

Co-Residential Groups¹

TREVOR DENTON
Brock University

RÉSUMÉ

L'étude des groupes co-résidentiels est refaite autour de la question de proximité, c'est-à-dire du fait que les membres du même ménage vivent sous le même toit. Se servant des hypothèses de congruence et la théorie de l'échange, l'auteur soutient que, toutes choses égales par ailleurs, les gens vont vivre dans le même ménage seulement quand ils forment un groupe minimal équilibré (ordinairement, une famille nucléaire composée des parents et des enfants). Les ensembles plus étendus vont résider en commun seulement quand des avantages additionnels viennent contrebalancer les difficultés cognitives potentielles qui en découlent. Plusieurs hypothèses sont déduites de ce principe et mises à l'épreuve à l'aide de données sur une réserve indienne du Canada.

The aim of this paper is to reconceptualize the study of co-residential groups. Traditionally, co-residential groups and residence patterns generally have been approached from three main perspectives. First, in the typological tradition the problem has been formulated in terms of specifying the range of types of (usually post-marital) residence found in cultures around the world (eg. Murdock 1949). Few today adhere to this approach, perhaps because of the seemingly endless variety of types found and difficulties of fitting vague definitions to concrete data. The second approach to residence pattern analysis has been that of decision theory, in which (usually post-marital) residence has been conceptualized in terms of couple choosing a residence in such a

¹ The data in this paper were gathered during research in 1967-1968 jointly financed by Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation and the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (see Denton 1970). This is a revision of a paper read at the 1973 meetings of the American Anthropological Association. Michael P. Carroll and Melvin L. Perlman made helpful comments.

way as to optimize gains in the light of the constraints which they face (eg. Barth 1966; Goodenough 1956). The third approach has been that of the domestic cycle, in which the diversity of households present in a given society at a given time is seen as the product of different norms appropriate to the different life cycle statuses present (Goody 1958).

All these approaches have missed a key dimension of household composition, which is — proximity, the fact that all members of the same household live together under the same roof. The aim of this paper is to reformulate the study of co-residential groups around this central issue.

CO-RESIDENTIAL GROUPS

In any explanation of concrete behaviour, such as a residence pattern, it is important to generalize, to conceptualize a problem in a theoretical framework of the widest possible range of application. Heider's balance hypotheses (Heider 1958) and Homans' exchange theory (Homans 1974) together provide such a conceptual framework for the study of co-residential groups. Other things being equal, people will live in the same household only when they form a cognitively consistent balanced minimal group, usually a nuclear family of parents plus children. Larger aggregates will tend to be cognitively inconsistent and unbalanced, and will live in the same household only when "other things" are not equal, namely, when there are additional social rewards for such co-residence which outweigh the potential strain involved. This argument can be formulated as follows.

While many theories of cognitive consistency have been advanced (cf. Abelson *et al.* 1968), Heider (1958) sets out a framework in which proximity plays an important role.² Briefly, he suggests that a cognition for a person P involving another person

² The field of cognitive consistency is somewhat chaotic, being characterized by many different competing theoretical formulations (cf. Abelson *et al.* 1968). Heider's formulation, while ambiguous about such issues as strength of relations among elements of a cognition and degree of balance, is in the writer's opinion among the best of the theoretical formulations which exist at the moment, and one of the few to incorporate the concept of proximity. See Carroll (1973) for an interesting cross-cultural application of Heider's work using the Harary *et al.* (1965) formulation.

O (or an object X) involves two kinds of relations — liking (+ 1 for liking, — 1 for disliking) and unit forming (+ u for unit forming, — u for not unit forming). Unit forming relations are those of, for example, causality, ownership, similarity, membership, and in particular proximity and interaction (which flows from proximity). A cognition is balanced if both signs are negative or both are positive (ie. + 1 + u, or — 1 — u). Heider suggests that unbalanced cognitions are stressful and tend to change to a state of balance. Now, co-residence implies positive unit formation (+ u). Thus, a cognition in which P lived in the same household as O (+ u) but disliked O (— 1) would be stressful to P and therefore likely to change to liking (+ u + 1) or fission of the household (— u — 1). Restoration of balance by ignoring and not thinking about such a cognition is also theoretically possible, but highly unlikely for any lengthy period of time when the unit forming relation is proximity or frequent interaction.³

Now, Sherif and Sherif (1953:2) define a group as “a social unit (1) which consists of a number of individuals who, at a given time, stand in more or less definite interdependent status and role relationships to one another and (2) which explicitly or implicitly possesses a set of values or norms of its own regulating the behaviour of individual members, at least in matters of consequence to the group.” Members of a group experience motives, aspirations and frustrations in common. If two such in-groups are “brought into functional relationship under conditions of competition and group frustration, attitudes and appropriate hostile actions in relation to the out-group and its members will arise” (p. 237). The same result would occur in the case of an in-group in hostile relations with individual outsider(s) not constituting an out-group but rather simply hostile individuals outside the in-group.

It can be argued that, if two in-groups or one in-group plus outsider(s) live in the same household, there will exist the potential

³ It is also possible to have a tripartite cognition involving P, O and X, or P, O and Q, where X is an object and Q is another person. Balance exists here when all three of the relations are positive or when one of the relations is positive and two are negative. Theoretically, an unbalanced P O relation (+ u — 1) could be balanced by adding a third person to the cognition (eg. P (— 1) O, P (+ 1) Q, Q (—1)O). However, where proximity or frequent interaction are involved, dyadic cognitions are inevitable and will be unbalanced if the sentiment relation is negative (ie. + u — 1).

for mutual hostility and therefore cognitive strain; each in-group or outsider, having its own set of norms important to it, would mutually frustrate one another in varying degrees. The simplest co-residential unit is thus a minimal group sharing a single set of common norms as with a mother plus children, plus usually a father.⁴ Such minimal groups are balanced and cognitively consistent (+ u + 1). All other groups are "abnormal" from the perspective elaborated above and require further explanation.

However, it is well established that in many societies around the world, co-residential groups larger than minimal groups do exist. The question then becomes, under what conditions will this arise?

Exchange theory provides an explanation. One of Homans' exchange theory propositions (the value proposition) states that, "the more valuable to a person is the result of his action, the more likely he is to perform the action." (Homans 1974:25)⁵ Thus, minimal co-residential groups will exist unless there are additional social rewards which make it profitable to endure the strain of a potentially unbalanced household. "Reward" is defined as "profit — cost", and refers to the value of an activity. Thus, we may predict that potentially unbalanced co-residential groups will occur when the profits of co-residence outweigh the cost of the strain toward cognitive inconsistency.

Consider a household in which P is co-resident with outsider O, but dislikes O (+ u — 1). There are four possible outcomes (although several may partially occur together):

1. — u — 1 — break off the unit forming relations
2. ignore the cognition (unlikely as a permanent solution where the unit forming relation is proximity)
3. + u + 1 — change the cognition to liking and ignore undesirable behaviour
4. + u — 1 — retain the unbalanced cognition and endure the strain

⁴ While parents plus children seem to be a typical minimal group, other varieties of balanced minimal groups have been reported in the literature (cf. Stephens 1964).

⁵ See Homans (1974) for the other propositions of exchange theory.

Other things being equal, the simplest solution is number 1, because, other things being equal, solution 1 means an end to any potential cognitive strain whereas solutions 2, 3 and 4 will all require continued psychic energy (ignoring the cognition in solution 2, ignoring or reinterpreting unpleasant behaviour as pleasant in solution 3, or enduring the strain in solution 4). To maintain co-residence where group norms will inevitably be frustrated to some extent, i.e. to opt for any of solutions 2, 3 or 4 or some mixture of them, means that additional social rewards will be present to make these a preferred solution over number 1 — fission of the household.⁶

The argument developed above can be summarized as follows. 1) Proximity creates a positive unit forming relation (+ u). 2) The sentiment relation between any given minimal group member and outsider(s) is likely to be negative. 3) Therefore, there is a high probability that the relation between any given minimal group member and the outsider(s) is likely to contain one positive bond and one negative bond (+ u — 1). 4) But, any such pair linked by a positive and negative bond is imbalanced according to Heider and a strain toward balance will occur. 5) Fission of the household to achieve balance will occur except where there are additional social benefits to outweigh the costs of the potential cognitive strain involved in continued co-residence.

CO-RESIDENTIAL GROUPS AT A CANADIAN INDIAN RESERVE

To test these ideas let us examine co-residential groups at a Canadian Indian reserve.⁷ The reserve is an acculturated one in the settled southern region of Canada. While older villagers are bilingual and younger ones speak only English, the kinship terminology in both English and the native Indian language follows the North American pattern in which mother's and father's siblings are equated as uncles and aunts, and the latter's children are equated as cousins.

⁶ See Homans (1974: 59 *et seq.*) for a discussion of the relation between exchange theory and the balance hypotheses.

⁷ See Denton (1970) for a detailed study of the reserve. By agreement with the Band Council the reserve is left unnamed to preserve anonymity.

While there are no residence "rules" at the reserve, there are certainly residence preferences. Ideally, a married couple should maintain their own separate residence, as should unmarried adults whether single, separated or widowed. It is quite proper for a married son or daughter plus spouse to live temporarily with parents if they are saving money to purchase their own house within a year. It is also appropriate for households to care for close relatives who are very elderly or infirm and who cannot take care of themselves.

Other forms of residence do exist but are held in lower repute. For example, unwed mothers plus offspring normally reside with the mother's parents. Unmarried adult sons sometimes live with their parents. In some households a brother, sister, brother-in-law or nephew is allowed to stay, and in a few households a married indigent son or daughter plus spouse and children live on a semi-permanent basis.

Here is the actual composition of households at the reserve as of June 1, 1967. The village population was 411 persons spread among 84 households.⁸ Of these 84 households, 20 were single person dwellings, and 38 were balanced households of a husband and wife or parent(s) plus children (of which four households also had a child plus spouse temporarily living with them to save money to purchase a house within a year). It should be noted that, because of intense norms of familism at the reserve, it is safe to assume that these nuclear family households are indeed reasonably balanced minimal groups. A further three two-person households consisted of non-nuclear family groups, with a woman plus her brother, or nephew or grandchild, who provided company for the woman and help around the household. All in all, 23 of the

⁸ All census terms used in this paper follow the definitions utilized by the Census of Canada. Thus, the term "household" is defined not in the *de facto* sense of persons at a house on a given day, but rather in the *de jure* sense of persons who themselves defined a particular house as their customary place of residence.

In large houses (eg. Iroquois longhouses etc.) it might be possible for household members to minimize proximity and interaction by turning the house into a virtual "hotel" wherein different segments belong to different people who interact minimally among themselves. This is not possible at the community considered in this paper because the houses are quite small. However, the concept of degree of proximity might be a useful one for refining cross-cultural applications of cognitive consistency theory to co-residential groups.

84 households were unbalanced in the sense that they consisted of parent(s) plus children plus someone(s) outside this group.

It has been suggested that single person households or balanced minimal groups are the norm, and that larger aggregates will occur only when there are rewards for enduring the strain of potentially unbalanced relations. Thus, only the 23 unbalanced households at the reserve need be accounted for.

Recalling that "reward = profit — cost", a number of hypotheses can be derived from Homans' value proposition. In each of the 23 households there exists a main minimal group consisting of the household head plus (usually) a spouse and/or children. It can be predicted that co-resident persons not in this main group⁹ will:

1. have first or second degree kinship links with the household head rather than third or fourth (high cost to household main group of ignoring close kinsmen and low cost of ignoring distant kinsmen); this hypothesis includes both adults and children not in the main group;¹⁰
2. have no other household of closer kinship ties on the reserve where they might live, nor a house of their own on the reserve (high cost to household main group of

⁹ Marginal persons who are members of both a main group and another group are counted as non-main group persons because they share non-main group norms. Thus a daughter living with her husband and children in her parents' household would count as a non-main group person.

¹⁰ Degree of relationship of kinship links between ego and any other kinsman is computed by counting the number of potential kinship categories between ego (the household head in this case) and the kinsman. Thus, in the reserve kinship system, ego's parents, siblings, children and spouse are all one link away; ego's uncles, aunts, parents-in-law, siblings-in-law, grandparents, grandchildren, etc. are two links away since in each case one kinship category intervenes between them and ego.

The community is endogamous and any given individual will have a much larger number of third and fourth (or more distant) degree kinsmen in the community than first or second. Thus, the probability of the results obtained in Hypothesis 1 is really much smaller than the .001 indicated in Table 1 using the binomial test with its assumption that the probability of either kind of kinsman (first and second versus third and fourth) is .5.

The derivation of Hypothesis 1 is made in terms of cost to the main group of ignoring close kinsmen. One could also argue that close kinsmen would be more similar in values to the main group than distant kinsmen, thereby creating less imbalance and constituting less of a cost. However, the same operative hypothesis (more first and second than third and fourth degree kinsmen) would hold for either formulation.

- ignoring close kinsmen and high profit to non-main group persons of place to live on reserve); this hypothesis will be tested for non-main group adults only since children ordinarily accompany parents;
3. be likely to be accepted by poorer households needing rent money and/or ones where they can provide needed services, eg. providing needed help with children (high profit to household);
 4. be of lower social prestige in the community (low cost to lower status persons of accepting lower status form of residence);¹¹ this hypothesis will be tested for non-main group adults only (ie. not children) and will exclude elderly and infirm adults unable to care for themselves;
 5. be less assertive rather than more assertive, ie. children rather than adult women and adult women rather than adult men (this scale represents reserve norms of assertiveness) (low cost to main group in household of non-assertive people).

TABLE I — TESTS OF HYPOTHESES

Hypothesis 1 — Degree of kinship links to household head.

persons of links of 1 or 2 degrees = 69	$p < .001$ (one tailed binomial test) ¹⁰
persons of links of 3 or more degrees = 5	

Hypothesis 2 — Households in which non-main group persons have possible alternative residence on reserve of their own or of closer degree of kinship relatedness.

alternative residence = 4	$p < .001$ (one tailed binomial test)
no alternative residence = 19	

¹¹ There is a three tier social stratification system on the reserve with an elite (based on income and steady off-reserve factory jobs plus respected personal department), a lower group (based on chronic unemployment and disrespected personal department) and a residual middle group consisting of all others (cf. Denton 1970: 53-55).

Hypothesis 3 — Wealth and/or need of special services of households.

poorer households or needing special services = 17	$p < .02$ (one tailed binomial test)
better off households and not needing special services = 6	

Hypothesis 4 — Social prestige of non-grain group adults (excluding elderly or infirm).

lower = 19	$p < .02$ (one tailed binomial test)
middle or high = 7	

Hypothesis 5 — Assertiveness of non-main group persons.

number of children = 40	
number of adult females = 16	$p < .001$ (χ^2 test)
number of adult males = 11	

All five hypotheses were supported (Table 1). It is not suggested that these hypotheses (and the rewards they represent) are the only determinants of co-residential groups at the reserve, but they are important determinants and their tests do support the line of theoretical reasoning developed in this paper.

DISCUSSION

This paper has suggested that co-residential aggregates larger than minimal groups will occur when the social profits of such co-residence outweigh the potential strain involved, and used the balance hypotheses and exchange theory to arrive at this formulation.

While a number of hypotheses were derived and tested with data from a Canadian Indian reserve, many additional hypotheses can be derived for future tests. For example, social profits important to the survival of groups of people include personal safety (as in societies with substantial incidence of violence), social identity (as with lineage and other groups), prevention of theft of production resources, and access to (and especially ownership of) production resources. Where large co-residential aggregates

are equated with any of these social profits, we may anticipate co-residential aggregates larger than minimal groups. Obviously many other hypotheses can also be derived.

The approach to co-residential groups outlined in this paper is to be preferred to previous approaches. It elaborates the decision theory and domestic cycle approaches. For, all members of a society, be they newly married couples or others, tend to maintain balanced co-residential groups on the basis of profits and costs involved, which may change through the life cycle as different norms become associated with different life cycle stages. The framework advanced in this paper can explain everything that past approaches to co-residential groups have explained, and more, and is therefore a preferred mode of explanation.

While the theory of co-residential groups advanced in this paper has greater explanatory potential than previous formulations, it is a start in a profitable direction rather than a polished final product. The theoretical conceptualization needs to be sharpened. For example, the concept of degree of proximity may be a useful one to pursue in cross-cultural refinements (cf. footnote 8). Moreover, in this paper minimal co-residential groups tended to be equated with nuclear families. At the reserve in question this as a reasonable assumption; however, throughout the world not all co-resident nuclear families are groups, and not all co-residential groups are families. This does not alter the theoretical formulation of this paper because the key concept is minimal co-residential group, be it familial or otherwise. Future work in this area may describe the range of co-residential groups other than familial groups to be found throughout the world. The ideas in this paper should be regarded as a start toward reconceptualizing the study of co-residential groups, not the end, and if they spark further thinking in the field they will have served their purpose.

REFERENCES

- ABELSON, R. P., E. ARONSON, W. J. MCGUIRE, T. M. NEWCOMB, M. J. ROSENBERG and P. H. TANNENBAUM
1968 *Theories of Cognitive Consistency: A Sourcebook*. Chicago: Rand McNally.

- BARTH, Fredrik
1966 Anthropological Models and Social Reality. Proceedings of the Royal Society, B, 165: 20-34.
- CARROLL, Michael P.
1973 Applying Heider's Theory of Cognitive Balance to Claude Levi-Strauss. Sociometry 36: 285-301.
- DENTON, Trevor
1970 Strangers in Their Land. Ph.D. Thesis, Department of Anthropology, University of Toronto.
- GOODENOUGH, Ward
1956 Residence Rules. Southwestern Journal of Anthropology 12: 22-37.
- GOODY, Jack
1958 The Developmental Cycle in Domestic Groups. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- HARARY, Frank, ROBERT Z. NORMAN and Dorwin CARTWRIGHT
1965 Structural Models. New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc.
- HEIDER, Fritz
1958 The Psychology of Interpersonal Relations. New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc.
- HOMANS, George Caspar
1974 Social Behaviour: Its Elementary Forms (second edition). New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc.
- MURDOCK, G. P.
1949 Social Structure. New York: Macmillan.
- SHERIF, Muzafer and Carolyn SHERIF
1953 Groups in Harmony and Tension. New York: Harper and Brothers.
- STEPHENS, William N.
1964 The Family in Cross-cultural Perspective. New York: Holt Rinehart and Winston.