Poets, architects, developers, advertisers, psychologists, and others continually inquire about people’s feelings and meanings about their homes. Bachelard’s (1964) inquiry was a poetic phenomenological investigation. Hayward (1977) developed a multidimensional taxonomy of the meaning of home from an empirical sorting task investigation. Monographs address the various methodologies and orientations researchers use to try and understand how, and what, people feel about their homes (see Altman, Werner & Oxley, 1985). Home is not only a physical place but a state of being. It is a relationship or experienced meaning (Dovey, 1985).

But what has been explored is typically based on conventional dwelling arrangements and conventional households. In a review of the literature on the meaning of home, Despres (1987) notes that the majority of both empirically-based and phenomenologically-derived models address the experiences of families with children. Non-conventional housing and household arrangements are seldom explored or considered.

Interestingly, ethnomethodologists argue that understanding the nature of a social norm is best explored by "disruptive experiments" (Garfinkel, 1967), that is where a social norm is posited and a situation designed in which the norm is broken. Analyses of the resulting reactions typically lead to an enriched understanding of the structure and meaning of the norm itself.

In this manner, understanding people’s interpretations of home can be enriched through an investigation of their feelings when home is not only an abode but something else, in this instance, a workplace. The home/work/abode might be viewed as a total institution (Goffman, 1968) when it becomes a locale for work, domestic and leisure pursuits. In total institutions friction is increased, privacy is curtailed, and one’s vision of the world narrows.

Werner (1987) maintains that people are linked to their homes through (1) social rules and relationships, (2) affordances (i.e. objects and environments are perceived according to the meanings and behaviors they imply rather than specific physical characteristics), and (3) appropriation practices (i.e. one takes aspects of the world into one’s being and in turn is taken in by the world). When work and business clients enter the home, social rules and appropriation practices often change, as witnessed in the previous chapter. Consequently affordances and meanings of the home are likely to occur.
One common theme in many explorations of the meaning of home is home as order. Rybczynski (1986) says that if home meant neatness we would all live in Architectural Digest worlds. He maintains that the fastidiousness and cleanliness of the Dutch homes which came into prominence in the 1600s not only reflected a concern for hygiene but also a desire to define the home as a separate, special place. Order then is the orientation within a spatial, temporal and sociocultural order.

Another theme is home as identity. The German word "stimmung" reflects this. It refers to an interior characteristic which conveys the character of its owner (Rybczynski, 1986). Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton (1981), in interviews with 315 Chicago residents, concluded that domestic objects were cherished not only for their monetary, utilitarian or material comfort, but also because of the information they conveyed about themselves and their relationships with others.

Home as identification has two dimensions. The social perspective, exemplified by the work of Appleyard (1979) and Goffman (1971), views home as a collective identification, as a statement of identity experienced through a shared symbolic language. The personal identification perspective, exemplified by Cooper (1974), sees the connection between home and the individual human spirit.

Another reoccurring theme in the investigations of home is home as refuge. Ruskin illustrates this point directly:

This is the true nature of home--it is the place of peace...In so far as it is not this, it is not home; so far as the anxieties of the outer life penetrate into it, and the inconsistently-minded, unknown, unloved, or hostile society of the outer world is allowed by either husband or wife to cross the threshold it ceases to be a home; it is then only a part of the outer world which you have roofed over and lighted fire in (Quoted in Meyrowitz, 1985, p. 222)

This positive sense of home as refuge is emphasized in the academic literature (e.g. see Altman et al, 1985). Yet feminists in recent years have criticized this orientation (see Despres, 1986), emphasizing that the positive image of home as refuge is myopically conceived by those, typically men, who spend an inordinate amount of their lives outside the home. The notion of home as refuge from the world of work masks the sexual division of labor (Kelly, 1979). Becker (1986) contends that the idea of home as oasis is probably an upper-middle class image and reality. Most inquiries into the meaning of home have neglected, at the least, the nature and meaning of work (professional and domestic) as a component in that interpretation.

Metaphysical questions about the meaning of home are more than simple academic mental calisthenics. The lack of consensus about the meaning and use of spaces and objects in the home may engender conflicts among household members (Lawrence, 1987). Although in this chapter we focus
only on the homeworkers' perceptions of home, it is incumbent to pursue in the future the role of those feelings as coping devices or as instigators of heightened stress and strain in the home.

The question posed is:

**How do homeworkers feel about their homes, and have those feelings changed or been reinforced since they started working at home?**

Homeworkers were asked the above question directly. But comments about their feelings arose at various times during the interview. Some could not answer this question, and simply said, "Well, I like my house." We probed extensively on this question.

We recorded each comment (sometimes people would have more than one interpretation) on an index card, and followed qualitative data analysis procedures recommended by Miles and Huberman (1984). This type of analysis, and the complexity of the question, was intended to generate a number of different classifications and taxonomies. We did not feel we were to discover a singular "answer" or taxonomy.

Three researchers individually sorted the cards into categories, which they defined and developed. Sometimes these categories were similar between judges, others quite different. Although this procedure may appear to resemble the multiple sorting task advocated by Canter and colleagues (1985) what we were attempting was to discover the multiple categories which reflect people's changed feelings about their homes. We were less interested in the relationship between comments and more in the creation, development and understanding of multiple categories of meaning.

A more complete analysis from these sorts is forthcoming. This chapter explores the 3 common themes of the meaning of home in the research literature—as refuge, as order, and as identity—from the perspective of professional homeworkers. Future work will involve developing more complete taxonomies as well as differentiating interpretations by domestic and work characteristics.

**HOME AS REFUGE**

As discussed above, the "home as refuge" metaphor is a theme prevalent in most empirical and phenomenological studies of home. However, the dimensions of this feeling explode when home is more than one's private abode.
For some, home remains a refuge.

_The home is private. It is a sanctuary. There is no difference in my feelings._ [199, Man, Full Nest]

**For others, home becomes more of a refuge, in a positive manner.** Some spoke of the pleasure not having to go out of the home often. One woman operating a bindery and mail service said her home became more of a refuge, a safe haven. This was because she and her husband are building a family business, and that business is located in the home along with their children. As she explained, "This business is like a child—you have to nurture it also." This nurturing quality of a business along with the family, and the links between them, intensified for her the refuge and haven aspect of her home.

_Home is very important and I can spend weeks without going outside._ [82, Woman, Full Nest]

_Home is more of a refuge since I don’t have to go out of the home._ [26, Woman, Single Parents]

**For many, the refuge nature evolved into a sense of isolation and entrapment, resulting in negative feelings and in some cases reactions to minimize those feelings.** Home became less of a haven and more of a prison. Many people describe this as feeling "chained" or "trapped." One person mentioned that now since the home was the center of most of her activities, she felt more vulnerable when she left her home. This may reflect "the problem that has no name" (Friedan, 1963) shared among many housewives in the 1950s, and a concern among feminists today that home-based work may once again confine and isolate women.

_Home is not a refuge now—I can get trapped here._ [152, Woman, Solos]

_Home used to feel like a sanctuary. Now I sometimes feel trapped because I’m here all the time._ [164, Woman, Full Nest]

Several people who mentioned this feeling also mentioned how they responded to counteract it. Many make an effort to get out of their homes for part of the day. One woman said the home used to feel like a sanctuary to her. But now that she is here all the time, and with a new baby, she often feels trapped. Because of this, the neighborhood has become "critical" to her for walking, getting out, and "extending" herself from the home. Similarly an escrow manager mentioned that she used to go out to lunch everyday with her husband, when he was alive, to make sure they maintained a distinct area away from the home/office. As one woman mentioned, "I feel home is my place, a place to come back to when I go out. But I definitely need to go out at least one day a week to see people."
It's difficult to detach from things at home. I must get physically away. [116, Man, Adults Only]

Home may become less of a refuge especially when it becomes "invaded" by clients. It was no longer a place to relax. As one person said, "It is now harder to get away from either work or my family." But many of these people interpreted the nature of refuge as a place to get away from work: "When you work at home it is not a refuge from work--the work is always there." Many times the nature of having clients in the home produced these feelings: "I used to feel the home was a more personal place. Now it's not because other people are coming into the home, walking through it and seeing my family."

People who come into my home to see my demonstrations also come into my privacy. [23, Woman, Full Nest]

A space or time associated with the work itself may become a refuge within the home. Sometimes this is defined temporally. One homeworker felt that her relationship with her home was stronger when she was home alone. When her family entered the house, the feeling of refuge dissipated. Another homeworker saw her home as "her castle" during the day, and, as she put it, will do anything to "defend it" then. Her husband had an extended disability for awhile and was home during the day--her working hours. Even though he spent most of the time upstairs while she was working in her exclusive downstairs office, she did not like it and felt he was intruding. Refuge may be temporally defined.

Others define it spatially. A few people explicitly mentioned that they did not like household members or friends to go into the office. Some are explicit about it: "the office is my refuge," "my workspace is more of a haven," "the workspace is a haven for me from the rest of the house." Conversely other parts of the home may be viewed as a refuge from the workspace. One homeworker felt that her bedroom was a retreat because she did not work there.

My office is my space. I don't like my family in here. I like having a door to close. [107, Woman, Adults Only]

HOME AS IDENTITY

Home as identity was another consistent theme that homeworkers mentioned. In many cases this was positively construed.

For some, home took on a professional identity. One woman claimed, "Home now reflects my values, tastes, interests. My work
allows me to express my values more than I would do with a washing machine." One woman who does a lot of demonstrations at home feels she should impress her clients when they arrive by not having a messy house. Interestingly this woman is corporate-employed, and what she feels she is representing is the company and her role in that company. Another felt the exterior facade was important in its appearance to clients since it was their first impression.

I feel better about my home because I have something definite to do at home now. [13, Woman, Full Nest]

My children [grown and living outside her home] don't feel it is a home but a business. [126, Woman, Solos]

Home may identify the homemaker domestically which is generally disliked. After completing a two-hour interview, a respondent hesitated when I got up to leave. "I must tell you," she said, "working at home has made me a housewife." Her family does not see her as "working" since she does not show the exterior signs of professional work: i.e. she does not dress up and go out. Because they see her at home all day, they expect her to do all the housework. She complains that they never help her.

In a similar vein, one fellow mentioned he had an office outside his home office, not because of personal problems working at home, but, he felt, his clients had a negative impression of him, not being a professional, when they came to meetings at the home.

Home may assume an integrative identification. People mention that their homes now represent their integrated lives—domestic, leisure and work. As one free-lance writer who had been working out of his home for the past 25 years said, "Work is such an integral part of me that I would feel lost without an office in the home. If I had an office outside my home I'd still want an office here. It is part of my identity." Another person mentioned how the identity of the home had changed. It was now not only a place for family but also for the creative, work part of her. In fact she likes her home more now because "it incorporates all of me—the creative part and the other part." A number of people appreciate this integration. One person said he does not feel he has to separate his work and private lives; he likes the integration, it makes him feel "whole."

The identity of the home has changed—not only a place for family but also for the creative work part of me. [160, Woman, Adults Only]

All wins and disappointments are anchored here. The home is the repository now for everything. [115, Man, Adults Only]
Some people express a need for identity separation. They prefer this separation between their domestic and work lives, in space and time. Integration, like that expressed above, was not desired and hence this spatial arrangement was sometimes problematic.

I like having a separation between work and home. I like travelling to work, putting on a suit, and all the rest. If I had my own business I would not want to do it out of my home. [113, Man, Full Nest]

I must keep home life and work life separate in space and time. [110, Woman, Adults Only]

One homeworker began to identify with her home as her own through her work at home. She felt that having her own business, at home, perhaps made her feel it was her home. When she remarried and moved into her husband’s house several years ago, she never felt it was her own home. But recently, with her children grown and gone, and having a business at home, she now feels that the house is hers: an appropriation through individual work and space as she now claims her home as her own.

HOME AS ORDERED SPACE

This involves four dimensions.

Increased spatial awareness of the home was often the result of spending more time at home and of having clients visit the home. Some mentioned becoming more aware of the size—the house now seemed smaller when using it more intensively and frequently. Certain areas of the home or certain qualities and fixtures are more keenly noticed.

I didn’t appreciate the upstairs [where her office is now located, and which used to be the children’s bedrooms] until I moved up here. [67, Woman, Adults Only]

I now notice more things that need to be done around the home, things that need to be fixed. I notice them more than my husband does because I’m here so much. [14, Woman, Single Parents]

A spatial response to this spatial awareness is remodeling, not only of the workspace but the entire house. Many homeworkers took me on "tours" of their homes to show me how they had remodeled the kitchen, renovated the basement, added an outdoor deck, or completed other work. Another spatial response is separating domestic and work space. One Solo woman not only had an exclusive office but also a
separate bathroom for clients and visitors to use. Sometimes this spatial response was in closing doors. Sometimes the response is attitudinal; a feeling that work and domestic spaces are separate, or they commingle. One health care consultant said that when she is working on a big project she mentally construes her workspace as encompassing her kitchen and workroom; normally she thinks of it simply as her workroom.

*Since I spend more time at home I want to do more remodeling. I want the entire home to look nice. I've remodeled almost every room.* [11, Woman, Full Nest]

*Before, home used to be just a place to sleep. Now I want to make the entire home comfortable. This also makes me feel better about working here.* [202, Woman, Solos]

*Decorating now is more important because I spend so much more time at home. I've decorated not only the office but everywhere in the house.* [101, Woman, Full Nest]

*Many homeworkers voiced being aware of order,* particularly clutter. One homeworker with four children said that she was now more aware of her home being messy. Not only the time spent at home but also client visits prompted this increased awareness.

*I'm more aware of the messy state of my house because people pop in at any time.* [19, Woman, Full Nest]

*I'm now more aware of things going wrong in the house.* [2, Woman, Full Nest]

*Many people respond to this awareness of order by tidying the home.* I expect that many of them spent quite a bit of time cleaning their homes before we came over for interviews. Many said they kept their homes clean and tidy not only for clients, but also for themselves since they are there more. Some resent this. One male homeworker said, "I tend to resent doing things around the house just because I'm always here. Home becomes a place to do housework and not to relax." One corporate-employed woman resented the cleaning she did for customer visits to the home, and felt the time spent in cleaning was not recognized by her company.

*I keep the home cleaner for myself. I don't have clients here. I do it because I'm here more.* [206, Woman, Adults Only]

*I keep the downstairs neater than before [office is upstairs] for both myself and for clients. I think better when things are neat.* [64, Woman, Adults Only]
I keep the house neater because now it is the center for work and private life. I especially keep the "community rooms" clean and picked up. [162, Woman, Adults Only]