

Integration and Disintegration: The Role of Kiva Architecture in Community Formation and the Construction of Identity in the Prehispanic U.S. Southwest

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Researchers in a number of fields have come to recognize the vital importance of the built environment not only as material culture, but as symbolic expressions of the larger cultural framework through which social relations are produced and reproduced. Over the last half-century, studies have demonstrated how architectural characteristics—such as building size, shape, and the presence of various architectural materials, features, and furnishings—have a direct influence on human behavior and interaction, and are material manifestations of worldview ideologies. One of the most important functions of the various elements within a structure are the encoded messages that convey group identity and provide clues into ancient social organization. This study raises the question of how the built environment reflects identity formation and dissolution during periods of community integration and disintegration.

Specifically, this will be achieved through the analyses of ancestral Pueblo vernacular architecture dating from the Pueblo II (AD 900-1150) and Pueblo III (AD 1150-1300) periods in the northern, middle, and southern San Juan regions in the northern Southwest in order to shed light on communities of practice and their social, temporal, and spatial production techniques. This research examines public and residential kivas—or round rooms used for communal and domestic activities, respectively—to address how architecture emphasized the ways in which structures were actively mediated by production groups, and how their architectural signatures reflect identity during periods of population aggregation and dispersal at the household and community levels.