
Understanding the Meaning of 'Home': Critical analysis of Interview

1. Introduction

The purpose of this report is to analyze the meaning of 'home' by engaging the experience of another person by approaching them through interviews. In order to ensure the validation of the analysis, the first section of the study is written with literature review which discusses theories of what 'home' is which is relevant the most to the study. Those many theories which are mentioned will be synthesized into one paragraph which will be the base of the analysis of the findings. This way, the study will have a focus in terms of analyzing. The methodology used throughout the study was to explain the process of gathering the data until writing the report. This includes the guide from Queensland University of Technology ethical form and qualitative research of method Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). It is also explained that one participant is required for the study and how the researcher approaches the participant and what kind of interview question is eligible to be asked. To present the analysis of perceiving 'home' on the participant's perspective as a meaningful understanding of 'home', one superordinate theme with three subordinate themes are provided as they cover all analysis. With comparison with theories and concepts of home discussed in the literature review section, there is a strong connection between them with the findings. These findings can be applied to future practice as a designer as a new preference before designing a space. Analyzing in detail on understanding the meaning of 'home' to other person experience challenge the existing theories of home whether they can be proven in order to achieve the aim of the study.

2. Literature Review

In order to show valid context, there will be correlation between findings with relevant theories and concepts to the study. Since it relates to study of 'home', this section will explain about literature reviews about various views about 'home'. First, 'House' and 'Home' may have a same meaning. However, they have different level of value. 'House' can be described as a place to live such as, apartment, flats, or hotel. 'Home' cannot be described with one or two definition. As defined by Mallet, who mentions several meanings of home as a noun, some of them are, "a family or other group living in a house or other place", "the place where something is invented, founded or developed: the US is the home of baseball" (2004, p.62). Further, Mallet explains more that, "Home is place but it is also a space inhabited by family, people, things and belongings – a familiar, if not comfortable space where particular activities and relationships are lived" (2004, p.63). Therefore, it is not just the place or location which can be focused on. It can be a person, a group of people, an animal, or a still object depending on what kind of point of views towards the relevant being. Meaning, that approach will not always require more than just the visible characteristic of the 'home'.

One researcher found three keys which influence the concept of 'home': cultural, linguistic and historical context, philosophical and phenomenological context, and psychological context (Moore, 2000, pg. 207). To simplify, a person indicates something as 'home' can be caused by the cultural aspects and memory of the person had spent with, it can be how long or how

special the memory is. One example defined by Moore as a concept of family, which having historical and cultural associations. However, Moore stated more about those contexts do not seem to suit the concept of 'home' in depth (Moore, 2000, pg. 208). Moreover, 'Home' has been described as ambiguous as defined by Lawrence (1995) and is difficult to explicitly define and manipulate according to Benjamin (1995). Even how vague the word 'home' is, 'home' can make a person to becoming their true self. As described by Hayward (1975), who drew list of meanings of 'home'; 'home' as self and self-identity, is one of them. This leads to how 'home' can contribute a person to feel that way. Based on Maslow's theories (1954), "'Home' provides psychological comfort, social needs as well as physiological needs". Therefore, a person can perceive something as 'home' because how comfortable a person with something.

Those theories relating the concept of 'home' must be understood in order to apply them to the findings. Psychological, social and cultural aspects are crucial as they are part of the self-identity of someone, which contributes a person to feel comfortable of something and perceive it as 'home'.

3. Methodology

The methodology used to explore the concept of home through memory and culture from another person involved recruiting one participant to be interviewed before reaching written the study. The participant chosen for the study is a 21-year-old female who currently studying communication at the University of Queensland as an international student who is undergoing an undergraduate double degree program. Thus, she lives far away from her home country, Indonesia. She explained that she had no one close to her when the time she arrived in Australia and this is the second year she lives in Australia. In order to maintain private information of the participant, she will be referred as Kelly. The researcher explained the process and the requirements to Kelly regarding the study in brief. Then, the researcher ensured Kelly maintained her identity by making her name anonym as it is in accordance with the ethics guidelines provided by the Queensland University of Technology. On the guidelines, there is the requirements for Kelly to contribute to the study, which she can read it once more and sign it. As the ethical form stated, Kelly was asked to search five photographs which remind her 'home'. The researcher reminded Kelly that 'home' can be anything than just a mere place, without specifying what 'anything' is, so Kelly have more choices of photos. After a few days the images were sent through via social media, and the researcher printed out the photos and bring them when interviewing Kelly. In continuation for further understanding about home concept, highlighted in self and self-identity, Kelly was asked questions which mainly related to:

- How can self-identity have a main role for the participant to consider something as 'home'?
- How adaptive can the participant be to perceive something as 'home' in an environment she is not familiar with?
- How can memory and culture contribute to make something feels like 'home'?

The following questions which were asked to Kelly were mostly referring to 'why', 'what' question in order to get more information to be analyzed. 'Why' versus 'what' questions are both needed in collaboration, 'why' provide explanation while 'what' invites creative reflection towards understanding the question, as defined by Akihiro Yoshida (2010) in Finlay (2011, pg. 14). One of the questions was; in what way those photographs means 'home' for the

participant and why. This question led Kelly to provide rich knowledge about what 'home' is according to her understanding and each meaning from each photo may show Kelly's self-identity. Another main question was what is special about those photographs compared to others, which made Kelly to answer in creative reflection as Akihiko mentioned. While others, were following Kvale (1996) interview questions such as a beginning question, probing question, and interpreting question. Lastly, the researcher always asked whether there is something Kelly wants to tell about as a sign before moving on to another photo.

Later, the responses were transcribed first, and were analyzed deeply according to Smith (2009) Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). Based on the IPA, the researcher started to do initial noting on every Kelly's answers in order to engage more with the transcript. The initial note would be self-understanding about Kelly's answer then develop it to three aspects; descriptive (describing the content, written in normal text), linguistic (focusing on specific use of language, written in italic text), and conceptual (engaging at interrogative level, written in underline text). From the initial notes, the researcher wrote what themes that were found on each note and compare whether there were same themes between responses. Further, when similar or same themes were sorted, the researcher determined the theme in a bigger picture as the super-ordinate theme which cover all part of the analysis as defined by Smith (2009, pg. 101), "Often it helps the analysis to move to a more theoretical level as one recognizes, for example, that themes or super-ordinate themes which are particular to an individual cases also represent instances of higher order concepts which the cases therefore share". In addition, on the diagram (See Appendix) have more detail regarding the process throughout the analysis.

4. Findings

This section represents outputs after analyzing the collected data related to study in relation about the overarching theme posed in this thesis: What is the role of self and self-identity in the process of someone who perceive something as 'home' for a person who had no one close in a new environment. There is one super-ordinate theme that branches into three ordinate themes from the analysis of Kelly's perspective about 'home' as she is related to them. Highlights and contradictions were found about the factors that has affected the way 'home' is understood by Kelly; in this content, they can be social, cultural, and psychological aspects. Inherent in this question in the assumption that Kelly, who had no one close in her new environment may different from someone who had someone close at the time they arrived at the new environment. In addition to all the explanation of the section in brief, photographs and quotations from the transcript of the interview are provided for more detail information as a support of the findings.

4.1 Sub-Ordinate: Adaptation through Challenging Situations, Mutual Relationship Through Compatible Personalities, and Dependence of Memory

4.1.1 Adaptation Through Challenging Situations

This theme emphasizes on how Kelly can adapt to something she cannot obtain from the start and need some process to achieve it such as how she understand her mother strictness, her bonding session with her friends, her relationship with her cat, the traditional food she could not cook, and how she manage to made her current living space like that. There is one similarity

between those examples, which all of them took so much time to be achieved as Kelly mentioned. Time is the main influence on someone to adapt, because every person has their different capabilities to do something. Further, Kelly also feels that she is becoming a better self through tough times, without them, she cannot be the person she is (See Appendix) Kelly consider the process as tiring, however, fun and worth it. It can be shown by how she explained the procedure of making the food (See Appendix)

4.1.2 Mutual Relationship Through Compatible Personalities

One consideration for Kelly to identify something as 'home' is how mutual they relationship are, especially with living beings. Different from the first ordinate theme, this theme does not include time as the main factor. As Kelly mentioned, people can get to know to each other and become close right after. This can be happened if they have compatibility. Compatible does not always mean two persons having the same personalities, the same preferences, or the same hobby. Compatible means they can have random personalities, but they understand the differences which can be shown by not judging each other. This also was defined by Kelly, "We have different personalities, but we have the same way of thinking. Same way of thinking means tat we understand each other when somebody does, like we can do anything in front of them without them judging us" (See Appendix).

4.1.3 Dependence of Memory

Kelly, as a student who study on Australia which in environment, she was not familiar with, she tends to use her memory is the main base for Kelly to do something. Kelly's experiences of 'home' is the main connection all ordinate themes. She answered most questions with her memory about past experiences with beings she thinks as 'home', which are people and her pet, a cat (See appendix). The photo of a food and her current living space she perceives as 'home' also strongly connected to her memory, even though it is not a living thing. Kelly prefers to remember memories which she thinks as challenging and fun. This is because she mentioned a lot of word which related to hardworking, tiring, worth, and fun at least once in each photograph (See appendix).

4.2 Superordinate Theme: Home as Self and Self-Identity

Self-identity is interpreted as, "the perception or recognition of one's characteristics as a particular individual, especially in relation to social context" in Oxford Dictionary. To simplify, self-identity is when someone being himself with a distinctive character. Throughout the interview, Kelly explain that she is comfortable to something which she can be her true self (See appendix). It can be shown from her family, they obviously know Kelly what kind of person she is. Kelly's friends and pet whose she can do whatever she wanted on front of them without being judge. Self-identity is one characteristic as an individual, in relation to Kelly, her current living space also defined what kind of person Kelly is because she said herself that she will always decorate her room with her one preset. Lastly, the food, it is a traditional food from her home country, which has its own characteristic either from the ingredients used and the method of cooking it. Thus, self-identity is the only one super-ordinate theme which connects the three ordinate themes and covers other themes which related to what 'home' is in Kelly's understanding. The statements above can be proven in the analysis in a form of notes, diagram, and photographs.

4.3 Person-environment Influences That Contribute to 'Home'

In the beginning of the interview, she referred 'home' as people whom she comfortable with (See appendix). On the contradictory, the photographs which remind her as 'home' were group of people, an animal, a food, and a place. For her, it does not matter how long Kelly spent time with them, but how compatible she is with them, which leads to a sense of comfort (See appendix). Therefore, the keyword which can be taken from this statement is comfort.

Secondly, culture, is strongly related for Kelly to perceive something as home. Since Kelly is not continuously living for two years full in Australia, it is possible that her culture still affect how she think, behave, and how she perceives something as 'home'. This culture can be shown where did Kelly raised from. It can be seen from the analysis which she told the researcher that she knows her friend who she thinks as her 'home' back in her home country, however, no more than acquaintances (See appendix). Kelly explained that she became close with them when they are living on Australia. In relation to the ordinate themes, it can be assumed that Kelly has a sense of dependence towards people she knew before, especially came from the same major, university, and country. The food she perceives as 'home', besides being a traditional food from her home country, she also explained that she only made them during special occasions, which she also celebrates them in her home country (See appendix). Therefore, Kelly is strongly attached to her culture as it affects her on perceiving something as 'home'.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

Before going to the discussion, this study revealed important information to me as a future professional designer. The most important thing is to keep in mind when designing a 'home' is highly depends to the clients themselves and can vary drastically. Further, a sense of home is established not just because the location of the place, but it can be a group of people or a familiar. Defined by Mallet, "Home is place but it is also a space inhabited by family, people, things and belongings – a familiar, if not comfortable space where particular activities and relationships are lived" (2004, p.63). This theory firmly connects to Kelly as she included people and an animal on the photo elicitation, she also mentioned people first when being interviewed of what 'home' is. This can be gained by approaching the client to gain information which analyzed later. Thus, it is important to deeply engage with the client as a part of the early stage in the study.

As Kelly explained throughout the interview with experiences and memories of her perceiving 'home' which play a main role on this study, it is important to understand the client preference before doing the practice in any designed space. Memory is indeed connected to Kelly's perspective of 'home' as she strongly depends to it especially on her new environment. Supported by Rapport and Dawson theory (1998, pg. 8), "Home encompasses cultural norms and individual fantasies. Home brings together memory and longing, the ideational, the affective and the physical, the spatial and the temporal, the local and the global, the positively evaluated and the negatively". It is also shown by Kelly's behavior when explained how she decorate her current living space, she tends to decorate it with polaroid photos which fills with her memories of her life, this reminds her of 'home' as she mentioned it as nostalgic. As the literature theory explained, definition of 'home' is various and ambiguous like Lawrence (1995) explained, because there are numerous aspects which can affect a person to perceive something as 'home', but it will show as an identity of a person, as described by Hayward (1975), "home as

self and self-identity". This theory also can be proven by Kelly answers number of times in relation to becoming a true self without anyone judging her. Designing a space with those aspects on mind will allow to influence my design in a future, which will have an atmospheric space that suitable to the client's preference.

In conclusion, through analyzing and engaging the lived experience of another person preference of 'home' is understood as self-identity which includes psychological aspects which is dependent of the person's memory and social aspects which is mutual relationship through compatible personalities and self-adaptation. While it may not always within the person, a sense of 'home' can be achieved by having a comfortable environment and can be affected by culture.