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The middle-class African American home: its objects and their meanings

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The middle-class African American home: Its objects and their meanings

by

Carol Lynnette Hall

A dissertation submitted to the graduate faculty
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Major: Textiles and Clothing

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Iowa State University
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Major Professor

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For the Major Program
DEDICATION

As the tears well up in my eyes, I am thrilled to dedicate my dissertation to my Daddy, Mr. David Wilbert Hall, and my Moma, Mrs. Lillie Dorothy Hall. Words cannot express the unwavering support you guys gave me from the very beginning of my journey at Iowa State University. Thank you for encouraging me to persevere and fight to the end! As the tears now flow from my eyes, I also thank both of you, and God, for your continuous, tremendous support, and giving me the opportunity to pursue and complete this academic experience and degree. Thank you for never letting me give up my dream (which was “our” dream) of earning a doctorate when times looked bleak and hopeless. Thank you for helping me spread my wings and soar to higher heights. Thank you so, so, so much for helping me, Moma and Daddy!

I am also happy to dedicate my dissertation to the nine families who eagerly participated in this study. Thank you for opening your homes to me, and contributing to an understanding of the meaning of home and its objects from a middle-class, African American perspective. This study would not have been possible without you guys. And a very special thank you to Mrs. Barbara Oliver Hall and Ron Fuller for locating and identifying a number of prospective families for my study when I was desperately searching for participants.
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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Background

The topic of relationships between people and home interiors has gained popularity in recent years. Traditionally and historically, anthropologists were the primary scholars studying this phenomenon. Today, psychologists, architects, sociologists, and geographers are also studying this area (which is called environmental psychology). From their diverse fields, they share the same goal to address how "the home interior, in its physical as well as symbolic qualities, is the central aspect of human experience" (Rullo, 1987, p. 250). They also share the goal of addressing how the home interior "provides a unique opportunity for understanding the experience of 'dwelling,' or a person's intimate interaction with objects, spaces, and persons in the home" (Rullo, 1987, p. 250). Duncan (1981) and Altman and Werner (1985) have been instrumental in making contributions to the field of environmental psychology on the topic of the meanings of home. Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton's (1981) work has focused on peoples' feelings about their homes, its objects and their meanings.

Home is described as a "window to a culture" (Gauvain, Altman, & Fahim, 1984, p. 211). The layout of home and its decorative choices tend to mirror or compliment differences in culture, lifestyle, and social structure (Giuliani, 1987). The home, in terms of personal meaning in addition to an experience, represents the site and center of an individual's place identity, connection, and sense of belonging (Rullo, 1987). Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton's (1981) study of the meanings of domestic objects
supports the fact that the home’s interior is a closer depiction of the dweller’s personalities than any other aspect of the home.

Regardless of the exterior architectural style (such as, bungalow, mansion, hut, apartment, or townhouse) of peoples’ homes, they construct the interior of their homes by using a variety of materials, objects, consumer goods, and convenience products. Many of these items include textiles designed specifically for the home. Home textiles include window treatments, curtains, draperies, fabric wallpaper, bed and bath linens, upholstered furniture, pillows and cushions, carpeting and rugs, fiber arts and other textile-related decorative objects.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to explore the sense of self African American families convey in their homes. The sense of self under study is related particularly to culture, identities, beliefs, roles, and interests. By viewing the homes of middle-class African American families and talking to them about their homes and household objects, the researcher strived to gain an understanding of the aesthetic themes employed to decorate their homes, the significance of their homes, and those objects deemed of particular importance to the family. Among those objects, the researcher was especially interested in those made of textile materials—namely, home textile objects. Also of exploration was the symbiotic relationship between the family, home, and the meanings of things in the home. In addition, characteristics of the family in connection to this relationship were also considered.
The phenomena studied was how middle-class African American families express themselves and construct their identities through the objects in their homes, including textile-related objects, and the meanings these things hold for them. However, little research of this kind has been conducted to understand a symbiotic relationship between the family, home, and the meaning of things in the home. No existing research of this kind known to the researcher has been conducted on a predominantly African American sample nor a predominantly middle-class African American sample. The phenomenon under investigation has never been studied before. Typically, when the African American population has been studied, it is the urban underclass segment of the African American population which receives an abundance of attention, and the findings of these investigations are usually extrapolated and generalized to the entire African American population. Middle class African Americans are, as a result, denied the positive accolades of the middle-class and upper-class stratum of the American population.

Socioeconomic Status

Very few African Americans are from families that accumulated wealth from previous family generations; their daily living is dependent upon the compensation they earn from present employment in the labor force (Willie & Reddick, 2003). On that ground, Willie and Reddick (2003) viewed socioeconomic status as determined by occupation, education, and income of household adults. Hollingshead (1949) considered socioeconomic status as defined primarily by occupation, then education, followed by ecological area of residence. Coleman and Rainwater (1978) combined the variables of
income, occupation, and education to determine people’s location in the socioeconomic hierarchy. Therefore, socioeconomic status is a multifaceted role.

The 2000 U.S. Census reported that in 1998 about 28% of all Black families (or about one out of every three) were classified as middle or affluent if their annual family incomes fell about the national median family income for households of $46,737 in 1998 (Willie & Reddick, 2003). The annual family incomes of working-class African American families were above the poverty line but at or below the national median of $46,737 according to the 2000 U.S. Census (Willie & Reddick, 2003).

The 2000 U.S. Census found that one-third of African Americans in the 1999 labor force were in the first and lowest occupational category as laborers, unskilled service workers, semiskilled operators, and unemployed adults who have pursued these occupations. Two-fifths of African Americans were employed in the second, middle occupational category as “people with trades or crafts, technicians, retail sales clerks, and other clerical workers, mechanics, practical nurses, other human service aides, assistants and support staff” (Willie & Reddick, 2003, p. 21). One-quarter of African Americans were in the third, highest occupational category as “professionals, managers, administrators, accountants, computer programmers and sales representatives” (Willie & Reddick, 2003, p. 21).

The 2000 U.S. Census (Willie & Reddick, 2003) revealed that 13% of African American adults comprised the lowest educational category consisting “... of families whose adult members are without a high school diploma or its equivalent” (p. 21); 67.5% of African American adults comprised the middle educational category consisting “... of
families whose adult members are high school graduates but have not received a college degree” (p. 21). And 19.5% of African American adults comprised the highest educational level consisting “... of families whose adult members are college graduates” (p. 21).

Another social scientist who has studied African American middle-class families is sociologist Bart Landry (1987). He found that African American middle-class families make every attempt to achieve the role of homeowner. The reality of owning a home became more important than ever “as a conformable, secure place” (Landry, 1987, p. 59) that was lavishly furnished. Middle-class African Americans also are greatly concerned about enhancing and fine-tuning their occupational skills through participation in professional organizations at both local and national levels (Landry, 1978).

Willie and Reddick (2003) asserted that the Black middle-class has increased steadily, and incrementally, digressing little from the recent past with the exception of a substantial increase in political activity in recent years due to the Civil Rights Movement which led to the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. According to Landry (2000) the middle class status of African American parents has been inherited by middle-class African American families at an increasing proportion. Willie and Reddick (2003) described this inheritance as “a recent phenomenon without historical roots” (p. 24).

Because the middle class among blacks today recruits from the working class and also reproduces itself, the size of the black middle class now is one-fourth to one-third of all black households. (Willie & Reddick, 2003, p. 24)

Willie and Reddick (2003) examined the achievement of parity in socioeconomic status between African American and White population groups. Willie and Reddick (2003) contended that “... the first and fundamental fact about black contemporary family life is
the increasing socioeconomic differentiation found among such households in the United States" (p. 137). A number of researchers recognized that "... growing affluence is a fact of life within the black population" (Willie & Reddick, 2003, p. 138). Willie found that in the 1970s about one-fourth of African American families had incomes at or above the national median. This 1970s trend runs parallel to the 1990s trend that indicated one-third of African American families had incomes at or above the national median (Willie & Reddick, 2003). Today, according to the 2000 U.S. Census (Willie & Reddick, 2003), 27% of the African American population is in the two highest income brackets with 14% (compared to 42% of Whites) earning $50,000 to $74,999 annually and 13% (compared to 23% Whites) earning $75,000 or more annually. On the other hand, 28% of the African American population lies in the two lowest income categories (Willie & Reddick, 2003).

All population groups, including Whites, have undergone substantial improvements in opportunities since the Brown vs. Board of Education landmark case that prohibited public schools from practicing racial segregation (Willie & Reddick, 2003). Differences between African Americans and Whites in attaining an education are most telling in the formal schooling hierarchy (Willie & Reddick, 2003). Among adults ages 25 and older with less than a high school education there were 70 White adults for every 100 African American adults (Willie & Reddick, 2003). At the opposite end of the formal schooling spectrum, for every 100 African American adults who possessed a bachelor's degree or an advanced degree there were 152 to 173 White adults of similar educational standing. "The largest discrepancy in educational accomplishment by race is found among college graduates" (Willie & Reddick, 2003, p. 146). It is important to note that college-educated
people of all races comprised only one-quarter of adults ages 25 and older working in the labor force (Willie & Reddick, 2003). Therefore, Willie and Reddick (2003) declared that during the past three or four decades, there has been a substantial reduction ... in the educational attainment gap for 75 percent of the adult population [which] is a remarkable achievement ... that raises the question as to whether education does as much for black people in terms of employment opportunities as it does for white people. (p. 146)

“White collar” jobs, which include technical, sales, and administrative support work positions, appear equitably distributed among African Americans and Whites, accounting for 28% of all workers in the labor force (Willie & Reddick, 2003). A majority of both African American (i.e., 51%) and White (i.e., 63%) people hold “white collar” positions (Willie & Reddick, 2003). African American and White people have nearly achieved parity with 103 Whites working in “white collar” positions to every 100 African Americans (Willie & Reddick, 2003). Whites tend to dominate the “white collar” top job category of managers and professionals with 150 White adults employed to every 100 African American adults (Willie & Reddick, 2003). “Blue collar” jobs, which include skilled precision production/craft and repair workers, semiskilled workers, service workers, operatives, fabricators, and laborers, account for 12% of all workers in the labor force (Willie & Reddick, 2003). However, “blue collar” jobs appear less equitably distributed by race, with 63 White adults employed to every 100 African American adults who are semiskilled workers and laborers (Willie & Reddick, 2003). Considering the top “blue collar” jobs (i.e., skilled workers), 150 White adults are employed to every 100 African American adults (Willie & Reddick, 2003). In the area of service work, the proportion of African American people employed is twice the proportion of White people (Willie &
Reddick, 2003). Overall, “blue collar” employees outnumber “white collar” employees in the U.S. labor force for both racial groups according to statistical data reported in the 2000 U.S. Census (Willie & Reddick, 2003). Willie and Reddick (2003) emphasized that it is inappropriate to categorize the labor market as divided, with jobs solely reserved for African Americans and other jobs solely for Whites. However, among workers who possess a high school diploma, selectivity plays a serious role, with skilled jobs more available to White people and service work for African Americans (Willie & Reddick, 2003). As mentioned earlier, Willie and Reddick (2003) wondered if education helps Black people as much as it does White people. After their analysis, which included reviewing data from the 2000 U.S. Census, they concluded that yes, education helps Black people, but education definitely best meets the employment interests of college-degreed African Americans (Willie & Reddick, 2003).

Middle-Class Socioeconomic Status

“Middle class” is a notoriously elusive category based on a combination of socioeconomic factors (mostly income, occupation, and education) and normative judgments (ranging from where people live, to what churches or clubs they belong to, to whether they plant flowers in their gardens). Among African Americans, where there has historically been less income and occupational diversity, the question of middle-class position becomes even more murky. (Pattillo-McCoy, 1999, p. 13-14)

The Black middle-class has not been given much attention in scholarly or popular circles because they are not obviously identifiable to non-African American people (Pattillo-McCoy, 1999, p. 1). Furthermore, poor African Americans living in urban ghettos are the recipients of overly intense and usually negative attention when attention is given to the African American population (Pattillo-McCoy, 1999, p. 1). Sociologist
Mary Pattillo-McCoy (1999) explained that with more African Americans reaching a middle-class status, it appears that ethnicity is not the hindrance some people have said it is. She continues to explain that "... the reality, however, is that even the black and white middle classes remain separate and unequal" (p. 2). Often referred to, from a socioeconomic standpoint, as "lower middle class" (Pattillo-McCoy, 1999, p. 2) the contemporary Black middle class as a result of the Civil Rights movement integrated occupations, businesses, neighborhoods, and social clubs and relocated to the suburbs from predominantly Black urban areas. Professional and managerial jobs are held more by Whites, whereas sales and clerical positions have typically employed greater percentages of African Americans. This results in lower earnings for African Americans, although "the inequalities run even deeper than just income" (Pattillo-McCoy, 1999, p. 2).

In regard to housing, the Black middle-class experiences the same magnitude of housing segregation as poor African Americans (Pattillo-McCoy, 1999). In comparison to other racial or ethnic groups, Black Americans are more segregated from White people (Pattillo-McCoy, 1999). Although many middle-class African Americans can financially afford homes in predominantly White sections, they are confronted with overt racial discrimination (Pattillo-McCoy, 1999). Racial segregation, according to Pattillo-McCoy (1999) "means that racial inequalities in employment, education, income, and wealth are inscribed in space" (p. 3). Geographical, kinship, and friendship ties link middle-class and poor African Americans together (Pattillo-McCoy, 1999). Policies that adversely affect poor African Americans also affect middle class African Americans, despite the fact that middle-class African Americans reap some benefits and privileges from their middle-class
status (Pattillo-McCoy, 1999). However, Pattillo-McCoy (1999) believes that policy
initiatives to build upon the successful status already achieved by the Black middle class
should especially target “continued affirmative action, access to higher education, a plan to
create real family-wage jobs and the alleviation of residential segregation”
(Pattillo-McCoy, 1999, p. 12). Pattillo-McCoy (1999) points out that although middle-class
African Americans are detached from poor Black Americans, this difference is the function
of the increased growth of the African American middle-class which has, over time,
reconfigured African American communities. Therefore, poor and middle-class African
Americans resume living with and near one another (Pattillo-McCoy, 1999). It is important
to note that Pattillo-McCoy’s (1999) observations and views are based on her research of a
Black middle-class neighborhood on Chicago’s south side.

The overall purpose of this study examined how middle-class African American
families express themselves and construct their identities through the objects in their
homes, including textile-related objects, and the meanings these things hold for them. The
objectives of this research are stated as follows.

(1) To help advance understanding of housing, textiles and objects in the home as a
reflection of middle-class African American families.

(2) To explore the meanings that domestic objects hold for middle-class African American
families.

(3) To explore the aesthetic decorative themes middle-class African American families use
in their homes to convey their identities.
(4) To explore how these meaningful objects lend a sense of self for middle-class African American families.

(5) To draw from existing theory to interpret themes in the data.

(6) To allow new themes and theory to emerge from the data.

The findings of this study will be useful to textile and furniture designers, merchandisers and manufacturers, interior designers, interior decorators, homebuilders, realtors, furniture companies, marketing and advertising agencies, and African American consumers. Businesses will have a better understanding of how to interpret and meet the needs of some middle-class African American consumers through their designing, merchandising, marketing, and advertising efforts.
CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The first part of this chapter includes a review of relevant literature that encompasses the broader issues of marriage, the status of African American families and related demographic trends, religion, and aesthetics. The remainder of this chapter includes the theoretical framework, which explains in great detail the theories that supported this study. The closing section of this chapter includes the research questions that guided this study.

Marriage

The family is one of the strongest and most important traditions in the Black community. How much of this tradition is based in African custom and how much was developed in the New World is impossible to determine. It is doubtless some of both. (Franklin, 1997, p. 5)

The institution of the African American family has suffered an unwanted abundance of adversity since the holocaust of slavery, and, despite such hardships, has maintained the will to thrive and survive by the grace of real human affection, attachment, and warmth (Franklin, 1997). Even during slavery, the concept and practice of family was of extreme importance to slaves. Franklin (1997) explained that the family institution was one institution that allowed slaves to be openly committed. Forced to marry at an early age, for the economic reason of generating capital and labor for their slave-owner and his plantation, slaves strongly believed in the concept of family. For example, in North Carolina in 1866 after the Civil War, 9,452 former slaves registered their marriages thereby making them legal and their children legitimate (Franklin, 1997). Some of these couples, according to Herbert Gutman (1976), went on to conduct secular or religious wedding
ceremonies to fully celebrate the legitimacy of their marriages. Although it was common practice for slave families to be broken apart by slave-owners, usually for reasons of economic gain, the Black family remained intact through slavery as separated loved ones frantically searched for one another to return home to their reunited families after slavery ended (Franklin, 1997).

Franklin (1997) contended that Black families remained stable through Reconstruction and the close of the nineteenth century. From 1880 through 1900 in the urban and rural South and from 1905 through 1925 in New York City, the average African American family was lower class and continued to maintain its two parent heading (Gutman, 1976). During the 1880s through 1900, many women over age 40 began heading father-absent households and subfamilies due to husbands dying or leaving home to work elsewhere. As a result, this situation led to the practice of young, single mothers living in the household of their parents or other adults, thereby easing the responsibilities of motherhood for the single mothers (Franklin, 1997). Therefore, kin-related household structural type was common around 1900, and so were long, lengthy marriages of southern African Americans in rural and urban areas (Franklin, 1997). Interestingly, around 1925, a husband or father was present in six of seven African American households (Franklin, 1997). African Americans migrating to Northern cities during World War I and the years thereafter had no adverse affects on the stability of the Black family (Franklin, 1997).

Into the 1960s, an impressive 75% of African American families remained headed by two parents (Franklin, 1997). According to the 2002 U.S. Census, however, among 8.8 million Black families, an alarming 48% or one-half were married-couple families
compared to 46.1% in 1996. On the other hand, the 2002 U.S. Census reported that among
the 53.6 million non-Hispanic White families, 82% of them were married couple families.
Franklin (1997) identified “racially hostile governmental and societal practices, policies,
and attitudes” as contemporary forces that have weakened the institution of the African
American family. The Joint Center for Political Studies (1983) identified the 1960s trend
of African Americans migrating from rural areas to large urban cities as the primary demise
of the African American family unit. Migration negatively resulted in rapid urbanization,
ghettoization, and African American men frequently not finding work.
Harriet Pipes McAdoo (1997), a Black families scholar, indicated that external economic
and policy environments have historically affected Black families earlier than other groups.
The notable sociologist W. E. B. Du Bois (1903) was the first scholar to point out that the
decline in marriage rates among African Americans was due to the sex ratio imbalance.
However, despite the fact that African American men and women marry later now than
they did in earlier decades, and that African Americans are less likely to marry than they
did fifty years ago (than Whites and Latinos), the number of African American marriages is
increasing (Tucker & Mitchell-Kernan, 1995).

The Egalitarian Arrangement

Willie and Reddick (2003) declared that

one of the greatest gifts of blacks to the culture of the nation has been the egalitarian
family model in which neither the husband nor the wife is always in charge ... men
are not always the head and the supreme power, and women are not always weak
and dependent. (p. 124)
The egalitarian family model consists of spouses who both work in order to merge their salaries and make the greatest sacrifice so their children will face a better life than earlier African American generations (Willie & Reddick, 2003).

Egalitarian decision-making processes are a characteristic of middle-class African American families. Depending on the nature of the situation at hand, one of the parents will make an independent decision on behalf of the family (Willie & Reddick, 2003). Middle-class African American families have completely engaged “in the social, political, and work realms in America” (Willie & Reddick, 2003, p. 58). Acting as partners out of need, neither spouse has the final authority (Willie & Reddick, 2003). Under this egalitarian framework, the African American middle-class wife and mother is allowed to completely participate in the functioning of the family and also other community institutions, which are favorable for the husband’s personal growth and development and the couple’s children as well (Willie & Reddick, 2003).

The “egalitarian arrangement” (Landry, 2000, p. 82) was a new kind of family paradigm used by contemporary African American middle-class families as a result of the historical necessity of both husband and wife in African American families to be employed (Willie & Reddick, 2003). The egalitarian arrangement was common for African American families long before it became more prevalent among other ethnic groups. Landry (2000) described African American women as foreshadowers of coming changes in society and White culture, in which White women would eventually have to join their husbands in the labor force in order to help provide a living for their families. Middle-class African American wives (that is, about 7 out of every 10) were present in the labor force in 1990
and outnumbered White middle-class wives in the labor force by a little above 50% (Landry, 2000). Additionally, 31% of middle-class African American wives earned higher incomes than their husbands by 1990 (Landry, 2000). Willie and Reddick (2003) found the egalitarian arrangement in family structure and function in middle-class Black families interesting because it deviated instead of conformed to Moynihan’s 1965 observations of male dominance in White households as the prevailing custom. No longer showing a preference for the patriarchal form of family, although egalitarian decision-making is the usual custom, White families are gradually adopting the egalitarian arrangement model that was originally lived by African American middle-class families (Willie & Reddick, 2003).

Preparing children to confront and combat racism

Despite the successes that black middle-class families experience, the parents often feel a responsibility to prepare their children for the reality of an America that continues to discriminate against African Americans. (Willie & Reddick, 2003, p. 56)

For some middle-class African American families, “education is armor to defend against the constant barrage of economic hardship and racism” (Willie & Reddick, 2003, p. 55). In the lives of children of middle-class African American families, education is emphasized as a value of tremendous importance (Willie & Reddick, 2003). African American families portray a pattern of shared power and status (Willie & Reddick, 2003). African American middle-class families believe in instilling their children with a consciousness of accountability and obligation (Willie & Reddick, 2003). Regardless of rewards, all family members provide an offering to the family’s common good due to the egalitarian aspect of the African American family (Willie & Reddick, 2003). Middle-class
African American parents want their children to grow up with an awareness of and pride in their cultural heritage (Willie & Reddick, 2003). They also wish that their children will judge others and be judged by others on the basis of their character, as declared by Martin Luther King, Jr. (Willie & Reddick, 2003).

Fit of African American Families in U.S. Society

Having described the history of the American Black family “as a miraculous movement from nothing to something,” Willie and Reddick (2003, p. vi) do not believe that any particular group with regard to ethnicity, socioeconomics or gender represents the mainstream. However, White, Black, and brown families collectively comprise the mainstream. Current conditions such as inadequate income as a result of racial discrimination have contributed to the greater pace of instability faced by Black families rather than the experience of slavery or Black African origins, as was incorrectly assumed by political scientist Daniel Moynihan in 1965 (Willie & Reddick, 2003). Willie and Reddick (2003) contend that contemporary poverty, racial discrimination, and family instability are connected to one another, although poverty and discrimination can be eliminated with the aid of policymakers to stabilize the Black family in education, employment, and income.

Willie and Reddick (2003) explain that even the best American social scientists have conflicting perceptions of Black family life. Moynihan viewed the Black family from a pathological standpoint, whereas sociologist Andrew Billingsley and psychiatrist Robert Coles viewed the Black family as unique for its characteristics of resiliency and adaptivity (Willie & Reddick, 2003). Similar in perspective to Moynihan, social scientist
John Scanzoni wanted contemporary African American families to conform to the pattern of the once dominant American family, which was the White family (Willie & Reddick, 2003, p. 6). In contrast to Moynihan and Scanzoni, Robert Merton believed that minority groups in society that do not conform to the norm, rarely reflect the values and interests of the dominant group (Willie & Reddick, 2003). Therefore, Willie and Reddick (2003) believed that “refashioning black families in the image of white families” (p. 7) was a plausible solution only if African Americans were given the same equal and fair access to society’s institutions as European Americans.

Using macrosocial and microsocial societal units is parallel to the assumption or proposition that social structures can efficiently maintain society if they uphold its groups and individuals (Willie & Reddick, 2003). Willie (1994, p. 90) explained that microsocial units, like Black families, cannot be labeled as deviant nor beyond the macrostructure, which is the mainstream. In essence, Willie and Reddick (2003) think that “a study of black families must consider their unique cultural adaptations to society and its institutions as well as the differential adaptations by society and its institutions to various racial and cultural groups” (p. 7). E. Franklin Frazier accused African American middle-class families of the 1950s of living in a make-believe world due to their pursuit of status, prestige, active involvement in social clubs, recognition through competition, and purchases of homes, cars, and furniture (Willie & Reddick, 2003). However, Hollingshead (1949) found that Black middle-class families were very little different from White middle-class families who were also seeking prestige, a fashionable car, country club membership, and a well-maintained home.
Willie and Reddick (2003) described a Black family as affluent, or middle class, “if [their] household income is above the national median, the adults in the family have attended or graduated from college, and if they are employed in administrative and managerial work, technical specialties, or sales and clerical work” (p. 10). Regarding the behavior of affluent African American families, they conform “to both the cultural goals of success in this nation and the prescribed means for fulfilling these goals” (Willie & Reddick, 2003, p. 13). These families adhere to the belief that society’s institutions should shield the weak from the strong and that solutions are determined through democratic decision-making (Willie & Reddick, 2003). The values of affluent African American families subscribe to the values outlined in the United States Constitution, as well as the normative values of the United States (Willie & Reddick, 2003).

Demographic Trends

American families in general, but especially African American families, have experienced major demographic and social changes during the 20th century; considerable increases in single-parent families headed by females only, children born out of wedlock, and children living in poverty have occurred (Taylor, Jackson, & Chatters, 1997). Black and White American families have been influenced, but Black families disproportionately, by demographic changes including the trends of

... overall declines in the rate of marriage and later ages at first marriage, a higher proportion of births to unmarried mothers, increases in female-headed households, larger percentages of children residing in female-headed families, and a higher percentage of children living in poverty (Taylor, Jackson, & Chatters, 1997, p. 14)
in the last thirty years. Sudarkasa (1997) has pointed out that single parenting by men has also increased in number. Social scientists and media analysts have tried to ameliorate these problems, but only from a "social problems" (Taylor, Jackson, & Chatters, 1997, p. 1) perspective, which is very narrow and limiting with its focus on the problems rather than the issues affecting Black families. In recent years, the media has portrayed African American family life as urban, poor, and plagued with teen pregnancy, drug addiction, and violence in the community (Taylor, Jackson, & Chatters, 1997). This portrayal mirrors urban Black life, but has erroneously been interpreted as the representation of all Black family life (Taylor, Jackson, & Chatters, 1997). Therefore, social science researchers need to study Black families from a different perspective (Taylor, Jackson, & Chatters, 1997). African American researchers of Black family life have been working to identify "what is normative for families across cultural groups and to offer new paradigms and models for understanding the nature of black family life" (Taylor, Jackson, & Chatters, 1997, p. 3).

Black families were labeled deviant (primarily by E. Franklin Frazier and Daniel P. Moynihan) from the norms of the White middle-class on the basis of differences in family structure and function due to race in the past (Taylor, Jackson, & Chatters, 1997).

According to Taylor, Jackson, and Chatters (1997) when confronted with adversity, Black families are adaptive and resilient. Taylor, Jackson, and Chatters (1997) believe "that although black families face a number of social circumstances that constitute risks to their well-being, they also possess a number of strengths and resources that constitute protective factors that may offset these risks" (p. 4). Therefore, the positive functioning of
these families relies on a correct evaluation of the resources and strengths used to combat the problems they face (Taylor, Jackson, & Chatters, 1997).

The national African American community is making strides and progress despite its problems. A report released by the U.S. Census Bureau (The Philadelphia Tribune, 2003) indicated that more Black families are headed by married couples (that is, up from 46.1% in 1996 to 47.9% in 2002), and they own the homes they live in (that is, up from 42% in 1990 to 48% in 2002). It is important to note that the report did not specify or indicate the socioeconomic status of these families.

Iowa Demographic Trends

In 2002 18.1% of the total U.S. African American population of 34,658,190 (or 12.3%) resided in the Midwest in addition to 18.1% in the Northeast, 8.6% in the West and 55.3% in the South (U.S. Census, 2002). African Americans in Iowa comprised 2.1% (or 61,853) of the total state population of 2,926,324 in 2000 (U.S. Census, 2000). The study participants resided in the state of Iowa in either Polk County or Story County. African Americans in Polk County comprised 4.8% (or 18,113) of the total county population of 374,601 (U.S. Census, 2000). The 1999 median household money income was $46,116 in Polk County (U.S. Census, 2000). The median family income in 1999 for Polk County was $56,560 (U.S. Census, 2000). Family income in 1999 for Polk County (for 97,182 families) is given as follows: 16,764 (or 17.3%) families reported incomes between $35,000 to $49,999; 25,993 (or 26.7%) families reported incomes between $50,000 to $74,999; and 14,767 (or 15.2%) families reported incomes between $75,000 to $99,999 (U.S. Census, 2000). The 2000 home ownership rate (also known as owner-occupied
housing units) was 68.8% (or 102,621) of the total Polk County households of 149,112 (U.S. Census, 2000). The median value of a home in Polk County in 2000 was $103,100 (U.S. Census, 2000). Married couple families comprised 51% (or 76,055) of the total Polk County households of 149,112 (U.S. Census, 2000). Married couple families with children under 18 years comprised 23.8% (or 35,481) of the total Polk County households of 149,112 (2000 U.S. Census). Married persons comprised 56.4% (or 165,682) of the total Polk County population of 15 years and over of 293,638.

African Americans in Story County comprised 1.8% (or 1,463) of the total county population of 79,981 (U.S. Census, 2000). The 1999 median household money income was $40,442 in Story County (U.S. Census, 2000). The median family income in 1999 for Story County was $55,472 (U.S. Census, 2000). Family income in 1999 for Story County (for 17,064 families) is given as follows: 3,024 (or 17.7%) families reported incomes between $35,000 to $49,999; 4,539 (or 26.6%) families reported incomes between $50,000 to $74,999; and 2,654 (or 15.6%) families reported incomes between $75,000 to $99,999 (U.S. Census, 2000). The 2000 home ownership rate (also known as owner-occupied housing units) was 58.3% (or 17,125) of the total Story County households of 29,383 (U.S. Census, 2000). The median value of a home in Story County in 2000 was $115,800 (U.S. Census, 2000). Married couple families comprised 49.6% (or 14,581) of the total Story County households of 29,383 (U.S. Census, 2000). Married couple families with children under 18 years comprised 22.3% (or 6,553) of the total Story County households of 29,383 (U.S. Census, 2000). Married persons comprised 46.3% (or 31,226) of the total Story County population of 15 years and over of 67,470 (U.S. Census, 2000).
Religion

A good way to understand a people is to study their religion, for religion is addressed to that most sacred schedule of values around which the expression and the meaning of life tends to coalesce. (Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990, p. xi)

Lincoln and Mamiya (1990), who examined the Black Church and Black religion through the lens of contemporary sociological theory in their book *The Black Church in the African American Experience*, described religion as a subjective experience. One of the reasons African American Christians started their own churches was to create a place where they could collectively escape and devise strategies to combat antiracial discrimination, which was not an issue or concern in the mainline Christian White churches (Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990). They wanted an environment where they could freely practice their authentic understanding of Christianity, which did not involve discrimination of any kind or form, including antiracial discrimination. African American churches had the topic of “freedom” (Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990, p. 4) on their agendas; freedom represents a fundamental part of Black Christian belief. From a historical perspective, the term “freedom” was of crucial importance to African American Christians because:

From the very beginning of the black experience in America, one critical denotation of freedom has remained constant: freedom has always meant the absence of any restraint which might comprise one’s responsibility to God. The notion has persisted that if God calls you to discipleship, God calls you to freedom. And that God wants you free because God made you for Himself and in His image. (Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990, p. 4)

Therefore, being a slave and being forced to serve two masters (which was declared impossible) jeopardized and risked the promise of salvation for the slaves (Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990). Within the context of the African American church, the meanings of the term “freedom” have been exigent in nature (Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990). The interpretation
of the term “freedom” in the African American experience historically referred to the slaves released from bondage during slavery. The meaning of the term “freedom” changed to indicate the right for an education, employment, and movement from place to place according to the individual’s will after emancipation. The contemporary connotation of the term “freedom” refers to “social, political, and economic justice” (Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990). Freedom for Whites, explained Lincoln and Mamiya (1990), “has bolstered the value of American individualism: to be free to pursue one’s destiny without political or bureaucratic interference or restraint” (p. 5). Freedom for African Americans “has always been communal in nature” (Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990, p. 5).

The familial aspect of religion

Lincoln and Mamiya (1990) described the Black family as the primary unit of the Black Church. For most African American families, the Black Church has been instrumental in creating their primary or first identity (Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990). The Black Church and the Black family have historically worked together to improve the quality of life for poor young African Americans and to strengthen the self-esteem and both the individual and cultural identities of African American youth in all three social classes (Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990). Young poor Black people are of grave concern to these two dominant Black institutions for several reasons. (1) The Black Church has historically provided clerical and lay adults as role models and inspiration for African American youth (Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990). (2) The Black Church has historically been located in the heart of Black communities and has remained in these urban locations despite the influx of middle-class African Americans relocating to the suburbs.
The demographic movement of middle-income blacks out of inner city areas and into residential parts of the cities, older suburbs, or into newly created black suburbs, has meant a growing physical and social isolation of the black poor. (Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990, p. 384)

Therefore, the Black church has remained one of the most visible and viable institutions in the Black community dedicated to assisting the needs of the Black urban underclass.

(3) Lincoln and Mamiya (1990) reported that evidence exists indicating that the possibility of young poor Black people moving out of poverty circumstances increases when they are involved with mainstream organizations such as churches, youth groups or church-sponsored athletic teams (Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990).

The spiritual aspect of religion

Religious and spiritual beliefs and practices provide a meaningful context within which African Americans interpret and respond to both life’s hardships and joys. (Taylor, Mattis, & Chatters, 1999, p. 528)

Religion plays a profound, spiritual, and affirmative role in the lives of some African Americans. People’s “perceptions and attitudes regarding religion” is defined as subjective religiosity (Taylor, Mattis, & Chatters, 1999, p. 531). Taylor, Mattis, and Chatters (1999) studied the role of subjective religiosity in the lives of African Americans. Overall, Taylor, Mattis, and Chatters (1999) found that although subjective religious involvement varies in a systematic fashion by age, gender, religion, and marital status, African Americans demonstrate higher levels of subjective religiosity (on various indicators) than Whites. African American participants in their study ranged from high schoolers to adults who both indicated that (a) religious comfort and support was extremely helpful in coping with life problems and difficulties, (b) religious and spiritual beliefs were important in their
daily lives, (c) they felt close to God, and (d) they considered themselves to be religious. (Taylor, Mattis, & Chatters, 1999, p. 536)

Regarding the Midwest in general and Iowa specifically, Taylor, Mattis, and Chatters (1999) discovered that participants in their study who resided in the North Central region of the United States, which includes Iowa, were less likely to state that religion was important in their lives than did Southerners (that is, participants residing in the Southern region of the United States). Research by Taylor (1988) indicated that African Americans who live in rural environments, which includes Iowa, have a greater likelihood of being church members.

The Taylor, Mattis, and Chatters (1999) study revealed two interesting findings regarding married couples. (1) Married couples exhibit higher levels of subjective religious participation than their unmarried counterparts. (2) Married people find it important to seek, incorporate, and rely on religious or spiritual beliefs for comfort in their daily lives more than unmarried persons and separated couples. Taylor, Mattis, and Chatters (1999) explained that married couples' higher levels of subjective religiosity and their need to seek spiritual comfort are attributed to the fact “that both public and private religious involvement have socially integrative functions that contribute to marital stability and well-being” (p. 538). Furthermore, Chatters, Taylor, and Lincoln (1999) explained that the religious involvement among married people is assumed to be higher as a result of church and marriage being institutions which both support values that encourage and promote mixing in social settings, as found by Cornwall (1989) and Mueller and Johnson (1975), and permanence in personal and social relationships, as found by Levin and Vanderpool (1989).
Regarding education and socioeconomic status, Chatters, Taylor, and Lincoln (1999) in their research on religious participation of African Americans found a correlation between education and religious service attendance among African Americans. African Americans with higher levels of education also possessed higher levels of religious service attendance that "may reflect the generally higher levels of social integration and social resources found among educationally advantaged persons" (Chatters, Taylor, & Lincoln, 1999, p. 140). This was also found by Lenski (1961) and Stark (1972).

Addressing Aesthetics

Fiore and Kimle (1997) define aesthetics as an experience: "The sensitive selection or appreciation of formal, expressive, or symbolic qualities of the product or environment, providing non-instrumental benefits that result in pleasure or satisfaction" (p. 4). According to Holbrook (1994), beauty is a part of a consumer's daily consumption experiences and prompts appreciative responses ranging "from simple hedonic pleasure to profound aesthetic experience" (p. 131). Mitias (1982) described an Aesthetic Experience as an event that occurs within an individual as a result of active participation with the object's sensuous and imaginative attributes. Creating a home involves aesthetics to develop a private space where one can display possessions that express who he or she and other family members are. Aesthetics are involved in the myriad of ways people decorate their homes to illustrate who they are, where they have been, and where they are possibly going. Aesthetics is the visual, material, and spiritual sum of oneself in his or her own home (Raybon, 1999).
Addressing Aesthetics in the African American Home

Traditionally, African people used decoration for aesthetic purposes and as a form of visual communication to express “for example, marital status, religious affiliation, or tribal identity” (Algotsson, 2000, p. 118). To Africans, decoration was a creative activity done for communication purposes (Algotsson, 2000). Throughout Africa, people have used geometric designs to encode both secret knowledge and cultural knowledge via the medium of decorative textiles designs (Tobin & Dillard, 1999). Here in North America, slaves from West Africa relied upon their craftsmanship skills and values to reconstruct their lives in their new environment (Tobin & Dillard, 1999). For warmth, they made quilts adorned with geometric designs (Tobin & Dillard, 1999). Eventually the meaning of their quilts evolved from warmth and survival to a system of symbols (Tobin & Dillard, 1999). Tobin and Dillard (1999) explained that the slaves’ quilt-making skills actually saved the lives of many slaves. Encoded with messages giving directions, certain patchwork quilts were placed along the Underground Railroad to lead runaway slaves to safe havens and eventually to freedom (Tobin & Dillard, 1999).

African American cultural critic bell hooks (1990) envisions aesthetics as more than a philosophical or theoretical approach to art and beauty. hooks (1990) stated that

since many displaced African slaves brought to this country an aesthetic based on the belief that beauty, especially that created in a collective context, should be an integrated aspect of everyday life enhancing the survival and development of community, these ideas formed the basis of African American aesthetics. (p. 105)

To hooks, aesthetics refers to the manner in which one inhabits space or a specific location (hooks, 1990). She contended that “… an entire room is a space to be created, a space that
can reflect beauty, peace, and a harmony of being, a spiritual aesthetic. Each space is a sanctuary” (hooks, 1990, p. 105).

Some African Americans aesthetically adorn the spaces of their homes to express connections to their culture and family. For example, these aesthetics can be exemplified in two ways through:

1. the juxtaposition, mixing and matching of furnishings, textiles, and decorative, domestic objects to create an improvisational, or even traditional, look. African American interior designer Sharne Algotsson (2000) explains that anyone can achieve and reflect “African style” (p. 116) in their home by combining, mixing, and matching African inspired furnishings with the decor they currently have in their home. Algotsson described African style as “exotic woods, vibrant and earthbound colors, rich textures, and varied patterns” inspired by and captured in “timeless arts and crafts of the vast African continent” (p. 116), which is comprised of over fifty nations. African style is a revival of the African tradition of “hands-on, do-it-yourself, down-to-the-details design” (Algotsson, 2000, p. 116) while combining the traditional and modern. African style emphasizes simplicity, spirituality, and a “chameleon-like flexibility” (Algotsson, 2000, p. 118). Since African style “is one of the few design styles that is simply too diverse to be codified into a standard look” (Algotsson, 2000, p. 118), African style’s changeable and adaptable nature allows it to flow or integrate easily with other styles such as African Country, Classical African, modern or contemporary African, Afro-Euro, Afro-Retro, or other style options that people create themselves.
(2) the concept of *bricolage*, which involves using things (such as furnishings, textiles, and objects) in ways other than their intended purpose. Several years ago, the researcher spoke with a young man who had recently purchased his first home. On a shopping trip at Wal-Mart he bought a black velour blanket that he decided to use as a bed ruffle on the cast iron bed his grandmother gave him when he left home after college. As the researcher explored his thoughts and feelings about the bed, he told the researcher that biannually he sleeps in the bed to nurture his spirit in this peaceful private context that evokes good memories of his grandmother.

Black culture has a historical legacy of creating something out of nothing. Aesthetics have historically given African Americans hope and comfort in a world where racial oppression and domination has been a psychologically enduring part of their history (Majors & Billson, 1992). Consider how clothes functioned politically and psychologically against them during the era of Jim Crow when African Americans were not allowed to try on clothing in stores (hooks, 1990). This adversity made some African Americans yearn desperately for material goods—to possess and to own objects. And this adversity further developed and strengthened the creativity of some African Americans.

In current society, this adversity may be reflected in dress. Previous research (Hall, 1992; Majors & Billson, 1992; Freeman, 1996; O’Neal, 1994, 1998; White & White, 1998) has shown that African Americans have retained a flair from African culture for aesthetics, style, and self-expression/expressiveness displayed via clothing and personal adornment of the body. O’Neal (1998, p. 167) describes an African American aesthetic of dress as the sum of four elements: “The affinity for ‘high affect’ colors; ‘style’ or individual
expression; improvisations and exotic features; and the tendency to dress up” (p. 167) combined with metaphysical beliefs and a unified spirit. To dress up means to impeccably groom and outfit oneself in his or her best clothing and accessories for the purpose of achieving the most striking and remarkable impression one can create in order to insure that the outcome of the situation at hand will be in their favor. To avoid what Michele Wallace (1990) called “invisibility blues,” (p. 1) some African Americans dress up to be seen, to be visible in the eyes of the dominant culture. However, according to Hebdige (1997), some minority cultures, like African American culture, tend to be more visible because mainstream people blend in with the majority.

African Americans and other ethnic groups dress according to a subcultural style. Szostak-Pierce (1999) describes subcultural style as “... manifested through look, sound, and performance, yet dress is a subculture's most powerful means of communication because of its high visibility” (p. 141). Dressing subculturally is a style choice for African Americans to use if they so desire. Szostak-Pierce (1999) explains that dressing subculturally lends an alternative route to status attainment in several ways: First, by controlling how others gaze and look at them as a result of their subcultural style (Hebdige, 1997); second, by resisting mainstream notions of appearance through choosing to work within the margins of society; which third, gives African Americans a place where they can exert the power of expression resulting in creative, unique, novel appearances (hooks, 1990; Majors & Billson, 1992); and last, gaining power by visibly and politically resisting mainstream society (Majors & Billson, 1992).
In African American culture, being seen at times becomes somewhat equated with being heard. Therefore, the aesthetic of African American dress style is often as political as it is cultural (hooks, 1990; Hall, 1992; Majors & Billson, 1992). As a result of the negative connotations the dominant culture has attached to people of non-White races and ethnic groups, African Americans dress up so they will be taken seriously and treated respectfully by European Americans who have historically held the power and control of our society's institutions. Research by Hall (1992), on African American undergraduate students' favorite clothes, revealed that African American dress style is organized around three themes which convey: (1) personal expression (that is, the creative aspects of attaining a style that shows and compliments one's personality, individuality, and unique qualities of self), (2) status (that is, dressing to impress others to denote one's class level in society, monetary buying power, or heighten one's self-esteem), and (3) African pride (that is, dressing to exemplify one's spiritual and emotional connection to the ancestral homeland of Africa, or one's dedication to the contemporary struggles for Black power and civil rights for Black Americans). In the Hall (1992) study, the personal expression and status themes were relevant to both male and female students. However, the African pride theme was more relevant to the male students than the female students.

The personal expression theme may be applicable to housing if middle-class African American homes and their furnishings reflect one's personality and individuality, unique qualities of self, and a time-consuming process that involves backstage experimentation (mixing and matching, moving and removing). Achieving the most effective front stage presentation in the home may be similar to African American dress
style as a socially and culturally constructed process. The status theme may be relevant for housing if middle-class African American homes and their furnishings are status symbols used for decorating to impress and to get people’s attention. The status theme may also be relevant for housing if middle-class African American homes and their furnishings are status symbols used for making the most powerful statement that the residents can make about themselves to others. The African pride theme may apply to housing if middle-class African American homes and their furnishings convey their interest in things related to or symbolic of their African heritage.

Theoretical Framework

This section presents theoretical frameworks for the initial conceptual ideas that shaped the researcher’s understanding of the data. This framework is supported by symbolic interaction theory which serves as the main, overarching theory for this study. The symbolic interaction theory framework is concentrated on three themes: (1) self, (2) meaning and symbols, and (3) setting and definition of the situation.

House and Home

Home ownership is a part of the American dream, but depending on one's socioeconomic status and geographic location, it can be just a dream or a dream come true. “The house is a physical unit that defines and delimits space for the members of a household. It provides shelter and protection for domestic activities” (Lawrence, 1987, p. 155). Houses come in different sizes, shapes, and are built from a variety of construction materials. Homeowners decide how to organize and decorate their home’s interior based on
their environmental needs. Needs focus (1) creating a context for regulating privacy and conducting interpersonal relationships; (2) symbolizing oneself in a personalized environment; and (3) drawing visual aesthetic stimulation from the home environment (Bonnes, Giuliani, Amoni, & Bernard, 1987). A house provides the context for a home which Lawrence (1987) describes as “a complex entity that defines and is defined by cultural, sociodemographic, psychological, political, and economic factors” (p. 155). The following section addresses these factors.

Home is more than a place. Its design, meanings, and interiors (based on their use) are connected to a range of dimensions—cultural, sociodemographic, and psychological. Home serves as a setting for developing and maintaining a variety of interpersonal relationships (Werner, 1987). Culturally, as well as socially, home reflects the values, norms, rituals, practices, and habits of its members. Environmental research proposes that the design and decoration of a home reflects cultural, social structural, and lifestyle differences among people. Individuals, cultural, and social groups display their identities in divergent ways through organizational space and decorative arrangements (Giuliani, 1987). The sociodemographic dimension of home reflects the gender, age, religious beliefs, household income and structure, employment status, domestic roles and routines, and social life of its inhabitants.

Psychologically, the home facilitates communication with oneself and among its residents and visitors (e.g., friends, relatives, or strangers) (Lawrence, 1987). Psychologically, the home conveys information about its members' self-esteem; personal identities, space, privacy, roles, and values; shared/communal domestic spaces, objects,
symbols, symbolism/meanings; goals and aspirations; personal preferences of house shape/style and construction; residential biography; and subjective life stages (Lawrence, 1987).

People assign a plethora of meanings to domestic spaces and objects (Lawrence, 1987). "Both spaces and objects can express private/personal and public/shared meanings and values, because the home is simultaneously a haven for withdrawal from society and a credential for esteem and the respect of others" (Lawrence, 1987, p. 163). In summary, these dimensions are not competitive, but are complementary with the goal of strengthening how we interpret the reciprocal relationship between homes (the most treasured place for lots of people) and houses (the built environment’s spatial units).

It appears that definite distinctions exist between what is a house and what is a home among some home environment researchers. According to Saegert (1985) the concept of home is more elusive than house because: “Not only is it a place, but it has psychological resonance and social meaning. It is part of the experience of dwelling—something we do, a way of weaving up a life in particular geographical spaces” (p. 287). Marcus (1995) views home from a psychological perspective, as how people feel the way they do about their dwelling. Marcus (1995) describes house as the physical environment encompassing the kitchen plan, room arrangement, and storage space. Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton (1981) describe "homes" in their study as unique physical structures which in North America are rather spacious, well constructed dwellings given the liberal amount of convenient and comfortable material objects in them. In comparison to homes in other parts of the world, those in the United States

The word “home” is rife with emotional meaning. The word evokes thoughts of an individual’s roots, childhood, and a safe place for personal expression and control (Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981). We create cultural environments in the physical environments we inhabit. Our physical environment is constructed of communication signs that give distinctive information about the persons who live there. In order to adapt to organize and symbolize our physical environment, we are continuously humanizing and personalizing it (Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981). According to Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton (1981), a home extends beyond the provision of shelter. It is a universe in which one designs a material environment that holds those things he/she regards as dear and salient. In this light, the home comes to be the strongest sign of the self who resides in it (Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981). To most people the home is a church in that it is the one place where they can develop and protect their ultimate goals from the impositions of the public world (Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981). Most people regard home as a fundamental symbolic environment where they can change their identity and develop their goals without the fear of ridicule (Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981).

It is a misperception that people commonly have special feelings about their home. In their home environment study, Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton (1981) found that only 45% of their participants could describe an emotional feeling or tone connected with their home. Most of the feelings were positive, including happiness and cheerfulness.
Adult male participants tended to share neutral positive responses. It appears that both male and female children begin childhood with warm emotions and feelings about home. Women retain this attachment through adulthood, but men tend to relax in their connection to home possibly because masculinity calls for men to act in a "rational" not emotional manner. Home is not usually an important performance arena for men. Instead, the workplace arena is possibly more important to them. Children in general describe home positively with emphasis on its physical and emotional security and a somewhat private kind of freedom (Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981). Children, more than adults, depend greatly on the home for its emotional atmosphere. For children, their bedrooms are the one place they feel most at home (Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981).

Playing out instrumental roles, men are tuned into the financial and manual energy they invest in home (Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981). The house symbolizes his self and accomplishments. His physical relationship with the home is his closest link to it. A study conducted by Joy, Hui, Chankon, and LaRoche (1987) on how Italian immigrants decorated their homes with memories of the cultural past revealed that the home was more of a material investment for the husbands and an emotional one for their wives.

Women, on the other hand, perform affective roles in relation to the home (Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981). They view the house as a positive setting where people can agreeably interact with one another. They appear less dependent on the home’s emotional state possibly due to focusing their psychic energy on transforming the dwelling’s interior into a home. In addition to feeling like they had more control over the
private sphere, they believed that the maintenance of established affective relationships within the home was within their domain (Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981). Regardless of the kind of attachment and investment people have in their homes, the family is symbolized by the home, and serves as the foundation upon which each member defines himself or herself. To them the home is family and it is highly sacred (Joy, Hui, Chankon, & LaRoche, 1987).

Symbolic Interaction Theory

As a school of thought, symbolic interaction theory is primarily based on the intellectual work of George Herbert Mead (1934) who was a social psychologist at the University of Chicago in the early 1900s. Herbert Blumer (1969), a student of Mead, is the person responsible for coining the phrase symbolic interaction. Blumer (1969) further developed the notion of interaction as a process whereby people share meanings and fit their lines of action together in a context using symbols.

Symbolic interaction theory is concerned with social processes associated with the construction and reconstruction of meanings in daily life (Kaiser, 1997). Symbolic interaction theory focuses on the interpretation of how people jointly create meanings and how these meanings are modified over time. The social context is key to interpreting these socially constructed meanings. Information is regarded as meaningful from both individual and collective viewpoints. An individual views information as meaningful if it is important or relevant to him or her, but others help to shape what is relevant to the individual.

Collectively, two or more people find information meaningful if they interpret the same information in like ways or if they work together to develop or negotiate an
understanding based on the same information. This process of mutual understanding is called negotiation. Charon (2001) describes negotiation as an idea or rule that emerges from the actions of actors with one another. Although each actor "does not get his or her own way exactly, but instead the input by each affects the net result to some extent. Ideas, rules, direction of the group, direction of the individuals—all are negotiated in interaction" (Charon, 2001, p. 178). Therefore, negotiation changes meanings and creates new meanings.

Self

Symbolic interaction theory views the self as a process in which we continually examine and modify our perceptions of self as a result of our interactions with others. "Goffman viewed the self as something cooperatively built up on each and every occasion of social interaction... For Goffman, then, a self is not something an individual owns but something others temporarily lend him or her” (Cahill, 2001, p. 192). Described as “a global sense of who one is” (Kaiser, 1997, p. 193), the self consists of the “I” and the “me” (Mead, 1934). Charon (1995) described the “I” as “the individual as subject” (p. 88) or “... the person as actor” (p. 88), and the “me” as “... the person as object” (p. 88) or “self as object” (p. 87). The “I” refers to the active and impulsive part of the self. The “me” refers to the restrained part of the self. The “me” helps control the “I” and acts as the self’s conscience (Solomon, 1983). The “me” is “the social self, the object that arises in interaction, and the one that the actor communicates toward, directs, judges, identifies, and analyzes in interaction with others” (Charon, 1995, p. 88). The self is comprised of one’s awareness of being, which includes “a tangible dimension (body and
appearance symbols), as well as a conceptual or perceptual dimension (how one defines and appraises the self)” (Kaiser, 1997, p. 95).

In this study I am concerned with how self, constructed in the home context through dynamic interactions with other family members, is reflected through cherished possessions. It is possible to envision the house as part of the tangible dimension and the meanings of the objects in the home as the perceptual dimension. The house, like the body and appearance symbols, serves as the shell, the framework, or the nucleus. And the objects in the house capture the personality of the home because of their meanings.

The appearance of an individual’s home conveys information about the self. According to Stone (1965) appearance conveys information about the self through one’s identities, values, moods, and attitudes. Stone (1965) found that appearance might display consensual goals which are associated with wealth, power, and prestige. Due to the fluid nature of the self, home and its domestic objects give meaning to the self by helping its residents understand who they are as time passes and their lives evolve. Kamptner (1991) explained that

possessions are thought to play a role in the development of a more individuated self during early life, whereas in later life they are thought to become an important means by which individuals maintain and cultivate their sense of self at different ages. (p. 210)

Belk (1988) contended that our possessions form an important part of sense of self and reflect our identities. He argues that clothing, housing, and automobiles represent a second skin and become a part of the backdrop of daily life. As a part of the material self (James, 1890), our clothing, housing, and automobiles inform others about our identities (who we
are) and values (what is important to us) (Kaiser, 1997). The self is comprised of a subset of identities.

Looking glass self

Charles Cooley (1902) described the looking glass self as one’s image or view of how other people imagine him or her. The looking glass self is based on the premise that an individual continually assesses the self to understand how he or she appears to other people. The looking glass self arises in small groups, which produce opportunities for intimate and permanent ties called primary groups. A family is an example of a primary group. LaRossa and Reitzes (1993) stated that “… it is in the family that an infant becomes aware of others and interested in gaining their approval and support for a positive self-conception” (p. 138). In primary groups, an individual becomes capable of identifying with other people, and broadens his or her self-interest from concern with “I” to “We” (LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993, p. 138). The feelings of primary group members are transferred into more abstract symbols and ideals, and their actual experiences into values and norms (LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993). An example of the looking glass self is a couple who may think that the husband will attract potential clients by conveying their wealth through the enormous size and prestigious location of their home. The couple believes that people probably assume that if the couple projects an image of success then people will want to conduct business with the husband.
Extended self

Our possessions are part of who we are, a part of our sense of self (Belk, 1988). Tuan (1980) contended that our possessions lend support to our tenuous sense of self. Possessions that people deem as important mirror the developing self at different ages (Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981). Our possessions represent and comprise who we are (Belk, 1988). The extended self includes external objects, personal possessions, persons, places, group possessions, body parts and vital organs, and things to which one feels an attachment. In addition, the extended self also includes possessions and objects viewed as both “me” or the self and “mine” (Belk, 1988, p. 140). Belk (1988) explained that “in claiming that something is ‘mine,’ we also come to believe that the object is ‘me’” (p. 141). Several researchers (James, 1890; Belk, 1988; McCracken, 1988) have posited that personal possessions become symbols of the self, and also may become difficult to distinguish from the self.

Identities

An identity is defined as “the organized set of characteristics an individual perceives as representing or defining the self in a given social situation” (Kaiser, 1997, p. 186). Described as self-in-context, identity is constructed and negotiated through social processes. People may have a given number of identities that are relevant to different contexts (Kaiser, 1997; Troiden, 1984). These multiple identities help convey “who one is” (Kaiser, 1997, p. 193) to others. In the home context, family members construct their identities based on their interactions and relationships with one another. The concept of identity explains how people perceive themselves across contexts (Kaiser, 1997). The
meanings of identities are constructed and revised as a result of being socially negotiated (Kaiser, 1997). It may be possible for a middle-class African American woman to feel comfortable displaying her interest in style through her home’s decoration and material objects, rather than her physical appearance at work, because of her occupational status and/or adherence to an Afrocentric beauty standard. It may be possible that as middle-class Black families achieve an identity of financial comfort, that they change their tastes in furniture from, for example, La-Z-Boy recliners to Ethan Allen leather wing back chairs that symbolize their affluence. Identity is comprised of a subset of roles.

Role

A role refers to a position that one occupies in society (Biddle & Thomas, 1966). One’s performance of a role is influenced by social norms, rules, demands, and his or her personality (Biddle & Thomas, 1966). A role is described as “what one does” (Kaiser, 1997, p. 193), and is considered “more of a ‘given’ in a social situation” (p. 194). In order to enact a role credulously, one has to look the part (Kaiser, 1997). A role is also defined as “a set of rules” or “a set of expectations—or a script—that tells the individual what to do” (Charon, 2001, p. 179). A role may or may not be included in an identity (Kaiser, 1997). Individuals form their roles to achieve their goals, and also create their roles through a continuous negotiation process in which roles are adjusted as needed depending on the feedback from others (Charon, 2001). However, as families change and age with time, their roles also change.
Family life cycle

According to Solomon (2002), the family life cycle concept addresses the needs of families and changes in their expenditures across time as roles change over time. "The family life cycle combines trends in income and family composition with the changes in demands placed upon this income" (Solomon, 2002, p. 359). Growing old in age causes changes in preferences and products needed; as families move through the stages of the family life cycle, as time evolves they will experience substantial shifts in their spending and expenses for food, relaxation and recreation, goods, and services (Solomon, 2002). Studying families from the family life cycle perspective "... assumes that pivotal events alter role relationships and trigger new stages of life that alter our priorities" (Solomon, 2002, p. 359). Such pivotal events include the last child leaving home or a spouse’s death (Gilly & Enis, 1982). Families move across the stages of the family life cycle as a result of four variables including age; marital status; whether children are present or absent in the home; and the ages of children, if any are present in the home (Solomon, 2002). Werner (1987) explained "... that residents at different stages of life ... engage in different activities and hold the home with different psychological significance" (p. 171). In a similar vein, Giuliani (1987) found that the activities and organization of people’s homes changed as people’s life stages and family situations changed. Models proposed to illustrate the family life cycle have failed to acknowledge important social trends such as marriages with out children, marriages with children who are born at a later point in time, households headed by single parents, and the continuously evolving role of women (Solomon, 2002).
Significant others

Significant others are defined as those people whom an individual wants to impress, gain the respect of, or gain acceptance from (Charon, 1995). Significant others include those people who become of importance to an individual, and also those people whom an individual identifies with or even fears (Charon, 1995). Kaiser (1997) explains that significant others may be context-dependent; for example, we may value some people’s opinions about our appearances more than others, whereas other significant others’ perspectives may be more valuable with respect to other areas of life (for example, parenting and career paths). (p. 163)

Meanings and Symbols

Symbolic interaction theory focuses on the process of interaction in which people share meanings and fit their lines of action together in a context (Blumer, 1969). People use symbols in order to fit their lines of action together. Symbols possess shared meanings for people. People use symbols to define or express their realities (Kaiser, 1997). According to Blumer (Morrione & Farberman, 1981), symbols help and enable people to express feelings and merge social experiences. Symbols provide cues to help people organize and guide their behavior. Social contexts provide symbols with their meanings. Symbols enhance our outlook on everyday life (Kaiser, 1997).

Consumer self-concept research has focused on a single brand or product as a representation of an individual’s total self-concept, whereas Belk (1988) has viewed an individual’s total self as represented by a group or collective of consumption objects. James (1890) and Prelinger (1959) contended that possessions comprise part of the self. Belk (1988) stated that part of self may include control over and by objects, meaning that
“we may impose our identities on possessions and possessions may impose their identities on us” (p. 141). Furby (1978) and Tuan (1984) have suggested that control is the determining factor in how people feel about their possessions. Research on favorite possessions studied by Rochberg-Halton (1984, 1986) and Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton (1981) concluded that as people grow older they increasingly identify their special possessions as those things that represent other people such as gifts other people have given them and photos of people. Furthermore, the boundaries of self widen with age, and special possessions play a helpful role in self-development. McCracken (1987a) suggested that special possessions might help ease transitions in life by serving an instrumental role in the maintenance of self-concept.

According to Fisher (1978), Mead identified symbols and gestures as two different levels of interaction or communication. Gestures are considered nonsymbols or nonsymbolic interaction. Symbols form the basis of symbolic interaction theory. This theory is based on the premise that people interpret their behavior and action in social interaction using symbols depending solely on the meanings of those symbols involved. Solomon (1983) contended that a symbol is also a stimulus that has a certain value and a meaning to be learned. It is this learned meaning that dictates how the person will respond to the stimulus. Davis (1982) described what Mead called a significant symbol as a symbol that brings out or triggers the same response in another person as it does in the self.

Objects in the Home and their Meaning

The home is shaped and crafted by its interior structure, inhabitants, and objects (Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981). The home fulfills an important
psychological function by holding those objects that shape one’s personality and express the values of the self (Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981). As a material shelter, the home shelters those objects and possessions that make life meaningful. People commonly have things in their home that serve as symbolic reminders of their past and culture as well. Joy, Hui, Chankon, and LaRoche (1987) found that the cultural past exists in the form of material objects and emotions (such as, in people’s hearts and minds). Objects found in the home help the inhabitants cherish and interpret the past in order to value the present. Material objects serve a variety of purposes. (1) They represent cherished memories of the past. (2) They offer visual pleasure and aesthetic stimulation. (3) They typically have a special history and story attached to them. (4) They stand not only for the cultural past, but also the future. (5) They depict the identity of their owner and the private world in which the owner resides.

The ultimate goal in people’s lives is not their material goods, but meaning. Material items serve a variety of purposes such as convenience and status. People want to be acknowledged (whether it is through their love, memories, or behavior) and know that what they do can make a difference for themselves and others (Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981). Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton (1981) found the following ten items as the most cherished in the home. Item one was furniture (that is, chairs, sofas, and tables) because it dresses the interior and gives it that feeling or thematic tone that makes it home. Item two was visual art because it is a reminder of relatives, friends, past events, and eases one’s mood. Item three was photographs. They represent and/or preserve memories, and, in some cases, are not easy to replace. Books are the fourth
item. They are reminders of the values, achievements, and goals one wants to develop, academic/intellectual success, and/or a cultural model for structuring one’s life. Item five, stereos, were identified as highly important to children and youths. Musical instruments, item six, were stated as a cherished home object since most people have a desire to master sound and develop creative expression and even to own an instrument to symbolize a lifestyle once had or expected. Television sets comprise item seven. They stand for both the destruction of the family and “the means of restoring human interconnectedness because it provides an instant sharing of information and emotions across continents and cultures” (Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981, p. 74). Sculpture, item eight, is a cherished object to more women than men. They are not interested in the aesthetic qualities of sculpture, but the way they symbolize family relationships and personal success. Plants, item nine, stand for the values associated with nurturance and caring. They demonstrate one’s ability to skillfully care for a living thing. Last, plates, item ten, include eating utensils and drinking ware which hold no particular meanings other than straightforward ones related to basic needs. In conclusion, the development of the self may involve transactions with a variety of objects affected by one’s gender, age, and location in the life cycle.

During the course of our lives, possessions fulfill different functions (Belk, 1988). In their study, Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton (1981) found that adults at the preretirement stage move from defining themselves based on what they do to, instead, what they have. Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton (1981) also found that grandparents in their study highly valued the possessions of photographs, athletic trophies, and mementos
for the people they symbolized, and in some cases, these objects were gifts from the people they represented. Furby (1978) found that adults in their forties and fifties, in comparison to other age categories, are the likeliest to own personal possessions as a result of status and social power. The favorite objects in the home selected by young couples tend to disclose their future plans and goals, and for older couples, their experiences together (Olson, 1981, 1985). Cameron (1977) found that once couples start having children, they start focusing less on themselves and more on their children. Overall in his research, Belk (1988) found that people are more inclined to highly treasure their possessions that elicit pleasant memories (such as newspaper clippings, trophies, keepsakes from former romances, and travel souvenirs).

Material culture continues to maintain an important role in the development of meaning (Joy & Dholakia, 1991). McCracken (1988) asserted that beyond their function and monetary value, consumer goods possess and express cultural meaning. The cultural meaning of consumer goods is always in transit from the time they are designed, produced, advertised, and consumed (McCracken, 1988). The cultural meaning of consumer goods is constantly in movement, usually "drawn from a culturally constituted world and transferred to the consumer good ... then drawn from the object and transferred to the individual consumer" (McCracken, 1988, p. 72-73). Housing interiors and exteriors in addition to clothing, food, adornment, and transportation "... all serve as media for the expression of the cultural meaning according to which our world has been constituted" (McCracken, 1988, p. 83). The movement of meaning from a consumer good to a consumer involves
symbolic action, which McCracken (1988) also calls ritual. Ritual represents the opportunity to produce, assign, modify, or manipulate cultural meaning.

In the context of North America, ritual functions as a way of transferring meaning from consumer goods to individual consumers in four ways identified as follows: exchange rituals, possession rituals, grooming rituals, and divestment rituals (McCracken, 1988). Exchange rituals involve the selection, acquisition, and presentation of consumer goods by one individual to another who is the recipient of the gift. Usually the gift-giver chooses a gift, say for Christmas or one's birthday, because the gift holds meaningful and symbolic properties that the gift-giver wants transferred to the gift-taker. Possession rituals give a consumer the opportunity "to lay claim and assume a kind of ownership of the meaning of his or her consumer goods" (McCracken, 1988, p. 85). Possession rituals allow individuals to move meaning (created by designers, producers, and advertisers) out of the goods into the life of the consumer turned owner to complement his or her personal meanings.

Grooming rituals involve the continuous process of transferring meaning from goods to the consumer due to the perishable nature of this meaning. The consumer uses grooming rituals to refresh some of the meaningful properties he or she extracts from goods and invests in himself or herself (McCracken, 1988). For example, at the beginning of each season, a consumer may change the slipcovers on his or her Rowe brand, white living room sofa and loveseat to protect them from dust. Divestment rituals refer to goods the consumer associates with on a personal level, but takes meaning away from those goods. This ritual is used for two reasons. The first purpose occurs when an individual buys a previously owned good. Therefore, the new owner has to erase the meaning connected to the previous
owner so that he or she can attach his or her own meaning to the good as a way of claiming
the good for himself or herself. The second purpose occurs when an individual is preparing
to get rid of a good as a result of selling or giving it away (McCracken, 1988). This
preparation process involves stripping or removing the current owner's meaning from the
good before handing the good to its new owner.

McCracken (1988) contended that meaning has ended its trip through the social
world when it finally enters the hands of the consumer. North American culture gives its
individuals a tremendous “freedom in the meaning they seek to draw from goods”
(McCracken, 1988, p. 88).

Setting/Definition of the Situation

The setting can provide different interpretations to the individuals involved based
on their roles in that setting. Goffman (1959) described the setting as a part of the front,
which is that part of an individual’s performance that helps define the situation at hand for
the audience watching the action. The setting, according to Goffman (1959), includes the
physical design, furniture, and decorative objects that serve as the backdrop for the actions
of the performers. He described the stage as a metaphor for the setting that is divided into
the front stage and backstage. In North American society, the home is a private context. It
must be noted that rooms shift in their purpose from backstage to front stage depending on
factors such as the time of day and who is home. As a result, backstage and front stage are
fluid, fuzzy boundaries of the home. In the setting of home nowadays, the living
room/family room/kitchen serves as the front stage where guests are brought to be
entertained. The bedrooms function as the backstage where the family performs its daily
life. Werner (1987) indicated that the home serves as an important setting for family members to develop and maintain interpersonal relationships. "The setting in which events unfold and the objects that are used are as significant to the events as are the people and their relationships" (Werner, 1987, p. 176).

The home and its objects help set the definition of the situation. Definition of the situation is based on the premise that humans define the world in which they act by constructing their own reality. Their realities are their definitions of situations. Other people, including their acts and words, commonly influence definitions of the situation "but in the end, each individual must define the situation through engaging in mind activity" (Charon, 1985, p. 139). Individuals define the situation for their own action as well as each situation for others. People individually act in a world that they create by interacting with others and also themselves. A negotiation process takes place for the actors to define who they are and what situations are as a result of their interactions and redefinitions (Charon, 1985). Other peoples' acts and words are considered symbols to which we apply meaning to understand what they are trying and not trying to communicate. Individuals change or adjust the physical environment to present self a specific way to define the situation for others (Charon, 1985).

Research Questions

Several research questions were explored to ascertain an understanding of the sense of self African American families convey through their homes and its objects/furnishings. (1) How are the sociodemographic variables of age, gender, religion, and household structure related to the meanings of home and its objects?
(2) What effect does the environment of each home have on the interpersonal relationship of each family?

(3) Is the aesthetic choice of decoration style and home furnishings/objects selected by each family related to their level of consistency in social class and social mobility?

(4) How does each family consider their home and its things an extension of themselves?

(5) How does each family exhibit emotional ties to their home?

(6) How does the home and its things represent or convey who each family is as a collective unit?

(7) What kinds of home textiles and textiles-related things is each family fond of or particular about?
CHAPTER THREE: METHOD

This study addressed the meanings that middle-class African American married couples assigned to their homes and household objects. Following the constructivist, interpretive paradigm, the study was conducted according to an emergent design. A case study approach was used to identify and explore the dense meanings of home and its objects. Data were collected from nine married couples in the form of long interviews that were audiotaped, videotapes, and photographs of their homes and objects within them. The data were interpreted using a grounded theory method that allowed the researcher to also delve into new issues as the participants introduced them.

Research Approach

Qualitative research is typically used to study people’s lives, behaviors, and experiences in interactional relationships, organizational work settings, and social movements (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The qualitative researcher must be able to critically analyze and gather valid, reliable data that can be organized and re-organized with a keen sense of abstraction (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Denzin and Lincoln (1998) contended that: “The constructivist paradigm assumes a relativist ontology (there are multiple realities), a subjectivist epistemology (knower and subject create understandings), and a naturalistic (in the natural world) set of methodological procedures” (p. 27). The viewpoints and opinions of the study participants represent each participant’s reality. The participants’ total, collective viewpoints represent multiple realities. Each participant can only approach the study topic from his or her personal experience. Each participant shared his or her reality...
in the course of an interview dialogue with the researcher. The researcher and each participant discussed, negotiated, and achieved a shared, common understanding of the experiences in the natural world context of the study participants’ homes. The procedure of each home-based interview included a conversation of exchanging pleasantries, explaining the study purpose and participant’s rights, signing the participant permissions forms, answering the questions outlined in the interview protocol, and a videotaped home tour. According to Denzin & Lincoln (1998) “qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (p. 3). Qualitative researchers rely on multiple methodologies, instead of a singular one, to sufficiently explore the phenomena under investigation, using an interpretive approach or approaches. The present study employed case study and grounded theory approaches to understand the meanings of home and its objects in the lives of middle-class African American married couples. The case study combined with a grounded theory approach enabled the researcher to ask “how” or “why” questions (Yin, 1994, p. 1). In addition, the grounded theory approach helped the researcher develop or discover a rich interpretation that emanated from the data (Creswell, 1998).

Case Study

A case refers to a bounded system or object of study such as an event, a program, a process, or individuals (Stake, 1995). A case study is “an exploration of a ‘bounded system’ or a case (or multiple cases) over time through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information rich in context” (Creswell, 1998, p. 61). The case study is an original way of expanding existing knowledge of individual, social,
organizational, and political phenomena (Yin, 1994). Case studies are beneficial for comprehending intricate social phenomena (Yin, 1994), such as the significance of the home and its objects to couples.

According to Yin (1994), explanatory case studies are suitable for conducting social science research based on the following three conditions: (1) When how or why questions are being posed—the primary intention of this study was to learn how or why African American families conveyed a sense of self in their homes; (2) when the researcher has little control over events—only the couples' families could participate in constructing meanings of their homes since the researcher was not a member of any of the families interviewed; (3) when the emphasis is on a contemporary rather than historical phenomenon. Evidence, including direct observation and systematic interviewing, make case studies ideal for investigating contemporary events in which relevant behavior manipulation is not possible (Yin, 1994). The researcher was kindly granted access into the private domains and home lives of the nine families whom she interviewed. The researcher could not exercise any control over the participants' behaviors, as she was a guest invited into their homes as a result of their interest in aiding the project and their fit into the sample.

Stake (1995) recognized three different types of case studies: Intrinsic, instrumental, and collective. An intrinsic case study examines unique or original topics that lack previous intensive examination (Stake, 1995). An instrumental case study uses the case to illustrate an issue or issues (Stake, 1995). A collective case study studies several cases instead of a singular case (Stake, 1995).
Purposeful sampling was applied to the selection of the case study used and the sampling of information within the case (Creswell, 1998). Creswell (1998) indicated that a single study could use a combination of case study types or, in other words, various kinds of case studies. This researcher conducted a collective, intrinsic, multi-site case study. A collective case study was used to achieve a broader understanding of the meanings of things middle-class couples have in their homes. Studying only a single couple would have provided a very narrow focus of the phenomena under investigation. An exploratory case study was used to understand what home and its objects mean to these middle-class couples. An intrinsic case study was used since this research is an original topic no one else has studied from this perspective, according to the literature search performed by this researcher. A multi-site case study was used since the researcher visited the homes of nine couples as opposed to one couple, for the purpose of interviewing them and touring their homes.

Data were collected using multiple sources of information such as long interviews accompanied by direct observations, audio-visual materials including audiotapes of each interview, videotapes of the homes, and photographs of the physical artifacts. The data were analyzed using a holistic analysis approach of the entire case which provided a detailed description of the emerging case, an analysis of issues or themes, and the researcher’s interpretation of the case (Stake, 1995). Creswell (1998) explained that the researcher gives an account of the study through a chronology of major events succeeded by an in-depth overview about a few incidents. If multiple cases are used, first a within-case analysis takes place and then a cross-case analysis (Creswell, 1998). The within-case
analysis includes an in-depth description of each case and the themes within each case (Creswell, 1998). The cross-case analysis includes a summary of the themes across the cases (Creswell, 1998). After the cross-case analysis, the researcher presents from the case what Lincoln and Guba (1985) called the "lessons learned."

Grounded Theory

Grounded theory is one of the five types of qualitative research including ethnography, the phenomenological approach, life histories, and conversational analysis. Grounded theory is both a theory of method and a method approach. A grounded theory is defined as theory that is inductively created from the phenomenon being studied (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The goal of grounded theory research is to produce theory which Travers (2001) described as "a set of interrelated categories that describe or explain some phenomenon" (p. 42). Creswell (1998) described theory as "an abstract analytical schema of a phenomenon that relates to a particular situation" (p. 56). A grounded theory is applicable to a phenomenon if it fits the reality of the phenomenon being studied (that is, is derived from the data), is comprehensible to the participants, is applicable to a number of related contexts, and lends control for interactions with the phenomenon (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

Grounded theory as a method approach was developed by sociologists Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The grounded theory approach is described as "a qualitative research method that uses a systematic set of procedures to develop an inductively derived grounded theory about a phenomenon" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 24). Grounded theory methodology is also described as "a
general methodology for developing theory that is grounded in data systematically gathered and analyzed” (Strauss & Corbin, 1994, p. 273). Theory unfolds while the research is being conducted and continues to expand through the analysis and data collection phase (Strauss & Corbin, 1994). As a scientific method, when the techniques and procedures of grounded theory analyses are conducted diligently and systematically, it is possible for the researcher “to develop a substantive theory that meets the criteria for doing ‘good’ science: Significance, theory-observation compatibility, generalizability, reproducibility, precision, rigor, and verification” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 31). In addition, creativity plays a significant role in the grounded theory method. Creativity pushes the researcher to think beyond static assumptions and access them from a new perspective with fresh insight (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Creativity gives the researcher the potential to identify and name categories and make connections among these categories that result in discovery. Therefore, creativity is a fundamental component in advancing an effective theory. In addition, existing theories can be applied, but not tested, to determine if they are helpful in understanding the data. Denzin and Lincoln (1998) refer to this strategy as triangulation of theory in which the researcher uses multiple theories to interpret the data at hand.

Participants

Nine middle-class African American married couples were selected through purposive and snowball sampling techniques. The couples resided in the surrounding Central Iowa areas of Des Moines, West Des Moines, Urbandale, Ankeny, and Ames. Des Moines is the largest metropolitan area in Iowa, and is also one of the most ethnically diverse areas in Iowa, which made it a beneficial location for identifying a more realistic
variety (or a somewhat heterogeneous mixture) of middle-class African American families. The sample was comprised of married couples in which both spouses were over seventeen years of age, both spouses were African American, both spouses were United States citizens, one or both of the spouses owned the home they lived in, and the spouses had a combined annual income within the range of $40,000 and $100,000.

The husbands ranged in age from 44 to 57 years of age. The wives ranged in age from 47 to 54 years of age. The couples’ marriages ranged in length from 14 to 33 years. All of the couples have children who ranged in age from 2 to 27 years of age. Seven of the nine couples had some or all of their children living in their home, and the remaining two couples’ adult children no longer lived with them. All nine husbands held high school diplomas. Eight husbands possessed undergraduate degrees, three husbands possessed Master’s degrees, and two husbands had earned doctorates. All nine wives held high school diplomas. Five wives possessed undergraduate degrees, and two wives had earned Master’s degrees. Six wives were employed outside of the home with the exception of three wives who were retired. The greater majority of the sample worked outside of the home with the exception of three wives and one husband who were retired. The husbands’ occupational careers ranged from employment in law and marketing to carpentry. The wives’ occupational careers ranged from employment in banking and corporate buying to telecommunications.

Procedure

Nine married couples, or 18 participants in total, participated in long interviews to grasp an understanding of how the spouses and significant others constructed, managed,
and modified their home’s identity, including what its objects symbolized and/or meant to
the couples. To document footage of each home’s architectural and interior decoration
styles and those possessions identified as meaningful, seven of the nine interviews and
home tours were videotaped. Photographs were also taken of some possessions the couples
singled out and discussed with the researcher about their significance. The researcher
reviewed the videotapes and photographs when necessary to help interpret and understand
the data.

Three informants assisted the researcher in locating couples for in-depth, long
interviews. The first family of participants was contacted with the help of a woman (whom
I call Informant #1) I met and befriended at the Des Moines Art Center during its Black
Film Festival during the summer of 2002. Informant #1 happened to be a native of
Des Moines who eagerly agreed to assist me by speaking with several couples after I
explained my need for families for this study. Informant #2 was a central Iowa resident and
long-time friend of Informant #1 whom she recruited to help her locate families in order to
increase the pool of African American families the researcher could possibly interview, as
some of the families she recommended did not meet the needs of the sample when the
researcher screened them. It is important to note that the main reason she sought his help
was that many of the couples she recommended to the researcher did not fit the sample due
to the spouses combined annual incomes exceeding the $100,000 upper limit of the salary
range defined to capture middle-class households. Informant #3 was a friend of the
researcher who had a neighbor from her birthplace living in central Iowa. Informant #3 put
the researcher in contact with her former neighbor whom she thought could assist the
researcher in identifying more couples. The couples the informants recommended and whom the researcher actually interviewed also suggested the names of other couples who might possibly fit the sample. The researcher did contact those couples to inquire about their interest, fit, and availability to participate in the study. Therefore, a snowball sampling technique and purposive sampling method were used to recruit study participants. All potential participants were sent an introductory letter to their homes which included a description of the study and the interview process, indication that potential participants would receive a videotape of their home to use for insurance purposes as a thank you gift for their assistance, and notification that the researcher would be contacting them to learn of their interest in the study.

About a week after the letters were mailed, the researcher called potential couples for the first time, usually speaking with the wives. The researcher introduced herself, acknowledged the informant or couple who recommended the prospective couple, and their receipt of the introductory letter. If the wives could engage in a conversation at that given moment, the researcher re-introduced the project, and reinforced the fact that there were no physical risks or threats involved. The researcher also explained that couples identities would remain completely anonymous and confidential, that they had the right to skip questions they did not wish to answer or that made them feel uncomfortable, and that they could withdraw from the interview or the study at anytime if they so desired. However, the researcher asked the wives if they would be comfortable with her videotaping the tour of their home and taking photographs of some of their significant objects. The researcher also explained to the wives that the videotape of their homes could possibly be subpoenaed by a
court of law in the unusual instance of a court case involving the family (but unrelated to this study). Wives who expressed an interest in participating in the study were next asked the screening questions to determine if they and their husbands fit the needs of the study. Those wives who fit the study either scheduled an appointment for their interview during that phone call, or the researcher called back a few days later to set the appointment after the wife had checked her husband’s schedule. The interviews were held at a time most convenient for the couples in their homes.

It is important to note that the introductory letters (and informed consent forms) indicated that the spouses would be interviewed separately. However, when the researcher began the first interview, the couple explained that they did everything together as a family and that group structure also applied to the interview as well. They watched and cared for their children, who sat in the family room with us, during the course of the interview. Interviewing the spouses together rather than individually was a better strategy that allowed the spouses to converse not only with the researcher, but most importantly, with one another. Together, the spouses were able to share, compare, and contrast their views, while making discoveries about one another, their homes, and the things they are fond of in their homes.

The interviews had three parts including signing the informed consent forms, participating in the in-depth, long interview, and, if allowed by the couple, the videotaping and photographing segments. The interviews were carried out following a standard procedure. Each interview started with the researcher distributing and reviewing the informed consent form with the couples. The spouses signed separate informed consent
forms as documented proof of their permission to participate in the study, which usually
took a maximum of ten minutes. The researcher collected the signed and dated informed
consent forms from the couple. For record keeping purposes, the researcher left a blank
informed consent form with each couple also, just in case they needed to contact her. The
researcher requested and answered any last minute questions or concerns the participants
had, if any.

Before starting the interview, the researcher asked the couple for their permission to
audiotape the interview, and then later videotape the tour of their home and photograph
some of the salient things. All of the participants gave the researcher permission to
audiotape their interview. All of the couples gave the researcher permission to videotape
and photograph their home and its objects except for one couple due to the burglary of their
neighbor's home. The interview protocol consisted of questions regarding the couples'
background/demographic information, housing history, current home description,
decorating roles, procedures for disposing of unwanted things, and those domestic objects
(including home textile objects) they were fond of or particular about. (See interview
protocol in Appendix A). The interviews were also transcribed verbatim for data analysis
purposes.

The Iowa State University Committee on the Use of Human Subjects in Research
reviewed and approved these procedures, the informed consent document, and the
interview protocol. (See Appendix D for approval and application form). The duration of
the interview ranged from a minimum of 60 minutes to a maximum of three hours. The
majority of the interviews were 2 hours and 15 minutes in length. The interviews were conducted during the months of late July, early August, and the middle of November 2003.

During the seventh interview, the researcher concluded that the participants were discussing similar issues and themes. The ninth interview confirmed that the participants' responses were repetitious. The interviews were transcribed verbatim by the researcher and analyzed using the grounded theory approach and constant comparative process (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

To help the researcher conceal the participants' identities, numeric codes ranging from 1 to 9 were randomly drawn and given to each couple. In addition, each husband was identified by the term “husband” followed by his particular couple number, for example Husband #1. In the same manner, each wife was identified by the term “wife” followed by her particular couple number, for example Wife #1. These identifiers are used in this document for referencing the participants as couples or spouses. The next section addresses the data analysis process.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed according to a grounded theory approach for the purpose of building theory that is grounded in the reality of the participants and is a close approximation of that reality (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). This researcher tapped into the lives of 18 participants to understand the meanings they assigned to the dynamic, complex, evolving worlds they inhabit. The researcher coded the data to achieve this endeavor. Coding is described as the process of breaking data down for the purpose of conceptualizing the data and the packaging or assembling of the data in new ways
(Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The coding process represents the primary way theories are constructed or created from data.

The coding process is comprised of the two analytic procedures of making comparisons and asking questions, which explains why grounded theory is also known as the constant comparative process (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). These two procedures enabled the researcher to conceptualize and categorize the data through open coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Using these two procedures, the coding process was implemented in steps.

Step one involved labeling the phenomena by taking the actual nine interview transcripts and breaking down and conceptualizing the data into concepts which “are the basic unit of analysis in the grounded theory method” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 63). Concepts are defined as “conceptual labels placed on discrete happenings, events, and other instances of phenomena” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 61). The data were conceptualized by comparing each discrete incident or theme with one another. Similar incidents or themes were given the same name (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). This conceptualizing process of identifying and labeling concepts occurred on the right hand side of the actual pages of the nine interview transcripts. The researcher managed to keep track of the growing list of conceptual labels using paper and pencil, which made it easier to modify these labels as necessary.

In step two, using the list, similar concepts (i.e., the conceptual labels) that appeared related to the same phenomena were grouped together, also known as categorizing (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). In step three the categories were named. Since the categories have the “conceptual power” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 65) to unite and consolidate many
concepts, the phenomena these categories stand for are given a more abstract conceptual name than the concepts themselves. In step four, a coding guide was created from the list of categories.

In step five, the coding guide was used to conduct the process of open coding the data. (The coding guide is included in Appendix C.) Strauss & Corbin (1990) defined open coding as “the process of breaking down, examining, comparing, conceptualizing, and categorizing data” (p. 61). The process of open coding was conducted to break the data apart and put it back together by grouping like concepts into categories with specific properties and dimensions (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The researcher conducted the open coding process by reviewing the interview transcripts in search of other concepts and explanations. The categories of the coding guide were modified and condensed on a higher level of abstraction until they reflected as many themes presented in the data as possible in a concise way.

Trustworthiness

Researchers rely on trustworthiness to convince others that their findings are correct, worthwhile and of importance. In qualitative research, trustworthiness is established through credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The researcher tried to achieve transferability by thickly describing the phenomena being studied in order for other people to arrive at a similar conclusion. Lincoln and Guba (1985) explained that the researcher “can only set out working hypotheses together with a description of the time and context in which they were found to hold” (p. 316). Therefore, the researcher suggests that these findings may be
transferable to other similar contexts as the researcher has tried "to provide the data base that makes transferability judgments possible on the part of potential appliers" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 316).

The researcher conducted an audit or check for trustworthiness. This process involved having another coder (i.e., a fellow graduate student) review the research transcripts, notes and coding system to insure that the researcher (1) was not biased and (2) had a clear understanding and focus on her participants' realities. In order to check the accuracy of the researcher's interpretations of the categories and concepts during the open coding process, the researcher's advisor assisted in developing the coding guide with the task of labeling and narrowing concepts into similar categories and finding relationships between, and meanings of, the categories. To establish trustworthiness by achieving dependability and confirmability, the researcher sought the assistance of a coder who played an integral role in the coding process. The coder determined that dependability had been achieved after she assessed the researcher's implementation of the coding guide to the interview narratives by examining four interview narratives randomly selected from the nine narratives that represented 44% of the data. Holsti's (1969) formula (i.e., % agreement equals # of agreements divided by # of agreements plus # of disagreements) was used to calculate the reliability or agreement which was 89.01%. The researcher and coder discussed and found common ground regarding their differences in applying the coding guide. The coder also confirmed that the findings and interpretations were supported by the data. Disagreements identified by the coder were discussed with the researcher when necessary, processed and changed. There were 38 disagreements that resulted in
modifications of coding, with the exception of two disagreements that were not relevant or salient.

The researcher continued the coding process in search of new categories and meanings at a higher level of analysis by utilizing the axial and selective coding process (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). In axial coding the data were broken down and assembled in a new fashion to connect subcategories to their categories, using what Strauss and Corbin (1990) referred to as the "paradigm model" (p. 99), while continuously finding and focusing on similarities and differences between and within the categories. The selective coding process helped the researcher recognize and suggest connections between major categories and their properties and dimensions (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). In both axial and selective coding, the researcher continued thinking both inductively and deductively in order to verify deductions against the data by comparing incidents with one another. The researcher also looked at the data for indications or examples that would prove or disprove the suggested relationships between the major categories. A variety of relevant theories, identified before data analysis, were searched for applicability in the data analysis phase. Symbolic interaction theory and several of its theoretical concepts were also examined by the researcher for their ability to support the developing storyline that emerged from the data coding processes.

The Researcher

The researcher is an African American, Catholic female in her 30's who was born and raised in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. The researcher, who is the fifth born child among her four sisters and one brother, was raised in a middle-class family by her mother and
father who both valued education and family not only as concepts, but most important in practice. The researcher, who attended private elementary, junior high, and high school, grew up in the backdrop of a historically Black university setting where she eventually pursued her bachelor's degree in Home Economics with emphasis in clothing and textiles. Prior to and during college, she worked in her parents' campus-located, fast food restaurant as a waitress and cashier where she developed customer service skills and learned how to communicate both formally and informally with a diverse range of people from university professors and staff personnel to African American male and female college students from across the state of Louisiana and the nation. The researcher was introduced to the possibility of one day working or teaching in a university setting, particularly Southern University and Agricultural & Mechanical College, by several of her parents' friends who taught at Southern. An older group of these friends (which included Dr. Comradge Henton, a psychology professor; his wife, Mrs. Ruby Henton, an Extension home economist; and the Henton's close friend, Mrs. Camille Shade, a university librarian) visited our rural countryside home frequently for Sunday dinner. My siblings and I were further instructed by our parents during these visits in how to interact with, communicate with, and host such distinguished, educated African American high-achieving role models who nurtured and encouraged our educational and personal growth.

In college, the researcher explored first-hand the reality of being a graduate student in textiles and clothing at the University of California at Davis and Cornell University through participating in their undergraduate summer research programs designed to attract minority students to pursue doctorates and become university professors. The summer
research experience at Davis introduced the researcher to qualitative research in the social psychological area of textiles and clothing while the Cornell experience exposed the researcher to quantitative research in the polymer science area of textiles and clothing. Feeling very connected to the social psychological area with its cultural and sociological slants, the researcher pursued a master’s degree in textiles and clothing at Davis.

A major lesson I learned while growing up was that African American people had a sense of obligation to help one another due to our history of racial oppression and discrimination in American society. The researcher’s Catholic family and upbringing increased her awareness of having compassion for, and being of service or assistance to especially other African Americans and people in general. With this unwritten, cultural rule of indebtedness in mind, the researcher knew that it would not be impossible to convince African American couples she had never met before, but who fit her sample, to invite her into their homes for an interview. The researcher knew the issue of gaining access to her sample and their homes could not be very difficult because African Americans are ordinarily committed to supporting educational endeavors, mainly higher education. Telling prospective informants that I was working on my Ph.D. was the selling point that opened the doors of a few homes. On the grounds of race and community, I stood on common ground with my participants; however, on the grounds of biology and regional differences, we stood on somewhat less familiar ground since I was not an actual member of the participants’ families.

In addition, the researcher developed excellent interviewing skills during the summer experience at Davis where she personally recruited and interviewed primarily
White adolescents, none of whom she knew beforehand. The researcher enhanced her interviewing skills during her Master’s degree when she personally recruited and interviewed forty-two African American undergraduate students (that is, twenty-one males and females), none of whom she knew beforehand. The prior, positive interviewing experiences convinced the researcher that getting African American married couples (that is, two people at one time) to open up and share would be a new challenge she would overcome and a new interviewing skill she did gain in the end. Getting the participants to talk was effortless possibly because they viewed me as an adult like them, and they knew that I was not married and lacked firsthand knowledge of the actual marriage experience. At times during some of the interviews, the researcher felt like she was sitting in a course titled “Marriage for Beginners 101.” Some of the couples spoke as if they were instructing the researcher about marriage and family, and what it meant to be married and have a family for which to care and provide in the real world. The researcher discovered that she was not only fulfilling the dissertation research portion of her degree by conducting these interviews, but it was also a wonderful opportunity to actually learn about marriage and family from some long-lasting couples, as well as couples who live in both a city context and a White, Midwestern environment. The researcher concluded that for these African American couples to sustain marital and familial love in such an environment is a remarkable experience to have witnessed and lesson to have learned.

The researcher’s interactions with the participants were easy, comfortable, and familiar since I am African American like my participants and had been in the homes of other middle-class African American couples numerous times in the South. However,
although I scheduled the interview appointments with eight of the wives and one of the husbands, I was shocked and puzzled about why all of the husbands, with the exception of one wife whose husband was simply a quiet man, were the spokesperson of the couples. I figured that the wives would do the talking for the couples—not the husbands—since the home is traditionally defined as the wife's domain. But in African American culture, middle-class families tend to fit the egalitarian family model in which husbands and "fathers often assume customary female roles" while on the other hand, wives and "mothers often perform many traditional roles of fathers" (Hill, 1999, p. 107).

Denzin and Lincoln (1998) expressed that contemporary qualitative research "can no longer be viewed from within a neutral, or objective, positivist perspective" (p. 22). Hudson and Ozanne (1988) contend that since there is a plethora of ways of seeking knowledge about consumers, researchers must choose the processes that help them to acquire knowledge. The researcher employed an interpretive research approach to obtain knowledge about how middle-class, African American, married couples convey a sense of self in their homes through everyday household objects. Qualitative research has begun to acknowledge the issues of class, race, gender, and ethnicity as worthwhile considerations in the conduction of research (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). In adherence to the assumptions of the interpretive tradition, the researcher also believes that continuously changing multiple worlds and realities exist that are socially constructed and viewed holistically (Hudson & Ozanne, 1988). Multiple realities are assigned meanings by perceivers according to the context in which these realities are found (Hudson & Ozanne, 1988).
The researcher is also an African American who knows through lived experience and from being a member of the same racial and cultural group as the participants she studied, that multiple realities instead of a single reality also exist in African American culture. This point illustrates and supports the researcher's decision to study the nine couples in the natural contexts of their homes. Although the researcher is African American like her participants, she does not hold their reality as married couples who are Iowa homeowners. In contrast to her participants, the researcher's reality is that of a single, graduate student of middle-class socioeconomic status who rented a room in a university dormitory during the period of data collection. Regarding the nature of social beings, the researcher also agrees with the interpretivist view that people create and participate with one another in an active manner to form their environment (Hudson & Ozanne, 1988). This study is concerned with how the spouses of these middle-class African American married couples jointly created meanings of home and its objects over the course of their marriages through continuous interaction.

In reference to the axiological assumption, the researcher subscribes to the belief that understanding behavior, instead of predicting behavior, is the fundamental goal of interpretive research (Rubinstein, 1981). The researcher continuously makes interpretations of the phenomena under study due to understanding (also known as Verstehen) being a continuous, ceaseless process whereby "what was interpreted enters into current interpretations, just as the current interpretation will influence future interpretations" (Hudson & Ozanne, 1988, p. 510). The term Verstehen was coined by Max Weber (1930). Verstehen is an active process through which the researcher strives to
embrace the shared meanings within a culture (Wax, 1967). By performing the interviews at the informants’ homes, the researcher was able to actively participate in the culture of her informants thereby receiving an insider’s view to see the world from the participants’ perspectives, and, most importantly, acknowledge the shared meanings. Hudson and Ozanne (1988) stated that researchers typically perform studies about their own culture in which a high degree of *Verstehen* is already present. Therefore, in order to gain *Verstehen* the researcher tried to displace her awareness of shared meanings in the research questions, as well as whenever participants appeared to assume or showed signs or indications that, by virtue of the fact that the researcher was obviously African American, she knew what they were talking about automatically.

In adherence to the epistemological assumptions of the interpretive tradition, the researcher also subscribes to conducting this study in a specific place and time (i.e., Central Iowa and July/August/November 2003, respectively) to capture the meanings and motives behind their views bound by both time and context resulting in thick description. Regarding the view of causality, the researcher supports the interpretivist view that simultaneous shaping occurs among entities from viewing the world holistically. The research relationship became a cooperative inquiry constructed by the interaction between the researcher and nine couples who aided in creating the research process. The researcher easily became a member of the social reality primarily because she was the same race as her participants, and shared a cultural bond with them despite their regional differences; she is from the Southern part of the United States and they are originally from the Midwest or East Coast.
CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter includes a presentation of the findings of this study and a discussion of these findings. The first part of this chapter includes background demographic information, housing history, and descriptions of home. The second, and largest, part of this chapter encompasses the discussion of the categories and overarching categories that emerged from the grounded theory analysis.

Background Demographic

The couples have been married a minimum of 14 years to a maximum of 33 years. With four of the nine couples interviewed, either one or both of the mates were from Iowa. All nine couples have children who ranged in age from two years to twenty-seven years. For most of the couples, their children were either in their teens or twenties. Seven of the nine couples still had some or all of their offspring, as well as one couple their grandchild, living with them. The other two of the nine couples had raised their children and were in the empty nest stage of their lives at the time of the study.

The husbands interviewed ranged in age from 44 years to 57 years. One husband was skilled in a vocational trade, and eight husbands possessed baccalaureate degrees. Two husbands held professional degrees (one, a Juris Doctorate and the other a Doctor of Veterinary Medicine), three held Master’s degrees, and two had also earned several credits towards Master’s degrees. The husbands’ occupational careers were in the areas of law, sales, marketing, finance, real estate, insurance, veterinary medicine, and carpentry. These eight husbands represent the one-quarter of African Americans who are employed in the
highest occupational category as "professionals, managers, administrators, accountants, computer programmers and sales representatives" (Willie & Reddick, 2003, p. 21). Only one husband was retired, but was still active in other personal, goal-oriented projects. The only husband who was skilled in a trade is a part of the two-fifths of African Americans employed in the middle occupational category comprised of workers such as trades persons, clerical workers, and support staff.

The wives interviewed ranged in age from 47 to 54 years. Two wives had earned technical training beyond their high school diplomas. Two wives had completed three years of college education. Among the five wives who had obtained college degrees, two of them held Master's degrees. The wives' occupations spanned the areas of banking, insurance, corporate buying, state programming, the public school system, and telecommunications. Three wives were retired. The majority of the wives' occupations were in the highest occupational category of professional and managerial workers comprised of one-quarter of employed African Americans. The remaining minority of the wives' occupations was in the middle occupational category comprised of two-fifths of the African American workforce. Overall, the majority of the study participants were employed in the professional/managerial occupational categories. Among the nine middle-class couples, only one couple was a lower middle-class family. This couple had previously been lower class and had worked their way to the middle-class socioeconomic level. Among the remaining eight middle-class couples, three couples were upper middle-class families, and five couples were middle middle-class families.
In terms of education, the majority of the sample (that is, eight husbands and five wives) are a part of the 19.5% of African American adults in the highest educational level with college degrees. The remainder of the sample (that is, one husband and four wives) is a part of the 67.5% of African American adults in the middle educational level, with high school diplomas but no college degrees. Therefore, in the context of this study, these participants achieved their middle-class socioeconomic status primarily through higher education, then income and occupation. This supports Willie and Reddick’s (2003), Pattillo-McCoy’s (1999), and Coleman and Rainwater’s (1978) view that people’s socioeconomic status is determined by the combined factors of education, occupation, and income.

Regarding the socioeconomic status indicator of income, the couples’ annual combined salaries fell within the range of $40,000 to $100,000. The researcher intentionally did not ask the couples to disclose their salaries because that kind of information is usually very private to people in general. However, during the sample screening process when the researcher initially spoke with the couples via telephone to determine if they fit the sample the researcher asked each couple if their combined annual salaries were within the range of $40,000 to $100,000. Their salaries were in line with the 2000 U.S. Census (Willie & Reddick, 2003) reporting that 27% of the African American population is in the two highest income brackets (that is, 14%—compared to 42% Whites—earning $75,000 or more annually). Therefore, this study supports Willie and Reddick’s (2003) conclusion that education does help Black people, especially in the employment interests of college-degreed Black people.
Housing History

This category focuses on the other types of homes the couples previously lived in and the circumstances that led them to their current homes. This category includes references to the home as an investment strategy and statements that the couples did or did not feel that their current home was their final home. The couples had been living in their homes from two and one-half to fourteen years. They purchased their current homes for a simple common reason: A nicer location and additional space. They needed larger, more spacious homes with ample closet space and three car garages. However, some of the couples bought their homes for other varied reasons. One wife was retired and needed a project. Therefore, she and her husband decided they would build their dream home, the perfect project for the wife. They found their dream home in an architect’s blueprints for a home he had designed, but never built. The wife suggested several modifications for an open floor plan.

Another couple bought their home after deciding they would be living in Iowa for a while. After living in their newly constructed home for a few years, one couple found their current home directly across the way on the lake side of the street. They sold their home and relocated across the street. Once they started having a family, one couple desired a well-developed, established neighborhood with the safety and privacy offered by a cul-de-sac.

All of the couples had lived in several dwellings (i.e., apartments, duplexes, or rental houses) during the course of their marriages prior to moving into their current homes. Two couples had previously lived in one to two dwellings. Five couples had lived in three
to five former dwellings. The remaining two couples had lived in seven to ten other
dwellings. Eight of the nine couples started their marriages living in apartments, duplexes,
or townhouses with the exception of the ninth couple who had already purchased a home
that they moved into immediately following their wedding. Regarding the actual
experience of home ownership, six of the nine families were familiar with this experience
because they had already owned a home at some point in their marriages prior to buying
and settling into their current homes. Although the other three couples had not owned
homes before their current homes, they had resided in single-family rental homes.

One couple stated emphatically that their current home was their final home because
it felt like home:

... I am never moving again. Because when we moved in here, we didn’t have all of
this. We’ve accumulated this in seven years... You know we’ve accumulated a lot
of stuff... All the houses have been stepping stones. And I feel like this is the home
that we were intended to grow old in. And our kids could grow up in. And that’s
what we wanted... The only way I’m moving from here is if I win the lottery and I
can afford to have somebody move me. That’s it! And actually if that’s the case,
this can stay here. Somebody can move in and I’ll buy all new stuff. I’ll take what
I want, but everything else can stay. I’m not ... I don’t have a desire to move. You
know, this is home. (Wife #7)

Six of the nine couples revealed that their current residences were not their final homes for
a number of reasons. According to one couple their current home is always for sale for the
right price, although they are content living in their home which is not on the market at this
point. Two couples will relocate to warmer climates after their children leave home and the
husbands enter retirement. One couple planned to relocate home to their birthplaces on the
East Coast to join relatives, after their son graduated from high school in a few months.
One couple was still hoping for their dream home, and the sixth couple had plans for a smaller home once they emptied their nest.

Description of Home

This category is about the typical design components and features employed in the homes such as the kinds of architectural and interior decoration styles, and the desire on the part of some couples to customize the original design of their homes to reflect their personality and tastes. Four of the nine couples lived in two-story homes they described as traditional, typical (or local), conventional, or modified Cape Cod in exterior architectural style. The remaining five couples lived in one-story or one-and-a-half story homes they described as split-foyer or ranch in architectural style. Ten rooms on average comprised the homes. Common features in the homes included three to four bedrooms, two-and-a-half to three-and-a-half bathrooms, family or great room, formal living room, formal dining room, kitchen, laundry room, basement, office area/exercise area, and a two-car garage.

The interior decoration styles of these houses ran the gamut. One common interior decoration style was not employed in the couples’ homes other than a do-what-you-want aesthetic approach. Seven of the nine couples thought of different names for the interior decorative style of their homes, which include “ethnic,” “formal modern/contemporary,” “comfortable yet elegant and formal,” “biblical/scriptural” (i.e., based on Bible scriptures), “traditional,” “traditional African American,” “archival (i.e., similar to an archive) and angelical (i.e., adorned with collectible angels).” The remaining two couples both thought of the name “eclectic.”
For four couples, it was very important that the design of their current homes, which they built themselves or had a hand in building, be customized to their style and taste. In the following quotes, one of the couples explained some of the customizing process they experienced with their townhome.

On this house, we actually took the basic floor plan that the builder was offering. But we customized the house. There's no other house on this street that's like this house. None. (Husband #9)

We customized the interior space. You can't do anything for the outside. (Wife #9)

You can't do anything on the outside. But on the inside, we customized this space. (Wife and Husband #9)

And I'll give you a couple of [examples] for instance. One, there is no house with a curved stairway in this whole [townhouse] development. There's no house with a hallway that large. The hallway in our house is three-fourths of our living room... When we went to talk to the architect about changing the model, which was the first thing that we talked about was changing ... that's very significant in terms of this house. The first thing we talked about was let's do the entry-way different so when you walked in the house, you had something different. There are many different things in this house than in any other house in this area. (Husband #9)

All four couples simply wanted to do something different, as they were building their new homes themselves. Three of these four couples were upper middle-class. They customized their homes by modifying the design of their homes to make them open and airy structures and by taking their time to find the perfect pieces of furniture and decorative objects they needed. It can take years to select the right furnishings, for a myriad of reasons. In the following quote, a wife explains why it took her the entire nine years they have been living in their home to find her new mocha colored leather sofa.

I couldn't find what I wanted. That's why it took... My dining room set took me almost ten [years]. I looked for a dining room set before we moved into a house that had a dining room. And I found it and had dining room furniture, but nothing in the living room. Because I didn't find anything that I liked. So, this took me a
long time because, number one, I have to be able to sit on it and have my feet touch the floor. I'm a short person. It's not because there wasn't anything nice out there. It just didn't fit me. It has to fit me because if I'm going to sit on it. (Wife #6)

Emergent Categories

Several themes emerged from the data. These themes are addressed at length in the remainder of this chapter.

Open family life

This category included statements that the home has a free, open, inviting feeling that culminates into a psychologically comfortable and accessible environment for the entire family, including relatives and guests, and that the home and its furnishings are meant to be lived-in and used instead of preserved with any off-limits spaces. This category also includes any references to making the house into a home. The participants described home as an accommodating, children-friendly environment that invoked an inviting, relaxing, comfortable feeling in its residents, in addition to their visiting relatives and guests. Five couples indicated that two fundamental components of home were the family unit itself and the presence of God.

Home is where your heart is. And if there's love and joy in there. And always remembering where your blessings come from ... because basically from where we came from, we started off with basically nothing. (Wife #5)

A house is material things. The children [cannot be replaced. The house] it's something that can be replaced. You can get another one, you can be living great and lose it tomorrow, you know. It's still nothing. I think that again the things are intangible that make it a home. (Husband #5)

Families turned their houses into homes through their social activities, holiday gatherings, achievements, and memories. For all family members to feel at peace and comfortable
confirms the transformation of houses into homes in addition to the love, care, and respect the family members have for one another. God was attributed a role in helping families transform their houses into homes through the families having faith in God, putting God first in their homes, and being mindful of their blessings from God. A husband explained that home is embedded in the feelings you carry within yourself regardless of the house or dwelling in which you live.

Peace ... that you can have peace in your home. They say the house ... if I could move tomorrow to another one, I wouldn’t feel a loss. No part of me is lost if I can have the same peace and comfort... Everything is not rosy all the time, but you can get back to the peace gradually when there’s turmoil. So, the home ... rest, comfort, peace. That’s me. (Husband #1)

Four couples, whose children lived with them, shared that their entire homes were open and accessible to the entire family for the sake of everyone’s pure enjoyment. These families equally shared their houses with all of its members because, as one wife said, “It belongs to all of us.” Among these four couples, those with adolescent children allowed them to freely use the living room for sitting and/or reading. Referring to their living room, one wife (who has adolescent children) said,

They are not allowed to eat in here, but they can come in here. We try to keep this area as nice and you know... The kids can go ... this is their home. We want them to feel comfortable in any room in the house. They just can’t eat in here. This is the only room they can’t eat in, you know. (Wife #7)

One couple explained why they did not practice the same material preservation strategies as their parent’s generation in order to have a livable home.

You don’t see plastic around the house. When we were coming up, sometimes you’d go in the house and they’d have plastic over ... (Husband #5)

Over the furniture... (Wife #5)
It's just that when you do that, you're putting too much emphasis on material things. And so, I mean, the house is supposed to be lived in. (Husband #5)

And so like if I'm paying for it, then I should enjoy it and that my family enjoys it. And I guess that's how I see it. (Wife #5)

These families believed that homes are comfortable places where the furnishings are usable, touchable, and unbreakable to the extent that the family members and guests do not have to worry about being uptight or having to tip-toe out of fear that they will break anything, especially anything valuable.

Well, we live in it. We don't ... I mean, it ain't like it's as neat as a pin. We live in it. (Husband #4)

Yeah, it's livable. It's well lived in. (Wife #4)

And that's what we enjoy about this house. (Husband #4)

... That's what a house is for ... live in. You can't be stepping on eggshells in here... (Wife #4)

Couples tried to create homes with a comfortable feeling where they, their children, and guests can reap the pleasurable benefits of their dwelling. One couple summarized this issue in the following quote.

Well, I just want people to be ... feel ... a feeling of warmth ... a feeling of love you know. Unpretentious. Unstuffy. I don't like going to a house where you feel that you can't sit in a certain place. You got to watch everything you touch or something like that. A relaxed feeling. (Wife #1)

Uh ... child friendly. The kids can feel free to, you know, explore. (Husband #1)

To a certain point. (Wife #1)

Yeah. To explore and feel free to move around and you know objects and some of the paintings reflect children in different moods and modes and you know, just kind of reflect that. Uh ... the welcoming of children into the home. (Husband #1)
Personal spaces within the home

This category focuses on identification of space in the home for the spouses, their children and/or family itself for purposes such as relaxation, entertainment, and/or rest. In the homes of seven couples whose children lived with them, family members often had areas in the home they designated as their very own personal space. The wives’ spaces were usually for pleasure, relaxation, and entertainment (such as a television room which was formerly a guest bedroom, the living room where one wife liked to sit in her favorite chair, a sewing room located in the basement), or functional work (such as an office area or an actual home office). The husbands all used a particular place for different activities: Their basements. They head to their basements for relaxation and entertainment (such as watching television, passing time on the computer), recreation with male friends (such as playing pool, putting golf balls, watching television), or functional work (such as a home office, a workshop, or tool shop). Children’s spaces were solely for rest (such as their bedrooms) or entertainment (such as their yard, or the basement where they spent time in their toy room or, for one family who was musically talented, their recording studio). On the other hand, two of these families explained that they also had spaces where they spent time together such as their family room, kitchen, backyard, or the music-recording studio. Regardless of how and where they invested their time at home, the important issue was being together in comfort.

Homes and objects reflecting family relations

This category focuses on how the family members express and convey who they are and their relations with others through the objects in their home. This category includes the
couples' views on the importance of open communication and a sound education for their children in addition to any references to family unity. It was important to some of the couples to create a home environment that conveyed who they are as a family. These environments were designed to convey that these couples perceived their families as comfortable, warm and loving, and proud of their ethnic heritage. For example, a Baptist couple, who valued modesty and comfort, explained how their home reflected these values:

Well, what we try to do is provide a living area that shows comfort. And the fact that we ...like my husband says ... He’s a plain man and we’re just common people that have grown up from working hard and getting their education and ... we don’t put on any airs or anything. We just want to make sure that when people come here that they’re comfortable. That’s the way we try to present not only ourselves, but our home life, too. (Wife #3)

Another couple’s home informs their guests and the community at large, that they are successful people who are down-to-earth:

As a professional person, you try to project the image because you want people to work with you ... do business with you. So I think it hopefully projects our success. (Husband #4)

We’re just down to earth people. That’s all. (Wife #4)

For us to get in this house... (Husband #4)

The one thing that comes out loud and clear in these environmental expressions of family through the home is that these families have withstood the test of time thus far, and remained a family, together, intact over all the years they have existed as a collective unit. Essentially, they are survivors! Their tangible houses, intangible homes, and the things in them are living testaments to their survival over the course of their marriages. Their homes are not expensive showplaces, but instead places (dream homes for some couples) that
illustrate their evolution along the family life cycle from newlyweds to experienced parents, from new employees to vested employees or retirees.

The home and its objects represent or reflect three kinds of relationships: (1) the marital relationship of the couple; (2) parent/child relationships; and (3) other relationships the couple has with other people. The following quotes illustrate the marital relationship of one couple as expressed through their hutch, which symbolizes their togetherness and growth.

... I think this is the first major purchase that we bought right after we got married together. This is our hutch with our china and ... things that we feel are important to us... We put things in there that we feel ... like you said are mementos. And important things you know... Our first trip when we went to Las Vegas. There are some dice in there. It doesn’t mean anything to anybody else, but to us, it’s very important. (Wife #7)

The following quotes illustrate the parent/child relationship of a couple and their children as expressed through two sculptures which symbolize the unity, as well as the open communication, they share as a family.

... you see the hands, the sculpture ... we got that shortly after we were married. And we also have another sculpture in the living room that has hands that are intertwined. And I look at that as you know Willard and I have been together for a long time. And it’s the togetherness that I see as our family. You know, we do everything together. Nothing is done by me, you know, on a major scale that I don’t talk to him about. We talk to the children, you know, to a degree, you know. So, we do everything together and I think that’s what keeps our relationship so unique and new. (Wife #7)

And also, the communication. We talk a lot. We talk to the kids as adults. Since we talk to them, the response is that way, too. (Husband #7)

The following quote illustrates the other relationships of a couple with other people as expressed through a plant which symbolizes the husband’s mother and is also cared for by the wife’s family.
It’s funny. It’s not a plant that Philip takes care of or I take care of. We both take care of it. He says, “Baby, you forgot to water the plant.” I say, “Philip, you water your momma’s plant.” It’s kind of like that. It’s kind of like everything in the house is. It’s not mine or it’s not his. It’s ours to do. And it’s our job, I guess, to take care of it. And even my family member’s help take care of it. They come in and water it. My sisters or my mom will come and she’ll look at the plant and say, “You need to do this and that...” (Wife #5)

Like home, a pervasive message underlying these three relationships is that not only are the couples still together, but they have actual objects in their homes that they are both fond of, and these objects have withstood the years of their marriages. A sense of togetherness has been established over the years that the couples have maintained partnerships. Their objects symbolize that togetherness. Why do homes and objects they are fond of appear to represent togetherness in marital and parent/child relationships? Possibly because the marital partners had to work together, and eventually with their children, to jointly construct the meanings of their homes and its objects.

Three couples, with children living at home, brought up the topic of family unity. They described family unity as doing things together; preserving the memories and history they share; maintaining a Christian home; and treasuring the concept and application of family.

Two of these three couples made several comments about the importance of keeping the lines of communication open across the family unit and serving as role models to their children. In their homes, one of the couples has created a learning environment in which the children are encouraged to ask them questions. To carry out their belief that children are heard as well as seen, unlike when they were children who were only seen, this couple often talks to their children as adults. The second couple had created a home environment
they called a “safe haven” for the dual purpose of keeping out conflicts and other negativities they encounter outside of their home, and to keep a comfortable atmosphere in the home when anyone of them gets upset. In the lives of these two families, open family communication is a process of continual dialogue to insure that these children, as one of these mothers said, “... will be able to stay in the boundaries that society sets” and lead middle-class lifestyles as adults just like their parents.

Education is one of the tools parents can employ to try and insure the future socioeconomic status of their children when they become adults. Two couples introduced and discussed the importance of their children earning a solid education starting at the elementary level as a way of developing, what one of the wives called, “the foundation.” One of the husbands, who achieved middle-class status through blue-collar employment, explained with urgency the importance of higher education for African Americans today. He wants his adult children, their offspring, and the African American community at large, to realize the fact that they can capitalize financially from using their brains instead of their physical strength and carry a briefcase in order to earn a living.

Decorating the home

This category focuses on how each spouse participated in decorating the home or contributed to its condition and appearance, such as deciding who was in charge of decorating all or some of the home, making decisions about decor, and shopping for decor. This category also includes references to the couples’ children decorating efforts in the home. In western society, married couples often place aesthetic concerns about the home in the wives’ hands. Typically, the home’s interior is solely the wife’s domain, and the
exterior, the husband’s. For these African American couples, decorating the home’s interior was a concern for both husbands and wives. Another scholar has discovered egalitarian sharing and concern of the home in African American, middle-class, married couples. Research by Harris (1997) on married, middle-class Black and White participants found that Black families are possibly more egalitarian in traditional gender-related purchase decisions. Black families equally incorporate the views of both husbands and wives in purchase decisions of major appliances and automobiles, which traditionally are made solely by husbands. In six of the nine couples, rather than the wives making decisions regarding the home’s interior by themselves, their husbands lent some assistance in helping them make these decisions. Overall, both mates confidently participated in searching for decor since they knew each other’s taste, and in some cases, share similar tastes. Although they tended to shop separately (possibly as a result of their schedules or simply being out alone on errands or casual outings), they made sure the other mate viewed the prospective purchase items before they made their final decision together. For example, three of the six couples explained the roles each partner took in decorating their homes. For one couple, the husband selected the plain, simple, functional furniture they wanted while his wife selected the colors of their decor. For another couple, the husband’s involvement was relegated to his personal space. He primarily decorated his computer area located in the basement while his wife decorated the remainder of their home. For the last couple, the husband selected all of the artwork while his wife applied her decorative ideas to their home. Although husbands did participate in decorating their homes, the amount of
assistance they gave appeared to vary due to their level of interest and/or knowledge in this area.

Among the remaining three couples, one couple did not find this topic of great relevance to them, whereas the other two couples did. They revealed that only the wives decorated their homes without any input from the husbands. The message was clear that the home was under the wife’s domain. These two wives did not appear to mind their husband’s lack of interest and participation due to the fact that one of the wives considered both the house and home her project. The other wife pictured herself as a historian, a keeper of stuff instead of a decorator. She happily exclaimed, “I’m just storing stuff.”

Interestingly, two wives shared that they made major purchases by themselves when their husbands were out of town on business. These two wives bought furniture that the couples needed without their husbands’ input, possibly to avoid undergoing their joint decision-making process or simply to surprise their husbands. However, the husbands made major purchases without their wives as well. Two husbands explained that they bought artwork for their homes while traveling out of town on business. In the four scenarios, the spouses did not appear to be offended by the solo purchases since they had agreed to eventually make such purchases.

In middle-class Black families both husbands and wives are likely to share the role of interior decorator to create the look and atmosphere of home they desire. Traditionally, the interior decorator role is associated with the wife since this is considered a part of her gender domain in the home. But in African American culture, participation and interest in
appearance style is a gender bond shared by women and men (Hall, 1992). Thus, this gender bond is also apparent in decorating the home.

Disposal

This category focuses on descriptions of how the couples get rid of things they no longer need or want or can use by passing them on to specific people they know or donating them to charity. Performing exchange rituals is of great importance to these couples. They commonly practice giving certain things they no longer want or need to specific people they know will appreciate, and use, these items. Most of all, the recipients usually need, or could use, these things. According to several couples, they downsize their possessions when they no longer use certain things, do not have the room to store things, or simply get in the mood. They dispose of their old things, such as women’s and children’s clothing, furniture, utensils, knick-knacks, appliances, and vehicles which still have some life in them, by passing them on to organizations or particular people they know who can make good use of these previously owned items. They donate their used things to charities such as Goodwill, Salvation Army, and the Disabled Veterans, and other people such as particular families with children at their churches, relatives and friends with growing children, or a young couple “starting out” a little apartment. Why is it important to these couples to share their unwanted things instead of placing them on their curbs for the trash collectors? A possible reason is for practicing one’s religious, Christian beliefs of sharing and giving to others. One couple shed light on this perspective very clearly as follows.

We gave a queen sized bed away. (Wife #7)
Yeah, he was starting out. He was ... just graduated from college. He didn’t have no money. Just give it to him. I’m a firm believer that if you do that, it’ll come back to you. (Husband #7)

Tenfold. (Wife #7)

You know we don’t get caught up in all that are you better [than us]? We just pass it on. Especially if it’s good. We’re not gonna give nobody nothing that’s no good. But, it it’s got some more life to it, we pass it on. (Husband #7)

In performing exchange rituals, these couples are not really ending their emotional attachment to their unwanted things because they hold onto these things until the opportunity to get rid of them presents itself, as the wife of one couple explained:

We had the encyclopedias. We brought them all the way back ... all the way here and we worked with a youth organization in the Quad Cities. And we’re like, why did we bring these encyclopedias? So, I trucked them all the way back to the Quad Cities and gave it to them. You know just different things like that. But, it was a spur of the moment thing when we decided to move. And we just didn’t want to make that decision... I didn’t ... at the time. So, we just brought it. (Wife #3)

Some of these couples are possibly incapable of relinquishing their concern for their old things until they find a new home for them as a result of the common African American historical experience of poverty, of coming from pretty much nothing and struggling to get something, of being cognizant of sharing with family and friends when somebody got something even close to substantial.

When we moved, everything from our other houses came over here with us because we had a lot of space in here. So pretty much everything came. (Wife #6)

It appears that one of the benefits of owning a house is the ample amount of space it offers to store things from junk to memorabilia in a basement and/or storage room. One couple explained that they are still holding onto pretty much everything they own, to the husband’s dismay, but will start passing things on eventually.
One reason the basement is where it is is that it’s full of junk. We don’t throw away anything. The old broke couch ... it goes in the basement. (Husband #3)

It’s not really junk. (Wife #3)

Kids’ stuff from school ... it goes in the basement. Plus a couple of their friends’ stuff ... (Husband #3)

We have a lot of ... it’s called memorabilia. It packs very nicely away. But eventually, we know we’re gonna have to ... the next move, it’ll probably be gone. But, it’s ... in terms of throwing things away ... it was very difficult because we collected so much stuff. (Wife #3)

Only for her ... We could back a truck up to the wall right now and clean the basement out. We wouldn’t miss it. It’s been packed for five years and twenty years before that, a lot of it was packed. So, she’s a pack rat. She keeps everything. (Husband #3)

Yes, I am. (Wife #3)

We got a lot of stuff. (Husband #3)

Yes, we do. We have a whole living area downstairs. (Wife #3)

Similar to this husband, only one other husband called his wife a “pack rat.” He also identified her as the reason why they did not get rid of anything they own:

How do you get rid of things here in your home that you no longer want? (Interviewer)

We don’t. (Laughter) (Husband #4)

Oh, why not? (Interviewer)

She’s a pack rat. (Husband #4)

There is ... along with love in every room, there’s clutter in every room. So ... (Laughter) (Wife #4)

She can’t throw anything away. (Husband #4)

... But I’ve been getting rid of it, though ... It’s a process. (Wife #4)
So, why are you not a pack rat? (Interviewer)

... Cause I know if you haven’t used something in six months ... just throw it away. I get rid of a lot of stuff. (Husband #4)

Possibly as a result of having climbed their way out of the lower-class socioeconomic group, only one couple revealed that they keep everything, and do not give any of their possessions to charity nor particular individuals. The following quotes capture the couple’s differing, yet sentimental views on this topic.

I usually ... I keep all little things. But, like pieces of furniture, typewriters ... you know ... I put out. (Wife #8)

I don’t mind getting rid of stuff, but once stuff gets to be fifteen years old ... no. I don’t throw nothing away once it gets to be ten or fifteen years old. Then, it’s too late. Then, it’s part of the family. It’s part of the story. You know, it might take me back ... ten, fifteen years. (Husband #8)

To fulfill a rite of passage is another level of passing things on, but within individual families. Two couples discussed that they have particular things, which happen to be textiles and clothing objects they are fond of and would like to hand down to some of their children. The wife of a couple hopes that she can pass down her wedding gown to her daughter whom she hopes will wear it for her own wedding. In the other couple, both spouses hoped that the first of their four sons to have children would pass down the two handmade baby blankets to his children. La Branche (1973), a consumer behavior scholar, has suggested that people retain their possessions out of the fear of annihilating their current histories. In other words, material possessions that form parts of our extended selves also seem to form a base or anchor for identities that somewhat convince us that our identities will not wash away (Belk, 1988). These couples possibly decide to get rid of
their excess things as a way of adjusting their views of themselves and their entire personal history (La Branche, 1973).

De-emphasizing status, emphasizing practicality

This category focuses on preferences for practicality such as through comfortable, functional homes and furnishings, and includes references to some of the couples’ monetary standing or prestige in the community. Two of the nine couples revealed that they are practical people with practical things. One of the couples described their practicality in terms of how they are not like impractical people. This couple explained that they are not elegant people. Therefore, they do not have elegant or classic home furnishings, and they do not have the money for those kinds of things either. They are not cultured; nor does their home reflect that culturally sophisticated inhabitants dwell there. Instead, they have a comfortable home which they enjoy as a family, and also their children’s friends enjoy.

I’m educated, but as far as the stereotypical cultured individual ... I’m not. And so I think that reflects the furniture that we live in... I just get that stereotypical viewpoint of what a cultured individual would have in his home, and that’s not me, so ... it’s not here. (Husband #5)

I think he said it right when he said that it’s practical ... it’s uh ... livable. But it’s comfortable so that my kids’ friends can come in and they do. (Wife #5)

And they do. All the time. (Husband #5)

They have lots of friends and they all enjoy coming [over]. And I guess I want a home ... a place that would invite them. I guess I don’t think that I would want it so elegant and so sterile that they couldn’t enjoy themselves. They come and they get on the floor. They play their games or whatever, and that’s what I enjoy. That’s what I want. It’s very family oriented. (Wife #5)
A major point that comes out of this couple’s disdain for exhibiting status is that it gets in the way of their family’s comfort. To this couple, being “cultured” and having the markers of status is a difficult thing to do while trying to meet the financial needs of their children.

We’re not some of these people that are so regimented ... you know, we’ve got to have Louis Vuitton. We’re not that at all. We’re just a comfortable home that we can enjoy. (Wife #5)

We’re not into buying a lot of art, uh, or expensive pieces. We may once the boys get out. (Husband #5)

Laughter! (Wife #5, Husband #5, and Interviewer)

Well, we will do everything when they’re gone. (Wife #5)

There’s nothing in here that you can break that would cause me to go into bankruptcy. Cause we just don’t put that much money in furniture ... into items. You know, if it looks nice, but if you break it, it’s not going to cost me an arm and a leg to replace it. (Husband #5)

We can go back and get it. (Wife #5)

Earlier in the interview while discussing the roles each mate played in decorating their home, the husband (who works in the real estate field to complement his primary career) hinted that he was somewhat attracted to the idea of conveying his family’s status through their home to the community in a few years when they can afford such things. This couple’s perception of their future selves supports research by Amaturo, Costagliola, and Ragone (1987) who found “... that the choice of a style of decor seems not to be mainly dependent upon income, but to be more related to the degree of status consistency and social mobility of the individuals” (p. 228). This couple explained that they remind their children to keep in perspective that their house and home are blessings from God and they
must worship Him for that, but their house does not define them as a family. Rather, their home defines them as the family they are for the reason that, as the husband stated, "... your value comes from within."

Speaking of values, the husband of the other couple explained that he does not place much value on his house, and houses in general, other than it is a necessary place to live where he, of course, wants to be comfortable. He did not show himself through or put much interest in material things. Therefore, he had a hard time saying that their house represented him. He explained that he could just walk away from their house as long as he had another one. On the other hand, his wife described him as "the plain man," and them as common, educated, hard-working people who do not put on airs. She said they only want to make sure that people are comfortable when they visit their home since that is the way they try to present not only themselves, but their home life, too.

In these two couples, both of the wives were concerned with their family's comfort, whereas the two husbands were concerned about their families keeping their values in perspective regarding the replaceability of their homes and their irreplaceability of their families. Although their focuses differed by gender, they all viewed their families as practical and de-emphasizing status.

Status is commonly thought of in terms of money and economics. Only one couple talked specifically about money. In reference to how much they spent for a painting in their art collection, the husband of this couple said,

We've always had a lot of art in our house. But it wasn't the same quality of art. In other words, it didn't cost as much money. This cost a lot. This cost money. The cheapest one in here is probably a thousand dollars... (Husband #9)
For the majority of these couples (that is, six), status expression in the home is possibly not a major factor in their lives because the home is not a portable environment like the body. However, the homes of the three more status-conscious couples reflected and supported themes of African American dress style defined by Hall (1992). The interior decoration styles of their homes, which two of these three couples described as “eclectic,” and the other as “biblical/scriptural,” are quite striking and impressive, especially to guests. Two of the three couples entertain quite often. These three couples reinforce McCracken’s (1987b) finding that the attribute of status is sought after the most by more socially mobile higher classes. It is noteworthy to point out that these three couples are the upper middle-class of the nine middle-class families studied.

Accomplishments

This category focuses on how the couples express achievements and successes through the things in their homes. Three of the nine couples talked about things in their homes that represent a sense of accomplishment and success. These objects fall into one of two categories: (1) symbols of achievement, or (2) successfully completed craft projects. Items identified as symbols of achievement include one wife’s service plaque and another’s wedding gown. For giving twenty years of service to her employer a wife showed me the honors plaque she received. As I admired the plaque and her occupational dedication, she told me she could soon retire with thirty years of service, but did not know if she would since she was determined to buy her dream house in an exclusive area of Des Moines. The plaque appeared to be a marker of where she had been and where she is going: From her house on the hill to her dream house.
The home and the things it holds can symbolize the adherence to tradition and proper protocol or etiquette. For one wife, her wedding gown represents not only a change in her marital status, but also a change in her residence.

The wedding dress for me ... was a real big ... you know, that was a big stepping stone that I was going from my home into the home with another person that I planned to spend the rest of my life with. And I got to wear the white wedding dress and felt proud of it. And ... knowing there was no baggage. There was not all of this other stuff. And we had a beautiful wedding. (Wife #7)

The wedding gown represents her once in a lifetime opportunity of being able to follow tradition by getting married first, in a white gown, and then having children with her husband. She explained that her wedding gown reflected her childhood dream of growing up and one day having a big wedding and wearing a white gown. Her dream actually came true without having “to put the cart before the horse” she said. Getting married the proper, traditional way without having children before marriage was an expectation from her mother, as well as herself, which she was actually able to fulfill.

Items identified as successfully completed craft projects include artwork such as a hand-drawn, hand-carved wooden owl and a dinette set made by one of the husbands. The owl and dinette set represent artistic challenges for the husband who made both objects to test his artistic skills in drawing and furniture-making. He thought he possessed the capability to make both items and proved to himself that he actually did. Embedded in the owl are the drawing skills he did not know he possessed. Although he never finished the owl project, it is complete in the regard that it exhibits his drawing skills. Residing in the dinette set, which he did finish, are the high-quality, manufacture-level, furniture-making skills he did not know he possessed. He explained the significance of the dinette set:
Well, I started it about a year ago, but I got so busy. I finished it up maybe about six months ago, didn't I? It took me about ... I probably could have made it in a week, three days ... it's sweet and I made it. 'Cause it came out looking like it came out of the store like I wanted it ... like it was supposed to do. And I made it.
(Husband #8)

Mastering these two challenges presented by these objects, he learned more about himself, his abilities, and gained a wealth of personal satisfaction from the work of his hands.

Utilitarian

This section focuses on those objects and homes identified as useful and functional. Three of the nine couples talked about the usefulness of some of the things in their homes. Their take on this topic produced three revelations. (1) Some of the objects they are fond of were designed to provide a functional purpose. For example, one of the wives explained that she has wicker and willow baskets especially in the family room to hold things that she would normally place on a coffee table. Since she has a bad habit of piling things up, she decided to get rid of her coffee table and use baskets instead to keep her books and papers organized and presentable, yet close at hand. For her, baskets truly serve the purpose of storage and display as they were meant to regarding present day applications of interior decoration. (2) For years they have owned some of the objects they are fond of and these objects are still working. For example, one couple has a chess table which the wife bought for her husband during their dating days in order to make him happy. Although the chess table originally represented the husband's passion for chess when he was a single man, he explained that he would bring the table to the family room to rekindle and share that passion with his sons who now play chess. (3) All three couples have a preference for functional home decor. They like, and actually own, decor that is durable, replaceable,
plain, and simple for the purposes of handling wear and tear, and easily blending in with their other furnishings.

Uniqueness

This category focuses on homes and objects described as unique and/or original, such as the colors and construction techniques used in artwork. Only one of the nine couples revealed a preference for unique kinds of things, different things. Uniqueness or novelty is a stimulus property that affects aesthetic response (Fiore, Kimle, & Moreno, 1996, p. 99). The couple expressed their preferences through their home decor, especially their collection of artwork, according to the husband who said: “One of the things that we probably are very proud of is our artwork ... 'cause we do have a lot of money invested in art.” They referred to the entertainment area of their basement as the art gallery. Its pristine yet inviting atmosphere could certainly rival that of any museum. Actually, their entire home was of museum quality in its meticulous organization and sparse, uncluttered displays. Between the mates, the husband appeared to be the main catalyst behind their art collection, as he invested a significant portion of his free time, especially Saturdays during the wintertime, browsing art stores. During the latter part of the interview when the wife began to finish answering a question her husband was pondering she said, “He is good. I mean he is really ... he can tell you stories about everything...” which probably explained why he was responding to my questions more than she did.

The couple selects art that is somehow different, but is not necessarily by African Americans. Regarding the artwork they buy, they explained that the race of the artists is not a factor in the kind of art they like; however, the uniqueness of an art piece is the
primary factor that determines whether or not they like it. During vacations and trips they look for those special pieces to complement their home art gallery.

... my wife and I were on a ... we went to visit our son in Panama, and we saw this vase. And we brought that back from Panama. I mean, there's things like that when we go and see something unique. (Husband #9)

So, what made you bring that home? What jumped out at you? (Interviewer)

The colors. The technique that was used ... (Husband #9)

Just different. (Wife #9)

The technique that was used in making this. You know ... (Husband #9)

And it was ... sort of, you know, to the region. I mean, you know, it was Panamanian... But you know it was a mixture of the folks in Panama. And then ... just uh, it picked up the colors, then. (Wife #9)

It matched. Just jumped out at you. It said, "Buy me!" (Husband #9)

It was just, uh, almost as if you had it made. (Wife #9)

It said, "Buy me!" (Husband #9)

The word "made," mentioned by the wife above, is key to the manner in which this couple displays their tastes. To complement the decor in their home, they had a few pieces of art custom-made expressly for their home. For example, they had a factory in Italy, which is known for making beautiful glasswork, custom make two black blown glass pieces of a man's and woman's head according to their design specifications after seeing similar ones elsewhere. According to the husband, although the two pieces are not unique, they are unique due to his design changes and the way he envisioned the pieces fitting into his home.

I can't say that they're unique because the cast ... the molds are not unique. But what's unique about ... they [put] it on a base for me and the body here was put on
The technique(s) that artists use to create their works of art appear(s) to be the second factor that determines whether or not they are attracted to it. As appreciators of novel art for their “eclectic” home, this couple’s artistic tastes were influenced by the creative processes (Fiore, Kimle, & Moreno, 1996) used to create their art. While referring to one of their many pieces of art, the husband slipped into a mesmerizing state. He was probably undergoing what Fiore, Moreno, and Kimle (1996) call an “Aesthetic Experience” (p. 169).

He managed to say,

That’s an outstanding piece right there. I mean ... it is outstanding. It’s just small. I mean, the technique he used to do the piece is, you know, is outstanding.

(Husband #9)

His reaction put me in a state of awe, which resulted in my failure to capture the description of that actual piece. People can take you along on a wonderful journey through the stories attached to the everyday objects in their homes.

Memories

This category focuses on those homes and objects that hold and elicit memories of the past, such as thoughts of specific people and specific times or happenings. Objects often become embedded with memories. In a way, the objects are evidence of the memories they represent, and also confirm. Eight of the nine couples identified things in their homes that recalled particular memories. The memories attached to the things in their homes that they are fond of revolve around specific people and/or specific times or events. The couples commonly pulled out objects that recorded the memories of their children.
growing up and participating in family activities such as family photographs, videotapes, and photo albums. Some couples showed me things that call to mind their children such as artwork (either made or purchased by their children), and baby blankets made by one wife and her mother-in-law. The husbands usually identified objects that represented their mothers, such as a set of dishes passed down from one husband’s mother and a funeral sympathy plant given to the family of one husband who became the plant’s recipient since it was too large for his sister to take back to Washington State with her after the funeral. However, only one husband was fond of an object that represents his father. Interestingly, during our interview, one husband discovered that the new pair of leather shoes he bought for his wedding was amazingly also connected to a specific person in his life: his deceased father.

You know, when I look at those shoes, I say, well, I wore those shoes when I got married. Now that’s my own little personal thing. It doesn’t mean anything to anybody else, but it’s something I wore when I got married. (Husband #7)

... and I remember when he bought ’em. He said, “I’m not wearing them plastic, shiny patent leather shoes. I’m gonna get me a pair of shoes.” (Wife #7)

They were expensive shoes. (Husband #7)

At first, I thought, that’s odd. Why don’t you just wear the shoes that come with the tux. “I’m not wearing those patent leather shoes. Ain’t no man wearing no patent leather.” He went and bought him some Florsheims. And that’s what he bought. (Wife #7)

That comes from my dad. You know, my dad ... they shined their shoes. And my dad always had shiny shoes. So, I guess it rose to that ... to that from my father and stuff, too. When I sit here and think about it ... you know ... we were trying to analyze it, why I wear those shoes. So, my dad, you know, he always shined his shoes. That shoe thing still carries on and I didn’t even know until you just kind of put ... made me think about it. (Husband #7)

That’s why I love doing these interviews. (Interviewer)
See, I didn’t know it. (Husband #7)

Once a month, he wears his wedding shoes to work.

The objects that hold memories for the wives tend to remind them of not just their grandmothers and female friends, but also their husbands. On the contrary, the husbands did not show me any objects they were fond of that conjured up memories of their wives. The wives showed me things that reminded them of their grandmothers, such as an antique hutch and depression china two wives inherited from their grandmothers, and preserved funeral flowers one wife saved from her grandmother’s funeral. However, only one wife pointed out an object that reminded her of her grandfather—a get well fish-shaped ceramic planter given to her grandfather by a family friend prior to his death.

Two of the eight wives showed me objects that called to mind female friends who are both deceased. One of the wives showed me two small antique oriental vases that represented Aunt Gigi, a next-door neighbor whose house she visited while growing up. When Aunt Gigi passed away at ninety years old

... her granddaughter sold the house and had a sale inside the house. So, when I came in, she said, Dorothy, you can just have anything you want. I said, oh, you know what ... she said have what you want. I said, I’m taking these two pieces because those two pieces were still sitting in Gigi’s house ... in the same spot they was in when I was little coming over playing. Twenty-five years later they were still in the same spot in her living room on the china cabinet. (Wife #8)

The other wife easily pointed out a sand dollar that she said brings forth memories of the friend who gave it to her some time before she died of breast cancer twenty years ago.

Two of the eight wives showed me objects that represented their husbands for whom they bought those things, a chess table and a university graduate figurine. Two of
the eight wives pointed out objects that hold the pleasant memory of shopping for and purchasing those objects such as the furniture one wife selected by herself and the chess table she also purchased for him because he enjoyed chess. The other wife, who loves shopping for bargains, found more than she bargained for on one of her outings. Showing me an African American Christmas angel missing one of its two hair braids, she explained that when she saw the angel in the clearance bin at a store she knew she had to buy it. The angel with one braid reminded her of the time her “daughter cut her braid off when she was about four, and she had one braid that was shorter.” The angel figurine not only served as a visual aid for that story, but it also reminded her of her daughter the moment she saw it for the first time.

Examples of objects that conjure up memories of specific times and events include two photographs of a golf course and a marriage plate. Hanging on their basement wall, one husband showed me professionally enlarged, matted and framed snapshots of a golf course in Colorado that he had taken while waiting for his friends to join him at the next hole. He said that the view of the course was spectacular from where he stood so he decided to take pictures of it. The pictures appeared to combine his love for golf, the outdoors, and landscape views. Earlier in the interview, his wife also expressed an appreciation for landscapes scenes. Perhaps their love of nature is one of the many things they have loved about each other for the past twenty-nine years. The memories associated with objects can sometimes be very explicit. One couple explained that the plate of their marriage they received as a wedding gift simply represents their wedding day.
Hedonics

This category focuses on objects and homes that offer pleasure and enjoyment for self. This category includes any references to intrinsic qualities of objects and homes, such as the physical/aesthetic components of color, shape, texture, and the overall look/appearance. Six of the nine couples talked about how they experience pleasure and enjoyment for self through objects they are fond of in their homes. These experiences, that take place in activities conducted at home for some and away from home for others, are aesthetic experiences. For example, at home, a husband tinkers around on the computer for personal enjoyment, entertainment, and intellectual discovery. At home while watching television, one couple’s youngest son keeps his legs warm with the same hand-knitted baby blanket that kept him warm as a baby. Aesthetic components and aspects of beauty may be contained in mundane consumption experiences including recreational activities, food, furniture, and apparel (Holbrook, 1994).

Five of the eight couples spoke about their liking of and preference for the aesthetic components of some of their fond objects. Pertaining to the formal quality of color, three of the five couples liked the colors of their objects, mainly shades instead of tints. Regarding the formal quality of visual elements, two of the five couples explained their preference for the ambiguous look or appearance of their fond objects. For example, one couple liked the way that their handmade Persian rug does not look like a normal Oriental rug. The husband, who was intrigued by the way the rug’s pattern seems to change about every time he looks at it said, “... it’s always a little bit different.” For example, the outspoken wife of the other couple liked the nondescript look of their “creamy, not white,”
colored Christmas angel from her brother which makes its race difficult to identify or decipher. Two couples expressed an appreciation for artists’ talents, skills, and the processes and techniques they use to create their masterpieces. For example, one of the couples explained that they liked a painting, by an Asian artist named Jang, for the amount of detail he brings into his work and the option to hang that painting as a square or a diamond. Both of these couples admitted that they pay special attention even to the frames they select. For example, one of the couples actually goes to the extent of having an artist frame most of their pictures, which shows the intensity of their interests in art. The wife of the other couple explained that it took her longer to select the frame for their fabric mixed media picture than the picture itself. She explained that she likes the water stains and marbling effects in the frame that give the appearance of different textures. Probably because the wife was a home economics major in college, she and her husband were the only couple, among the five couples, that was greatly influenced by the aesthetic components of their objects. The wife was especially taken with the following formal qualities or expressive aspects of their objects overall, namely their colors, fabrics, ambiguous looks or appearances, scenes of nature and waterfalls, life-like/vibrant qualities, black and white photographic contrasts, construction processes and techniques, overall looks or appearances, and tactile qualities.

Textiles and clothing

This category includes any references to clothing accessories, apparel, and home textiles. Unfortunately, the participants did not have many home textile objects they were fond of or particular about. But there were a few textile-related things they found highly
salient such as a fabric mixed media picture, two handmade baby blankets, a Persian rug, and a pair of fuzzy dice. The significance of these four items was discussed at length in previous categories. On the other hand, this study revealed that people do not think of clothing as part of their household. This study also pointed out that people do not tend to think of clothing as a furnishing in the home, which is probably why the participants did not discuss clothing a great deal as objects they treasured. Fitting their lines of action together to get married, one couple revealed that they treasured the symbols of her wedding gown and his wedding shoes. The significance of these two articles was also discussed at length in previous categories.

Two Overarching Emergent Categories

Embedded in the emergent categories were two larger, all-encompassing themes about African American ethnicity and religion. The remainder of this chapter focuses on these two specific themes that stemmed from the couples thoughts on their families, their homes, and its objects.

African American ethnicity issues

This theme includes references to race, ethnicity, ethnic pride, real estate issues, reinforcing one’s African American heritage, celebrating and/or expressing one’s African American ethnic identity via home.

We wanted our children to be ... we moved into a White environment. And there was very little Black pictures or anything of Black people. And so, we just made a conscious effort to put Black art and Black pictures in our home. (Wife #1)

Sure. And so when you moved here into your home that was an immediate goal? (Interviewer)
Right. (Wife #1)

So that was understood in the beginning between the two of you? (Interviewer)

Right. We wanted them to take pride in their heritage. You know, we just wanted to have Black people in our home. Pictures and art in our home. (Wife #1)

That was pretty much it. Just to have the sense of culture that comes from the African American churches and ... just to have that sense of presence in a region or area of the country where you don’t get that... (Husband #1)

Although Des Moines is becoming more ethnically diverse than the broader state of Iowa, seven of the nine couples said that it was important for them to reinforce their African American ethnic identity in their homes especially for their young children. Because they became motivated to find elsewhere the Black decor and furnishings that they could not find locally in Iowa, they desired for their homes to reflect their ethnic heritage, as a decorative style option. Spouses (that is, one wife and one husband) from both of the remaining two couples did not find it important to reinforce their African American ethnic identity in their homes, although their respective spouses stated that they intentionally avoid displaying any images of White people in their homes.

In marriage spouses have often mastered the lesson that agreeing to disagree with one another can be a suitable solution when conflicts arise. The wife above, who disagreed with her husband about reinforcing their African American ethnic identity in their home, explained that her husband selects artwork with scenes and abstract subject matter since he “didn’t want a whole lot of White folks” in his house. Regarding the two couples, one declared “we think our family is Black art” while the other said they wanted pictures and
artwork depicting Black people in their home since they were living in a White environment.

In order to display and celebrate their ethnicity in their homes through their decor and furnishings, these seven couples and two mates used artwork (including figurine collections of African American angels, children, and clowns; paintings by African American artists Brenda Joysmith, Katie Roberts, Charles Bibbs, William Tolliver; paintings of African Americans by Caucasian artist Vincent Oates; paintings of abstracts by Asian artist Jang; Casaboda glasswork; pictures of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Muhammad Ali, pictures by the late photographer Ansel Adams, and pottery ranging from ceramic teapots to a Panamanian vase). One of these couples talked about the importance of balancing the bicultural worlds their children inhabit. Since their children are exposed to White culture at elementary school, the couple works hard to reinforce their African American culture at home through the numerous African American books (including an African American Bible), movies and videotapes. Interestingly, hanging on the walls of the front door entryway among pictures of the couple, their children, and relatives were pictures Martin Luther King, Jr. and Michael Jordan, as if they were also close family members. The couple explained that those two pictures were included among the family photographs in order to teach their children about positive African American role models whom they can emulate, identify with, and look upon as individuals who are examples of African American pride and success.

When I entered the home of another couple, adorning the wall opposite their front door were pictures of Martin Luther King, Jr., Nelson Mandela, and Malcolm X. Making
my entry through the front door, the bold presentation of the images of these three history-
making men staring back at me demanded my attention as my hands shook those of the
waiting couple. Those pictures were definitely going to be a topic of discussion. After we
concluded one of my questions with laughter, followed by a hanging silence, my chance
had arrived to pursue this puzzling issue:

I want to take a step back and talk about the pictures of Martin Luther King, Jr.,
Nelson Mandela, and Malcolm X. Why are they located at the entrance of your
home? (Interviewer)

Because to me, to me they represent what we are about. They represent the
struggle. When people look at them the first thing they gon’ do is realize what kind
of house they coming into. Proud, Black home! That’s the first thing they gon’
realize. Then they can think about whatever they want to think about. But that
right there got ’em together right now. Now when you look at that, you just can’t
come in here and say what you want to say. That let’s ’em know that we’re a proud
family... I don’t know if the Bible gon’ be wrote again ... revised again, or
whatever. But who know what those three men really were? One of them might be
a prophet. (Husband #8)

They [were] a prophet. I believe they [were]. They laid down their lives for what
they believed ... and made a change in people. (Wife #8)

The pictures were there not for the family, but instead, for visitors and guests, warning
them that the family and their home were to be treated with the utmost respect. After
thinking about how home is pretty much one of the only places, if not the only place, where
some African Americans can exert control and choice for and by themselves without the
presence of White bosses or supervisors, as the husband of this couple told me earlier in our
conversation, “In your home, you’re free. That’s where you’re truly free.”

Unfortunately, some African Americans are not truly free in their very own homes,
especially if they want to sell their homes. Putting a house on the market may require
hiding from prospective buyers all evidence that the owners are African American. The
fear or belief is that some prospective White buyers might not want to live in a home previously owned and occupied by African Americans. Typically, African Americans buy homes previously owned by Whites, but in most cases, Whites rarely appear to buy homes previously occupied by African Americans, unless they are upper-class African Americans whose socioeconomic status, in a sense, negates their racial identity. The husband of a couple discussed this topic in the following quote:

If you look around, you’ll see a lot of Black art ... and we think our family is Black art. You see that the pictures in our home are very visible around the house. Nothing wrong with White pictures, but you just don’t see anything around here really White. If somebody would walk in this house and they didn’t know ... and they walked in and they know this was a Black house... That has problems if you’re in the real estate business. I don’t know if you know that or not... If I was trying to sell this house right now, I’d have to take all these pictures down. That’s sad to say that, but I would have to if I wanted to sell the house. You know ... and I got some ... I have some White pictures downstairs (laughter!) that I had from a previous job that I could put on the wall if I had to ... to sell the house. You gotta do what you gotta do. Where are you at? I’m in Iowa... So, if you walk in this house, you’d know that Black people live here, African Americans ... whatever you want to call it. (Husband #7)

In order to celebrate their ethnicity outside of their homes, all nine couples explained that they maintain cultural ties to the African American community by attending Black churches, and participating in activities such as the Isiserettes drum and dance corps for seven to eighteen year-old African American youth. It appears that keeping a delicate balance in both African American and White worlds is a full time job not only for a family with young children, but also for families whose adult children have established their own independence and homes.
African American religion

Religion was very important in the lives of these middle-class African American married couples. The common viewpoint across these families on subjective religiosity, or “perceptions and attitudes regarding religion” (Taylor, Mattis, & Chatters, 1999, p. 531) was that they hold religious and spiritual beliefs as essential parts of family life. It is important to note that the researcher did not ask the families their religious affiliation; religion was not at the outset an obvious theme and component of this study. Several of the emergent themes included religious referents.

Seven of the nine couples made various references to religion, God, spirituality, faith, blessings, and/or church as reflected in their homes and some of its objects. Overall, their references to religion focused on how they convey their religious values. These couples express their religious values through their actions and beliefs in three ways based on: (1) The notion of having a home, (2) how they behave toward some of the objects in their homes, or (3) the actual objects themselves. Three couples were thankful to God for the blessings He has bestowed upon them in the form of their families, homes, and memories related to the family and home. One couple explained the importance of living simply and practically, rather than very materialistically, due to their religious faith. Two couples explained the importance of thanking God for the blessings He has given them by applying their talents and sharing their resources. For example, the husband of one of these two couples was the audio person at his church. The other couple feels they serve God by consciously and continuously giving their used, no longer needed possessions to charities and hand-selected individuals. Although several of the families revealed that they also
donate their old belongings to charitable organizations, this particular couple stands out from the others because they actually said they believe that one must give in order to receive. Therefore, their act of generosity is not just a contribution to help others, but rather, from their perspective, their duty and religious obligation.

One couple decorated the rooms in their homes according to different Bible scripture themes as their way of displaying their gratitude to God for the blessings He has given them. One couple mentioned that they have tried to make their house a home by invoking and infusing it with that presence or atmosphere and “sense of culture that comes from African American churches” located mainly in the southern region of the United States. The researcher failed to probe for a greater understanding and explanation of what this “sense of culture that comes from African American churches” actually meant since she was not aware that religion was a dominant theme of the study at that point of data collection. However, the researcher did sense that on a simplistic, surface level, these objects discussed by the couples in relation to their religion are familiar objects. But on a deeper level, these couples featured or pointed out those objects to the researcher because they conveyed their religious significance and meanings.

The researcher attended church with one of the nine families at their request. During the service, the researcher noticed several of the families she interviewed. After the service, the family who invited her to join them for church explained that most of the middle-class and upper-middle class African Americans in the area attended either their church or a nearby church. Both of these churches are affiliated with the Baptist faith.
This study supports Taylor, Mattis, and Chatter's (1999) contention that religion plays a profound, spiritual, and affirmative role in the lives of some African Americans. God is a significant member and religion is an important component of these families, their homes, and their values. Speaking about the different obstacles she and her family have overcome, one wife said, "... But it's just a blessing by the grace of God that we got this far... It's just a blessing. Family's doing well..."
CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Symbolic interactionists propose that the social context or setting must be considered to develop an understanding of people. The purpose of this study was to explore how middle-class African American families create their own realities and a sense of self by managing the appearances of their homes through meaningful material and textile objects. Adhering to an assumption of symbolic interaction theory proposed by Blumer (1969), the researcher studied the home and its objects to grasp an understanding of how family members individually created and collectively negotiated meanings of the symbols of home and its objects, in addition to the interpretations of these meanings as redefined or changed over time. This chapter includes a summary of reflections on the two overarching emergent categories and their contributions to the theoretical literature. Limitations of the study and recommendations for future research are also addressed.

African American ethnicity issues and African American religion are the two thematic categories that derived from the twelve emergent categories. These two themes are significant and encompassing of all other themes. The theoretical framework used to interpret the data of this study was house and home, symbolic interaction theory, meanings and symbols, and setting/definition of the situation. This section addresses the researcher’s reflections on those theories and how useful they were in understanding the two overarching emergent themes of African American ethnicity issues and religion.
African American Ethnicity Issues

As an African American, I did expect for some of the couples' homes to be adorned with furnishings and decor reflecting an African American aesthetic sensibility. However, I never imagined that creating an African American inspired and furnished home environment could be such an intentional act or deliberate style choice for the sole purpose of de-emphasizing Whiteness in order to emphasize one's Blackness. In other words, I was surprised to hear the couples (i.e., three couples) reveal that they intentionally avoid displaying pictures of White people in their homes. But on the other hand, based on my experiences as an African American, I could easily understand and relate to that point. By taking the role of the other (that is, the study participants), it makes perfect sense (to me) to imbue one's home with things that reflect his or her ethnic identity and self when one lives in such a predominantly White environment—especially one with such a small African American community. By taking the role of the other, it also makes perfect sense to imbue one's home with things that reflect his or her ethnic identity when one has spent the greater portion of his or her life living in a predominantly White environment and has had to possibly attend more to their ethnic identity since there were not many other people of their ethnicity around them. The following example illustrates this issue. Among the nine couples there were only two couples in which both mates were natives of Iowa. Interestingly, both Iowa couples had created a sense of self and home with God and their religious faith and beliefs in mind by decorating their homes with collections of African American angels. The couple that described the interior decoration style of their home as "angelic" started collecting angels as a challenge to find pretty ones that did not look like
witches with pointed noses. The other couple described their interior decoration style as "biblical" or "scriptural" and started collecting angels because it was rare for them to find anything of color—especially little angels. The wives of both couples stated they became intrigued with finding Black angels, and intentionally started searching for them on local shopping excursions and out of town trips and vacations. Their angels truly reflect their ethnic identity, and connect them to the larger, national Black community. Therefore, especially in the lives of the two native Iowan couples, African American ethnicity issues are real issues that must be assessed and addressed on a continuous basis.

Interestingly, it was just as important to the couple from the Southern region of the U.S. to display their African American heritage in their Midwestern home—mainly for the sake of their children. Perhaps for some people who have relocated to the Midwest after living in areas of the country with larger Black populations it becomes additionally important for them to affirm the self by displaying their heritage and reinforcing their ethnic identity. On the other hand, for some people like the wife from the West Coast, reinforcing their Blackness because of the lack of Blackness surrounding them is not an issue of importance. For a number of the couples, because they live in Iowa it appeared increasingly important to them to teach their children about their heritage in the home. Home is more than likely the only daily context where their children encounter other familiar Black people with whom they identify on social and personal levels. It is helpful to remember that these couples' children live in bicultural worlds (that is, majority White at school and majority Black at home). It also appears that regardless of the couples' experiences of having or having not lived in a larger African American environment, it is
their current environment that matters to them. Adaptation to and survival in Iowa is an
issue all of them are addressing.

I believe it is possible to suggest that the couples conveyed their ethnic identity in
either a subtle or blatant fashion. The majority of the couples’ homes embraced the subtle
approach which conveyed an aesthetically inclined sense of self, such as the couple with
the precisely coordinated home that featured an art gallery that displayed their love of art
and the creative/artistic process. The remainder of the couples’ homes embraced the blatant
approach which conveyed a more functional and basic rather than aesthetically inclined
sense of self, such as the two couples with lived-in homes that featured pictures of
legendary African American men including Martin Luther King, Jr., Michael Jordan, and
Muhammad Ali. Both couples had a picture of Martin Luther King, Jr. hanging in their
front door entryway that was immediately apparent as soon as I entered their homes. One
husband explained the significance of the picture as an example of a positive role model for
his children. For the other husband the picture conveyed that he and his family were
straightforward people who demanded the utmost respect and tolerated no foolishness in
their home. I was intrigued by how both men spoke about the picture with such seriousness
in a somewhat defensive manner. Their tone of speech was familiar to me and resembled
the defiant stance taken by the African American male college students I interviewed for
my thesis in their discussions about their embracement of African American style and
rejection of White style (Hall, 1992). Overall, these two husbands and their families had
united and worked at creating and achieving identities that they were strong, confident,
intelligent, serious families. Their identities expressed the highs and lows, the joys and
pains they had experienced, overcome, and would continue to overcome through their faith in God and relentless prayer.

African American Religion

Getting married, having a family, and owning a home have traditionally been a part of the American dream. The couples who participated in this study ascribed to this belief and achieved this dream through meaningful symbolic interaction. The mates of each couple joined forces in the context of marriage to expand their lives because they both believed in their ability to fulfill their dream of family and home. However, these Christian couples also joined forces with God to help sustain and support them along their journeys from newlyweds to established parents.

Throughout their interviews was the admission that they had primarily been granted their families and homes because of their belief in God. The couples were highly cognizant of the fact that they did not need their middle-class socioeconomic status and accompanying affluence to lead abundant lives. The couples admitted that they were very grateful to God for their families and homes, but the more important of those two possessions was their families. Their homes serve as an extension of self while conveying their religious aspect of self. These couples incorporated the spirit of God into the private context of their homes as a way of acknowledging God for His love and blessings. The things that people surround themselves with in their homes cannot necessarily be taken at face value. A collection of colorful pins once worn by a female Russian exchange student who spent several months living with one of the couples appeared to simply be a gift from the student to her hosts. However, the wife explained that those pins were very meaningful
because when she looked at them she saw that student's freedom and the fact that "...there's still hope in the world 'cause things are changing."

Usefulness of the Theories

Symbolic interaction theory served as the larger theoretical framework of this study. This section addresses how the findings of this study supported symbolic interaction theory. The joint interaction focus of symbolic interaction theory was applicable to this study; in middle-class African American marriages, husbands assist their wives in jointly creating the meanings of their homes and its things, in addition to the negotiation and modification of these meanings over time. The middle-class African American home is characterized by an environment that is as egalitarian as these couples' marriages. For example, findings of this study showed that husbands actively participated in making the aesthetic decisions regarding how these couples decorated their homes.

Other concepts of symbolic interaction theory were applicable to this study, including self, extended self, looking glass self, identities, role, and family life cycle (originating in marketing perspectives). McCracken's model of meaning movement (1988) was also useful. In the context of this study, the concept of self and extended self revealed that, at this point of their family life cycle, middle-class African American couples: (1) remain attached to domestic things they no longer need or want until they find new owners who need those things; (2) remain attached to domestic things that represent particular memories; (3) value domestic things that reflect their heritage and ethnic pride; (4) value domestic things that represent their religious beliefs and faith; (5) value domestic things that convey uniqueness and originality; (6) value domestic things that convey usefulness and function, and (7) value domestic things that reflect
their relationships with their children and other people, as well as themselves. The concept of looking glass self and family life cycle in this study hinted that the middle-class African American couples become less concerned with having large, spacious homes that are aesthetically and uniquely decorated as they grow older, and more concerned with downsizing to smaller, simpler homes with fewer furnishings to accommodate their future empty nest stage of life. The concept of identities and role as applied to this study revealed that middle-class African American couples convey to others who they are through their homes and its domestic possessions. For example, one couple portrayed an eclectic identity (as depicted by their collection of African American artwork, their museum-quality home art gallery, and their purple colored front door), whereas another couple portrayed an affluent identity (as depicted by the size and location of their home for the purpose of attracting business clients). Overall, the symbolic interaction theory fully captured the point that meaning is the main goal in the lives of these middle-class African American families rather than their material goods although material goods serve as an important means for communicating information to others about the self.

This study reflected Werner’s (1987) contention that home is more than a place. Both culturally and socially, home mirrors the inhabitants’ values, norms, rituals, practices and habits. The participants of this study valued having achieved the role of homeowners. As homeowners they valued their families by sheltering them in homes to develop and maintain their interpersonal relationships. The participants’ homes reflected their religious values, practices, and habits through objects such as the African American Bible located in one couple’s living room for their children to read.
This study also reflected Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton’s (1981) contention that home is a church where one can create and shield their ultimate goals from the impositions of the public world. For example, one family, who was very grateful to God for their home, considered their home a safe-haven where situations outside of their home would not affect the peaceful harmony that they had created within their home.

This study does not support Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton’s (1981) contention that men tend to relax in their connection to home possibly because masculinity calls for men to act in a rational (defined as economically-oriented) manner. The male participants of this study were greatly connected to their homes. They were the ones who served as the spokesperson of the couples during our interviews. Under the egalitarian arrangement, these husbands were part of a team with their wives. Therefore, the husbands were not completely relaxed in their connection to home because they make decisions regarding the home just as their wives do.

Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton (1981) contended that men play out instrumental roles by being tuned into the financial and manual energy they invest in home. This study both supports and refutes this contention. The men were clearly concerned about financial concerns, such as selling the home and investing in artwork. However, this study refutes this contention because under the egalitarian arrangement, the wives of this study were just as financially invested in their homes as their husbands were.

Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton (1981) contended that women perform affective roles in relation to the home. This study supports this contention, but also found that the husbands performed affective roles in relation to their homes, too. The wives and many of the husbands worked together as a team to make their homes a positive setting where they could
agreeably interact with one another. As Joy, Hui, Chankon, and LaRoche (1987) contended, the home is family and is highly sacred.

Limitations

A few limitations are inherent. Using in-person interviews and the sampling method provided their share of limitations to the study. Denzin and Lincoln (1998) stated that respondents are rarely capable of providing thorough descriptions of their intentions or actions. Therefore, they can only provide the researcher with stories explaining what they did and why they did it. My respondents or participants may not have wanted to divulge all of their views to me. This is possibly due to them not knowing me personally and therefore viewing me as an outsider trying to gain access to their private lives. My participants may have assumed that I fully understood their experiences and views since I have also led life as an African American person. My participants may have subconsciously left additional informative details and nuances out of their statements. My participants may have chosen not to share specific information with me because they thought I would make negative assumptions about them or perceive them negatively. For example, it is possible that they did not discuss some objects because they believed they were too personal or reflected their private self, and instead they focused more on those objects that reflected their public self. My participants may have felt like they had to please or impress me based on the person they perceived me to be. It is possible that they felt they had to impress me with their stories, experiences, and intelligence since I am working on a doctorate, which most African American people view as an amazing feat and remarkable achievement because of our historic past in the U.S. My participants may possess opinions that are different from
those of African Americans in Southern, Western and Eastern cities. For example, since most African Americans in the U.S. reside in the Southern region, one’s sense of self is possibly conveyed through home textile objects such as African American quilts, blankets, baby blankets, draperies on a more frequent level.

In addition, my snowball sample is very biased. My participants may have suggested couples that they thought were interested in their homes and other topics (such as interior decoration, textiles, clothing, home improvement, and home craft projects) related to the interview questions I asked them. Conversely, my participants may have agreed to participate in the study because they were very much interested in their own homes. The most significant, intertwined limitations of my sample that I encountered were having to select middle-class African American married couples from a small African American population; this limitation further compounded the difficulty I experienced in locating families with annual, dual incomes of less than $100,000; most of the families I screened who did not fit my sample earned over $100,000 annually. In order to get a better sense of the couples placement along the middle-class socioeconomic level, the researcher should have asked the couples to indicate if their annual, combined salaries fell within the ranges of $50,000 to $69,999, $70,000 to $89,999, or $90,000 to $100,000. Overall, the findings of this study can only be generalized to the sample of this study.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study found several issues that should be addressed in order to fully understand how married, middle-class African American couples convey a sense of self through their homes and its furnishings. A larger sample should be studied to determine if more married,
middle-class African American couples also hold these same views and opinions. Regarding other ethnic groups, White, married, middle-class couples from central Iowa should be interviewed for the purpose of conducting a cross-cultural study against which to compare the findings of this study and African American sample. In addition, Hispanic or Latino married, middle-class couples from central Iowa should also be studied in order to make cross-cultural comparisons. These cross-cultural studies should also examine if expressing ethnic identity and religious beliefs are common among Whites and Hispanics or Latinos. The researcher suggests studying Whites and Hispanics or Latinos because they are the two largest ethnic groups in the state of Iowa. African Americans are the third largest ethnic group in Iowa with a population of 61,853 (U.S. Census, 2000). The total state population of Iowa in 2000 was 2,923,179 among which there were 2,748,640 Whites and 82,473 Hispanics or Latinos (U.S. Census, 2000). The researcher also suggests studying middle-class, African American married couples who reside in the Southern region of the United States because religion (mainly Baptist and Catholic) is a fundamental component in the lives of Southern African Americans, and the South continues to be the largest concentration of Blacks in the United States according to the 2000 U.S. Census.

This study found several questions that should be addressed in order to fully understand how married, middle-class African American couples convey a sense of self through their homes and its furnishings. As with clothing, do middle-class African American families use the objects and interiors of their homes as a way of making the most powerful statement they can about themselves? Or are other symbols that are more transportable such as clothing and automobiles of greater importance? Is expressing ethnic
identity in the home common among other ethnic groups? Do the meanings of cherished objects lie in their representation (what they stand for or represent), acquisition (how the owner acquired it), mechanization (the process by which the product or item was made) or location in the home? Is there more of a need for couples at the upper middle-class level to display status through their homes? Therefore, African American, married upper class couples who earn over $100,000 annually should also be studied. This study has only begun to understand the connections among family, home, and textiles and clothing for middle-class, African American married couples in North America.
APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS
Interview Questions

-- What is your age?

-- What is your occupation?

-- What is your level of education?

-- How long have you been married?

-- How long have you lived in your present home?

-- How many people currently live in your home? What are their ages and genders?

-- Can you describe for me the other types or styles of housing you lived in and with whom? Where were they located? How long did you live at each location? How many other residences have you lived in?

-- What circumstances led you to your current home or residence?

-- How do you describe the interior and exterior decoration styles of your home?

-- How many rooms are in your house? What is the name and function or purpose of each room? Are any of these rooms used by only one person or only the males or females of the house?

-- Which family members participated in decorating your home? What role(s) did each family member play in this process? In what ways did family members influence one another in deciding and negotiating the aesthetic look of your home? How did you and your family negotiate what to keep and what to get rid of?

-- In what ways does the appearance or look of your home express who you are? Who your family is?

-- Do you have any objects in your home that you are fond of or particular about? What are these items? Where are they located in your home? What do you like about them? Where are they from? How did you acquire them? What do other family members think about these objects? (Probe for home textile objects if not mentioned.)

-- How do you get rid of things in your home that you no longer want?

-- What makes your house a home?
June 2002

[name and address]

Dear [prospective participant],

Hello! I am Carol Hall, the graduate student in the College of Family and Consumer Sciences at Iowa State University who talked to you on the phone the other day about my study of African American families who are homeowners in Iowa. I am working on my doctorate and am interested in how you feel about your home in Iowa.

As explained during our phone conversation, I will need to interview both you and your spouse separately. It is important that both of you participate; we can arrange separate appointments with each of you if necessary. I am speaking with married couples in which both partners are African American. Participation in the study would involve me visiting your home and talking to you and your spouse about your home and its meaningful objects as we tour your home. I would appreciate being given your permission to audiotape our conversation and videotape your home as we walk through it. I would also like to get photographs of your home’s exterior and furnishings that you like, as well as those you do not like.

Your interviews will be held at a time most convenient for you, and should last approximately one hour to ninety minutes. You have the right to withdraw from the study at any time and to decline to answer any questions if you so desire. Your conversation will remain completely confidential—even from your spouse. Your identity will never be disclosed in any documents related to the study or to anyone besides the researchers (myself and my Major Professor).

As a thank you gift for opening your home to me, you will receive a copy of the videotape of your home that you can use for insurance purposes. I hope you will take the time to share your home with me. Thank you for your attention. I will get back to you by phone to verify your decision whether or not to participate.

Sincerely,

Carol L. Hall

[Contact information]
Script for Initial Phone Contact with Potential Participants

Hello! I am Carol Hall, an African American graduate student in the College of Family and Consumer Sciences at Iowa State University.

[....] suggested I talk with you about a study I am conducting on African American families who are homeowners in Iowa. Has [....] mentioned that I would be calling you? [pause for answer] I am working on my doctorate and am interested in how you feel about your home in Iowa.

I am speaking with married couples in which both partners are African American. Participation in the study would involve me visiting your home and talking to you and your spouse about your home and its meaningful objects as we tour your home. I would appreciate being given your permission to audiotape our conversation and videotape your home as we walk through it. I would also like to get photographs of your home's exterior and furnishings that you like, as well as those you do not like.

I will need to interview both you and your spouse separately. It is important that both of you participate; we can arrange separate appointments with each of you if necessary.

Your interviews will be held at a time most convenient for you, and should last approximately one hour to ninety minutes. You have the right to withdraw from the study at any time and to decline to answer any questions if you so desire. Your conversation will remain completely confidential—even from your spouse. Your identity will never be disclosed in any documents related to the study or to anyone besides the researchers (myself and my Major Professor).

As a thank you gift for opening your home to me, you will receive a copy of the videotape of your home that you can use for insurance purposes.

I hope you will be willing to participate in this study. I can mail to you a letter containing the information I just covered over the phone and a copy of the participation consent form if you have any interest in participating. Do you have any questions right now?

Screening Questions:

Thanks for your interest! I have a few screening questions to go through right now that will help us decide that you fit the needs of the study:

1) Are you and your spouse both over the age of 17?

2) Are you and your spouse both African American?

3) Are you and your spouse both U.S. citizens?

4) Do you or your spouse own the home you live in?
5) Do you and your spouse have a combined income somewhere between $40,000 and $100,000? You do not need to tell me your exact income.

6) Besides your spouse, are there any other adults or adolescents living in your home with you?

If any of them are interested, they could also participate in an interview. However, that is not required.

Thank you so much for your interest! I will send you the consent form and information we covered over the phone. After you have had a chance to look over the information about the study, I will call you back to see if you are still interested and able to participate. If so, we can then begin to schedule my visits with you.
INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT

Title of Study: The Middle Class African American Home: Its Objects and Their Meanings

Investigator: Carol L. Hall, doctoral candidate
Iowa State University
303 Welch Avenue, Apt. 305
Ames, IA 50014
515-292-6864

Dr. Mary Lynn Damhorst, Major Professor
Iowa State University
Apparel, Educational Studies, and Hospitality Management
1071 LeBaron Hall
Ames, IA 50011-1120
515-294-9919

This is a research study. Please take your time in deciding if you would like to participate. Please feel free to ask questions at any time.

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study is to explore the sense of self African-American families convey in their homes, in addition to how they decorate their homes, and what their homes and its objects mean to them. You are being invited to participate in this study because you are an African-American family that owns their own home in Iowa.

DESCRIPTION OF PROCEDURES

If you agree to participate in this study, your participation will consist of an interview with you and your spouse in your home. A time will be arranged to interview each of you separately. Each interview will last for about an hour to 90 minutes. During the study you may expect the following procedures occur. You will be asked several questions about your home and its furnishings, how long you have lived in the home, and your personal background. The interview will be audiotaped for the purposes of analyzing our conversation. Your home and meaningful objects will be videotaped and possibly photographed in order to have a visual record. You may skip any question that you do not wish to answer or that makes you feel uncomfortable.

If you are willing and available in early 2003, the researcher will meet with you to check on your assessment of the interpretation of your data.
BENEFITS

If you decide to participate in this study there will be no direct benefit to you other than you will receive a copy of the videotape of your home furnishings and objects recorded during the interview. The tape can be useful as a record for insurance purposes. It is hoped that the information gained in this study will benefit society by increasing understanding of the needs and values of home-owning African-American consumers, particularly in Iowa. The general findings may be useful to the home furnishings industry.

RISKS

There are no perceived risks related to participation in this study.

COSTS AND COMPENSATION

You will not have any costs from participating in this study other than your time. You will not be compensated for participating in this study. However, you will be given the interview videotape which you can use to document your personal belongings for insurance purposes.

PARTICIPANT RIGHTS

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you may refuse to participate or leave the study at any time. If you decide to not participate in the study or leave the study early, it will not result in any penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Records identifying participants will be kept confidential to the extent permitted by applicable laws and regulations and will not be made publicly available. However, federal government regulatory agencies and the Institutional Review Board (a committee that reviews and approves human subject research studies) may inspect and/or copy your records for quality assurance and data analysis. These records may contain private information.

To help us protect your privacy, we have obtained a Certificate of confidentiality from the National Institutes of Health. With this Certificate, the researchers cannot be forced to disclose information that may identify you, even by a court subpoena, in any federal, state, or local civil, criminal, administrative, legislative, or other proceedings. The researchers will use the Certificate to resist any demands for information that would identify you.

You should understand that a Certificate of Confidentiality does not prevent you or a member of your family from voluntarily releasing information about yourself or your involvement in this research. If an insurer, employer, or other person obtains your written consent to receive research information, then the researchers may not use the Certificate to withhold that information.
To ensure confidentiality to the extent permitted by law, the following measures will be taken: Participants will be assigned a unique letter code that will be used on data transcripts instead of their names. Personal identifiers will not be kept with the data. Only the researcher and her major professor will have access to the data records. The data will be kept in a locked file cabinet in the researcher's office. Your names and addresses will be discarded (files shredded) after complimentary tapes and follow-up meetings are completed, by March 31, 2003. If the results are published, your identity will remain confidential. Data will be retained for five years while publications of general results are prepared.

QUESTIONS OR PROBLEMS

You are encouraged to ask questions at any time during this study. For further information about the study contact Carol Hall at 292-6864 (cali@iastate.edu) or Mary Lynn Darnhorst at 294-9919 (meldmhrst@iastate.edu). If you have any questions about the rights of research subjects or research-related injury, please contact the Human Subjects Research Office, 16 Pearson Hall, (515) 294-4566; meldrem@iastate.edu or the Research Compliance Officer, Office of Research Compliance, 2810 Beardshear Hall, (515) 294-3115; dament@iastate.edu

*******************************

RESPONDENT SIGNATURE

Your signature indicates that you voluntarily agree to participate in this study, that the study has been explained to you, that you have been given the time to read the document and that your questions have been satisfactorily answered. You will receive a copy of the signed and dated written informed consent prior to your participation in the study.

Participant's Name (printed) ____________________________________________________________________

( Participant's Signature) (Date)

(Signature of Parent/Guardian or Legally Authorized Representative) (Date)

[Legal guardian line will be omitted from consent forms of adult participants.]

DKA 5/15/02
INVESTIGATOR STATEMENT

I certify that the participant has been given adequate time to read and learn about the study and all of their questions have been answered. It is my opinion that the participant understands the purpose, risks, benefits and the procedures that will be followed in this study and has voluntarily agreed to participate.

(Signature of Person Obtaining Informed Consent)          (Date)

DKA 5/15/02
APPENDIX C: CODING GUIDE
Coding Guide

BACKGROUND/DEMOGRAPHIC
-Husband's occupation
-Wife's occupation
-Husband's age
-Wife's age
-Husband's educational level
-Wife's educational level
-Length of marriage
-Their children's ages/genders
-Time in present house
-Number of residents in home

DEEPER MEANING THEMES

1. HOUSING HISTORY—Other types of homes in which the couple lived and the circumstances that led them to their current home. This category also includes references to the home as an investment strategy and statements that the couple does or does not feel that their current home is their final home.
   A. Former dwellings prior to current home—Refers to the numbers and kinds of housing the couple lived in before their current home
   B. Reason for current home—Refers to why the couples chose their current home
   C. Home as an investment strategy—Refers to the marketability of the home
   D. Finality of home—Refers to the chronological state of their home
      1. The couple thinks of their current home as their final home
      2. The couple thinks of their current home as just one of the many homes they will have

2. DESCRIPTION OF HOME—This category is about the typical design components and features employed in the home, such as the kinds of architectural and interior decoration styles. Includes the desire on the part of some couples to customize the original design of their home to reflect their personality and tastes.
   A. Total number of rooms in house—As described by the participants
   B. Exterior architectural style of current house—As participants described the style
   C. Kind of interior decoration style—As participants described the style
   D. Customizing home to their style—Wanting to change the home, wanting to do something different to the home

3. OPEN HOME LIFE—Includes statements that the home has a free, open, inviting feeling that culminates into a psychologically comfortable and accessible environment for the entire family, including relatives and guests. The home and its furnishings are meant to be lived-in and used instead of preserved with any off-limits spaces. Also includes any references to making the house into a home.
4. PERSONAL SPACES WITHIN THE HOME—Identification of space in the home for the spouses, their children and/or the family itself for purposes such as relaxation, entertainment, and/or rest.
   A. Husband’s spaces in the home
   B. Wife’s spaces in the home
   C. Kid’s spaces in the home
   D. Families unified space or together space

5. HOME AND OBJECTS REFLECTING FAMILY RELATIONS—How the family members express and convey who they are and their relations with others through the objects in their home. Includes the couple’s views on the importance of open communication and a sound education for their children. Also includes any references to family unity.
   A. Couple dynamics—Home or object represents or reflects marital relationship
   B. Parent/child relationships—Home or object represents or reflects parent/child relationship
   C. Other relationships—Home or object represents or reflects the relationship of the couple with other people or one of the spouses with other people

6. DECORATING THE HOME—How each spouse participated in decorating the home or contributed to its condition and appearance, such as deciding who was in charge of decorating all or some of the home, making decisions about décor, and shopping for decor. Also includes any references to the couple’s children decorating efforts in the home.

7. DISPOSAL—Descriptions of how the couple get rid of things they no longer need or want or can use by passing them on to specific people they know or donating them to charity.

8. PRACTICALITY VERSUS STATUS—Expression of preferences for practicality, such as through comfortable, functional homes and furnishings. Also includes references to some of the couple’s monetary standing or prestige in the community.

9. ACCOMPLISHMENTS—How couples express achievements and successes through the things in their homes.

10. UTILITARIAN—Objects and homes identified as useful and functional.

11. UNIQUENESS—Homes and objects described as unique and/or original, such as the colors and construction techniques used in artwork.

12. MEMORIES—Homes and objects that hold and elicit memories of the past such as thoughts of specific people and specific times/happenings.
13. HEDONICS—Objects and homes that offer pleasure and enjoyment for self. Includes any references to intrinsic qualities of objects and homes, such as the physical/aesthetic components of color, shape, texture, and the overall look/appearance.

14. AFRICAN AMERICAN ETHNICITY ISSUES—References to race, ethnicity, ethnic pride, real estate issues, reinforcing one's African American heritage, celebrating and/or expressing one's African American ethnic identity via home.

15. AFRICAN AMERICAN RELIGION—References to religion, God, spirituality, faith, blessings, church, etc. as reflected in or shaping homes or objects in the home.

16. TEXTILES AND CLOTHING—References to clothing, accessories, apparel, and home textiles.

17. MISCELLANEOUS—Includes any topics/codes that do not fit into any of the thematic categories.
APPENDIX D: HUMAN SUBJECT REVIEW
Iowa State University
Human Subjects Review Form
(Please type this form & submit the original & two copies with three copies of all attachments)

1. Title of Project: The Middle-Class African-American Home: Its Objects and Their Meanings

2. I agree to provide the proper surveillance of this project to insure that the rights and welfare of the human subjects are protected. I will report any adverse reactions to the committee. Additions to or changes in research procedures after the project has been approved will be submitted to the committee for review. I agree that all key personnel involved in conducting human subjects research will receive training in the protection of human subjects. This also includes all PI's and Co-PI's. Access to the 45 CFR 46, Belmont Report, and ISU's Federal Wide Assurance is available to all PI's via the WWW. http://grants-svr.admin.iastate.edu/VPR/humansubjects.html. I agree to request renewal of approval for any project continuing more than one year.

Carol L. Hall
May 23, 2002
Typed name of principal investigator
Date
Signature of principal investigator

AESHM
1052 LeBaron Hall
Department
Mailing Address for Correspondence
292-6864, cali@iastate.edu
Phone number and email

2a. Principal investigator
☐ Faculty ☐ Staff ☐ Postdoctoral ☐ Graduate Student ☐ Undergraduate Student

3. Typed name of co-principal investigator(s) Date Signature of co-principal investigator(s)

Dr. Mary Lynn Dombert

3a. Co-Principal investigator(s) (check all that apply)
☐ Faculty ☐ Staff ☐ Postdoctoral ☐ Graduate Student ☐ Undergraduate Student

3b. Typed name of major professor or supervisor (if not a co-principal investigator) Date Signature of major professor or supervising faculty member

4. Typed names of other key personnel who will directly interact with human subjects. (all key personnel must have training before approval will be made)

5. Project (check all that apply)
☐ Research ☒ Thesis or dissertation ☐ Class project ☐ Independent Study (490, 590, Honors project)

6. Number of subjects (check all that apply)
25 # adults, non-students ☐ # ISU students ☐ # minors under 14 ☐ # other (explain)

7. Status of project submission through Office of Sponsored Programs Administration (check one)
☐ Has been submitted ☐ Will be submitted ☒ Will not be submitted

1/02
7a. Funding Source: College of Family and Consumer Sciences, Graduate Thesis Funding

7b. Title of grant as listed on the Proposal Data Form (GoldSheet) if it differs from title above: 

8. Brief description of proposed research involving human subjects: (See instructions, item 8. (Include one copy of the complete proposal if submitting to a Federal sponsor.)

The purpose of the proposed research is the exploration of the sense of self African-American families convey in their homes. By viewing their homes and talking to families about objects in the home, I hope to gain an understanding of the aesthetic themes employed to decorate their homes, the significance of their homes, and those objects deemed of particular importance to the family. Among those objects I am especially interested in those made of textile materials—namely home textile objects. Also of exploration is the symbiotic relationship between the family, home, and the meaning of things in the home. In addition, characteristics of the family in connection to this relationship are of consideration.

Ten married couples, in addition to their adolescent children ages 14 to 17 and other adults living in the household who express interest in participating in the study, will be purposively sample in central Iowa. Each couples' combined income must fall within the range of $40,000 to $100,000 for the purpose of sampling middle-class families. These ten families will be located using a snowball method originally generated through the assistance of four informants who are familiar with African-American families who reside in the surrounding area and fit the sample. Husbands and wives (and other interested children and adult family members, if any) will each participate in a separate one-on-one interview held in their home. Each interview should take approximately ninety minutes and will be videotaped. The interviews will also be audiotaped for an additional audio backup, and to help with transcribing the videotapes in case anything is hard to hear. The interviews will be transcribed verbatim. A tour of each couple's home will also be videotaped to capture their home's exterior style, interior decoration, and those possessions identified as meaningful. Photographs will be taken of each couple's home, and the objects they deem meaningful.

An inductive, grounded theory method will be used for collecting the qualitative data. The planned interview questions are a general outline of what is of interest, but exact wording of every question cannot be known in advance. The participants may bring up new themes that the researcher/interviewer will probe for understanding.

A member check of validity of interpretations will be conducted with adult members of 3-5 of the families. During individually arranged meetings with family members, the researcher will present a write-up of the interpretation of the data—coding of themes that emerged from that family member's data. The researcher will check with the participants to see if they are comfortable with the interpretations and if they have any suggestions for interpretation.

9. Informed Consent: □ Signed informed consent will be obtained. (Attach a copy of your form.) □ Modified informed consent will be obtained. (See instructions, item 9.)

10. Confidentiality of Data: Describe below the methods you will use to ensure the confidentiality of data obtained. (See instructions, item 10.)

Cassette tapes, videotapes, photographs, signed consent forms and the primary investigators notes will be stored in a locked file cabinet at all times. Numbers will be used to represent each subject instead of their names. Consent forms will never have identifying numbers assigned that can be linked with the respondent's data. Their real identities will never be disclosed in any report of data. The exact city in which the participants reside will never be disclosed in reports. Names and addresses of the households will initially be used for arranging first contact with the participants and will be kept separate from the data. After tapes of the household interview and tour are sent as a thank you gift and member checks for validity are completed, the names and addresses will be destroyed. N

11. Will subjects in the research be placed at risk or incur discomfort? Describe any risks to the subjects and precautions that will be taken to minimize them. (The concept of risk goes beyond physical risk and includes risks to subjects)
dignity and self-respect as well as psychological or emotional risk. See instructions, item 11.)

No risks, either psychological or physical, are foreseen. It is possible that the videotapes and photographs could be subpoenaed as evidence for a court case. Because of that possibility, we are also in the process of applying for a Certificate of Confidentiality from NIH, which could take several months. However, we were not aware of this process far enough in advance to submit the application to NIH 3 months prior to data collection. We would like to start collecting data on June 3, 2002, as indicated, and are including two consent forms—one that explains the possibility of subpoena and the second version stating the protection of the Certificate of Confidentiality. In the event that we acquire the NIH Certificate of Confidentiality during data collection, we will then use the second version of the consent form.

12. CHECK ALL of the following that apply to your research:
   □ A. Medical clearance necessary before subjects can participate
   □ B. Administration of substances (foods, drugs, etc.) to subjects
   □ C. Physical exercise or conditioning for subjects
   □ D. Samples (blood, tissue, etc.) from subjects
   □ E. Administration of infectious agents or recombinant DNA
   □ F. Application of external stimuli
   □ G. Application of noxious or potentially noxious stimuli
   □ H. Deception of subjects
   □ I. Subjects under 14 years of age and/or
       □ Subjects 14-17 years of age
   □ J. Subjects in institutions (nursing homes, mental health facilities, prisons, etc.)
   □ K. Pregnant women
   □ L. Research must be approved by another institution or agency (attach letters of approval)

If you checked any of the items in 12, please complete the following in the space below (include any attachments):

Items A-G Describe the procedures and note the proposed safety precautions.

Items D-E The principal investigator should send a copy of this form to Environmental Health and Safety, 118 Agronomy Lab for review.

Item H Describe how subjects will be deceived; justify the deception; indicate the debriefing procedure, including the timing and information to be presented to subjects.

Item I For subjects under the age of 14, indicate how informed consent will be obtained from parents or legally authorized representatives as well as from subjects.
In the case of a family that has adolescent children who are interested in participating in the study, the researcher will interview them and film their significant objects in exactly the same way that the parents are interviewed and filmed. It is possible there will be no adolescents interviewed. Informed consent from parents will be acquired prior to interviewing any adolescents.

Items J-K Explain what actions would be taken to insure minimal risk.

Item L Specify the agency or institution that must approve the project. If subjects in any outside agency or institution are involved, approval must be obtained prior to beginning the research, and the letter of approval should be filed.
Iowa State University Human Subjects Review Form

The following are attached (please check):

13. □ Letter or written statement to subjects indicating clearly:
   a) the purpose of the research & a statement that the study involves research
   b) the use of any identifier codes (names, #s), how they will be used, and when they will be removed (see item 18)
   c) an estimate of time needed for participation in the research
   d) if applicable, the location of the research activity
   e) how you will ensure confidentiality
   f) is a longitudinal study, when and how you will contact subjects later
   g) that participation is voluntary; nonparticipation will not affect evaluations of the subject
   h) contact information of the P.I. and if a student project, the major professor or supervising faculty member’s
      contact information

14. □ A copy of the consent form (if applicable)

15. □ Letter of approval for research from cooperating organizations or institutions (if applicable)

16. □ Data-gathering instruments

17. □ Recruitment fliers or any other documents the subjects will see

18. Anticipated dates for contact with subjects. Allow at least two weeks for review of your proposal before your anticipated start date.

   First contact: 06/03/02
   Last contact: 03/01/03

19. If applicable: anticipated date that identifiers will be removed from completed survey instruments and/or
    audio or visual tapes will be erased:

   03/31/03
   Month/Day/Year

20. Signature of Departmental Executive Officer

   Date
   Department or Administrative Unit

   If the PI or co-PI is also the DEO, a Dean signature authority must sign here.

21. Initial action by the Institutional Review Board (IRB):

   □ Project approved
   □ Pending Further Review
   □ Project not approved

   □ No action required

   Date

22. Follow-up action by the IRB:

   Project approved
   Project not approved
   Project not resubmitted

   Date

Rick Sharp
IRB Chairperson

Signature of IRB Chairperson

Date

1/02
DATE: May 31, 2002

TO: Carol Hall

FROM: Janell Meldrem, IRB Administrator

RE: “The Middle-Class African Home: Its Objects and Their Meanings” IRB ID 02-504

TYPE OF APPLICATION: ☐ New Project ☐ Continuing Review

The project, “The Middle-Class African Home: Its Objects and Their Meanings” has been approved for one year from its IRB approval date May 30, 2002. University policy and Federal regulations (45 CFR 46) require that all research involving human subjects be reviewed by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) on a continuing basis at intervals appropriate to the degree of risk, but at least once per year.

Any modification of this research project must be submitted to the IRB for prior review and approval. Modifications include but are not limited to: changing the protocol or study procedures, changing investigators or sponsors (funding sources), including additional key personnel, changing the Informed Consent Document, an increase in the total number of subjects anticipated, or adding new materials (e.g., letters, advertisements, questionnaires).

You must promptly report any of the following to the IRB: (1) all serious and/or unexpected adverse experiences involving risks to subjects or others; and (2) any other unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects or others.

The PI must retain the signed consent documents for at least three years past completion of the research activity. If the principal investigator terminates association with the University before that time, the signed informed consent documents should go to the DEO to be maintained.

You are expected to make sure that additional key personnel who are involved in human subjects research complete training prior to their interactions with human subjects. Web based training is available from our web site.

Upon completion of the project, a Project Closure Form will need to be submitted to the Human Subjects Research Office to officially close the project. If data collection or contact with the subjects will continue beyond the approval date, you will need to fill out a Continuing Review/and or Modification Form before the approval’s expiration date. Renewal is the PI’s responsibility, but as a reminder, you will receive an e-mail or letter notifying you approximately a month in advance that the expiration date is approaching.

Both of these forms are on the Human Subjects Research Office web site at: http://grants-svr.admin.iastate.edu/VPR/humansubjects.html.
# Iowa State University Human Subjects Review Form

**PI Last Name:** Hal

**Title of Project:** The Middle-Class African-American Home: Its Objects and Their Meanings

## Checklist for Attachments

The following are attached (please check):

13. ☐ Letter or written statement to subjects indicating clearly:
    a) the purpose of the research & a statement that the study involves research
    b) the use of any identifier codes (names, #s), how they will be used, and when they will be removed (see item 18)
    c) an estimate of time needed for participation in the research
    d) if applicable, the location of the research activity
    e) how you will ensure confidentiality
    f) in a longitudinal study, when and how you will contact subjects later
    g) that participation is voluntary; nonparticipation will not affect evaluations of the subject
    h) contact information of the P.I. and if a student project, the major professor or supervising faculty member's contact information

14. ☐ A copy of the consent form (if applicable)

15. ☐ Letter of approval for research from cooperating organizations or institutions (if applicable)

16. ☐ Data-gathering instruments

17. ☐ Recruitment fliers or any other documents the subjects will see

18. Anticipated dates for contact with subjects. Allow at least two weeks for review of your proposal before your anticipated start date.

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Month/Day/Year

19. If applicable: anticipated date that identifiers will be removed from completed survey instruments and/or audio or visual tapes will be erased:

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Month/Day/Year

20. Signature of Departmental-Executive Officer

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<td>5/23/02</td>
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If the PI or co-PI is also the DEO, their signature authority must sign here.

21. Initial action by the Institutional Review Board (IRB):

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22. Follow-up action by the IRB:

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Date

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<tr>
<td>Norman A. Scott</td>
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Date
REFERENCES


American Sociological Review, 40, 785-800.

Unpublished master's thesis, University of Utah, Salt Lake City, UT.

In E. Hirschman & M. Holbrook (Eds.), *Advances in Consumer Research: Vol. 12.*
(pp. 388-393). Provo, UT: Association for Consumer Research.

In M. DeLong & A. Fiore (Eds.), *Aesthetics of textiles and clothing: Advancing multidisciplinary perspectives* (pp. 212-223).


*Environment and Behavior, 16*(3), 335-368.


*Environment and Behavior, 19*(2), 250-259.


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