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Changing American home life: trends in domestic leisure and storage among middle-class families

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Abstract This study of middle-class American families draws on ethnography and urban economic history, focusing on patterns of leisure time and household consumption and clutter. We trace how residential life evolved historically from cramped urban quarters into contemporary middle-class residences and examine how busy working families use house spaces. Our ethnographic sample consists of 24 Los Angeles families in which both parents work full time, have young children, and own their homes. Formal datasets include systematically timed family uses of home spaces, a large digital archive of photographs, and family-narrated video home tours. This analysis highlights a salient home-storage crisis, a marked shift in the uses of yards and garages, and the dissolution of outdoor leisure for busy working parents.

Keywords Clutter · Dual-earner families · Home spaces · Leisure time · Suburban history

Introduction

Today's urban and suburban middle-class lifeways emerged from a complex convergence of governmental policies, social movements, developers' goals, and homeowners' needs during the past 150 years. Here we trace the evolution of the houses and grounds of middle-class America since the mid-19th century. An

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understanding of contemporary homes and yards and how families use these spaces is significantly enriched by an exploration of the historical roots of residential lots, house floor plans, and lawns and gardens, along with an examination of changing ideals of privacy and leisure. We reflect on these developments in a discussion of ethnographic data from 24 Los Angeles middle-class families in which both parents work full time, have young children, and own their homes. These data were gathered by the Center on Everyday Lives of Families (CELF) at the University of California, Los Angeles from 2002 to 2004.

Here we focus on the CELF ethnoarchaeological data sets, which combine ethnographic and archaeological methods to capture crucial information about spatial and temporal dimensions of family members' home activities (Arnold & Graesch, 2002). Data collection methods include systematic recording of each family member's uses of home spaces at closely timed intervals, a digital archive of photographs of each home's indoor and outdoor spaces, detailed floor plans of homes and yards, and self-narrated video home tours by parents and older children explaining their perceptions of their homes. This analysis is interdisciplinary, drawing on anthropological, architectural, and economic historical approaches to household organization. Our primary goal is to explore shifting American priorities, including time and space that families allocate to work and leisure as well as family behaviors in an era of accelerating consumerism and pressing problems with clutter in the home.

Among our findings, we observe an increasingly salient storage crisis, major shifts in the uses of garage spaces, and the dissipation of outdoor leisure for most of these families. Storage of material goods has become an overwhelming burden for most middle-class families, especially in the West, where basements are generally not available to absorb possessions. We document direct effects of a proliferation of consumer goods on the family home, garage, and yard. High home prices have also forced most middle-class families into smaller homes than they would find ideal, exacerbating this mismatch between goods purchased and space needed to house them. All dual wage-earner families in our study struggle to find enough time to enjoy the homes they worked so hard to buy, and although homeowners have pleasant, furnished, private outdoor spaces in which they have invested heavily, these spaces are rarely used by working parents. Outdoor leisure remains a strongly expressed ideal, according to home-tour narratives, but may be a fading commodity for families pulled in many directions by the demands of work, school, extracurricular activities, and indoor entertainment such as television and the internet.

Although this study is limited to the Los Angeles area, it incorporates families from many ethnic groups, suburban neighborhoods, occupations, and income ranges (all self-labeled as middle class) living in homes ranging from 735 to 3850 sq ft. The claim cannot be made that this sample is statistically representative of Los Angeles or the broader U.S. middle class, yet the study incorporates a diverse cross-section of families whose behaviors associated with the use of time and space at home is largely corroborated by recent analyses of time-use data from a much larger sample of dual-earner middle-class families ($n = 500$) across eight U.S. cities (Graesch, Broege, Arnold, Owens, & Schneider, 2006). Next we present a history of middle-class homes and grounds in urban/suburban areas in order to discuss the changing uses of space at homes across the decades and set the scene for understanding contemporary uses of these spaces.

Tracing Residential Histories

When the American national economy shifted from its farming roots to a range of industries between 1840 and 1920, cities expanded greatly with the arrival of farmers and immigrants. Grim living conditions ensued in most urban centers, and the families of the newly affluent (primarily businessmen and professionals) sought to leave bleaker urban areas. The development of trains and streetcars allowed them to move to city outskirts and commute to work. From the outset suburban houses with their bit of land were advertised as a reward for the working man (Hayden, 1984, p. 23), although they were mostly beyond the reach of working families.

As housing evolved, the material feminists of the later 1800s boldly experimented with housewives' cooperatives and neighborhood organizations, including kitchenless houses, day-care centers, and community dining clubs. They pushed architects and planners to think about house design as a ''spatial context for family life'' (Hayden, 1984, p. 29). Some social theorists speculated that household work could be moved into the factory. The material feminists, on the other hand, argued that women should be paid directly for their home-based housework as mothers, cooks, and seamstresses. Melusina Fay Peirce advocated a form of communal enterprise and economy of scale in neighborhoods, suggesting that women could unite in nurturing tasks at well-equipped neighborhood workplaces (Hayden, 1984). These efforts were, however, quite antithetical to the emerging corporate design for the suburbs and the masses of middle-class families.

By 1919 labor leaders, planners, and businessmen realized the great profits to be made from a system that would provide for better wages, larger houses, and more consumerism among ordinary working families. They reasoned that if more workers and their families were in bigger houses, they would need more cars, furniture, and appliances. Workers would also be less likely to leave jobs or to strike because they had invested heavily in their homes. Thus began the process of expanding the dream of the suburban home to the middle and working class. A much broader spectrum of men became home mortgage payers, and wives remained the home managers. The burgeoning suburban retreat created a strong gender-based division of labor, the effects of which are still strongly experienced by middle-class families. Consumerism became a powerful force in the better economic times of the 1920s. Advertising and the need to keep up with neighbors prompted people to purchase cars, stoves, refrigerators, washing machines, and vacuum cleaners. From the 1920s to the 1990s, the number of housing units in the U.S. expanded from roughly 30 million to 90 million. More housing starts occurred with each new decade, and houses became bigger although families became smaller. Contemporary Americans now control ''the largest amount of private housing space per person...in the history of urban civilization'' (Hayden, 1984, p. 38).

No longer do most American families consist of a male breadwinner and a stay-at-home mom. Women began to enter the workforce during World War II, and although most jobs were reclaimed by men in the period after the war, family employment profiles again changed with the advent of the women's rights movement. In the past two decades, the predominant pattern has become the dual wage-earning family. Moreover, employed women—and some men—each essentially toil at two full-time jobs: a paid job at work and an equally demanding one at home (Hochschild, 1989; Robinson & Godbey, 1997; Schor, 1991). A burdensome corpus

of unpaid work (including shopping, childcare, cooking, cleaning, planning) is layered on to formal paid work. Parents have little time for themselves. Since the 1940s, social importance has been attached to women's housework and home decoration because family status is elevated through beautification of the home. Social pressure to maintain yards in the suburbs similarly generated stresses for working men. The home came to be critiqued in the 1960s by feminists as ''a box to be filled with commodities'' which then demanded constant attention, updating, and maintenance (Hayden, 1984, p. 50).

Despite this critique, to many Americans the good life still means home ownership and all that goes with it. For a family of four in the 1980s, a typical productive home life consumed up to 60 h per week, including food preparation, cleaning, laundry, banking, shopping, articulating with school and healthcare systems, personal care, family communication, and maintenance (Hayden, 1984, pp. 64–65). Not to be forgotten are other tasks such as assisting with homework and shuttling kids to activities, plus big-ticket maintenance such as replacing the failing furnace. Upkeep of the family home life has typically fallen to women, and their personal services and nurturing come with few limits on hours. Ironically, demands on women's time for menial household tasks have increased despite improvements in technology. Laundry takes more time now than in the 1920s because the family has more clothing and expects bright whites. The rise of gourmet cooking as a pastime and the larger sizes of homes also mean increasing demand for labor in the home. Recent statistics show that American women still do most of the housework, even when both adults are employed (Clarkberg & Merola, 2003; Robinson & Godbey, 1997). A cooperating pair of adults sharing basic cooking and cleaning tasks has little chance to keep up—or to feel that keeping up is possible—if both are employed full time, especially if they are in the life-cycle stage where they have younger children (Clarkberg & Merola, 2003; Tausig & Fenwick, 2001). Pressures that parents experience leave little time to relax at home and less time to keep their houses organized. Clearly part-time work situations may alter this formula to create greater work-family balance at home (Hill, Martinson, Ferris, & Baker, 2004), but parents in our sample did not work part time.

In the remainder of this analysis, we trace in greater detail the emergence of demands associated with maintaining and organizing the outdoor habitat—that is, the outdoor and garage spaces—of middle-class homes. Significant restructuring of lots and houses during the past century has notably affected how people use their homes and yards. We find that these areas are especially revealing when it comes to identifying changing patterns of time use by busy dual-wage-earner families as well as the challenges they experience in storing proliferating possessions. We assess how Los Angeles families characterize and use these spaces and what that may tell us about middle-class families more broadly in terms of time allocation, priorities, sacrifices, and leisure.

The Outdoor Habitat of Middle-class Families

The home powerfully symbolizes family status and ideals. Outdoor spaces such as front lawns, back yards, and garages seem so familiar as to go largely unnoticed, yet they are important elements in the operation of the home and its presentation to the world. Moreover, they are critical in the satisfaction and sense of well-being of many families, and they may serve as essential loci for entertaining, exercise, recreation,

cooking, and other activities. Families work hard for treasured leisure time, and the outdoor areas of the home have traditionally been a prime place for leisure. Major shifts in residential design over time, such as the arrangement of rooms within the house and the shape of residential lots, have had significant effects on the ways that back yards, patios, and decks were used through the 20th century. For instance, back yards were once receptacles for trash and coal ashes and the locus for outhouses and other unappealing buildings, but they have become heavily manicured realms of outdoor entertainment. When did this transformation occur?

We will show that the ways in which lawns, back yard spaces, and attached garages evolved sheds light on everyday experiences across several decades, revealing changing middle-class ideals about privacy, leisure, and consumerism. The generative role of back yards in this transformation has been on the whole uninvestigated by social scientists. We suggest that a growing yen for privacy may largely account for changing home configurations and provides a fresh perspective on the built landscape. We trace the history of home spaces using scholarly and popular sources, including a detailed survey of the magazine *House Beautiful* from 1913 to 1953, when most of the sweeping changes in middle-class uses of outdoor space took place.

A Brief History of Houses and Grounds

The landscape historian J.B. Jackson (1987) calls attention to the major points in the transformation of American yards. Although he focuses on the ways front lawns have become a means of communication with the larger community, Jackson notes how changes in daily life such as the development of supermarkets, trash collection, automobiles, and zoning affected the space behind houses. Add to that the improvements inside the house associated with plumbing and furnaces, the use of rooms for new purposes, and changes in lot size and shape, and it becomes easier to understand how a purely utilitarian back-of-the-house space became a major focal point for family interactions between the 1920s and 1950s.

During the mid-1800s, upper-class families in the United States began to expect less utility and more leisure from the spaces surrounding their houses. Games set in the gardens of the wealthy became popular, many requiring lawns (croquet, archery, lawn tennis, badminton) (Jackson, 1987, p. 26). The urban historian Kenneth Jackson (1985) writes of expanded open areas and homes set in the midst of a picturesque lawn in the newly developing (and eventually middle class) suburban dream. For centuries prior to this, people dwelled in close quarters, and urban congestion provided security. In early American cities, homes were attached or closely spaced, as can be seen in Philadelphia's preserved row houses. Small lots along narrow streets, each with a large home at the street's edge, were built for well-to-do families. The tightly spaced houses had almost no front or side outside spaces, and the space behind was often filled with back-alley dwellings. Back-of-house spaces ''were usually less than 25 feet deep, and the little space that was not built upon was typically rancid, disreputable, and overrun by rodents'' (Jackson, 1985, p. 56).

In large cities such as New York before the 1880s, no standard setback distances from the street were required, and houses were not regular in terms of the distance they kept from the street (Jackson, 1985, p. 59). On the other hand, emerging ideal visions of suburban homes included large expanses of lawn to form a thickened edge between the public life of the street and the private life of the house. Less is known about ideals regarding the spaces behind these houses. We can, however, infer

changing attitudes about which outside spaces were the focus of activities by observing major shifts in the positions of rooms such as the dining room, living room, and kitchen. The kitchen, for example, was moved from a position typically at the back of the house in the 1920s to predominantly the front by the 1960s; the living room concurrently was moved from a front position to a private space at the back, overlooking the yard.

Long, narrow lots (typically 25 ft wide at the street and 125 ft deep) predominated in U.S. cities after 1800 (Groth, 1990, p. 31). Fences enclosed the entire lot into the early 1900s, with high boards all around the back and sides. Outbuildings were lined up in the back (coal and wood shed, carriage house, outhouse, cow shed), or second houses were placed there. During the early 1900s, new fence laws had the dramatic effect of making front yards for the first time into open, parklike spaces; in essence, a street became bordered by a long and uninterrupted expanse of yard (Groth, 1990). Large front porches became popular additions to many houses built between 1900 and 1925.

During the 1930s to 1940s, when most sheds and ash pits were removed from back yards, builders began to attach garages to houses, freeing the back yard from a utilitarian focus. At this time, homeowners also began to shift many social activities from front porches to back yards. Planners and developers promoted the street frontage lot, which was wider along the street than it was deep. This discouraged the cramming of buildings into back yards and made space for wider driveways and garages toward the front.

Transformations of the House and Back Yard

Jackson (1987, p. 27) called the hustle-bustle of the city the ''charm of street life,'' but that charm gradually disappeared during the early 1900s as streets became busier with traffic, noise, and lights. Families largely abandoned socializing locales on their front porches and retreated to the interior of the house. They attached increasing social importance to activities on secluded porches, sunrooms, and terraces. During the 1920s, terraces and verandas were placed behind and to the sides of houses, and the back of the house was no longer dominated by activities linked with the kitchen.

The changing placement of garages and the activities within them contributed to the conceptualization of back yard spaces as separate from the front of the house. Garages were moved from the back corners of lots, where they had first functioned as carriage houses or sheds for the earliest mass-produced automobiles, to the front of lots when autos became ubiquitous in middle-class lives. The garage was connected to the house, and many of the uses for garages established then continue today: storage, play on rainy days, laundry. Families appropriated garages for such activities decades before developers began articulating them in plans during the late 1960s (Jackson, 1997a, p. 124). Changes in garages are strongly linked to the overall house/yard relationship. As Groth (1990, pp. 33–34) points out, ''When house builders and their clients moved the garage from its old carriage-house position and joined it to the front of the house, then the backyard was truly free.'' The new back yard space stimulated social interaction, seclusion, and personal expression, especially between the 1920s and the post-World War II building boom. How the space behind the house was arranged and used to create privacy and maximize outdoor leisure experiences became a major focus for the advice-oriented home magazines of that era.

House Beautiful tried to capture the essence of the aspirations of emerging middle-class homemakers across the country, and as such it became a potent shaper of life-style choices. Such magazines let homemakers know that they were part of a large, national community of women making decisions about the ways their families lived. These magazines nicely reflect the history of American houses and grounds and allow the identification of major architectural, social, and economic developments as well as advertising strategies used to pressure home owners to modify purchasing practices and work-leisure habits. We cull data from *House Beautiful* issues across five decades of last century (the years 1913, 1923, 1933, 1943, and 1953). We review ads, articles, and images that capture how people envisioned ideal outdoor activities and spaces. This 40-year span encompasses successive eras of prosperity, poverty, war, and renewed prosperity as American families weathered many changes.

Among the factors that framed the development of outdoor spaces, we draw attention to two strategies: (1) families increasingly sought privacy at home and (2) homeowners changed how they used selected rooms and how they wanted indoor and outdoor spaces to be organized. Across the decades, the placement of the house in relation to property lines, the placement of garages, and implications for the configuration of outdoor space were increasingly steeped in the tension between an ideal of carefree ''outdoor living'' and a growing desire for privacy as homes were built just a few feet from one another.

Between 1913 and 1923, Americans were ambivalent about investing in property in the suburbs. Having a lot all to oneself on which a house could be built was appealing, yet worries remained about unregulated lots and the costs of building infrastructure to support neighborhoods. The two most significant shifts in the 1920s were a new emphasis on outdoor living in the spaces behind the house and the arrival of the driveway and garage as permanent fixtures. A nationwide building boom made it possible for more people to build homes and move farther from their workplaces. Although afternoon tea on porches or sunrooms certainly was part of life before the 1920s, a new excitement for the freed outdoor spaces behind the house began to make its way into the lifestyle magazines. In illustrations of the house, garage, and driveway on the lot, we see a clear preference for placing the garage at the front, thus freeing the side and back areas.

The 1930s in *House Beautiful* is a decade of contradiction between the sparse spirit of the Modernism movement and advertisements that offered goods for every conceivable part of daily life in a middle-class home. Three-dimensional axonometric views show project houses on suburban lots, including some of the space around the house. Most properties shown were devoid of people and daily activities. However, material goods relating to the kitchen, garden, household utilities, and outdoor furniture were proliferating and were ubiquitous in ads.

By 1943, the back yard came into its own. No longer fettered by Modernist minimalism, people embraced the escape and leisure of the back yard during one of the country's most trying eras. *House Beautiful* articles portrayed gardens and yards as refuges from worldly troubles. The front of the house no longer warranted much attention; most life happened at the back. The spirit of the 1940s yard is captured in an article by Whitney (1943). Accompanied by a drawing of ''the perfect back yard,'' the text describes this new world right behind one's house. Whitney asserts that one's back yard escape can be ''shown off to friends and neighbors with more showmanship (and more times a year) than any other hobby known'' (Whitney, 1943, p. 31). At the house illustrated, people are on chaise lounges and playing

croquet, a woman barbecues, several people dabble in a vegetable garden, a badminton net awaits play, more people lounge on the terrace. The role of barbecue facilities emerges as a key element of back yard leisure.

> Barbecues were a trend before the war, but now that we are staying home more and are making our back yards the center of home and neighborhood life, barbecues are practically a necessity (Darbyshire, 1943, p. 38).

Articles from 1943 repeatedly addressed strategies for increasing privacy in the back yard. Short articles explained how to build fences and plant vegetation that screened neighbors and reinforced privacy as a major part of home ownership.

Featured in 1953 issues were extensive outdoor socializing, more on the barbecue, and a further focus on privacy as an essential part of the back yard. With the end of World War II had come the country's biggest building boom. Real estate developers built scores of tract homes and had major impacts on how people experienced their indoor and outdoor spaces. Writers touted the yard as an outdoor living room. Outdoor cooking and curtains of vegetation for privacy continued to be highlighted, but a new vocabulary emerged of enveloping walls, curved paths, and stone-paved floors, making a yard truly a roofless room for living.

The 1950s issues mirrored important developments in the broader social climate. In 1949, the planned community of Levittown was built on Long Island. Levittown was a sea of identical, tiny Cape Cod houses, each a self-contained world made for a breadwinner and his wife and children. They were populated by returning veterans and stay-at-home wives. Each had a white picket fence, lawn, washing machine, and built-in TV. This isolated new suburb had no services and no public transportation. Nonetheless, the Levittown house became a ''symbol of the dream of upward mobility and homeownership'' (Hayden, 1984, p. 6), and many other developments like it sprang up around the U.S., emphasizing family self-sufficiency. These houses became the overriding model for housing for working families.

Homes and neighborhoods kept pace with wider social history in other ways as well. In a 1953 article, affected by the specter of the House Un-American Activities Committee investigations of Americans with ''red'' leanings, anti-Communist fears and concerns about a loss of autonomy and privacy pervaded a discussion of fences around one's property:

> You need to protect against braying radios, glaring headlights, blaring car horns... [I]t goes deeper than that... The fence creates a small private world around you and yours. Today, that is exactly what communists and bureaucrats and authoritarians want to destroy: the private sphere around the person... So, that plain wooden board fence around a house *now* has a lot of meaning that it might not have had in other times (Langewiesche, 1953, p. 209).

The need for privacy no longer reflected a response to increasingly industrialized street life (as in the 1910s–1920s); instead, it symbolized Americans' freedom to own their own land and use it as they chose. In just a few decades, the idyllic middle-class American home gained this symbolic importance, which continued into the Cold War, furthering the isolating, private tendencies of designs for lots and homes in expanding suburbs. The Pace Setter House for 1953 pointed the way to a new staple of suburban design. Its split-level form permitted a raised deck or terrace at the back, which provided seclusion and detachment from the surrounding lots. Jenkins (1994, p. 187) recently suggested that ''privacy is becoming the new status symbol in

a society that is increasingly crowded,'' but this truly could be said as early as the 1950s. Today, we see this ideal expressed in gated communities with guardhouses and more pervasive walling off of lot boundaries.

Having inherited and perpetuated many of these traditions from the 1950s, back yards and gardens continue to be designed for outdoor living. Today these areas resemble rooms with demarcated decks, terraces, paths, lawns, and walls of trees or shrubs to create privacy. They contain dining areas and connect with the house via a French door or slider. They focus decidedly on human comfort (Grampp, 1985, p. 41). Many plants serve as screens and require little maintenance. Although avid yard and garden enthusiasts still exist, most middle-class parents do not want to ''spend every weekend chained to the house'' doing yard-related chores (Grampp, 1985, p. 43). Today, some middle-class Los Angeles homeowners distance themselves from labor in their yards, hiring gardeners to mow and prune, while some permanently escape outdoor gardening labor through the construction of ''architectural gardens'' with paved surfaces and rock gardens in lieu of, or sparsely complemented by, plants.

The Front Lawn: An Institution

Turning to the front yard, we see that its history strays more than one might expect from that of the back yard, and it has come to serve quite a different purpose at home and neighborhood scales. The ubiquity of the patch of grass between house and street is highlighted by J.B. Jackson, who notes that even isolated farmhouses on the Great Plains have a green lawn in front, usually with a fence and some trees. ''All front yards in America are much the same, as if they had been copied from one another, or from a remote prototype'' (Jackson, 1997b, p. 107). They are ''a national institution–essential to every home'' (Jackson, 1997b, p. 108). The yard represents a significant investment of homeowner labor and pride. Not only must one have a lawn and make it look good, but one's standing in the community is judged in large measure by its appearance. ''By common consent, the appearance of a front yard, its neatness and luxuriance, is an index of the taste and enterprise of the family...Weeds and dead limbs are a disgrace, and the man who rakes and waters and clips after work is usually held to be a good citizen'' (Jackson, 1997b, p. 108). The judgments Jackson describes clearly occur daily and ubiquitously, powerfully reinforcing front yard form and upkeep.

The suburbs have been described as a collective experiment in which the masses seek to live a private life. One controls one's own home but does it with thousands of other people. For many years after the late 1800s, front fences were prohibited, often by local ordinances. Indeed, FHA-financed housing developments in the 1950s could not include front hedges or picket fences (Jackson, 1997b, p. 116). If installed by individual homeowners, fences announced that a family was antisocial, flying in the face of like-mindedness. Lawn care was and continues to be a civic duty, and lackadaisical mowers and other front yard nonconformers invite conflict with neighbors. The front yard takes on a participatory aspect—it must take account of neighborhood norms. But the public nature of the front yard has a tangible cost. Most families hardly use their front yard spaces—even ample ones—because they lack privacy. Middle-class families cram ''activities into microscopic back-yards...where the usefulness of fences and hedges seemed to outweigh their undemocratic connotations'' (Pollan, 1991, p. 49).

Over and above its low utility as a mostly unused, nonfunctional space at middle-class homes, the grassy front lawn is a very unnatural expanse. Jenkins (1994) notes that lawn grasses are not native to North America, and it took an enormous amount of botanical experimentation with grasses from many world areas, a range of fertilizers, and various watering regimes to develop these now taken-for-granted carpets of green. Frederick Law Olmsted, the father of public parks in Boston and New York, modeled his grass-rich parks after English country estates. Olmsted planned the first suburban landscape in 1868 in Riverside, Illinois. He recommended that each house be set back 30 ft from the sidewalk, with park-like lawn areas and trees. The Midwestern ideal of residential areas with an expanse of trees and shrubs, and eventually lawns, around the houses solidified quickly in the 1870s (Jenkins, 1994, p. 25), but it took a long time for the ideal to reach average Americans. The wealthy began to play croquet and lawn tennis on their estates in the 1860s (servants cut the grass with a scythe), but most urban dwellers had no front yards and certainly no grass. During the late 1800s, advice for people with enough leisure to become novice gardeners began to appear in magazines, so homeowners were exposed to this ideal. Articles on lawn care informed readers about how to develop an attractive yard. But this was a challenge without mowers, herbicides, hoses, and sprinklers. In 1875, hand mowers began to be available, but they were unwieldy and back-breaking (Jenkins, 1994, pp. 28–29). Most people did not have lawns for another half century.

So changes in the domestic landscape began with upper-class aesthetic ideals trickling down. Also significant were the combined efforts of developers, planners, landscape architects, golf course planners, and publishers of home magazines and design books to shape ideals during the late 1800s. Most people came to want, but still did not have, single-family detached houses with yards. By 1900, the aesthetic standard was close-cropped grass, but of course grass-grazing animals could not be allowed on the front yards of respectable upper-class families, as this smacked of earthy practicality. Lawns—not pastures—showed that the homeowner had taste and money. Veblen (1899) characterized lawns as a classic form of conspicuous consumption. An occasional deer looked good on an otherwise empty lawn because it meant owners could afford an expanse of useless, decorative grass. Since live deer could not be assured, some of the earliest lawn ornaments such as cast-iron stags were developed in this era (Jenkins, 1994, p. 32).

Lawns required substantial labor and money. Men's leisure time was in short supply during the early 1900s, as work weeks were very long, and it was not acceptable or easy for women to do such heavy work, especially in corsets and long skirts. Despite the growing advice literature on lawns dating back to the 1880s, it was only during the 1940s that grass hybrids, better mowers, new watering devices, and better chemicals made lawns within reach of most middle-class suburban homeowners across the U.S. (Jenkins, 1994). By 1950, front lawns were truly ubiquitous.

Escalating consumerism between 1890 and 1930, along with the pursuit of more leisure time, was reinforced by advertising. A groomed front yard as a status symbol was repeatedly reinforced. As the lawn care industry continued to expand, consumers were prodded to add to their stores of equipment. In the 1950s, men bought rakes, shears, sprayers, sprinklers, wheelbarrows, rollers, mowers, spades, aerators, spreaders, carts, and more. By the 1960s, *Newsweek* decried the middle-class American garage as a space over-run by these tools (Jenkins, 1994, p. 103). Power mowers became popular in the 1950s, promoted as time and labor savers for job-pressured working men. Contracted lawn services arose, saving time for some

working families but consuming hard-earned wages. Water consumption skyrocketed, since even a small lawn requires tens of thousands of gallons of water per summer, and by the early 1990s the U.S. sported some 30 million acres of lawn (Jenkins, 1994, p. 187). The collective American investment in grassy lawns—labor, money, water, and ecological costs—is stupendous. Still, homeowners who opt for non-grass yards (ground covers, xeriscapes, shrubs) often irk and mystify neighbors.

This is because the front yard area long ago evolved into a space that is ''enjoyed principally by the public'' (Jenkins, 1994, p. 99; see also Grampp, 1985), and the public clearly prefers well-tended grass. Lawns are evaluated by passersby from the sidewalk or street, translating into an unending series of judgments about each household's standing. The house and front yard are a proxy for the attitude, wealth, and cultural or personal identity of the occupants. The lawn is the landscape element that middle-class Americans value the most, and the one they most nostalgically and faithfully recreate because of powerful childhood associations. Fewer than two percent of homeowners interviewed by Grampp (1985, p. 42) would give up their front yards even if it meant gains in the sizes of their back yards.

Garages

The valuable new playthings of the wealthy at the turn of the century—automobiles—had to be stored safely. At first, livery stables and carriage houses, located behind the house, were popular places to secure cars. Buildings designed to be garages began to appear on the backs of lots in the 1900–1920 span. Early high-end garages were large, well-lit, and efficient, with a turntable and mechanic's pit (Jackson, 1997a, p. 120). Many were very stylish on the outside as well, built in Tudor, colonial, and other styles. Garages stayed in the backs of lots for decades.

Once more ordinary folks had cars, more mundane garages were built, including small prefabricated garages. They were placed along the back ''service alleys'' (ca. 1915) or set behind the house and linked with the front street by two parallel cement paths (wheelways) that ran along the side of the house on its narrow lot. The first sign of the garage as an essential adjunct to the dwelling came in the planned city of Radburn, New Jersey, in 1928. Soon after, in the 1930s, the garage was attached to some relatively expensive houses in California to add architectural interest, but there was still no direct inside door to the house.

By 1945, garages were integrated into the street facade of most houses and typically had an interior door to the kitchen or mud room. The garage was expanded to hold two cars and items such as freezers, washer-dryers, water heaters, and work benches, plus lawn furniture and sports gear. The garage ''had become thoroughly domesticated, an integral part of home life and the routine of work and play'' (Jackson, 1997a, p. 123). Why did garages change radically during the 1940s? Frontages of lots were wider and cars were bigger, both propelling the garage toward the street. Many families acquired second cars and public transportation was on the decline. Home delivery services were declining, and people wanted to have more modern equipment (e.g., freezers) at home. Eventually this proliferation of appliances and other consumer goods created small-scale storage crises that began to be noticed during the 1950s, and basements and garages began to fill with possessions. Today, the home goods storage crisis has reached almost epic proportions, as we document below.

People's uses of spaces can eventually propel change in housing design. Well before builders began to plan for homes as places for recreation and entertainment, people began to convert basements to recreation rooms and convert back yards to relaxation zones. Garages also became—through family praxis—places that were ''half outdoors, part work area, part play area'' (Jackson, 1997a, p. 124). More recently, the garage came to be another way to signal wealth. Three-car garages, normally attached to good-sized, showy homes, make a house appear larger and bespeak the presence of three vehicles and thus a big income. Some developers tack three-car garages on rather modest homes, falsely signaling wealth, but generally there is a strong correlation between three-car or even four-car garages and homes with plans of over 4000 sq ft. A recent trend, particularly among the middle class in the West, is to convert the garage to a multipurpose storage space for household goods, pushing cars once and for all out to the driveways and streets. The vehicles owned by the family thus become part of the enduring front-of-home landscape.

Middle-class Dual-earner Families in Los Angeles

In the following analysis, we examine how a sample of today's dual-earner families situate themselves and their possessions on their property, maintain their homes and grounds, and try to find time in their busy schedules for family engagement and leisure at home. CELF staff collected a large corpus of ethnographic data from middle-class dual-earner families in the Los Angeles area. Families were recruited through advertisements and contacts at elementary schools in dozens of Los Angeles and San Fernando Valley neighborhoods. The research design specified that both parents work at least 30 h per week outside the home; families have two or more children, one of whom is age 7–10; and the families carry a mortgage. Establishing these criteria allows us to examine the daily lives of busy two-earner families who are juggling the challenges of raising children while they shoulder major financial responsibilities. Participant families self selected by volunteering and were added to the study if, after being interviewed, they met all requirements. They received modest monetary compensation upon completion of the research. For the families in the sample discussed here, total two-parent income ranges from $59,000 to $500,000 (mean $132,000; median $110,000), and home sizes range from 735 to 3850 sq ft (mean 1716; median 1520 sq ft). Families were filmed by CELF in their home-based daily routines over 4 days, including 2 weekdays and 2 weekend days during the school year. In the present discussion, we concentrate on the first 24 families (of 32 total) in the sample and their houses and outdoor spaces.

For each family, we have: (a) hundreds of digital photos encompassing all indoor and outdoor home spaces and belongings; (b) parent-narrated video home tours (and tours from older children) providing a valuable emic perspective on the house, grounds, and objects; (c) a detailed property map including house, garage, and yard areas; and (d) tracking data, which record all household members' activities in spaces at the home at timed 10-min intervals throughout the 4-day videotaping. The project details many other aspects of family life through about 50 h of video recording daily interactions. It takes about 1 month per subject family for a large team of researchers to gather the project data; digitize and transcribe the full sets of video, audio, photographic, tracking, and spatial data; and prepare these data for the first stages of analysis. Thus, a much larger sample size was not possible, even given the

considerable resources available. With these new data, we focus on the increments of time that working parents allocate to outdoor leisure at home, how families use and maintain their yard spaces, what uses they choose for their garages, and how they are dealing with the accumulation of goods and the need to find storage space at home.

Families in the sample have the pressures of a mortgage and of long-term upkeep of their homes. They also have the latitude to remodel their houses and shape their indoor and outdoor spaces in any way they see fit and as budgets allow, permitting us to assess the effects of family needs, identity, and dreams on the condition of front facades, yards, rooms, and the like. We can roughly gauge pride of ownership and see how much of a family's self-identity may be based on the appearance of the front area of the house through their home-tour narrations and by means of analysis of digital photos. Our expectation is that although some families with two working parents will be oblivious to how things look around the house, and their happiness and self-identity rest apart from the house, most middle-class parents sacrifice time and money to these ends and gain a sense of well-being and identification with the neighborhood by conforming to community ideals.

Results: Major Trends

Some trends in our data suggest a tenacious continuity of middle-class aspirations and ideals. Others reflect new work-home economic realities for American middle-class families. Patterns of use of outdoor space, for example, largely contradict expectations. CELF data sets capture detailed records of all built features and furnishings in outdoor spaces (e.g., patios, pools, dining sets, swing sets), so we can assess how families have invested in these spaces and how they expect to use them (that is, how they are *set up* for use). Although there is variability, on average back yards are one to two times the size of house interiors, so we would expect families to be actively using these generous spaces, particularly if their homes are smaller than they would like.

Timed tracking methods systematically record all family activities—leisure and non-leisure—at home. As detailed below, we find that the time spent in back yards by parents and children is limited, and *leisure* activities outside by the *parents* in these 24 families are negligible. Despite having invested in special facilities in their back yards and carefully maintaining outdoor spaces that enable leisure activities, neither the parents nor the families as a unit are enjoying very much time of any sort, much less leisure, in these spaces. With four exceptions discussed below (families whose children *and* parents occasionally use the back yard for relaxation), adults were barely recorded in their back yards during the observed hours. For parents experiencing some time outside, five main types of activities occurred, none of which involved more than a few moments of leisure time for parents. These were children's play (with sporadic parental involvement or monitoring), eating a meal, very brief verbal exchanges with neighbors, mundane tasks such as yard work or taking out trash, or arrivals and departures. Only the first two items in this list can be categorized as leisure. The picture for the front yard is even more limited: one family routinely uses the front porch space for family socializing and leisure, and one family briefly played together in the front yard.

These findings are instructive in light of recent research on parents' time spent at work, home, and leisure by Robinson and Godbey (1997), Schor (1991), Shelton

(1992), and Clarkberg and Merola (2003). Using time diary approaches (Robinson & Godbey) and the less precise time estimate method (per most government reports), many scholars conclude that average time at work for Americans has not changed much during the last half century, but perceptions and attitudes about time have changed considerably. Working adults experience their free time as limited, rushed, and harried, and data from various sources suggest that few adults choose to spend their leisure in outdoors activities at home. Most people opt to watch TV, practice indoor hobbies, or play sports away from home. These and other studies on the subject of adult Americans' uses of time make little or no reference to leisure outdoors. Either scholars are ignoring outdoor leisure data or participants give them little reason to discuss them because outdoor leisure at home has become rare. Data presented by Clarkberg and Merola (2003) show that dual-earner couples, particularly those with younger children, have little leisure time, and our results reinforce the observation that they enjoy little of that leisure time together, with virtually none of it outside at home together.

Another of our observations is a uniformity of attitudes among these families toward upkeep of fronts of their properties. Three of the families have let their front facades or yards deteriorate below neighborhood standards, but two of the three are quite self-conscious about this behavioral lapse, focusing at length on the sorry state of their front yards during their home tour narrations. They are acutely aware that they are violating norms and speak about their plans to upgrade the spaces. The other 21 families work diligently to keep up appearances in these domains, keeping lawns green and sprucing up plantings and house exteriors. Some maintain highly manicured homes that are real showcases. Very few families put these spaces to much use, however, other than for viewing pleasure. Clearly the pressures to conform to ideals of maintenance and (non)use established decades ago are still widely felt by the middle class (Groth, 1990; Jackson, 1987).

A third observation is that we see some success—and many failures—by these families in battling a nearly universal over-accumulation of goods. Most homes, almost all garages, and even some outside spaces have become storage areas for growing piles of consumer goods. Although some families keep their purchases under control and their homes fairly tidy, this is usually at the cost of giving up their garages for storage. Others struggle to organize and store all that they acquire, and most succumb to the clutter in homes *and* garages. From construction materials to excess furniture and toys, we find items blocking driveways, cluttering back yard corners, or spilling out of garages at several of these homes. The culture of consumerism that has led to the doubling of consumption of goods in the U.S. between the 1950s and 1990s (Schor, 1991, p. 109) has ensnared many of these families. Whybrow (2005) portrays this hyper-consumerism as a key element of modern "American mania." He argues that Americans are strongly driven to work hard, take on challenges, and accumulate experiences and possessions at a rapid and unhealthy pace, part of a dangerously accelerating work-spend-consume cycle that can cause severe stress. We see some evidence of this syndrome in the young CELF families who rush from work or school to after-school activities, then to stores, home, or fast-food restaurants with little down time.

We see it as well in the mismatch between numbers of possessions and the space that families have to store them. Easy credit and recent stock-market booms, among other factors, have led to continued growth in consumer spending and debt of young and middle-class families at rates faster than the growth of their income (Baek &

Hong, 2004). It is no wonder that clutter jams so many of today's homes. Americans are bombarded with opportunities to buy. They are socialized from an early age to crave new things, and many goods are, on an inflation-adjusted basis, now cheaper than they have ever been. As a result, American families on average have acquired close to twice as many possessions (Schor, 1991) to absorb in the same house space as their counterparts 25 years ago. Early 21st century America is the most materially saturated society in global history. Although smaller homes in California may exacerbate this goods-space mismatch, considerable anecdotal evidence suggests that this pattern is widespread in the U.S. (see Whybrow, 2005). Our CELF colleagues in Italy and Sweden, who are conducting a parallel study, find evidence of less purchasing and accumulation of goods among selected European middle-class families.

Family Back Yards: Data and Discussion

In Table 1 we identify major built features and furnishings in the 24 CELF family back yards (decks, pools, swing sets, and the like). Most families have invested substantially in building these special features. Although the back yard is a purported center of family leisure, enjoyment, and privacy, the tracking data from Families 1 to 24 reveal limited uses of back-of-home spaces by family members, despite the fact that every sample included many weekend daylight hours and some afternoon and evening daylight hours, and the weather was generally mild and pleasant enough to be outside on most days. The most salient trend in the data is that 13 of the 24 families did not spend *any* leisure time (neither kids nor parents) in their back yards during the four days per family available for review (Table 1). In quite a few of these cases, no family member so much as stepped into the back yard. Sporadic activities in other cases were confined to non-leisure chores such as taking out trash or briefly feeding dogs or washing off chairs.

The fathers in Families 4 and 14 did limited lawn maintenance in the back yard but did not relax there. Two Dads (Families 12, 24) spent less than 15 min at the barbecue (if a momentary and isolated activity, this is classified as cooking, not leisure). Children engaged in a few moments of play, unsustained and without parents involved, in three cases: Families 12, 17, 24. For another two families, children used the space for more sustained play (Families 3, 9) without parents joining in. Thus, for 18 of the 24 families, the back yard was not a place of any leisure whatsoever (relax, play, eat, read, drink, swim) *for the parents*. Parents in two families had abbreviated moments of leisure time outside (20 min or fewer, Families 7 and 20) while their children played for short periods. Remaining are just four families (11, 13, 16, 21) in which parents spent an hour or more eating or playing outside with their children (and/or with visitors).

Moreover, for only 6 of 24 families (3, 9, 11, 13, 16, 21) did the *children* use the back yard for more than an hour (note: four of these overlap with parents' heaviest use, above). Even pricey investments such as formal built-in pools (present at the homes of three families), spas (Family 23), above-ground pools (Families 6, 18), and formal play sets (those of Families 1, 2, 7, 10, 13, 17, 18, 19) saw zero use during our tracking. The weather was likely too cool for swimming during our filming with Family 10, so we did not see a representative sample of use of their pool. That family reports (in a home tour narrative) extensive use of the pool in warmer months.

Table 1 Back yards: features and timed uses of space

Fam. no.	Approx. sq. feet	Back yard features	Parents' leisure	Children's leisure
1	1,575	Swing set; concrete patio; planting bed	0	0
2	3,600	Large side yard; brick patio; play set	0	0
3	2,450	Concrete patio; dining set; play set; benches	0	3.5 h (play)
4	2,450	Wood deck; volleyball net	0	0
5	1,750	None	0	0
6	3,600	Above-ground pool; brick BBQ; tiled patio; dining set; batting cage	0	0
7	1,750	Concrete patio; dining set; swing set	15 min (both parents sit, talk)	55 min (play)
8	2,100	Built-in pool; concrete deck; wood deck; lounge chairs; dining set	0	0
9	900	Wood deck; dining set; trampoline	0	70 minutes (play)
10	2,100	Swing set; trampoline	0	0
11	2,750	Concrete patio; play set; dining set; benches	60 min (Dad plays w/ kids)	2.5 h (play)
12	1,750	Concrete patio; table; 2 chairs	0	30 min (play)
13	2,500	Brick patio; swing set; dining set; 6 lounge chairs	80 min (both parents, meals)	2 h (play, meals)
14	600	Tiled patio; picnic table	0	0
15	2,400	Built-in pool; concrete patio; BBQ; table; benches; trampoline	0	0
16	1,800	Tiled patio; BBQ; dining set; sink; basketball hoop	2 h (both parents play w/ kids, BBQ)	1.75 h (play)
17	2,750	Swing set; picnic table	0	20 min (play)
18	14,850	Above-ground pool; brick patio; swing set; concrete patio; pitching machine; trampoline; planting beds; table; chairs	0	0
19	600	Picnic table; BBQ	0	0
20	1,075	Skateboard ramp	20 min (Dad plays w/ kids)	30 min (play)
21	2,500	Concrete patio; fire pit; BBQ; heaters; 3 dining sets; swing set	1.75 h (both parents, meals, BBQ, play)	3.5 h (play, meals)
22	1,750	Flagstone patio; table; planting beds	0	0
23	1,750	Spa; brick patio; dining set; BBQ; chair swing; brick planters	0	0
24	1,600	Redwood deck; BBQ; bench; chair	0	20 min (play)

Families 6, 8, 15, and 18, on the other hand, state firmly that they use their built-in or above-ground pools very little.

The few exceptions to this trend of limited or no leisure back yard use by parents include two families in which the parental participation as co-players in

child-initiated play extended over at least 1 h (Families 11 and 16), and two families that ate meals outside (13 and 21). Family 13 used the back patio space to eat a short breakfast and a more extended dinner; the latter included visitors. Family 21 used the back porch and yard over the course of two different evenings. During one, the Dad and kids played baseball for over an hour, and later the kids played themselves for another half-hour. A few days later, the family and guests spent nearly 2 h talking, eating, and tending the barbecue, with the kids running around in the yard another 15 min. Family 21 members also did chores and spent time intermittently talking in these spaces. Their use of back yard areas seems to come closer to professed norms of back yard leisure than any of the other families. In one other case, parents interacted with children in the back yard, but the term leisure may not be apt. Family 7 parents spent about 15 min one evening sitting on their back patio watching their sons play. Much of the father's time during this short interval was spent instructing the older boy how to do an exercise, and it became a fairly tense experience for the children. Indeed, it was just a fleeting moment of leisure that evolved into a moral and cultural lesson. Otherwise, use of this patio was confined to the boys sporadically riding a tricycle, playing with a ball, or reading. Lastly, the father in Family 3 was constructing a new back yard play set. The children played on it as he finished various sections. Altogether, there was sustained kids' play activity in the back yard for about 3.5 h across 3 days, the most observed for any family, but the parents did not join in or relax during construction.

Based on this sample, it appears that the ideal of relaxation in ''outdoor rooms'' after work and on weekends is not usually being met, despite families' often quite extensive investment in hardscapes, landscapes, and furnishings. People spend hard-earned dollars to make them appealing, private, and child-friendly but then largely admire them from afar—from inside the house or in their mind's eye while busy doing other things. Although patterns may be slightly different in summers when children are not in school, the parents' work schedules are in fact no lighter at that time of year, so we suspect that their time available for leisure at home can change notably only when they have blocks of vacation time. If vacations are taken away from home, no increase in the use of home outdoor spaces occurs. Significantly, parent-narrated home tours from several families in our sample acknowledge that they never use their back yards; in some of these cases, we observe a complete absence of outdoor seating areas and tables. Although the middle class as a whole still strongly endorses the yard as a place for leisure and entertaining, some families realize they have little time for leisure outside. A study of 500 middle-class families across the U.S. generally corroborates these results and at the same time indicates that parents and children still do enjoy modest periods of *indoor* leisure (Graesch et al., 2006).

Family Front Yards: Data and Discussion

CELF house plans show little formal investment in facilities for leisure in what are typically fairly small front yards (Table 2). Maintenance of attractive front gardens, lawns, and facades is the major investment in these spaces. One family has a private patio space and dining area; four have porches large enough for chairs; one has a swing set and picnic table; and one has a pool with spa, deck, and dining set. Most of these facilities went unused. Among the 24 families, activities in front yards were typically confined to arriving and departing, unloading groceries, and taking out

Table 2 Front yards: features and timed uses of space

Fam. no.	Approx. sq. feet	Front yard features	Parents' leisure	Children's leisure
1	750	Wall; private patio; dining set	0	0
2	450	None	0	0
3	1,400	None	0	10 min (play)
4	500	None	0	0
5	800	Small porch and chairs	65 min (parents read, talk, smoke)	2.25 h (play, read, talk)
6	2,800	Tree swing	0	70 min (play)
7	0	Sidewalk only; none	0	0
8	1,000	None	0	25 min (play)
9	600	None	0	0
10	>3,000	Built-in pool; spa; dining set; wood decks; lounge chairs; terraces	0	0
11	2,000	Large porch and chairs	0	0
12	1,350	None	0	30 min (play)
13	1,600	None	0	0
14	400	Small porch; table and 2 chairs	0	0
15	1,250	None	0	20 min (play)
16	1,600	None	0	25 min (play)
17	1,400	None	0	10 min (play)
18	1,500	None	0	0
19	2,600	Swing set; picnic table	25 min (Dad, smoking or chatting)	0
20	1,400	Tree swing; planter bed	5 min (Dad plays w/ kids)	20 min (play)
21	625	None	0	20 min (play)
22	1,550	Portable basketball hoop	0	50 min (play)
23	1,450	None	0	0
24	1,550	Porch; bench, chairs	90 min (Mom or Dad plays w/kids)	90 min (play)

trash. No leisure activities occurred among 20 of the families beyond fleeting greetings to neighbors or brief instances (≤30 min, often intermittent) of children playing with a bike or ball in the front (Families 3, 8, 12, 15, 16, 17, 20, 21). Most activity falls in the category of chore rather than leisure. One mother and daughter did limited planting, weeding, and pruning in the front yard. Another mother and daughter cleaned the car and watered plants. A few fathers briefly watered plants or smoked. Thus, these families' behaviors conform well to the expectation that front yards are mostly for show.

The children of three of the other four families (6, 22, 24) played at basketball hoops in the driveway, threw or kicked a ball around, or played on tree swings for 50–90 min in the front yard areas; parents were briefly involved in the play in one case. Family 6 is typical of this group: a sports-oriented family with a roomy back yard complete with a built-in barbecue, above-ground pool, and portable batting cage. But the boys' leisure time was spent in or near the front yard (along a kid-friendly cul-de-sac) playing with baseballs and bats, tossing tennis balls, or swinging on a tree swing. This activity happened on multiple occasions for short bursts, adding up to about 70 min of play. Their parents did not conduct any leisurely activities in the front yard.

Family 5, a Cuban–American family in western Los Angeles, is an exception. This family relaxed and played with some regularity in its front yard. They used the front porch daily, much like many households in the strongly Latino area of East Los Angeles (Rojas, 2003). Indeed, their unused back yard was a tangle of trees and shrubs, whereas the area in front of the home (including porch, lawn, and driveway) was used for reading the paper, smoking, casual conversation, playing, talking on the phone, and snacking, for 3.5 h altogether during the period of filming and tracking. Often multiple family members were using the front porch and yard spaces together, and some time was spent there every day. This intensity of front-of-house use was not found elsewhere in our study.

Family Garages: Data and Discussion

The garages of middle-class America are suffering an identity crisis. Fewer and fewer are used for their original purpose, the storage and protection of automobiles. Increasingly they are converted, either permanently or through practice, to different functions. The fact that most households in this sample—and millions visible throughout the U.S.—have converted their garages to spaces not focused on car storage signals a changing need of middle-class families. Families living in average-sized homes (1500–2000 sq ft), as most of these are in our sample, simply do not have enough living and storage space for all of their possessions, and they value garages more for these purposes than for housing cars. This reveals something important about family priorities, the intensity of consumerism in the U.S., and family struggles to organize their lives. The problem has become so ubiquitous that a new generation of personal home-organization gurus is now featured in several television shows in which overwhelmed families living in hopelessly cluttered houses learn how to clear away possessions and reclaim their rooms. The National Association of Professional Organizers has grown exponentially, assisting homeowners with these household excesses, and also now featuring specialists who create designer garages (at great expense) that aim to curb the goods that wind up there and reintroduce (temporarily, perhaps) at least one family car to the garage.

In the CELF sample, about one-third of families needed more living space and carved it out of the garage (Table 3). This is a fertile area for a space grab, since nearly every garage offers at least 300 sq ft of space. Five of these families banished cars from the garage through formal conversions of the space with new walls, built-ins, and floors. Family 1 permanently remodeled the entire room into a girls' bedroom, thereby eliminating all traces of the garage. Family 6 converted about one-third of the garage to a small office (built by the father) and used the rest of the space for crammed storage, laundry, and barely accessible arcade games. Family 17 converted three-quarters of their garage to a den, and Family 15 converted half of the garage to a bedroom/computer room. Family 22 added many built-in storage units and desk units, finished and painted the floor, and made the garage into a recreation/computer room with ample storage.

Some families created new living spaces by refurnishing rather than construction. Family 4 carved out a relaxation area with seating and media (for the father) and a storage/laundry area within the garage. Family 16 uses one-third of its garage for exercise and recreation, and Family 19 uses a similar-sized area as a TV, studying, and smoking area for the father. Not surprisingly, most garages converted to full or partial living

Table 3 Garages: features and timed uses of space

Fam. no.	Garage size	Relationship to house	Cars in garage	Primary use of garage	Orderliness of storage	Density of items	Use of garage space
1	2 car/now 0	Attached, front	0	Converted to living space	N/A	N/A	N/A
2	1.5 car	Detached, rear	0	Storage	Chaotic	High	0
3	2 car	Attached, front	1	Parking and storage	Average	High	5 min
4	1.5 car	Attached, front	0	Storage and recreation	Average	High	>2 h
5	1 car	Attached, front	0	Storage	Chaotic	High	5 min
6	2 car/now 1	Attached, front	0	1/3 converted to office; rest for storage	Chaotic	High	>2 h
7	2 car	Detached, rear	0	Storage	Chaotic	High	0
8	1.5 car	Attached, front	0	Storage	Chaotic	High	0
9	2 car	Detached, rear	0	Storage	Chaotic	Average	5 min
10	3 car	Detached, rear	2	Parking and some storage	Organized	Low	0
11	1 car	Detached, rear	0	Storage	Chaotic	Average	5 min
12	1 car	Detached, rear	1	Parking and storage	Organized	Average	5 min
13	1.5 car	Attached, front	1	Parking and storage	Organized	Average	0
14	2 car	Attached, front	2	Parking and storage	Organized	Average	0
15	2 car/now 1	Attached, front	0	Half converted to living space; rest for storage	Chaotic	High	0
16	2 car	Detached, rear	0	Storage and recreation	Chaotic	High	1 h
17	1.5 car/now 0	Attached, side	0	3/4 converted to living space; rest for storage	Chaotic	Average	0
18	1.5 car	Detached, rear	0	Storage	Chaotic	High	0
19	1 car	Detached, rear	0	Storage and recreation	Chaotic	High	2.25 h
20	2 car	Attached, front	0	Storage	Chaotic	High	25 min
21	2 car	Attached, front	0	Storage	Chaotic	High	5 min
22	2 car	Attached, front	0	Storage and recreation room	Organized	High	1.5 h
23	2 car	Attached, front	2	Parking and storage	Organized	High	5 min
24	1.5 car	Detached, rear	0	Storage	Chaotic	High	0

spaces are attached garages (Table 3); people generally do not want to go outside to get to a bedroom, media room, or office. Also, detached garages are on average smaller and older than their attached counterparts for historical reasons explored earlier.

Most of the other families have converted their garages into storage spaces, usually without making any large structural changes but with the resigned understanding that storage is going to be the sole long-term use. Families 2, 7, and 8 use their garages solely for storage. Family 5 uses the garage as a storage and laundry area. Family 9 uses the garage for storage and keeps the cars in the driveway carport. Their 1927 home has a garage in the back, as was characteristic of the time, and today's cars are too large to squeeze along the narrow driveway on the side of the property. Family 11's home, built in 1912, also has a detached garage in back and a narrow driveway, and the garage is used for storage. Families 18, 20, 21, and 24 cram their garages with a range of items. Families 4, 6, 15, 16, 17, and 19 (all noted above)

have substantial storage of goods, usually quite jumbled and chaotic, in the remaining ''garage-like'' areas of their functionally divided spaces.

Just 3 of 24 families (Families 10, 14, 23) park two cars in their garages, and each has very organized storage practices, using some garage space for storage but keeping it fairly neat and orderly. Another three (Families 3, 12, 13) squeeze one car into the garage and have more organized storage practices than the norm in our sample (the norm being crammed and chaotic storage; Table 3). Stored items—bicycles, furniture, tools, toys, foods—are packed snugly around family cars. Four of the six families that manage to get at least one car in the garage appear to have fewer goods in search of storage than most middle-class families, meaning they are storing things elsewhere (in larger or better organized houses), they own fewer goods, or they are better at consolidating them than the average family. Observations within the houses suggest that all three factors pertain in these cases. In sum, just 6 of 24 middle-class families (25%) use their garages in traditional ways by parking at least one car there regularly. These patterns are confirmed by the presence of storage-dominated garages that can be seen from the streets in neighborhoods throughout Los Angeles.

Much of the stored material goes unused. No visits to garage spaces were noted for half of the 24 families, and just 10 or fewer minutes of use were noted for 7 others, including doing tasks or retrieving stored items. Five of the participant families make active use of garage spaces, and in all cases these are families who have converted their attached garages to recreational use. The father of Family 4 has made the garage into an area for storage and laundry and a recreation area for TV watching and displays of photographs and sports memorabilia. All family members describe the area as his ''domain.'' He is often there on weekends and keeps the garage door open to the neighborhood. It is a minor social hub for the family, with several instances of family members talking there. The father also did some cooking on the barbecue at the apron of the garage. The children in Family 6 spent considerable time playing arcade games in a chaotic, cramped space of the garage dominated by furniture and other household goods, and the mother spent some time there doing laundry and watching the kids play. Members of Family 16 conducted tasks and played in the recreation area of their garage for an hour. The father and some male guests of Family 19 studied, smoked, ate dinner, and watched TV in the recreation area of his garage one evening. And various Family 22 members spent over an hour at the computer or playing in their converted garage.

These observations of uses of garages in many different neighborhoods and in houses of different vintages make a pointed statement about living space and the storage crisis among middle-class families in the U.S. Many houses are too small, or feel too small to resident families, and the first space to be cannibalized and shifted to other uses is the garage. About one-third have been converted in part or whole via construction or specified use to living spaces. Almost every garage that is still recognizable as a garage is dominated by, if not overtaken by, storage needs except that of Family 10, an upper middle-class family occupying a large home with two generously sized interior storage spaces, and that of Family 14, recently moved into a new house. Virtually every other family is struggling with ways to accommodate needs for personal space within the house and the need to stash possessions wherever space can be found. Density of stored items (how many articles are stored in relation to storage space available) is quite high for 16 of 23 family garages (Table 3). Yet even more space is needed. We also observed storage of household goods, equipment, and toys spilling into several back yards, visible in metal storage sheds or stacked on steps or

yard perimeters. Even those families that used garages for recreation used most of the space for household storage (and none of it for their cars). As a consequence, cars are semi-permanent fixtures in driveways and along the streets of Los Angeles.

Interpretations of Homeowner Ideals from the Photographs and Home Tours

Thus far, we have focused on how people actually use their homes, but the CELF archives include other valuable sets of data that can provide insights into homeowners' attitudes, how their personal identity may be tied to the home, and the overall symbolism of the home in their lives. We have assembled more than 20,000 digital photos of rooms, yards, garages, furnishings, books, and collections—basically, everything in and around families' homes. Also, narrated video home tours were recorded by parents and older children. These range from a few minutes to over one hour apiece and are fertile sources for analysis of the insider viewpoint. Together with the tracking data, these data sets allow us to examine any disjunctures between our largely objective records of objects and family uses of space and family members' own views about these artifacts and spaces.

It is clear that families conform closely to the established norm of maintaining considerable back yard privacy where it is possible to do so. Block walls or wood fences and tall screens of vegetation are dominant in virtually all yards, augmented by add-ons to further enhance privacy. As Jenkins (1994) points out, privacy is itself a powerful status symbol, a marker for those who have arrived. Most families in the sample have invested heavily in back yard features and trees to create private outdoor rooms, typically consisting of patios/decks with an assortment of furnishings for lounging or eating outdoors. A few seem disinterested in these spaces, perhaps for reasons attributable to quite different cultural traditions (e.g., a few first-generation-U.S. families in our sample) or because of street noise (Family 23) or the proximity of neighbors (Family 14).

Most homeowners in our sample take obvious pride in their front yard and front-of-house areas, with neatly trimmed lawns, plantings, and fresh paint (but also armed-response security signs, another marker of status and a home worth protecting). A few families did some mowing, pruning, or planting in front yards during filming, but family *use* of these spaces is mainly to pass through to the house. Most kids' play in the front is on asphalt driveways, streets, or concrete sidewalks; there were just a few instances of play with tree swings or bats and balls that carried on to front lawns. Indeed, the manicured lawns or formally landscaped areas in front of quite a few of the houses seem to actively discourage play and other rambunctious activity but invite passersby to admire the owners' good taste and conformity with neighborhood ideals.

The home tours are a rich source of data about middle-class perceptions of the ideal middle-class home and the ways that their home measures up (or fails) in relation to those ideals. Most homeowners appraise their yards and facades with some pride, commenting that the steps are newly tiled, or the deck newly built, or the picture window or plantings especially handsome. Some are critical of their home's size or some part of its appearance, and they express displeasure about its failures. Others offer highly personalized views of the home, especially its front grounds. For example, the father in Family 1, commenting with pleasure on the front entrance area—and despite the flaws that he notes in other areas of his modestly

sized home—says, ''I do feel like I know why I'm working hard to pay my mortgage,'' when he comes home and sees that area each day. He strongly identifies with several objects there that are linked symbolically with his three daughters. The father in Family 5, remarking that his wife planted some flowers in their modest front-yard space, says, ''This is what I see every day when I come home, and I love where I live.'' These men are emotionally invested in their homes' appearances, not because they are showplaces, but because certain features warmly remind them of their family. The mother in Family 19 explains how she grew up in this neighborhood and strongly identifies with it, how she can see her mother's house, and how much she and her husband look forward to fixing up the front. Both Family 19 parents are embarrassed because it is currently in poor shape, with weeds and no grass. Not surprisingly, the families with the highest incomes seem the most preoccupied about how their houses are perceived and comment most extensively on their appearances, grounds, neighborhoods, and/or views.

Home video tours also present various family members' notions of their own intensity of use of different spaces. Families recognize that most outdoor spaces are not used heavily, sometimes to their regret. Such parental laments typically take the form that, as their children are getting older, they are not using the back yard pool, swing sets, or grassy areas for play anymore. Parents seem nostalgic about their children's younger days. Narratives reveal as well that children's interests increasingly keep them within the home's interior (for homework, TV, or computers) or take them to organized activities away from the home. Other parents lament that their own time freed from job work or family work is very limited. The mother in Family 8, speaking about the back yard pool, said, ''Relaxing time is back here, which seldom ever happens.'' On the other hand, some families' home tour narratives refer to an intensity of use of outdoor spaces that we did not observe. Both parents in Family 4 assert that they use their back yard and new deck quite a bit, but no leisure activity was observed there during tracking. For these cases, family uses of yards are generally more intensive than we captured during our four days of observations (potential sampling error), or people overestimate their uses of these spaces, or both. Overestimates would not be unexpected; nice yard spaces represent a big investment and are a symbol of leisure that people want to see as within their grasp. Acknowledging that they never have time to use these spaces designed for relaxation and entertainment would be to recognize that their time management has spiraled out of control.

Some parents narrating their home tours conceded that the day was too short to sit and enjoy the outdoors, to work on the yard they way they might like, and to fix the house they way they envision it could be. They note that their jobs take long hours, they sometimes come home after dark, there is never-ending cleaning, and the kids always need to get somewhere. Family 17 parents say that they do not use their back yard because of their heavy work schedules, which is consistent with the findings of Clarkberg and Merola (2003, pp. 39–42), who point out that couples with young children and in career-building stages of life enjoy less leisure and consistently self-characterize as harried and overworked.

Lastly, most of the adults and older children quite pointedly described their storage-impacted garages as messes. They are highly aware of and frustrated about this state of affairs, but they seem resigned to its continuation. To note a small sample of the extensive home-tour commentary on this subject, the mother in Family 6 says of her garage, ''This is usually a total mess and it's a total mess today again. This is where we have bikes and all the old furniture. Sofas and things that we don't

use.'' Twelve-year-old Pam says, ''That's our garage. Our very, very messy garage with our bikes and ... other junk.'' The mother in Family 3 shows viewers ''...the garage where we store everything. When we have no place to put it in the home, we store it in the garage.''

Conclusions

Contemporary dual-earner families are conforming to cultural norms that encourage them to maintain their yards and gardens as middle-class families have for the past half century, but they are using these spaces less than families used to do and far less than they would like. The harried week of the dual-earner middle-class family—with job, commute, keeping up the home, and structured activities for children on many afternoons and weekends—allows little time for leisure outdoors.

The parents use outdoor spaces at home in limited ways because most daytime hours are absorbed by work and school, indoor household obligations (cooking, cleaning, bill-paying, coordinating), and driving themselves and the kids to and fro. For the children, there may be fewer and fewer draws pulling them to home-based outside spaces. When they have leisure time, it is often focused on inside entertainment: TV watching and computer games. Outside there is usually no TV, no computer, and no place to do homework. Nonetheless, parents' investment in keeping up these spaces and middle-class Americans' stated unwillingness to give them up makes it clear that outdoor spaces are a critical part of today's middle-class family well-being. Families treasure these plant-rich buffers around the house that serve the dual purpose of adding serenity and beauty to the home (thus maintaining good standing in the neighborhood) and enhancing privacy and a sense of separateness from others. The simple fact that back yard spaces are there and can potentially be used when the time is available may be enough to satisfy many busy families.

By any measure of intensity of use of middle-class homes, the yard spaces receive the least hours of use per square foot. This may well be true everywhere in suburban America and has likely always been the case (since kitchens, family rooms, and bedrooms are intensively occupied on a daily basis), but we suspect that the disparity between intensity of use of indoor spaces and yard spaces has become much greater in recent years, marking a strong trend toward more sedentary, indoor living and perhaps poorer health. This lifestyle privileges jobs, housework, TV- and computer-centered entertainment, and formal kids' activities away from the home. Relaxing in the back yard and extended play by children in the yard spaces may remain ideals but may be rarely achieved among today's time-stressed, electronically oriented families.

Middle-class family garages, at least in California, serve mainly as storage units and storage/recreation areas for fathers or kids; rarely do cars see the inside of the garage. Our data suggest that 75% of middle-class Los Angeles residents use garages in ways that preclude parking cars there. This pattern differs in the harsher climes of the East and Midwest, where families more often protect cars from foul weather and where many homes have basements that can absorb some of the demand for storage. Nonetheless, an informal sampling of Ohio neighborhoods suggests that many people use parts of garages for storage and place one or more cars in the driveway. One reality of middle-class living is that the housing stock consists of residences built

primarily during the 1930–1990s, and these vary considerably in overall size, floor plan, garage size, and space allocated for activities. The wealthy can create custom-built homes or extensively remodel luxury homes with the features they desire. The middle class typically moves into existing, more modest housing units with features that may not conform to their needs, and—in an expensive housing market—into houses with inadequate space. Despite the fact that inter-decadal variations in residential lot shapes and floor plans constrain in different ways how families can use their spaces, families adopt similar strategies to resolve pressing problems like oppressive clutter caused by too many family-owned artifacts. Directing the overflow of excess possessions into garages is perhaps the most common tactic.

In summary, the CELF study tracking data set provides considerable, detailed support for large-scale time-use studies that show that middle-class parents have limited leisure time at home as a family, and we demonstrate here that very little of it is enjoyed outdoors at home. Work schedules and school activities spill into time for family life at home. Each family member brings work and pressures home, and parents absorb the further challenges of housework and child care as well as the joys of family interaction. More and more, the outdoor spaces at home do not seem to be a regular outlet for the release of such stresses and strains, especially for the parents, although the mere presence of the yard and attractive outdoor facilities surrounding the house and buffering it from the outside world may generate a sense of well-being within the family. At the same time, many young dual-earner families seem to exacerbate their stress and frustration by buying more possessions than their homes can absorb, adding to their debt and routinely conscripting crowded garage spaces to function as chaotic storage rooms. Few of these middle-class families show signs of imminent relief from an energy-draining work-and-spend cycle.

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