

# Findings: A Quantitative Overview

## Home Satisfaction

**E**very interview started with respondents being asked to rate their satisfaction with the quality of their home from one to ten, with one being not at all satisfied and ten being extremely satisfied. The mean response for working-class respondents was 8.35, and for upper-middle-class respondents, 8.66. Furthermore, the Eugene respondents of both classes had slightly higher satisfaction ratings than their Boston counterparts. The small sample size, though, prevents any meaningful conclusions to be made from these figures alone. The responses shown here are generally in line with those of the American Housing Survey, on which more than 100,000,000 respondents were asked the same home satisfaction question, with a median response of 8.78, consistently high across income levels (U.S. Census Bureau 2004).

Table 1: **Home Satisfaction**

<b>MSA</b>	<b>Working Class</b>	<b>Upper-middle class</b>	<b>Combined</b>
<b>Eugene</b>	8.4	8.8	8.6
<b>Boston</b>	8.3	8.5	8.4
<b>Total</b>	8.35	8.66	8.5

## Neighborhood Satisfaction

After being asked to rate their satisfaction with the quality of their home, all respondents were asked to rate their satisfaction with the quality of their neighborhood on the same scale. Responses were similar to those for home satisfaction, with a working-class mean response of 8.97 and an upper-middle-class mean response of 8.81. Again, Eugene respondents had a higher average than Boston respondents. Interestingly, although working-class respondents tended to give their home a lower satisfaction rating than the upper-middle class, they tended to give their neighborhood a slightly higher rating, potentially suggesting a greater emphasis on neighborhood and community in working-class neighborhoods than in upper-middle-class neighborhoods. Again, though, the small sample prevents any strong conclusions to be drawn from this numerical data. Like home satisfaction ratings, neighborhood satisfaction ratings were in line with American Housing Survey data, which has a median neighborhood satisfaction response of 8.75 (U.S. Census Bureau 2004).

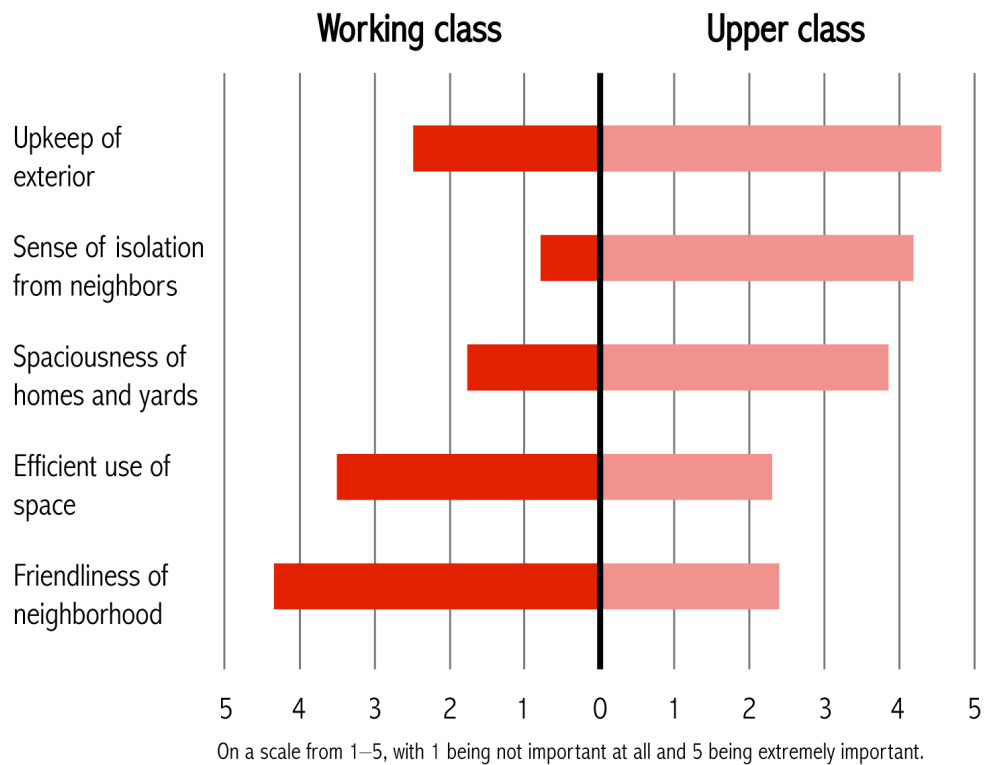
Table 2: **Neighborhood Satisfaction**

<b>MSA</b>	<b>Working Class</b>	<b>Upper-middle class</b>	<b>Combined</b>
<b>Eugene</b>	9.2	9.0	9.10
<b>Boston</b>	8.7	8.6	8.65
<b>Total</b>	8.97	8.81	8.89

## Defining a good neighborhood

All respondents were also asked to rank the importance of various characteristics of homes and neighborhoods. They were asked, “If you were looking for somewhere to live, how important would each of the following characteristics be on a scale from one to five, with one being not at all important and five being extremely important?” If a respondent indicated that they felt the characteristic was negative—that is, if it was something they did not want—it was recorded as zero.

Figure 1: Characteristics of Neighborhood Desirability



On average, upkeep of the exterior was the most important characteristic to upper-middle class respondents, followed closely by a sense of isolation from neighbors, and then by spaciousness of homes and yards. In the interview, the desirability of the spaciousness of home and yard were asked separately, and here they are averaged together. Though efficient use of space and friendliness of a neighborhood were both seen as positive characteristics, they were not given nearly as much value as maintenance or privacy.

For the working class, on average, the friendliness of a neighborhood was the single most important characteristic in gauging neighborhood desirability. The next most important characteristic, an efficient use of space, averaged almost a full point below friendliness in importance. There was another one-point difference between efficient use of space and the next most important characteristic, the upkeep or maintenance of the exterior. Spaciousness was not deemed particularly important, with an average ranking less than two, and when asked about the importance of a sense of isolation or separation from neighbors, a sizeable portion of working class respondents questioned that this would be a positive characteristic. Overall, these responses indicate that working class respondents put a high value on neighborliness, and upper-middle-class respondents on maintenance and privacy.

## Comparisons within Neighborhood

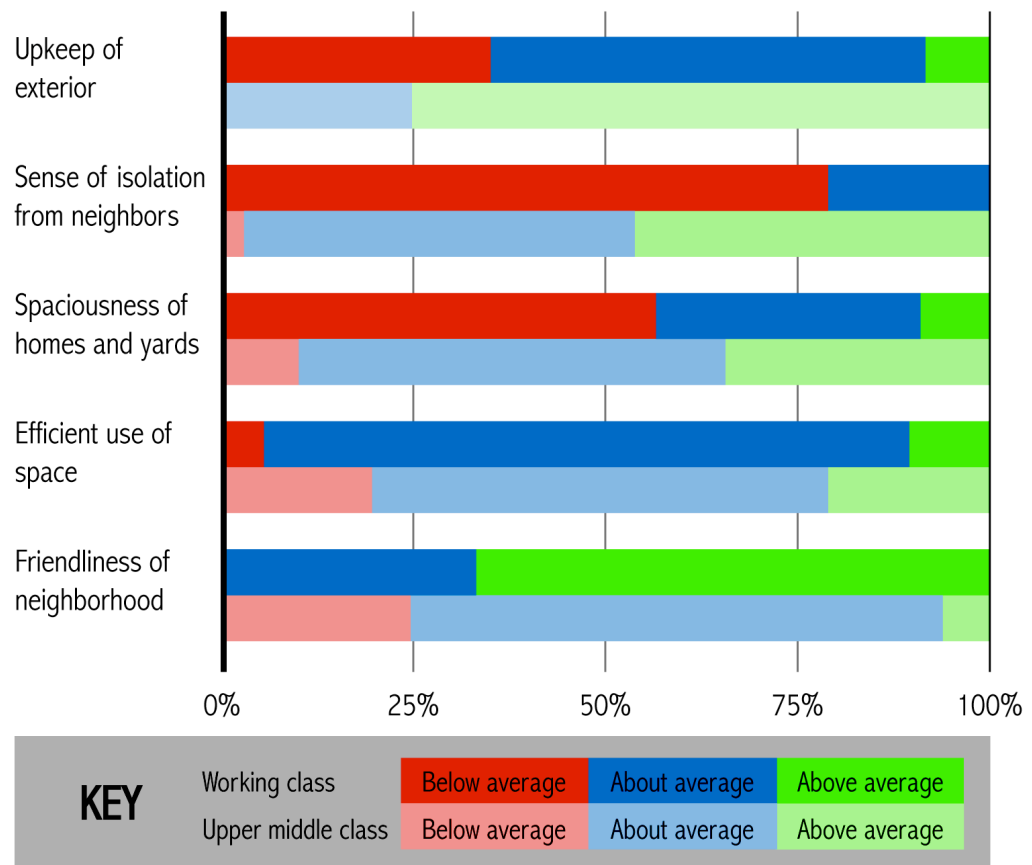
**R**espondents were also asked to compare their own home to others in the neighborhood on a list of various characteristics, including the upkeep of the exterior, the sense of isolation or separation from neighbors, the spaciousness of the home and yard, and the efficiency of usage of space. For each of these characteristics, they were asked to classify their own home as below average, about average, or above average as compared to other homes within their neighborhood. The overwhelmingly common response for every characteristic among every subsample was “about average,” indicating that respondents were unlikely to see their own home as exceptional as compared to others in the neighborhood. The upper-middle-class respondents were slightly more likely to classify the spaciousness of their home and yard as either above or below average, but these differences were negligible, with more than 85 percent of upper-middle-class respondents still classifying their home as average.

The one strong exception to this trend was the handful of residents who lived near a working-class neighborhood but whose occupation and educational attainment classified them as upper-middle class. These respondents, of which there were only three, all classified their homes as above average in terms of upkeep, sense of isolation, and spaciousness.

## Comparisons to Other Neighborhoods

After comparing their own home to others in the neighborhood, respondents were asked how they felt most homes in their neighborhood compared to most homes in the wider metropolitan area. Respondents were asked to classify their neighborhoods as below average, about average, or above average in terms of the upkeep or maintenance of the exterior, the sense of isolation or separation between neighbors, the spaciousness of the homes and yards, the efficiency of the usage of space, and the friendliness of the neighborhood.

Figure 2: Neighborhood Comparisons



Respondents' inter-neighborhood comparisons showed much more variation than their intra-neighborhood comparisons. Most notably, more than half of working-class respondents identified their neighborhoods as below average in terms of having a sense of isolation between neighbors and of spaciousness of homes and yards. In addition, approximately one third considered their neighborhoods to be below average in terms of upkeep or maintenance. At the same time, nearly three quarters replied that their neighborhoods were friendlier than the average neighborhood in the area, the only characteristic given an "above average" response by a majority of working-class respondents. In terms of efficiency and maintenance, most working class respondents considered their neighborhoods to be average.

In contrast to the working class, the upper-middle class was very hesitant to give their neighborhoods a "below average" ranking for any characteristic. The characteristic that drew the most negative responses—friendliness of neighborhood—still was considered to be "about average" for the majority of respondents. Likewise, a majority of upper-middle-class respondents considered their neighborhoods average in terms of efficiency of usage of space and spaciousness of homes and yards. Nearly half, though, felt their neighborhoods had a stronger sense of separation between neighbors than nearby areas, and an overwhelming 75 percent considered their neighborhoods to be better maintained than average.

These responses, like those dealing with neighborhood desirability, suggest a connection between working class neighborhoods and friendliness, and

between upper-middle class neighborhoods and maintenance and privacy. Taken together, the responses regarding inter-neighborhood comparisons and characteristics of desirability reflect an interesting pattern: among both classes, the characteristics respondents value are the same as those that they feel their neighborhood displays most strongly. These numerical measures suggest strong differences in the working and upper-middle class respondents' definitions of good and bad neighborhoods. It is in the respondents' own words, though, that the true extent of these differences emerge.



# Findings: The Upper-Middle Class

## Privacy, Personal Space and Neighborly Distance

When I first spoke to Albert, an Eaton Hills private school teacher, on the phone, he flatly refused an interview. “I don’t usually allow people I don’t know into my home,” he said. I let him know that I understood his concern, and suggested we meet at a coffee shop. We began a conversation, and, after I explained the project in more detail, he agreed to an interview in his home, a four-story Victorian set back amidst a grove of maples. Albert’s reluctance to invite me to his home reflects the upper-middle class’s most commonly mentioned characteristic of a good neighborhood: privacy. When asked to list the factors most important to a good neighborhood, virtually every upper-middle-class respondent mentioned privacy. “It’s most important for me to have my own space. I mean, that’s the definition of a home, is your own space,” explained Maria, an Eaton Hills financial planner. Jeffrey, a Whipple Heights attorney, made a similar comment. “Privacy isn’t *an* important factor, it’s *the* important factor. Your home is your space. Outside of it, you’re accountable to the public, but inside, what you do is your business,” he said. Several respondents, like Albert, said that I was one of the first strangers they had ever had into their homes.

Upper-middle-class respondents often justified their desire of privacy through their professional jobs, which they described as very people-oriented. “All day I’m at work. I’m talking to people. That’s my job. That’s what I do. Then at the end of the day I want to come home and put my feet up. I need that time or I probably couldn’t do my job. Maybe if I wasn’t working with people all day it would be different, but home is my break,” explained Nora, an Eaton Hills therapist. Charles, a history professor in the Whipple Heights sample also felt that his home gave him a refuge from his very public profession:

As a professor, I’m always around people—students, staff meetings, meetings, meetings, meetings. Then I volunteer, on political campaigns downtown. And don’t get me wrong—I love my job and I love volunteering, but when I come home, it’s my time and my family’s time. There’s not a lot of that kind of time, so I want to appreciate that I do have.

The referencing of professional careers represents a socio-economic distinction on behalf of these respondents. When questioned further, though, they tended not to avoid drawing explicit connections between occupation and the need for privacy. When I asked Charles if he felt blue-collar workers would desire the same levels of privacy, he replied, “Well, I’ve never had that kind of job, so I can’t really say.” Although attributing their own value of privacy to their own jobs, respondents like Charles hesitated to draw direct and generalized links between occupation and the need for privacy.

Respondents reported not only interacting with people through their careers, but also in social lives outside of the neighborhood. Approximately one third of the women respondents in both the Whipple Heights and Eaton Hills sample talked about their choice to socialize outside the neighborhood. Like those

who described home as a refuge from their jobs, these women said they were tired of being around people by the time they got home. They stressed their agency in choosing who they want to spend time with instead of depending on what one woman called “the happenstance circumstances of the neighborhood.” Allison, a Whipple Heights attorney, put it this way:

There’s so little time to spend with people these days. What time I do have I want to spend with the people I really have a bond with. It’s not so much that I wouldn’t like to spend some time getting to know the neighbors, it’s just that there isn’t enough time in the day. I want to make the most of the time I do have, and right now, that’s spending it with friends who happen to live in a different neighborhood. I have enough other allegiances in my life.

Cheryl, a homemaker married to a financial advisor, said that she centers her life around her children and their friends, who do not live in the same neighborhood. “I choose to spend my time with my children, and their friends’ parents. We take our kids to dance and to hockey together, and we also socialize together. That’s my primary circle of friends. I have a lot more in common with them than with my neighbors,” she said. Many upper-middle-class respondents described individual identities distinct from their neighbors, and considered their social lives as reflective of this. “You know, I’m really my own person with my own interests. I do yoga and belly dancing down at [the athletic center] and belong to a birdwatching group. Each of the neighbors has their own lives, so we’re similar I guess, I think that we’re all different,” said Denise, a Whipple Heights dentist. These respondents stressed the agency they exercise in choosing their friends, rather than relying on what Albert, the private school teacher, called “the chances of real estate.”

For most upper-middle-class respondents, their valuation of privacy was manifested in a desire for large amounts of interior and exterior space. Privacy, they claimed, was impossible without adequate space. “My home gives me privacy from the rest of society, from work and my public life. And inside my home, I need enough space for my family to also have a sense of privacy,” explained Ken, a restaurant manager. “Size in and of itself isn’t important, but it’s what the size represents, or what we’re able to do with the size we have,” he said. Joan, a Whipple Heights realtor, also stressed the ways in which she uses space rather than the space itself. “I want a back yard where the kids can run around, where I can run around if I want to, safely and privately. That’s one of the main things we looked for in a house, somewhere with a big enough yard to have plenty of space, and a big enough house for when it’s raining,” she said.

Respondents saw their appreciation of space as both a choice and a result of their financial success. While claiming to understand that not everyone can afford large houses and yards, they questioned the values of residents of very small homes. “I know that not everybody can afford a huge house and rolling lawn. I mean, we couldn’t afford something quite as big as we wanted. But you see these tiny, tiny cracker box houses right up against the street, and it just doesn’t suggest a very high value put on privacy” said Chester, a Whipple Heights department store executive. When asked if he felt as though people living in very small houses did so by choice, he said, “Well no. But at the same time, if I didn’t have much money, I would still put a value on some amount of privacy, you know? There’s other things you could cut. So it’s not a choice, but at the same

time, it kind of is.” He went on about the importance of sound financial planning, struggling to defend his appreciation of space as a personal value, while still acknowledging the financial capital required to purchase such space. Gilbert, a Eaton Hills physician, shared this struggle. “Well sure, I’ve had to save a lot to get this. But that’s why I saved, that’s why I worked, so it would pay off. And now it’s payed off. Maybe it won’t pay off for everyone, but you know, you can get what you can get, and if you want space, if you need space, you can save, you can work, and you can get it. Maybe not this much,” he said, stretching his arms out, “but some.” Gilbert acknowledged that his property—a recently built three-story house set far back from the street behind a rolling lawn complete with swimming pool—was out of reach for many people. Yet he maintained that the space was an expression of values and not of wealth. “What I would think, the space I have, it’s not a display of my wealth as much as it’s a display of you know, privacy, that I’m a private person and I value privacy,” he explained, offering as evidence the difficulty of discerning the size of his house from the street.

Closely connected to privacy was the importance of respecting and defining personal space. Upper-middle-class respondents most commonly defined good neighbors as respectful and quiet. “A good neighbor is someone who respects their neighbors’ property. The best neighbor is the one you don’t even know is there,” said Samantha, an Eaton Hills interior designer. Roger, a Whipple Heights school principal, also expressed the feelings of most upper-middle-class respondents: “I’m really happy with this neighborhood, because it’s very quiet

and respectful. Pretty much everyone is professionals. Pretty much everybody has a family. I think there's this sort of unspoken realization that everyone is very busy, and everyone's time at home is kind of sacred." Like those respondents who tied their value of privacy to their professions, Roger attributed people's respect of each other to their professional status, subtly indicating a preference for a class homogenous neighborhood. When asked if this was the case, he replied, "Well, so long as everybody respects everybody else, as long as it's a quiet neighborhood, it doesn't matter what they do." He tied professional careers to respectfulness and quietness, and respectfulness and quietness to being a good neighbor, but not professional careers directly to being a good neighbor.

Reflecting the importance of personal space, physical markers of separating spaces held great symbolic significance for many upper-middle-class respondents. Such markers, such as fences, rows of trees, or tall shrubs, were a visual manifestation of the respect of personal space so important to these respondents. "We keep this row of shrubs along the back yard. In the winter it looks pretty drab, in the spring it's beautiful with lilacs. And it's a reminder that the back yard is our space, our place, our spot," explained Elaine, a Whipple Heights store owner. Thomas, an Eaton Hills accountant, recognized both a regional and personal symbolic importance of the white fence bordering his spacious property. "The white picket fence. That's a lot more than old New England charm," he said. "It separates what's mine. What happens on this side of the fence is my business. Who comes onto this side of the fence is who I invited.

It's not some impermeable barrier, but it is a marker. It does indicate a separation of space and a respect of privacy."

Shortly before I conducted interviews, the residents of one section of Whipple Heights had decided to erect a fence between each house, separating the yards. "All of the neighbors contributed the money needed to put up the fence. We wanted a fence just so everybody couldn't always be seeing into everybody else's yard. Not because anyone was doing anything inappropriate by any means...It's more of a symbolic significance," said Angela, a financial planner. When asked if any incident precipitated the construction, she said no. "It was just a decision we came to. I mean, I think one family had gotten a dog or something so they suggested it, but it was something we all responded really positively though. Definitely not out of animosity or anything like that," she explained. Though there had been no problems, Maria felt as though the symbolic significance of the fence was important to the neighborhood.

Many of these respondents acknowledged that there was a fine line between respecting personal space and having no interaction with neighborhoods, even a sense of hostility. Still, they stressed respect over neighborliness. Neighborliness and respect were a tradeoff for many; in order to ensure the latter they paid the price of the former. "You know, maybe there's not as much interaction as there could be. Maybe people aren't as eager to be friendly as they could be. But that's okay with me, you know? No one is rude, and no one is knocking on my front door every morning for a cup of sugar, either," said Lisa, a Whipple Heights homemaker married to a physician. Sara, an Eaton Hills part-

time consultant, expressed similar feelings when she said, “Maybe once in a while it’d be nice to have a little more of the, you know, old neighborhood charm, always waving and everything, but ninety percent of the time, I’m thankful this is a quiet street. It’s peaceful.”

Those upper-middle-class respondents who did talk about neighborliness talked about it in a very limited context. The examples given of interaction were very structured and directly related to the neighbor role, rather than more general interdependence between people. Summarizing a pattern apparent in many interviews, Richard, an Eaton Hills publisher, said, “I couldn’t say we rely on each other. I think we all have other networks that we would turn to if we were really in crisis...But for neighborly things, watching the pets if you’re out of town, signing for packages, that sort of thing, yes, we help each other out.”

Maria, the Eaton Hills financial planner, distinguished between her friends and neighbors, considering them two distinct categories.

My friends are people who I call up when I’ve had a bad day. I go to their children’s weddings and when I really need something, they’re there for me. My neighbors, it’s different. It’s the sort of thing where we’re friendly, but we don’t know everything about each other. What we depend on each other for is much more usual neighbor things, you know, picking up the mail when we’re on vacation. It’s not that I don’t think I could depend on them when I really needed to, it’s that there’s other people in my life who, for a whole series of reasons, I’m more likely to depend on.

The friend versus neighbor distinction drawn by Maria was made explicitly by almost half of the upper-middle-class respondents. The most commonly mentioned “usual neighbor thing” talked about by upper-middle class residents was some form of house-sitting while on vacation; when asked if neighbors depend on each other for anything, three-fourths of upper-middle-class



respondents described neighbors keeping an eye on their house, feeding their pets, or watering their lawns while they were on vacation.

Although interactions were not common or necessarily desirable for upper-middle-class respondents, they were not unheard of. Fewer than one fourth of the Eaton Hills sample and only a few Whipple Heights residents talked about organized functions involving neighbors. These functions were described as distinct from the respondents' social lives outside the neighborhood, which they stressed as more important. Nora, the Eaton Hills therapist, described an annual party she holds to keep the neighbors in touch with one another:

Every Christmas I hold a neighborhood get together. It's probably the one time a year we see each other. We catch up, learn where everyone's kids are going to school, who got promoted to what at work, where we went on summer vacation. It's nice to see everyone. We all understand that we like each other well enough, we just don't need to be constantly hanging around talking to each other.

Sara, the Eaton Hills consultant, talked about a similar Labor Day function. "We have this summer block party type thing, where we all get together. A couple up the hill hosts it. They have a beautiful house. So that's where we have it, and we see each other, and it's really great to check in," she said. When asked what they check in about, she replied, "Oh, the usual things. Whose kid is doing what, whose planning what renovations, any changes in anyone's family. It's pretty superficial, but we do care about each other. We're just so busy." Like other respondents, she went on to explain the usual lack of interaction using the professional careers of the neighborhood residents.

Fewer than one fourth of the upper-middle-class respondents acknowledged that they would like somewhat more interaction amongst

neighbors. All of these respondents were women, and none expressed any intention of initiating the interaction they desired. They saw it as a necessary price to pay for the privacy they valued so much. “I mean, sure it might be nice to be a little closer, have a little more interaction. But I’m not unhappy with the way things are. You know, we can’t live in a perfect world, so I’m happy with the way things are,” explained June, a Whipple Heights librarian. Elaine, a Whipple Heights store owner, felt similarly. “I sometimes think that it would be nice to do more with the neighbors, but that’s all, it’s just a thought. It’s never something I’m going to go say, hey, let’s do this and that or let’s all get together,” she said. When asked why she doesn’t make an effort for more interaction, she explained, “It’s not that important. It’s easy to say, ‘yeah it would be nice,’ but at the end of the day, when I get home from work, I’m tired. They’re tired. We’re all tired.” Similarly, when June was asked the same thing, she said, “I just don’t think people would really respond. We value our time with our families. We’re just not really a ‘let’s all get together’ sort of neighborhood. We’re quiet. We’re busy.” For these women, both the norm of quietness and the perceived business of residents were reason enough not to initiate the interaction they desired.

## Taste, Diversity, and Open-Mindedness

**A**lthough personal privacy was of primary importance, many upper-middle-class respondents also expressed a desire for their home and neighborhood to reflect their values of open-mindedness and diversity—concepts

talked about by more than three quarters of Whipple Heights respondents and half of Eaton Hills respondents.

One way in which the appreciation of diversity was visually manifested was through modern art and architecture. Leonard, a Whipple Heights engineer, said he was proud of the eclecticism of taste found in his neighborhood, and especially of the eight-foot copper structure he displayed among his Hosta<sup>1</sup> garden. Roger, a school principal who lives down the street from Leonard, described the variation in ethnicity, religion, and political valence of all of the neighbors he knew, before explaining that these differences lead to differences in appearance:

You know, I want some diversity of taste in my neighborhood. I want to see that people appreciate different things. Different perspectives. Like take this neighborhood. I happen to have a very minimalist approach. I keep the grass green and cut but don't go for a lot of extras. Now, down the street, some of the neighbors take a much more natural approach. They have native vegetation and fir trees and a little creek. Then on the other side, a few years ago they built a very modern house, and outside is this angular rock pathway and some plants, I think they're yuccas, and that's still a different style. So there's these different viewpoints, these different tastes, and they all come together to make our neighborhood.

The type of diversity upper-middle-class respondents wanted represented in their neighborhood was usually defined both narrowly and vaguely. While different styles and tastes were acceptable, all were expected to follow vaguely described guidelines and standards. Ken, a Whipple Heights restaurant manager, articulated his appreciation for diversity within certain standards. "I look for non-uniformity in the dwelling. But in a way, there needs to be uniformity in that non-uniformity. People can express their taste, so long as they have taste. So, they

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<sup>1</sup> A shade plant popular in the Pacific Northwest.

could have an English garden or a naturalized landscape, that's their choice, but not some haphazard mess of weeds. I wouldn't want that in my neighborhood. Not many people would.” When asked what the defining characteristics of taste were, he struggled. “It’s something, I guess it’s something that’s put together in some way. It can be just about any way, but not just this and that, you know? Something that shows people care. I don’t care what people care about, just that they care.” Every upper-middle-class respondent who mentioned good taste—a total of more than half the sample—said that it involved some amount of personal judgment, and lacked absolutely universal standards.

Many of those who stressed good taste were careful to distinguish between taste and wealth. “You don’t need money to have taste,” said Maria, the Eaton Hills financial planner. “It’s more a matter of caring, or of putting time into it,” she said. When asked what sorts of things show taste in home appearance, she replied, “It can be any number of things. Maybe a specific architectural style. Maybe a flower garden or trees, even a natural look, you know, less manicured. I guess it’s hard to define. It’s easier to know when you see it.” The “know it when you see it” description was given by fifteen respondents when asked to define the characteristics of good taste—three quarters of those who talked about taste. “I just, sorry, but I can’t say really,” apologized Thomas, the Eaton Hills accountant.

One specific aspect of open-mindedness expressed by nearly a third of the Whipple Heights respondents and a few of the Eaton Hills respondents was a willingness to embrace displays of efficiency in their neighborhoods, and sometimes in their own homes. Rather than a way of life, efficiency was talked

about as a political statement. “You have to be open to new ideas like that,” said George, a Whipple Heights physician, in reference to a neighbor’s construction of a solar powered fountain. “Otherwise, how are we going to move forward,” he asked. The goal of efficiency was not lowering heating and electricity costs, but decreasing overall environmental impact. Often, this was done through expensive renovations, such as installing state-of-the-art heating systems. Robert, an engineer from the Whipple Heights sample, said his dream is to one day have a self-sufficient home, powered entirely with solar panels on the roof. “I’m glad I live in a neighborhood where that’s an acceptable lifestyle,” he said. The solar panels on his roof, he added, are a visual display of his environmental ethic, and one that commands the respect of passersby. Since the panels are so visible, he is able both to do something proactive about his environmental concerns, and display these concerns to the neighborhood, adding to the diversity of taste so important to so many of the upper-middle-class respondents.

## Laziness and Negligence

**T**he open-mindedness professed by many upper-class respondents did not preclude them from making strong negative judgments based on certain visual criteria. Talking about the importance of a diversity of styles one minute, many respondents were sharply criticizing particular visual cues the next.

The overwhelmingly most common basis for judgment was a lack of upkeep or maintenance. Every upper-middle-class respondent said that a lack of

upkeep or maintenance was one of the first things they noticed when assessing the quality of a neighborhood. “If things are not very kept up, lawns not mowed, houses not painted, I think that’s the first thing I notice,” said Nora, the Eaton Hills therapist, when asked what to her signals a bad neighborhood. Every upper-middle-class respondent shared this feeling; some form of lack of upkeep was listed as one of their primary cues of a bad neighborhood. “A run down neighborhood, a dilapidated neighborhood with peeling paint or piles of leaves,” said Ellen, a Whipple Heights teacher in her description of a bad neighborhood.

Disrepair in a neighborhood was not devalued because it signaled structural unsoundness, but because it was seen as saying something about the people who lived there. A lack of maintenance was directly tied to laziness, negligence, and lack of pride. “The first thing I probably notice is whether or not people are too lazy to keep their houses up. You know, if they’re dilapidated and no one has pride in their home,” said Toby, an Eaton Hills business owner, reflecting an almost universal connection between lack of maintenance and laziness among upper-middle-class respondents.

Ellen, the Whipple Heights teacher, expanded her critique of “run down” neighborhoods when she said, “It means there's not pride in what they're doing. They're just flopped there. They just couch surf. These people don't have any interest in their home, it's just a place to park it for a while and drink and do their meth. Even the old ladies in this neighborhood keep their homes a certain way. So it's not ability.” Here, Ellen stressed the personal accountability of maintaining a

home to certain standards. She also extended a lack of upkeep not only to laziness, but also to illegal activity.

This connection between a lack of regular maintenance and illegal drug use was made by a handful of Whipple Heights residents and a few Eaton Hills respondents as well. Kathleen, a Whipple Heights registered nurse, was one. “A house that’s looking run down, that maybe has weeds for a lawn or peeling paint, you have to wonder about a house like that. Is it a meth lab,” she questioned. When asked why a lack of upkeep corresponds so directly to drug use, she stumbled to find an answer. “Well, I guess it’s just maybe that, to have a run down house, you really must be spending a lot of time doing something else. Or really not care. And so around here, my mind goes to meth. There was a woman living in a house down a few streets. It was a rental, and the woman was skinny as a rail, and she was just skanky looking. She must have been doing meth. I mean, she was real scary looking.” When asked if the woman still lives there, Kathleen said no, that she had moved out a few months ago, her criminal record still unclear.

Although a complete lack of maintenance was usually seen as a sure sign of negligence, not just any maintenance was acceptable for homeowners to redeem themselves. Many Whipple Heights and Eaton Hills residents—about one half—critiqued “make-shift” or “make do” repairs and replacements as reflecting the same sort of laziness and negligence as a complete lack of maintenance. “You know, sometimes you see something, and you can just tell the people tried to scrape something together instead of really putting effort into it. Like lots of

different colors on the house instead of some coherent scheme. Or some makeshift roofing repair job that looks more like a hut than a house. Really, put a little thought into it,” said Bill, an Eaton Hills engineer. Lisa, a Whipple Heights homemaker, like most respondents, was a little more forgiving, but still stressed the importance of high standards of maintenance. “You know, not everybody can do everything, but there’s certain standards you need to keep. Just throwing something together isn’t good enough. You need to put thought into it,” she said.

Lisa’s comment that “not everyone can do everything” is reflective of the subtle and indirect way many upper-middle-class respondents talked about class in terms of home maintenance. When talking about upkeep in general, many respondents were careful to clarify that they did not feel as though money was necessary to maintain one’s house. “You don’t need a fancy house to have a nice house, to keep your house nice,” said June, the Whipple Heights librarian. Gilbert, the Eaton Hills physician, made a similar clarification, saying, “Even in poorer neighborhoods you can have people taking care of their places, showing pride in their homes.” As Bill’s and Lisa’s comments suggest, though, when describing the desired standards of maintenance, respondents were far less considerate of the financial prerequisites of such maintenance. When Gilbert, who explicitly referenced poorer neighborhoods as able to keep to his standards of upkeep, was asked what it takes to “take care of your place” and “show pride in your home,” he said, “Well, fixing something when it breaks or when it starts looking run down. You know, getting a new roof, replacing shutters, trimming trees.” To him, roofing and shutters were necessary expenses to maintain minimal standards.



Interestingly, when asked if he could think of any poorer neighborhoods that he felt met his standards, he fell short. “Well I can’t think of any off hand, but then again, I don’t know too many,” he said.

Upper-middle-class respondents also very commonly mentioned clutter, or the amount of “stuff” people have displayed outside their homes and in their yards, as a sign of laziness. Clutter was mentioned as frequently as a lack of maintenance. “Junk, clutter, tacky ornaments. That kind of country dump look...says I don’t care...They’ve got sheets on the windows instead of an attempt at curtains. They’ve parked on the front lawn. Those things say nobody cares here, nobody will notice if you scream in the street,” said Justine, a Whipple Heights dentist.<sup>2</sup> The worst sign of clutter—mentioned by more than half of upper-middle-class respondents—was cars outside of homes and in yards. Other common and repulsing signs were tools, toys, paper goods, and lawn ornaments.

“Rusty cars,” said Gene, a Whipple Heights banker, as he rolled his eyes. “A lawn is not the place for a junk yard. There’s not excuses for that. It’s dumpy,” he continued. When asked what a lot of cars outside of a house says about the people who live in the house, he said, “Well, I don’t know anyone like that. But they couldn’t care very much, or not be in a position to care, maybe they’re doing drugs, or yeah, they just don’t care.” Gene was not alone in expressing a strong distaste for cars parked outside of houses, and connecting such a display to laziness or negligence. June, the Whipple Heights librarian, articulated further criteria for determining the moral meaning of cars outside a home. “If they’re rusty, or there’s grass growing through them, you know, obviously not used, up

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<sup>2</sup> Justine was a pilot interviewee, originally selected for a previous project.

on jacks permanently, with no intention of driving them. What that's really saying is, you're not going to do anything. You don't care," she said. None of the upper-middle class sample said they personally knew anyone who displayed what they considered to be unacceptable displays of automobiles.

Beyond cars, other types of clutter were given a similar moral reading.

Ken, the Whipple Heights restaurant manager, focused on tools:

Just put away your tools. That's great if you're out working in your yard, I mean, if people never did that there would be a lot bigger of a problem. But then put the tools away. It's like what I always have to tell my teenage son—when you're done put it away. But some people never learned that, I guess...It reflects laziness I think. There are definitely worse things you could do, but it's just a simple thing and I think it makes a big difference.

Though the content of people's descriptions of clutter varied, the moral meaning of laziness and negligence was consistent in more than three quarters of upper-middle class interviews.

## Trashy Décor

Cars and tools were rather directly tied to laziness by respondents; people who had such displays were too lazy to pick up after themselves or didn't care enough to repair their cars. Other negative visual cues, though, signaled negative values much more indirectly. Specifically, displays of what respondents called lawn ornaments were commonly tied to lack of pride and laziness, and sometimes, to a lack of education and value of art. Approximately half of the

upper-middle-class respondents had something negative to say about these types of visual displays.

When asked to define lawn ornaments, as opposed to the type of art many respondents had talked about as bringing diversity to a neighborhood's appearance, respondents gave vague answers. Most commonly, respondents said that lawn ornaments, like examples of good taste, were something you know when you see but cannot coherently or explicitly define. "Well, it's kind of the thing you know when you see," said Maria, the Eaton Hills financial planner, a comment echoed by almost three quarters of the upper-middle-class respondents who talked about lawn ornaments. Another common method of definition was through example—most commonly, pink plastic flamingoes. Other common culprits were garden gnomes, windmills, pinwheels, and concrete statuary.

Cheryl, a Whipple Heights homemaker, defined lawn ornaments against what she called yard art:

To me, there's a difference. Gnomes, flamingoes, none of that has any appeal to me. But sometimes there are wrought iron or wood arches, that kind of thing is really neat...Lawn ornaments are things you could buy anywhere. They're the type of things that are dime a dozen, a plastic bird bath. You can go out and get another. To me, yard art is one of a kind, or two or three that ever existed, that might be in your yard. I have a bird bath designed by an architect. It is one of a kind. I would consider that yard art. Things that are rare, one of a kind. My brother's house has some antique rakes in the garden. That's yard art. when I see a bunch of yard ornaments, I think it's junky. I might find it amusing momentarily, but only momentarily.

For Cheryl, art is distinguished from ornaments by its rarity. The distinction between art and junk is made by how easily available something is. This distinction is inherently economic, since displaying rare objects likely requires a

much higher financial investment. When asked if she thought yard art needed to be expensive, Cheryl said no, that it just “had to be unique.”

Most of those who talked about lawn ornaments negatively, felt that they reflected poor taste. Tying this taste to a judgment of values, a preference for lawn ornaments was sometimes tied to a lack of education and a correlating close-mindedness. “If you’ve learned about all the art there is in the world, all the styles, the rich traditions, then you’ll want something more. You’ll want something that reflects that,” explained Tony, a small-business owner. “Once you’ve seen David, do you really want a concrete donkey? Once you’ve seen Picasso, why would you want a pink flamingo,” he mused, chuckling. When questioned as to how widespread the opportunity to see such artwork is, he went further, claiming his judgments were based not only on a lack of education, but also a lack of appreciation of education. “Learning about that art and those traditions, that doesn’t necessarily mean having an Ivy League education. It means valuing education enough to take the time to learn, to go to the library, to open your mind,” he said. Sonya, a university administrator, expressed similar concerns that lawn ornaments were a signal of close-mindedness. “That sort of kitsch American suburbia pink flamingo thing, it’s a generalization, but those are the people who want to call French fries Freedom fries, who don’t question anything.” When asked where this idea came from, Sonya admitted to drawing on stereotypes, but suggested that stereotypes sometimes arise from truth. “So maybe every person who displays flamingoes—I can’t make a broad generalization. But I think that sort of thing, it plays into that conformity, that conservatism. It’s an

indirect link, but I think it's there," she said. Though acknowledging that it arose from generalizations and assumptions, Sonya defended her moral judgment connecting lawn ornaments to close-mindedness.

For a handful of respondents, objects categorized by most upper-middle-class respondents as lawn ornaments became acceptable displays of yard art because of the procedure of consumption. Gene, the Whipple Heights banker, talked about his wife's small collection of gnome figurines she had gathered from flea markets in France. "Traveling to France, understanding the historical circumstances, appreciating them as a relic of pre-war Europe, that's very different from picking them up at WalMart." When asked what flamingoes from WalMart would mean, he said, "Well, I don't think it's very creative, or it's not very unique, it doesn't have that diversity of taste," referencing an earlier comment in the interview when he stated he liked diversity of taste displayed in a neighborhood. Here, Gene, like Sonya, ties lawn ornaments to a lack of open-mindedness.

Elaine, a storeowner, like Gene, exceptionalized a display of lawn ornaments based on the conditions of acquisition, describing the pinwheels she has in her backyard. "My niece was selling them as part of this fundraiser, some handicapped children she works with were making them. So that sort of thing, when there's meaning behind it, I think that's a totally different thing. I don't like them for what they are, but for what they mean. They say something about me only in so far as the story of acquisition." Laughing, she suggested that she placed

them in the back yard instead of the front to avoid assumptions on others' behalves about her taste, reflecting her familiarity with such judgments.

A handful of respondents sensed hypocrisy in their responses, professing a value of open-mindedness while making rather strong judgments on particular tastes. Fewer than one third of those who stressed both a value of open-mindedness and a distaste for lawn ornaments engaged directly with this disjuncture. Such an acknowledgement was more prevalent in Whipple Heights than Eaton Hills, but still only made by a total of four respondents. Talking about people who display clutter and lawn ornaments, Carol, a writer, initially said, "I don't know them. My sense is just that they're very different. They're not the type of people I'd want to share a neighborhood with." When asked where she felt this sense came from, she became very defensive. "I feel like I'm going to be pressed to say something I don't want to. Please don't ask me that. It's just, it's a sense I have I guess." Appearing to sense a disjuncture between her professed values and her actual processes of judgment making, Carol seemed to shut down, shorten her answers, and become very self aware of her responses following this question. Later on in the interview, she apologized for becoming so abrupt, saying, "Questions about judgments I make, they make me very uncomfortable."

Charles, a Whipple Heights professor, took another approach when I questioned the connection between lawn ornaments and close-mindedness. He began explaining why he would not want ornaments displayed in the community, saying, "I don't think that sort of display, it doesn't reflect well on the community." When pushed to explain the connection, he changed his explanation,

asserting instead that he did not like lawn ornaments because they presented a fire hazard. “Once you get a lot of stuff outside, you know, that isn’t plants, then, yeah, then that become a fire hazard. I don’t want that in my neighborhood. I don’t think anybody does,” he said. Carol’s and Charles’ comments suggest that they were aware of the contrast between their professed value of open-mindedness and their strong dislike of particular visual displays.

### Explicitly Socioeconomic Boundaries

**M**ost of the judgments made by upper-middle-class respondents were based on criteria not explicitly connected to class. Furthermore, when class was explicitly brought into the conversation, many denied it, focusing instead on choices and values as independent of income, wealth, or occupation. For some, though, socioeconomic status did play a distinct and explicit role. These respondents—a total of five individuals—spoke openly about their desire to live in a neighborhood of primarily affluent households. These were not the same respondents who talked about a value of diversity, and instead represented a small minority of upper-middle class who placed a high explicit value on social status. Like the other upper-middle-class respondents, these individuals placed a high value on privacy and personal space, while attaching an explicit distaste for lower-income neighbors or neighborhoods. Molly, a musician, said she would fear for her safety in a mixed-income neighborhood. “I’d feel, well, poor people don’t have a lot, so they’d be more inclined to steal. Lower income

neighborhoods have higher crime. That's maybe why," she said. Samuel, a pharmacist, harbored similar fears. "I've worked hard to be able to live in a neighborhood where everybody has about the same amount. So I don't have to worry about jealousy, about people wanting what I have. I wouldn't feel comfortable with that, there might be an inclination towards illegal activity, or you know, I feel safer here," he said. Samuel connected his work ethic to his affluence, suggesting moral superiority in his justification of his desire for economic homogeneity.