

Methodology

In order to examine the moral judgments people make based on the appearance of homes and neighborhoods, I conducted interviews asking people about their attitudes towards their home and neighborhood, the standards they use to define good and bad neighborhoods, and the visual cues they use to gauge those standards.

I used a clustered sampling method, talking to residents in four neighborhoods. In order to make comparisons between the attitudes and beliefs of people of different social classes, I talked to both working-class and upper-middle-class samples. In order to further assess class-based patterns and to ensure that any observed patterns were not solely the result of regional idiosyncrasies, I talked to people living near two very different cities: Boston, Massachusetts and Eugene, Oregon. These class and regional distinctions led to a total of four subsamples: a Eugene-area working-class sample drawn from the neighborhood of Winter Flats,¹ a Eugene-area upper-middle-class sample drawn from the neighborhood of Whipple Heights, a Boston-area working-class sample drawn from the neighborhood of Eagle Plains, and a Boston-area upper-middle-class sample drawn from the neighborhood of Eaton Hills.

¹ Pseudonyms have been used for all neighborhoods to protect the confidentiality of respondents.

The clustered sampling method allows cross-class comparisons within geographic areas that would be difficult if participants were drawn from a wide range of geographical locations. Different cities have different local cultures and standards of living, meaning the level of education or income that places an individual in the upper-middle class may not be sufficient for that level of status in another area. Defining respondents' class position in relation to local standards means that the relationship between what I label the working and upper-middle classes in the Eugene sample is comparable to the relationship between those groups in the Boston sample.

The two areas selected—Eugene, Oregon and the Boston, Massachusetts Metro area—have a number of interesting characteristics that make them ideal centers for this research. First, they both have low to moderate concentrations of poverty and affluence, meaning they are not exceptional cases of spatial boundaries (Coulton et al. 1996, Cortright 2006). Any patterns that arise related to spatial boundaries, then, cannot be discounted as the result of severe cases of economic segregation. Furthermore, the two areas represent two very different parts of the country in terms of location, weather patterns, architectural styles—factors that may potentially influence the visual criteria people use to assess neighborhood quality. By including both these areas, I hope to reduce the likelihood that any patterns are primarily regional. Lastly, my ability to frequently travel to both—one is where I attend school and the other near where I permanently reside—allowed me to spend extensive time in the field, develop

relationships with some subjects, and familiarize myself with the local atmospheres.

After selecting the two areas, I listed all census tracts with a population greater than 2,000 that were within the metropolitan statistical area (MSA) surrounding each of the selected cities. I limited my selection to those tracts in which at least two-thirds of residences were owner-occupied, rather than renter-occupied. Although the attitudes about homes and neighborhoods and coinciding judgments of renters are important, I excluded this population in order to prevent the tenancy from affecting reported differences in reported satisfaction rates. Since lower-income neighborhoods are more likely to contain many rental units, if I had not excluded renter-dominated neighborhoods, it would be impossible to discern whether any differences of the working class as compared to the upper class were the result of differences in tenancy or in class.

I also limited selection to predominantly (greater than 85 percent) white tracts. The role of race in people's perceptions of neighborhood quality would alone be an apt topic to examine. The scope of this project, however, prohibited the inclusion of racial variables. I opted to control for the racial makeup of neighborhoods in order to increase comparability between them, leaving the topic of race as it relates to this project to later research.

Central to this project is the concept of class—a concept whose meaning and operationalization is often contested (Bottero 2004; Crompton and Scott 2000). Though some have claimed a declining role of class in modern society (Crook et al. 1992; Pakulski and Waters 1996), the continued power of parents'

educational and occupational attainment in predicting one's life outcome indicates its persistent relevance (Gamoran 2001; Goldthorpe and Marshall 1992, Blau and Duncan 1994). Because of the complexity of the relationship between class, culture, and identity, some have advocated for a broad and pluralistic definition of class extending beyond the conventional measures of income, education, and occupation (Bottero 2004; Crompton 1998; Reay 1998b; Savage 2000). Such a conceptualization, though, can turn the operationalization of class into a research agenda on its own (Savage 2000). For this reason, I decided to use a standard operationalization of class, focusing specifically on educational attainment and income level.

To identify working- and upper-middle-class neighborhoods, I selected specific census blocks at the bottom and top in terms of income and educational attainment levels within each MSA. Although occupational prestige is also often included as a determinant of class status (Blau and Duncan 1994), this measure is much more difficult to quantify on a large scale, and so was excluded. For the upper-middle-class neighborhoods, I selected those census tracts whose median income and level of educational attainment were in the top five percent of all tracts within each MSA. For the working-class samples, I used the same method to select those tracts in the lowest five percent of income and education levels. In each MSA, there were two census tracts in the top and bottom five percent of both measures of class. In all cases, these were neighboring census tracts, resulting in four samples from four sets of tracts. Each of these pairs of tracts was separated

from other residential tracts by open land or non-residentially zoned areas, isolating them as distinct neighborhoods.

The neighborhood of Whipple Heights, the upper-middle-class Eugene neighborhood, is located in the hills south of the city, near a major university. The proportion of residents with college degrees is nearly twice that of the entire area, and the median income is 65 percent higher. Many of the single-family homes in the neighborhood were built in the 1970s, though some are older and others have been built more recently. Many of the streets end in *cul de sacs*, and tall fir trees abound. The neighborhood is home to several schools, both private and public, as well as several parks.

Located further south from downtown Eugene is Winter Flats. The distance from the city gives the area a rural feel; many residents have animals of various kinds and grow fruits and vegetables. The proportion of college degree holders is a third that of the entire area—fewer than six percent. More than ten percent never graduated high school, and almost fifteen percent live in poverty. Several of the Winter Flats respondents reported never having left the neighborhood in their lives, since a nearby commercial district provides basic stores, schools, and services.

On the other side of the country sits Eaton Hills, a New England suburb of large historic estates and newly constructed homes. Many houses are separated from others by considerable distance. A small commercial area nearby provides cafés, small shops, and some basic services. In Eaton Hills, six-figure salaries are

the norm and the proportion of college-degree holders is more than twice that of the wider area.

Across the Boston metropolitan area from Eaton Hills is Eagle Plains, located near a suburban town long considered a capital of the Industrial Revolution, due to its once prosperous textile mills (Dawley 2000). The gridded streets of the neighborhood are lined with symmetrical rows of houses. The median income is half that of Eaton Hills, and barely one tenth of residents benefit from a college education.

More detailed demographic information about each of the neighborhoods included in this project is provided in Appendix A. This information also shows the differences in the cost of living between the two areas—the median income of the upper-middle-class Eugene neighborhood is slightly lower than that of the working-class Boston neighborhood. Comparing information within metropolitan areas, though, reflects these areas' differing relative status. Looking carefully at the metropolitan-level data also indicates that the metropolitan-area statistics are much closer to the working-class neighborhoods than to the upper-middle-class neighborhoods, especially for the Boston metropolitan area. Because of the criteria of selection for census tracts, including relatively high proportions of owner occupied units and single-family dwellings, neighborhoods of extreme poverty were left out of this project, but not from the metropolitan statistics, explaining this discrepancy.

Having selected the neighborhoods, I needed to identify the individual respondents. I used a commercial survey company to obtain the names, addresses,

and phone numbers of a random sample of residents from each neighborhood. Dependent on public records, this method excluded unlisted residents from the sample. Although it is important to consider the ways in which the exclusion of unlisted residents may skew responses—if unlisted residents also tend to be more removed from neighborhood social networks, for example—there is no reason to expect any skewness to unequally affect the different subsamples and therefore affect observed cross-class differences. The random sampling resulted in approximately equal proportions of sex among each sub-sample.

Since the primary category of interest in this project is class and not neighborhood, a total of three individual respondents were reclassified from one sub-sample to another depending on their occupation and education level. Since these respondents had a potentially unique outlook on neighborhood values and appearance, they were monitored closely for variance, and, their position, if relevant, is indicated in the presentation of results. In the numerical tabulation of frequencies, I included them with the residents of the neighborhood that correlated with their metropolitan area and social status. For example, a respondent living in Winter Flats who held a Master's degree, was employed as a business executive, and was married to a physician was reclassified as a resident of Whipple Heights for the purposes of numerical calculations. All three of these respondents were upper-middle-class individuals living near working-class neighborhoods; no working-class respondents were identified living in or near the upper-middle-class neighborhoods.

I initially contacted potential participants with a letter introducing myself and my project and asking for cooperation in the study. The letter briefly described the content of the interviews, the time commitment requested of the respondents, and an assurance of the confidentiality of their contact information and responses. A sample letter is provided in Appendix B. I followed up the initial letter with a phone call in order to arrange in-person interviews with willing participants. I made multiple attempts to contact each sampled individual, but after three unsuccessful attempts, I ceased and considered the individual a non-respondent. The total response rate was approximately 23 percent, with 49 percent not responding, and 18 percent refusing participation. The most common reasons given for refusing was lack of time or conflicting travel plans. In addition, 5 percent of addresses obtained were incorrect, 3 percent of phone numbers were disconnected, and a handful of selected respondents were deceased or hospitalized at the time of contact. The response rate for the West Coast subsamples was slightly higher than that of the East Coast samples, potentially explained by the novelty of an Oregon native conducting a Harvard-based research project.² The response rate between the different class groupings was approximately the same, although lower-middle class respondents on average took more attempts to contact—two as opposed to 1.3. Non-response rates were approximately equal across the sexes.

² This is especially true for the working-class sample. The phone number I provided for respondents to contact me was that of my permanent residence, in a working-class neighborhood near Winter Flats. While arranging interviews, quite a few Winter Flats respondents commented on the prefix of the phone number, asking if I was originally from the nearby area. When I replied I was, they tended to be very willing to participate, and encouraging of the idea of a student from a neighborhood similar to theirs working to graduate Harvard.

I conducted a total of 84 interviews. This included 22 upper-middle-class Eugene-area respondents, called the Whipple Heights respondents, 23 working-class Eugene-area residents, called the Winter Flats respondents, 20 upper-middle-class Boston-area respondents, called the Eaton Hills respondents, and 19 working-class Boston-area residents, called the Eagle Plains respondents.

In order to estimate to what extent non-respondents would differ from participants in their responses, I re-contacted a random twenty percent of those who refused participation and asked them to complete a two- to three-minute telephone survey that included numerical responses about their level of satisfaction with their home and neighborhood, the traits they consider most important to neighborhood quality, and how they compare the quality of their neighborhood to others. More than 80 percent of those re-contacted agreed to this survey. The questions asked of them were also included in the full interview schedule. There were no discernible patterned differences between the answers of non-respondents and of respondents, suggesting that although the non-response rate is rather high, those who agreed likely do not represent a meaningfully different subset of the population. This control, however, does not apply to those selected who were unable to be contacted, a group that represented nearly half of the originally contacted individuals. Unfortunately, since repeated attempts using multiple means failed to engage these individuals, there was no way to compare their attitudes. Since the non-response rate was comparable between class subsamples, there is no reason to believe that the attitudes of non-respondents would differ in such a way as to significantly affect observed class-based patterns.

Most interviews were conducted in participants' homes. All were informed of their rights as participants and the confidentiality of their responses at the beginning of the interview. Some interviews were conducted at the workplaces of participants or local restaurants or coffee shops at participants' request. When participants could not or would not consent to an in-person interview, I conducted the interview over the phone. When the interview was conducted at a workplace, café, or over the phone, I asked permission to drive by the home residence to observe its appearance. Most respondents agreed, meaning almost all interviews were supplemented with field notes noting the appearance of respondents' homes and the immediately surrounding neighborhood. In many cases, these field notes included descriptions from full tours of respondents' homes and yards. Interviews lasted from under 30 minutes to over 2 hours, with an average length of about 45 minutes. Interviews were semi-structured, beginning by asking respondents to describe their homes and to gauge their satisfaction with them before more explicitly asking about processes of judgment making and moral definitions of good and bad neighborhoods. An interview schedule is provided in Appendix C. At the end of the interview, basic demographic information was gathered. Much of this information is presented in a summary of respondents in Appendix D.

After transcribing the interviews, I coded them using the qualitative data analysis software Atlas.TI. I coded every mention of personal values or morality, whether positive or negative, along with any description of morally significant or culturally preferred visual characteristics. I also coded field notes to analyze

patterns in neighborhood appearance. From the coded interviews, I determined the prevalence of various dimensions of morality discussed by each sample.