis a vis the other rooms
- Childhood living rooms: compare
- Where does the concept of what a living room should look like come from? Childhood memories, stores, TV, magazines, books, other people's homes? Other sources?

If they have a partner:

- Do you feel that the objects, the furniture and the smaller items, equally belong to both you and your partner, are yours, are your partner's, or some are yours and some are your partners? Is that the same for other rooms? Can you explain?
- Do you have a room you consider to be theirs?
- Do you feel the living room as a whole is equally yours and your partner's, just yours, just your partner's? Can you explain?
- Do you feel the apartment as a whole is equally your and your partner's, just yours, just your partner's? Can you explain?

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