

THE INMATES OF EIGENMANN: A LOOK AT DOOR DECORATION IN A GRADUATE DORMITORY

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1.0 Introduction

A graduate dorm is a fascinating artificial microcosm which serves to distill a great number of unique human beings into mere "residents." Eigenmann Hall on the campus of Indiana University is particularly interesting because of its international makeup and the concomitant social and cultural frictions which inevitably arise, but which, surprisingly, are kept very well in check.

I lived in Eigenmann Hall during the 1984-85 academic year, and as a folklore student I keenly watched the interactions of my fellow residents. A study on social interaction and the formation of cliques and alliances along ethnic, national, and academic lines would be fascinating, as would a look at the immense variety of survival techniques devised by people from widely varying backgrounds faced with the institutional dehumanization of dorm life. At least one folklorist has already investigated conversational interaction in dormitory elevators (Stewart 1983), and Eigenmann Hall would also provide a rich laboratory for the observation of esoteric/exoteric lore of all sorts (Jansen 1965). Likewise, the communication patterns in the building and the observance of public and private space (and, perhaps more interestingly, of those areas which are neither public nor private, such as the halls and the communal restrooms) would make for fascinating studies.

For the purposes of this paper, however, I will focus on just one aspect of life in Eigenmann, the ubiquitous custom of door decoration. At first glance it may seem that

door decorations are simply frivolous and unimportant, and indeed I would be the last to assert that the dorm residents consciously regard them as an essential aspect of dorm life. (How the residents would react if door decorations were outlawed is another question.) There are, however, some very interesting dynamics at work in door decorating. As I will show, these decorations follow recognizable patterns, are subject to rules, and are used as an expression of individual identity. In this use, they are clearly an aspect of self presentation. Like Goffman, I assume that there is a difference between the expression one gives (i.e., the decorations themselves) and the expression one gives off, the latter of which "involves a wide range of actions that others can treat as symptomatic of the actor, the expectation being that the action was performed for reasons other than the information conveyed in this way" (Goffman 1959:2). In other words, I assume that the things the residents of Eigenmann choose to post on their doors not only say something, but they say something about the residents.

In contrast to the kind of presentation with which Goffman primarily concerns himself, however, door decoration does not take place in a face-to-face situations. In this it is similar to yard art (Ohrn 1984) and the use of bumper stickers, for example. But door decoration is unique, as far as I know, in that there is a fairly wide range of possible decorations which are highly susceptible to personalization (compare bumper stickers) and which tend to reflect in very idiosyncratic ways on the decorator.⁽¹⁾ Unlike large-scale yard art, the door decorations in Eigenmann Hall, at least, are extremely common -- in fact, the rule rather than the exception. Also in contrast to yard art, door decoration allows the use of more subtle signifiers (e.g. cartoons and newspaper

clippings as opposed to pink flamingos). Thus I think that these decorations deserve some attention.

Further, at the risk of sounding like a functionalist, I would like to suggest that door decorations in a large graduate dorm populated by a very heterogeneous group of short-term residents serves a very specific purpose. I will show that door decoration can be used as a means to express one's identity; in this regard, door decoration can be seen as a mechanism for combating the uniformity and anonymity which can be oppressively significant in a large dorm on a large campus.

Before approaching the doors, however, some background information on the dorm itself and on the residents will prove helpful.

1.1 The Building

Eigenmann Hall is a fourteen-story cruciform building. It has a number of lounges -- a large formal lounge which takes up one wing of the first floor and smaller lounges, some of them with televisions and kitchenettes, on the third, ninth, and twelfth floors. There are two cafeterias on the ground floor, along with a snack bar, a small library, and two laundry rooms. Each wing is single-gender and has its own restroom with showers. Some floors have two female and two male wings, some have one female and three male wings. The elevators are at the juncture of the wings and there is a staircase at the outermost end of each wing. The majority of the rooms are single-occupant and none are provided with cooking facilities, though many residents rent small refrigerators. There is one telephone for every two rooms; the telephone is mounted in a hole in the wall between the two rooms and enclosed in a box with doors which open into the rooms. Thus while most Eigenmann residents do not have roommates, each one has a "phone mate."

1.2 The Residents

The residents of Eigenmann Hall are far from a homogeneous group, though they do have certain characteristics in common. Without exception they are students at Indiana University; however, there are both graduate and undergraduate students living in the hall, with undergraduates the clear minority (about 13%).⁽²⁾ Most of the residents (87%) are between 21 and 30 years of age, most of them (again 87%) are unmarried --the married students' spouses do not reside in the dorm. All of the residents are in the dorm for a relatively short stay, on the order of one to five years. In my estimation, a substantial minority of the residents stay for only one year.

The differences between the residents are, perhaps, more interesting. Eigenmann residents come from all over the United States and from many different parts of the world; over 60 different countries are represented. Residents have different native languages and are accustomed to different sets of norms and values; cultural diversity is the rule. Foreign students have a wide range of previous preparation for life in the United States. Some have lived here (either at I.U. or elsewhere in the United States) for a number of years, some are in the United States for the first time. One man I met from Saudi Arabia did not speak a word of English before he came to I.U. Most of the residents were U.S. citizens (between 59% and 71%); 52% were listed as "American White." There were more men than women (54% to 36%).⁽³⁾ Of the foreign students, something like 12% were from Europe (including 5% from Germany), 15% were from the Middle East (including 6% from Iran), 8% were from Sub-Saharan Africa (including 3% from Nigeria), and 44% were from East Asia (including almost equal numbers (3.5%))

from Hong Kong, Korea, and Thailand, 10% from Japan, and 18% from Taiwan). See Appendix C for a complete breakdown of citizenship.

Although all the residents are I.U. students, there is a great deal of academic diversity. No statistics were available, but along with the few folklore students in the building, I met music majors (voice, instrument, and theory), English and Public Policy students, library science and physics majors, MBAs, law students, language majors (French, Italian, East Asian Languages, and others), artists, historians, economists, computer scientists, and mathematicians, among others. I suspect that the residents of Eigenmann represent all of the diversity of Indiana University as a whole.

2.0 The Doors

Door decoration is an accepted form of communication and self-expression which relies entirely upon the discretion of the resident of the room -- both **whether** and **how** to decorate the door. There are no formalized rules, but there are observable conventions which people tend to follow. Door decoration is dynamic and yet stable; for while a given door may be changed many times in a given semester (or month or even week) all of the decorations (with a few exceptions which prove the rules) are fundamentally similar. Even so, door decoration is one of the few devices available to Eigenmann residents for changing drab, uniform, almost prison-like hallways into personalized, colorful, and interesting corridors.

Dorm door decorations are similar in several respects to the painted window screens of southeast Baltimore (Eff 1984) which are the most salient means of decorating row houses standing cheek-by-jowl without even a narrow strip of private property between the front step and the public sidewalk. Like the painted screens, decorated doors stand between private

and public spaces and transform standardized facades into unique entities. Unlike the dorm doors, however, the painted screens are usually produced by paid artisans; the dorm doors, in contrast, are decorated by the residents themselves and are therefore much more personalized.

2.1 Components

To collect data for this paper, I kept careful fieldnotes and prowled the halls of Eigenmann scrutinizing doors carefully. I took detailed notes of all the decorations on all the doors of my floor, and from these I deduced what I will refer to in this paper as the "minimum decoration," namely some combination of name, home town,⁽⁴⁾ major, and memo board. Over the course of the next couple of weeks, I talked informally to a number of people about their doors and doors in general, had formal, taped interviews with three residents, and visited half of the fourteen floors of the building to count the occurrence of various types of decorations.

The vast majority of items on doors come out of newspapers and magazines; only a tiny portion of them are hand-made. It seems that the single most common source is the **Indiana Daily Student (IDS)**, the campus newspaper. A few cartoons are notable for their prevalence, including **Bloom County** (which is published in the IDS), **Doonesbury**, and **Ziggy** (which are not). Political cartoons are also popular, as are cartoons from the **New Yorker**.

2.2.0 Artistry

Some doors are left blank, others decorated minimally, and many decorated, but not exactly artistically. A few doors **do** have interesting aesthetic impact. For example, one door was decorated with nine photos of athletes clipped from magazines, along with two large posters.

The clippings of the athletes were not riveting, but the posters were fascinating. One was a poster of an astronaut taking a space walk (obviously from a shuttle mission) with the blue and white globe of the earth in the background. The other was a poster for the 1984 Olympics, which was a picture of a man's hands holding a basketball in a pose preparatory to shooting for a basket. The bottom part of the basketball was orange rubber, but this faded into the top part which was a blue and white representation of the earth. Both posters were artistic and aesthetically pleasing, but the two representations of the world were nicely juxtaposed; in turn, the sports theme of the clippings of the athletes and the poster was interesting. No one piece of art on the door was created by the occupant of the room, but by placing them together as he did he created a new work of art.

In this light, at least some door decoration represents an interesting kind of artistic performance in small groups (Ben-Amos 1972). The choice of materials and the spatial arrangement of the materials can be very artistic visually, and a similar aesthetic response can be evoked intellectually by a choice of contrasting or complementary texts, cartoons, or pictures. Whether the residents of Eigenmann Hall decorate their doors to communicate with a small group in the rather specialized sense with which Ben-Amos uses the term is slightly more problematical. Ben-Amos quotes George C. Homans' definition of a group, namely "a number of persons who communicate with one another, often over a span of time, and who are few enough so that each person is able to communicate with all the others, not at second-hand through other people, but face-to-face" (Homans 1950:1, quoted in Ben-Amos 1972:12).

Certainly the residents of Eigenmann and indeed the people who can reasonably be supposed

to have access to the door decorations are few enough that they could communicate with all the others in a face-to-face manner. However, for the most part, they do not do so. There are several identifiable groups, all with debatable degrees of cohesion, which are likely to see any given door. There are, first, the room inhabitant and her/his close friends who visit the inhabitant's room on a regular basis; second, the other residents of the wing and **their** friends; third, the other residents of the floor; fourth, other residents of Eigenmann; and finally anyone who might pass by the decorated door. It seems to me that door decoration is chiefly intended to communicate to the first two groups, though which of the two is the primary audience probably shifts from door to door and even from decoration to decoration.

The type of communication that the doors represent is limited to the doors; if observing ("reading," if you will) another resident's door is communicating, then I have communicated with dozens of other residents without ever having seen their faces, and the reverse is true -- many residents have been communicated to by me (through my door decorations) without ever having seen me. Thus, if "face-to-face interaction" is required for the formation of a "group," the collective of people who participate in door decoration cannot, strictly speaking, be said to be a small group, since the primary form of communication is, as it were, "door-to-door." I find this an interesting exception to Ben-Amos's rule; I think that it fulfills the spirit of small group communication at the same time that it violates the letter of the definition.

2.2.1 Bricolage

The problem of artistic performance aside, the question could well be posed on what grounds I consider these door decorations as folklore,

especially seeing as how most of the components come from what we might broadly call "popular culture." For one, this is folklore insofar as the fairly elaborate decoration of dorm doors is not sanctioned institutionally -- it is a tradition which is learned by observation and imitation. I could also take the easy way out and claim that this is folklore on the basis of Dundes's famous definition. The residents of Eigenmann are a folk group because they "share at least one common factor" and this folk group has "some traditions which it calls its own" (Dundes 1965:2).

I would maintain, further, that the re-use of items from "popular culture" as door decorations and the act of transferring them from one context (as a magazine) to another is as truly a creative act as the carving of a duck decoy from a chunk of wood. Not only is the cartoon, for example, transferred from one location to another, not only is its physical context changed, but this change in context includes a change in meaning. What the cartoon meant in the magazine is anyone's guess, but once affixed to **my door** it has a new meaning intimately attached to my identity -- it is, really, a new thing.

This re-assembling of component parts into a new, whole entity was called "bricolage" by Claude Levi-Strauss. Levi-Strauss went a step further, though, and argued that "mythic thought" is characterized by bricolage -- that is, symbols ("the constitutive units of myth" (Levi-Strauss 1962:16)) are selected from the cultural stockpile and re-arranged and re-assembled to create new myths. Even so, cartoons, newspaper clippings, and posters are re-assembled on dorm doors to make a new statement.

2.3 Statistics

In my count of door decorations (tables of the results are in Appendix B), I looked for those doors which were blank, those which had minimum decorations (i.e., some combination of name, home town, major, and memo board), those which had more decorations (i.e., at least one of those elements listed as minimum plus some other decorations), and those which had other decorations (i.e., none of those elements listed as minimum, but some decoration). Some 76% of those doors counted included what I call the minimum decoration; this is fairly strong support for my use of the term. This, combined with the fact that only 3.8% of the doors I counted had some decoration exclusive of the minimum decoration (those which I call other) implies that there is a rule in operation, namely that one should decorate one's door with the minimum decorations. To fail to do so, or to decorate one's door in another way, puts a resident in the minority.

Thanks to the arrangement of the building, I was able to divide my information along wing, floor, and gender lines; but unless a given resident posted her or his hometown and major, these data were not available. Thus I was unable to make some interesting comparisons, such as between foreign and domestic students, between humanities and science and business majors, and so forth. A few interesting contrasts did come out, however.

First of all, a glance at the tables reveals that 64.7% of the doors on the first floor south wing are blank -- this is a figure almost half again that of the floor with the next highest incidence of blank doors. A second glance shows that the first floor has more blank doors overall than the rest of the building (40.4% to 20.7% for the 13th floor, the next highest figure). I assume that this is because there is a higher amount of traffic on the first floor

than on any other floor. Residents of higher floors using the stairs often pass through the first floor wings. Further, the wing with the most blank doors (1st floor south) has an even higher amount of traffic due to the fact that there are some administrative offices on that wing. Thus the "audience" for door decoration on the first floor is much larger than the audience for any other floor, and the audience has a disproportionately high number of strangers (as opposed to neighbors and friends). This makes the residents of the first floor more vulnerable, in the same sense that it is more threatening to perform before a large auditorium than it is to perform before a small gathering of friends.

Another interesting observation to be made from the tables is the difference between men's and women's wings. Assuming that the rule is to post the minimum decoration, and that to post nothing or to post some **other** decoration is to break the rule, then men follow the rule 69.3% of the time and women follow the rule 86.7% of the time. Women are also slightly more likely to post a greater amount of decoration than men are. The interpretation of these data is highly speculative, but they do suggest to me that the women in Eigenmann Hall are slightly more interested in making the dorm attractive and a good deal more sensitive to the rules -- or perhaps it would be better to say they are more eager to follow the rule, perhaps in an effort to minimize friction.

2.4.0 Common Motifs

The most common forms of door decoration are sanctioned by the dorm officials. Posters were put on the floor bulletin boards at the beginning of the year asking us to post our names, majors, and home towns. Many people also post memo-boards -- commercially produced plaques of cardboard coated with plastic,

complete with attached water-soluble marker. Some people tape small pads of paper and pencils to their doors rather than the commercial boards.

The other most common door decorations are cartoons, newspaper clippings, and posters, especially posters advertising musical events, such as student recitals. Cartoons and newspaper clippings often represent the student's major, a strong interest or hobby, a political leaning, or some form of allegiance to home. It is not uncommon to see representations of flags on foreign students' doors, for example, and a student from Colorado posted a photo of the Rocky Mountains and a Colorado license plate. Also if the IDS prints an article on, for example, Oriental art, it is almost a sure thing that at least one Oriental student will post that article for at least a few days. It is also common to display posters and cartoons which are thought to be representative of student concerns and interests, such as posters praising weekends or bemoaning Mondays and cartoons about vast consumption of alcohol.

Some of the interests displayed on dorm doors, represented by cartoons, newspaper articles, or pictures (usually clipped from newspapers or magazines) include sports affiliation (with either a team or a specific athlete -- one door had six photos of Bjorn Borg), hobbies such as music, chess, or fencing, and drinking. One door, for example, had six Willie 'n Ethel cartoons, all of which featured the male character talking about beer. Another door had the logos for Coca-Cola, Pepsi, Moosehead Beer, and Michelob.

2.4.1 Line and Face

Erving Goffman's work is primarily concerned with face-to-face interaction, that is, with "that class of events which occurs during co-

presence and by virtue of co-presence" (Goffman 1967:1). Clearly dorm door decorations do not fall into this category, since I have scrutinized many doors without ever seeing the persons who decorated those doors. However, Goffman's theories help to illuminate this phenomenon (and perhaps this phenomenon helps to illuminate parts of Goffman's theories).

Among other things, dorm door decorations can be seen as a line. In face-to-face interaction, Goffman defines a line as "a pattern of verbal and nonverbal acts by which [a participant] expresses his view of the situation and through this his evaluation of the participants, especially himself" (Goffman 1967:5). In the case of door decorations, rather than verbal and nonverbal acts, the resident uses verbal and nonverbal signs. The "situation" commented upon is harder to pin down, but perhaps one could say that, in general, dorm door decorations comment upon the dorm situation. When two residents meet in a dorm hallway, for example, their brief interchange often deals with dorm concerns such as the "quality" of the cafeteria food or the noise made by mutual neighbors. Even if the exchange does not explicitly concern dorm life, since the interactants are both residents, any interaction is necessarily colored by that fact.

In taking a line, a person presents what Goffman calls a face, or "the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself by the line others assume he has taken during a particular contact. Face is an image of self delineated in terms of approved social attributes" (Goffman 1967:5). The "positive social value" claimed in door decoration can be as simple as minimal participation in a rule-ordered social environment or as complex as an attempt to express both artistic talent and individual identity.

Door decoration is not identical to line-taking or face-presentation, however. For one

thing, Goffman's theory of face is largely concerned with social prestige. There is a degree of prestige involved in door decoration, but I do not think that it is the operative concern. Rather, I think that the most important thing that a person demonstrates in decorating her or his door is an identity. I will elaborate on this concept, as well as my reasons for making this assertion, below.

2.4.2 Cartoons and Jokes

The most common types of door decoration -- what I call "minimum decoration" (name, hometown, major, memo board) -- point fairly clearly to a concern with expression of identity. It is reasonable to suppose that many of the other decorations also serve this purpose. Thus people commonly post cartoons about their majors, hobbies, interests, and so forth. It is interesting that cartoons often mock the occupant's pursuits. For example, on an economics major's door was a cartoon featuring several people sitting at a table. One was a wizard, complete with conical hat emblazoned with stars; one was a stupid looking man, wearing a beanie with a propeller on top, holding up one finger as if to test the direction of the wind; another was a woman with a crystal ball; and the last was a man flipping a coin. The window of the office indicated that they were working for "Smith, Jones/Economic Forecasters."

The student in question posted clearly both his name and his major. There can be no doubt that in poking fun at economists, he was also making fun of himself. Why would he do so? One interpretation is that the statement he was making was "I am an economist, but I am not an prideful economist." Posting a cartoon is an easy way to make a decidedly non-aggressive statement about one's identity. The most salient feature of the residents of Eigenmann

Hall is their vast diversity, along cultural, linguistic, political, and academic lines. There is a slight but palpable tension between MBA students and law students, humanities and non-humanities students, and so on.(5) By poking fun at his or her interests or major a resident simultaneously makes a statement about his or her identity and about his or her sense of humor. In other words, the economist mentioned above signified both that he was an economist and that the fact was not worth fighting over.

2.4.3 Exceptions and the Rule

There do seem to be rules to door decorating, but there are also exceptions which prove the rules. Occasionally something will be posted which is clearly out of the ordinary. The very fact that I and other residents can spot some decorations as unusual indicates that we have some sense of what is "usual." Violation of the norms of door decoration is not a serious offense, if, indeed, it can be considered an "offense" at all. No reprisals take place -- but an unusually decorated door is worthy of comment.

During my first semester in the dorm, my door fell into the "more" category. I had posted my name and my major, a memo board, and an occasional political cartoon (usually clipped from *The Nation*). When I started researching this paper, however, I also tried to discover by experimentation just what might be considered anomalous behaviour. I re-decorated my door in several radically different ways, leaving each new design up for at least a week. First I posted dozens of irrelevant, unconnected, and uninteresting newspaper clippings; there was no response. Then, leaving only my memo board (because I assumed it would be a likely source for feedback), I stripped my door bare, taking off even my name which had been in place since

the day I moved in; there was no response. I posted a number of unrelated cartoons; there was no response. I was beginning to think that I would have no way really to know if people were responding to my experiments or not. Then I decorated my door with cinnamon bears.

Cinnamon bears are small, bear-shaped candies, much like the more famous gummy bears, but cinnamon bears only come in red and are slightly larger (about one inch long). I taped several cinnamon bears to my door jamb and was rewarded with immediate and almost continuous feedback. Unlike all of my other efforts, the bears evoked numerous comments, some delivered orally, others written on my memo board in the wee hours of the morning (such as, "I love your gummy bears!"). People stole bears, turned them upside down, bit off their heads, mutilated them, and re-arranged them. This is all in marked contrast to any text, cartoon, picture, or quotation that I had posted before. Although some cartoons I posted were intended to be quite offensive to politically conservative residents (and I know that several of my wing-mates and indeed of my friends who visited me in my room fell into this category), these cartoons were never tampered with and never drew comment.

The amount of response I drew with my bear experiments shows that I had found something which violated the expected behavior of door decoration. I had already observed that interference with anyone's door decorations was uncommon or unheard of; this is in line with what Ardrey called the "territorial imperative." Door decoration is the equivalent of marking one's territory. As Ardrey observed, "an innate compulsion to defend one's property lies...at the heart of the territorial principle; but just as close to its heart lies recognition of the rights of the next animal" (Ardrey 1966:249). Something about cinnamon bears removed them from the realm of legitimate territory markers. But

just what was so different about them?

Part of the answer is the fact that they were three-dimensional and that they were food. I was often asked how I managed to put them up, which is another way they were seen as anomalous. When people mentioned them and I asked why the bears were worthy of comment, the only response I got was that the bears were cute or interesting or unusual. When I was told the bears were interesting, it was said in the same tone that probably was used to describe much of Andy Warhol's art in his early days -- "Hmmm. Interesting." Perhaps the bears were also seen as unusual precisely because, unlike the majority of things which are commonly posted, the bears were not in any clear way an expression of my identity.⁽⁶⁾ I suspect that the people who attacked my bears did not think that they were attacking me, which is probably the sense they would have in ripping down a political cartoon.

Another way to look at the response to my bears is not a question of territory, but a matter of the type of communication they represent. Let it be assumed as true that what dorm door decorations are **supposed** to communicate is something about my identity, and, second, that cinnamon bears fail to do this. Then, perhaps, they can be seen as an example of what Jakobson (1960) described as "phatic" communication. The bears themselves are not **meaningless**, but their meaning lies in the fact that they are an offer to exchange meanings. Two strangers meeting exchange comments about the weather -- this is an empty exchange. But a comment on the weather is an invitation to communicate, an open door to more personal (more "meaningful") exchanges. I am reminded of the time I waited for a bus in front of Eigenmann Hall during sub-zero weather. My complaint about the cold to another man, who was bundled up far more extensively than I was (and was

clearly aware of how cold it was!), led him to describe to me how hard it was to explain in letters to his kin in Somalia just how cold "cold" can be. This led to a much longer discussion in which we learned much more about each other than is usual in waiting for a bus in sub-zero weather.

Just so, my bears had no "meaning" of their own, but invited response. It is interesting that most of the responses were as meaningless as the bears themselves, unless the acts of violence perpetrated upon them can be interpreted as violence aimed at me through a safe medium, or perhaps as violence at the entire situation of dorm life.

2.4.4 Minimum Decorations

It seems clear that many residents put minimum decorations on their doors because of a sense that they are supposed to do so. I was talking to one woman about this paper and she stated that she definitely had a sense that it was expected of her that she post her name and major. She had put up only a memo board when she moved into the dorm. She told me that a sense of need to conform made her add her name and her major later on. Likewise, M. told me that he posted his name and field because "everybody else was putting their names and their fields up on their door." Other people have a clearer sense that they are following insitutionalized rules when they post this personal information. Another student told me, "...all I put on my door was my name, and 'English MA/PhD'...and my hometown -- and that was because that's what I was told to put on my door by a little sign on the bulletin board." He did not add more decorations to his door due to an acknowledged aesthetic sense.

My door is extremely spare. And that's because I wanted it to be that way, just as my room is extremely spare...simply because I

don't like much decoration....I tend to like things simple and quiet and not busy.

2.4.5 Other Patterns

There seem to be some other interesting minor rules or patterns of door decoration. For example, although there were at least six Asian students on my wing, all of them who had posted their names had written them in Romanized form. As far as I have been able to tell, an Asian student will only post her/his name in foreign characters if another person on the same wing has done so. Although I looked, I was unable to find any wing with only one name posted in any foreign script.

Along these same lines, I have observed that some door decorations seem to be common on one wing or another and scarce or absent elsewhere. Thus on a few wings (all women's wings, as it happens) several doors were decorated with origami cranes, which appeared around Christmas. Likewise on my wing there were many doors which had small round stickers bearing the message "I Love The Hoosiers" ("love" being symbolized by a small red heart). The Cougars and the Panthers were likewise represented. Finally, within about two days copies of one cartoon (about the consumption of alcohol) appeared on several doors of my wing. One door had the original; several had photocopies; and one clearly had a photocopy of a photocopy. All of these examples show that although door decoration is finally the prerogative of the room occupant, there is cooperation and communication about what can be used to decorate doors. Sometimes (as with the origami cranes) a prerequisite is having a floor resident with artistic talent; sometimes (as with the stickers and the foreign script) an atmosphere is created which supports certain decorations; and sometimes the existence of a popular cartoon and the easy access to a copy machine (there are copy machines in the lobby of

Eigenmann Hall) make a given decoration popular and common.

2.4.6 Learning Rules

I have one last example of how the rules to door decoration are learned. Over Christmas break I was given a sticker advertising a small music group from my home state (Colorado). When I returned to I.U., I put the sticker on the wall **inside** my room. A few days later another resident of my wing posted a sticker on his door which advertised Bruce Springstein's latest album. After I had seen that decoration, I transferred my Horse Sense sticker to my door. This all took place before I started systematically observing door decorations and the behaviors associated with it. Of course it is risky to analyze one's own actions after the fact, but I believe that the other sticker sanctioned the posting of advertisements for professional musicians, and I acted in accordance with the new rules as they were revealed to me.

2.4.7 Contention

All of these are examples of basically cooperative behavior. Sometimes, however, the practise of door decoration is not exactly supportive. Several residents on my wing were in the habit of playing practical jokes on each other, and one kind of joke with is easy to execute and easy to get away with is the posting of materials which are embarrassing to the occupant of the room. The two favorite forms of this prank are name-parodies and "do not disturb" parodies, both of which depend for their success on the existence of the tradition of door decoration. If a resident has not posted his (I have only observed this on my wing) name, he is a likely target for an oversized, colorful poster with a name along the lines of "Big John Studd" or "#1 Hogger," often

decorated with phallic cartoons. The second prank is a parody of signs which people post when they are studying or sleeping (signs like "Do Not Disturb -- Napping"). The prank poster often reads "Do Not Disturb -- Masturbating." This prank is not entirely dependent on the custom of posting "do not disturb" signs, but it is made more effective by the common referent.

Likewise, some door decorations have a self-consciously contentious (not to say combatative) purpose. The following interview took place shortly after Ronald Reagan had been inaugurated for his second term as President.

M: I put the Reagan-Bush sticker on because somebody else had a Mondale-Ferraro sticker right down the hallway and I thought it was a shame that they were getting all the press, and that, that the other side was not represented as well so I put it on my door and it's still there. I left it on because they won.
(laughter)

K: Is the Mondale-Ferraro still up?

M: No, that came off.

G: So you're gloating.

M: Yeah.

2.4.8 Blank Doors

Another phenomenon which invites comment is those doors which are left blank. There were several blank doors on my wing, and I overheard some comments on the subject by the occupant of one of those rooms. At the beginning of the semester, A. made several racist remarks to me about the East Asian students on our wing, and his attitude did not improve with time. These comments led me to think that A. left his door blank because he did not care to communicate his presence at random -- the closed-mindedness of his statements was reflected by the blankness of his door. I also overheard him making a statement indicating that he thinks the posting of one's name is not manly.

Having noticed this about A., T.'s nearly

blank door confused me. T. is from Indiana, he was studying East Asian Language and Culture, and he was clearly both open-minded and tolerant of cultural difference. Yet he put only his name on his door, which is not much different from posting nothing at all. When I asked him about it, he said,

If anybody wants to know anything more they'll...find out...My name's T., I'm not EALC [East Asian Language and Culture], I'm not Indianapolis, Indiana. Because I've lived in about six or seven other places. You know, what do I do, put down "T., EALC, Indianapolis, Portland, Sacramento, Virginia, Maryland, Hong Kong, Taiwan." (laughter)

Perhaps T.'s sense is not that he does not want to communicate with other people, but rather that he cannot communicate enough through the medium of door decoration. At the same time, it seems clear that he has some uncertainty as to just what his identity is; thus his scant decoration.

3.0 Conclusion

In this paper, I have discussed some aspects of dorm door decorations, which is only one small part of the dynamic of dorm life. It is, I think, a particularly interesting facet, especially insofar as it seems to be a unique form of expression, namely a form of highly individualized and potentially extremely elaborate "presentation of self" (7) which does not take place in face-to-face interaction and which is an expected form of communication. As stated above, door decoration is different from the use of bumper stickers and painted screens in its potential for elaboration and expression of idiosyncrasy, and it is different from lawn art in the subtlety of signifiers and its nearly compulsive nature.

I should note here that many (if not, indeed, all) of the observations I have made in this

paper also apply to Weatherly Hall, which is the other graduate dormitory at I.U. -- it is a much smaller dorm and seems to have a smaller (proportionately speaking) population of international students. These are the only two dorms I spent any time in while making this study, but I would like to make a few very tentative speculations on another building administered by I.U.'s Department of Student Housing.

Campus View (see Stewart 1984) is not a dormitory -- it is described as "married student housing." It, too, is a very large building and it, like Eigenmann Hall, has a large number of foreign residents. There are three obvious and major differences between Campus View and Eigenmann. First, Campus View's components are apartments, each of which has its own kitchen and bathroom; second, the residents of Campus View are married and living with their spouses and sometimes children; and third, there is **very** little door decoration there. Given the first two circumstances, why might the third be the case?

Again, this is speculation on my part, but it seems to me that the Campus View residents have a substantially smaller need to assert themselves as individuals than Eigenmann residents do. Compared with the rooms in Eigenmann, Campus View apartments are luxuriously large and replete with private space. Further, Campus View residents have a major component of their identity ready at hand -- their families. It seems to me that Campus View residents might have less anxiety about losing their identity (becoming just a face in the crowd) precisely because they have at least these two things to stabilize their existence: home and family. Eigenmann residents are removed from their families and the dorm rooms are so small and so much of everyday living is shared with strangers (in the restrooms and the

cafeteria) that I, for one, was not able to think of Eigenmann as anything like home.

Perhaps as important, though, is the fact that the residents of Campus View tend to be a bit more settled in life and, I assume, a few years older on average than Eigenmann residents. In contrast to the Campus View residents, Eigenmann residents have their primary identification as graduate students, which is a precarious and (we all hope) temporary identity. Dorm door decorations help to create, maintain, and assert an identity which is not subject to the whims of the department or the university.

Notes

I would like to thank those who participated in F832, Folklore and Culture, with me in the Spring of 1985, in particular Hanna Griff and Will Wheeler, and also Dr. Roger Janelli, for their insightful, constructive, kind, and helpful comments on the original draft of this paper. I would also like to thank the editors of Folklore Forum, and three blind readers for their comments on an intermediate draft, especially Patricia Sawin who entered the project blind but left with her eyes wide open--and who left me with a great number of new insights.

(1) There is another phenomenon which challenges the "unique" standing of dorm door decorations, but it is so similar that I am not sure that it is a different phenomenon. I have noticed that, at least at Indiana University, it is very common for professors to decorate their office doors and for secretaries to have some area (sometimes a bulletin board) which is decorated with many other-than-official items. I have made no systematic study of these decorations, but it is striking to me that all three of these areas -- dorm doors, office doors, and secretarial spaces -- are public spaces which are the "territory" of one person.

(2) Mary Jane Riley of the Department of Housing kindly provided statistical information on the residents of Eigenmann.

(3) This does not add up to 100% because not everyone responding to the questionnaire responded to all questions. This is also why there is a range for U.S. citizens -- 12% of the respondents did not indicate whether they were foreign or U.S. citizens. These numbers are from an old survey and are therefore no longer exact, but the proportions have remained basically stable.

(4) I use the term "home town" loosely. My home is just outside of Denver, but since no one would know what I meant if I said I were from Adams County, I would be more likely to post Denver. Likewise, foreign students tend to post only their country of origin, unless they are from a world-famous city, as Tokyo or

Paris.

(5) This tension was commonly noted and often commented upon. One anecdote will serve to illustrate both the tension and the friendly way it is (sometimes) dealt with. One Saturday morning as I rode the elevator to breakfast, I overheard the following exchange. (I listened avidly and wrote down my recollection shortly afterward; this is a reconstruction.)

- A: It's about time you got up.
 B: I was pulling an all-nighter -- you know how MBA's study.
 A: Yeah, all-nighter at Nick's [bar].
 B: You kidding? That's where lawyers hang out.
 A: Ha.
 B: Yeah, you see a sign says "No cover for law students!"

It was obvious that the first speaker was a law student, the second an MBA. In spite of the fact that they were clearly friends, there is an evident level of contestation between the two pursuits. I frequently heard quite caustic statements about law and business students when none were present; I assume that such statements were also made behind my back about humanities majors.

(6) I am indebted to Will Wheeler for this particular insight. To further test the theory, I took down my name and put three cinnamon bears in the plate where names are usually inserted. It was weeks before anyone tampered with the bears in this location, and once someone wrote on my memo board, "Hello gummy bear."

(7) Levels of personal identity can be complex in a given person's mind, and when identity is seen as a socially shared concept, it can become even more involved. The following anecdote illustrates the point well. I wrote out a description of the event four days after it took place, which was 3 February, 1985. The following is taken from those notes:

Several people were loitering the hallway talking, as is not uncommon on this floor; they were right outside my door. I heard T. start to make a fuss, and I went out to see what was up. He had just been made fire marshall for the floor, meaning that he had to be present during fire drills and fill out forms on the cooperation of the floor residents. He was strutting up and down the hall wearing a cowboy hat (his official hat) and ranting about his duties as fire marshall -- it was very funny. One of the things he said (as a joke; everyone was laughing) was that there should be an emergency drill. "I want two volunteers to jump out the window." [I lived on the eighth floor.]

E., who is from Brazil, poked his head out of his door at that point and said, "I think they should be foreigners."

B. [from the U.S.] said, "Are you volunteering, E.?"

E.: "No, I'm not a foreigner."

T.: "Okay, the next one who hocks in the bathroom goes out the window."

This is a clear (and in context, very funny) reference to the

Oriental (Taiwanese?) residents of the floor, who were not present during the exchange.

There are several interesting things about this exchange. Sharing a bathroom with the Asian students, it was impossible not to notice them clearing their throats loudly into the bathroom sinks. T. used this as a ready and immediately understood reference to them. It is also interesting that a South American (E.) did not consider himself a foreigner, and when he made that statement, everyone present immediately knew to whom he was referring. The word "foreigner" had two clear meanings to the residents on my wing -- the people from the United States used it to refer to everyone not from the United States, and the Westerners (from the U.S., Brazil, and India) used it to refer to those from the Far East. The shift of frame was immediate and easy. (See Goffman 1974 for a complete discussion of frames.)

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APPENDIX A

Some Examples of Cartoons

On the door of an economics/sociology major:

1) Cartoon of Ronald Reagan in a balloon marked "Economy;" he has thrown overboard a man labeled "Economist." Caption: "We'll never have to worry about losing altitude as long as we keep tossing these overboard."

2) Cartoon of two burnoused Arabs; one sits behind a large desk, the one standing before the desk speaks: "Before they get the idea to hike their wheat prices to the extent we've hiked our oil prices, I propose we buy the state of Iowa."

3) Cartoon with four people behind a desk in an office. One is a wizard wearing a conical hat; the second a stupid looking man wearing a beanie with a propeller on top, holding up one finger as if to test the wind; the third a woman with a crystal ball; the last a man flipping a coin. The window of the office reads: "Smith, Jones/Economic Forecasters."

4) Cartoon of a classroom. Sitting in the corner is a student wearing a bishop's miter which has been elongated to make it reminiscent of a dunce's cap. Several lines are written on the blackboard; the first lines were clearly written by the teacher, the last line by the student. The blackboard reads:

"Economics on capitalism: -- supply
-- demand
redistribution"

On the door of a chess player:

1) Cartoon of a mail carrier striding out of the post office, bag over his shoulder, carefully balancing in both hands a chess set on a board. Caption: "These guys who play chess by mail give me a pain in the neck."

2) Cartoon of a cut-away view of a two-story building. On the upper floor two men are playing chess; on the lower, a man stands on a table pounding the ceiling with a broomstick. Caption: "A little less quiet up there!"

3) Cartoon of a burning building. A ladder is propped up to a window and a fire fighter climbs down from the window. In his hands in a set-up chess board, on his back is a man who warns him, "Careful!"

On the door of a library sciences student:

1) Cartoon of a library; a disgruntled patron storms away from a desk labeled "Library Information." A blase looking man speaks to a self-satisfied looking woman at the desk. Caption: "When we do not know an answer, we look it up. We do not say, how the hell

should I know."

On the door of a computer science major:

1) Cartoon of a man sitting before a computer terminal; from the screen a boxing glove has emerged, striking the seated man forcefully and violently in the face. Standing behind him is a stern looking man who speaks. Caption: "It must be you. The computer, it so happens, is user-friendly."

2) Frank & Ernest cartoon of two computer terminals (with eyes and mouths on their screens) sitting side-by-side. A man works at the one which speaks, which also has designs (graphs, etc.) on its screen. Caption: "He doesn't care about my brain, he just loves me for my graphics!"

3) Shoe cartoon. Cosmo Fishhawk sits at his desk piled with papers and a personal computer. His nephew, Skyler, stands nearby. Skyler: "Why did you spend all that money on this computer?" Cosmo: "To help me manage my money. Now I don't have to worry about what to do with my savings. I managed to spend it all on this software."

4) Cartoon of a smiling salesman showing a personal computer to a befuddled customer. Caption: "It's our newest model. It tells you the one you should have bought instead."

5) Berry's World cartoon of a man trying to drag another man (who resists mightily) toward a computer terminal. The man being dragged speaks. Caption: "I don't care if it IS USER-FRIENDLY. I'm not COMPUTER friendly."

APPENDIX B

Occurrence of Decoration on Seven Floors

Legend: Blank = no decoration
 Minimum = some combination of: name, home town, major, memo board
 More = one or more of the elements listed as minimum plus some other decoration
 Other = none of the elements listed as minimum but some decoration.

Four Point Table by Wing

| WING | GENDER | BLANK | | MINIMUM | | MORE | | OTHER | | TOTAL |
|------|--------|-------|------|---------|------|------|----|-------|-----|-------|
| | | # | % | # | % | # | % | # | % | |
| 1 E | F | 7 | 35 | 8 | 40 | 5 | 25 | 0 | 0 | 20 |
| 1 W | F | 3 | 20 | 5 | 33 | 7 | 47 | 0 | 0 | 15 |
| 1 S | F | 11 | 64.7 | 5 | 29.4 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 5.9 | 17 |
| 3 N | M | 5 | 25 | 3 | 15 | 12 | 6 | 0 | 0 | 20 |
| 3 E | M | 5 | 25 | 9 | 45 | 5 | 25 | 1 | 5 | 20 |
| 3 W | F | 0 | 0 | 11 | 55 | 9 | 45 | 0 | 0 | 20 |
| 3 S | F | 3 | 14.3 | 14 | 66.7 | 4 | 19 | 0 | 0 | 21 |
| 6 N | M | 8 | 40 | 9 | 45 | 1 | 5 | 2 | 10 | 20 |
| 6 E | M | 8 | 40 | 8 | 40 | 3 | 15 | 1 | 5 | 20 |
| 6 W | F | 0 | 0 | 15 | 75 | 5 | 25 | 0 | 0 | 20 |
| 6 S | M | 1 | 5 | 13 | 65 | 6 | 30 | 0 | 0 | 20 |

| WING | GENDER | BLANK | | MINIMUM | | MORE | | OTHER | | TOTAL |
|--------|--------|-------|------|---------|------|------|------|-------|------|-------|
| | | # | % | # | % | # | % | # | % | |
| 8 N | M | 7 | 33.3 | 5 | 23.8 | 4 | 19 | 5 | 23.8 | 21 |
| 8 E | M | 4 | 19 | 3 | 14.3 | 12 | 57.1 | 2 | 9.5 | 21 |
| 8 W | F | 1 | 4.8 | 11 | 52.4 | 9 | 42.9 | 0 | 0 | 21 |
| 8 S | M | 5 | 23.8 | 5 | 23.8 | 9 | 42.9 | 2 | 9.5 | 21 |
| 11 N | M | 10 | 47.6 | 7 | 33.3 | 3 | 14.3 | 1 | 4.8 | 21 |
| 11 E | M | 1 | 4.8 | 14 | 66.7 | 6 | 28.6 | 0 | 0 | 21 |
| 11 W | F | 0 | 0 | 8 | 38.1 | 12 | 57.1 | 1 | 4.8 | 21 |
| 11 S | M | 1 | 4.8 | 8 | 38.1 | 12 | 57.1 | 0 | 0 | 21 |
| 13 N | M | 10 | 47.6 | 6 | 28.6 | 5 | 23.8 | 0 | 0 | 21 |
| 13 E | M | 4 | 20 | 9 | 45 | 6 | 30 | 1 | 5 | 20 |
| 13 W | F | 0 | 0 | 10 | 50 | 10 | 50 | 0 | 0 | 20 |
| 13 S | F | 3 | 14.3 | 8 | 38.1 | 10 | 47.6 | 0 | 0 | 21 |
| 14 N | M | 4 | 19 | 8 | 38.1 | 7 | 33.3 | 2 | 9.5 | 21 |
| 14 E | M | 4 | 19 | 8 | 38.1 | 9 | 42.9 | 0 | 0 | 21 |
| 14 W | F | 1 | 4.8 | 10 | 47.6 | 10 | 47.6 | 0 | 0 | 21 |
| 14 S | F | 3 | 14.3 | 5 | 23.8 | 11 | 52.4 | 2 | 9.5 | 21 |
| TOTAL: | | 109 | 19.9 | 225 | 41.1 | 192 | 35.1 | 21 | 3.8 | 547 |

TOTAL MINIMUM + MORE = 417 = 76.2%

Four Point Table by Floor

| FLOOR | BLANK | | MINIMUM | | MORE | | OTHER | | TOTAL |
|-------|-------|------|---------|------|------|------|-------|------|-------|
| | # | % | # | % | # | % | # | % | |
| 1 | 21 | 40.4 | 18 | 34.6 | 12 | 23.1 | 1 | 1.9 | 52 |
| 3 | 13 | 16 | 37 | 45.7 | 30 | 37 | 1 | 1.2 | 81 |
| 6 | 17 | 21.3 | 45 | 56.3 | 15 | 18.8 | 3 | 3.8 | 80 |
| 8 | 17 | 20.2 | 24 | 28.6 | 34 | 40.5 | 9 | 10.7 | 84 |
| 11 | 12 | 14.3 | 37 | 44 | 33 | 39.3 | 2 | 2.4 | 84 |
| 13 | 17 | 20.7 | 33 | 40.2 | 31 | 37.8 | 1 | 1.2 | 82 |
| 14 | 12 | 14.3 | 31 | 36.9 | 37 | 44 | 4 | 4.8 | 84 |

Four Point Table by Gender

| GENDER | BLANK | | MINIMUM | | MORE | | OTHER | | TOTAL |
|--------|-------|------|---------|------|------|------|-------|------|-------|
| | # | % | # | % | # | % | # | % | |
| M | 84 | 25.5 | 123 | 37.4 | 105 | 31.9 | 17 | 5.2 | 329 |
| F | 25 | 11.5 | 102 | 46.8 | 87 | 39.9 | 4 | 1.88 | 218 |

Rule Table by Gender

(Follow Rule = Minimum + More; Break Rule = Blank + Other)

| GENDER | FOLLOW RULE | | BREAK RULE | |
|--------|-------------|------|------------|------|
| | # | % | # | % |
| M | 228 | 69.3 | 101 | 30.7 |
| F | 189 | 86.7 | 29 | 13.3 |

Decoration Table by Gender

(Low = Blank + Minimum, High = More + Other)

| GENDER | LOW | | HIGH | |
|--------|-----|------|------|------|
| | # | % | # | % |
| M | 207 | 62.9 | 122 | 37.1 |
| F | 127 | 58.3 | 91 | 41.7 |

APPENDIX C

Eigenmann Demographics

Based on information generously provided by Mary Jane Riley,
 Department of Housing.
 (1984 data -- latest available)

| ETHNIC ORIGIN | | MARITAL STATUS/GENDER | |
|--------------------|-----------|-----------------------|-----------|
| American Black | 49 = 4% | Single Male | 669 = 52% |
| American Indian | 5 = 0% | Single Female | 452 = 35% |
| American Asian | 17 = 1% | Married Male | 31 = 2% |
| American Spanish | 26 = 2% | Married Female | 13 = 1% |
| American White | 671 = 52% | Other (Incomplete) | 113 = 9% |
| Foreign Citizen | 367 = 29% | | |
| Other (Incomplete) | 149 = 12% | | |
| TOTAL | 1284 | AGE | |
| CLASS | | 18-20 | 13 = 1% |
| | | 21-25 | 794 = 62% |
| Grad./Professional | 946 = 74% | 26-30 | 326 = 25% |
| Undergraduate | 169 = 13% | 31+ | 124 = 10% |
| Special | 25 = 2% | Other (Incomplete) | 26 = 2% |
| Other (Incomplete) | 141 = 11% | | |

CITIZENSHIP
 1979-80 (latest available data)

| | | | |
|--------------------|----|-----------|----|
| Algeria | 4 | Holland | 1 |
| Argentina | 1 | Hong Kong | 11 |
| | | Hungary | 1 |
| Bangladesh | 3 | India | 5 |
| Barbados | 1 | Indonesia | 5 |
| Belgium | 1 | Iran | 23 |
| Brazil | 4 | Iraq | 5 |
| | | Israel | 6 |
| Canada | 16 | Italy | 6 |
| Cyprus | 1 | | |
| | | Japan | 35 |
| Dominican Republic | 1 | Jordan | 6 |
| | | | |
| England | 3 | Kenya | 2 |
| Ethiopia | 1 | Korea | 14 |
| | | | |
| France | 6 | Lebanon | 5 |
| | | Liberia | 3 |
| Germany | 16 | Libya | 2 |
| Ghana | 1 | | |
| Greece | 1 | Malaysia | 4 |
| Guam | 1 | Mali | 1 |
| Guyana | 2 | Mexico | 2 |

CITIZENSHIP (continued)

| | | | |
|--------------|----|----------------------|------------|
| Nepal | 1 | Taiwan | 66 |
| Nicaragua | 1 | Tanzania | 3 |
| Nigeria | 12 | Thailand | 12 |
| | | Trinidad | 2 |
| Pakistan | 4 | Tunisia | 1 |
| Peru | 4 | Turkey | 5 |
| Philippines | 6 | | |
| Poland | 5 | United Arab Emirates | 4 |
| Puerto Rico | 7 | | |
| | | Venezuela | 5 |
| Saudi Arabia | 4 | Vietnam | 1 |
| Singapore | 6 | | |
| South Africa | 2 | Yugoslavia | 1 |
| Spain | 2 | | |
| Sudan | 3 | | |
| Switzerland | 1 | <u>TOTAL:</u> | <u>359</u> |