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Taste is Within:

Decorative Material Culture at Home in

Los Angeles and Lima, Peru

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the  
requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy  
in Anthropology

by

Angela Marie Orlando

2012



## ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Taste is Within:  
Decorative Material Culture at Home in  
Los Angeles and Lima, Peru

by

Angela Marie Orlando  
Doctor of Philosophy in Anthropology  
University of California, Los Angeles, 2012  
Professor Jeanne E. Arnold, Chair

Influential scholars such as Pierre Bourdieu theorize that, because people practice unyielding habitus, members of the same class strata have similar taste and consume art objects reflective of this. In this dissertation, I address the relationships between art that is on display in the homes of 48 families (representing their taste preferences) and a range of economic and social variables. The sample consists of contemporary middle-class households – 32 in Los Angeles, California, and 16 in Lima, Peru. Methodologically, I employ quantitative and qualitative techniques inspired by sociocultural and ethnoarchaeological anthropology. I test several subsets of hypotheses involving such factors as quantity and placement of objects in the homes, socioeconomic status, marital satisfaction, gendered and age-based preference, and socialization of children toward that preference. I also explore the meanings family members ascribe to these artifacts. Photographic and videographic data-gathering methods allow me to examine all of the decorative objects displayed in the houses' most publicly visible spaces. I use cultural consensus modeling, including semantic analyses of open-ended interviews and a new

visual preference-ranking technique, to determine congruence between people's tastes. Among the patterns emerging from the analyses, even non-utilitarian household objects reflect homeowners' cultural capital, but class, and the cultural capital upon which it partially depends, is but one variable contributing to people's relationship with their household aesthetic. Some people who self-identify as middle-class consume art that some would consider "fine;" others do not. I posit that taste does not correlate with class as class is traditionally construed. Self-identified middle-class Angelenos and Limeños are not fixed in a habituated aesthetic based on such factors as income or power. Rather, they select from options that are increasing in availability with the rapid global flow of objects and ideas.

The dissertation of Angela Marie Orlando is approved.

Sondra Hale

David J. Halle

C. Jason Throop

Jeanne E. Arnold, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2012

## **DEDICATION**

*Dedico esta tesis a la actualidad ...*

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## **Chapter One: Introduction**

*Consider things, and you will have humans. Consider humans, and you are by that very act interested in things (Latour 2000:10).*

### **Impetus**

The first time I was invited into a middle-class Latin American family home, I looked around the sitting room and my jaw fell to the parquet floor. It was the summer of 1997 and I was about to turn 20. I was visiting the sweltering city of León, Nicaragua, strolling, chatting, and laughing with a group of friends I had met at my hotel. We found ourselves in a beautiful residential Colonial neighborhood near the city center. That particular street had been mostly spared by or rebuilt after the region's devastating 1972 earthquake, and the architectural scenery and our conversation distracted us from paying close attention to where we were. We were lost.

We asked for directions from a boy who looked to be about 12 years old. He was standing on a grand porch. He invited us into what turned out to be his home and asked us to sit down and wait while he found his mother. Our Spanish was mediocre, so while his mother explained our location to the girl in our group who best understood her, the rest of us had time to examine the space. I thought to myself, "these people must be really poor." Then, I remember thinking something like, "it's such a shame that this gaudy interior doesn't match the house's regal outside."

Comparatively, of course, the family was not poor at all. They were neither exorbitantly wealthy nor struggling to get by; they fell somewhere in between, representing what in the late 1990s could be called the seed of the Latin world's soon-to-take-root middle class. I remember that they even had a car, because they ended up taking us back to our hotel. The family's home

interior struck me, though, as shockingly different from how most families in the United States would decorate.

Two adjacent walls were painted a bright matte blue that approximated cobalt, but the paint had a chalkboard-like texture instead of the semi-gloss we would probably use here. The other two walls were a garish pale off-lemon yellow color, coated with that same grittiness. The thought of accidentally grazing it with my fingernails made me wince. I remember thinking that the paint might be leaded.

The only decorations I saw were a cheaply framed poster of a pastel-colored Jesus hanging crookedly from a nail, a round wall mirror, and on the shelves near the TV, some plastic toy cars that looked like they came from a McDonalds Happy Meal. A small beige rug lay somewhat crumpled where the large living room-cum-dining area met the kitchen. I began to develop a sense of what I would long stereotype the “Latin American domestic aesthetic:” bright wall colors and minimal, religious, plastic decorations.

Looking back with a better-traveled and anthropologically educated perspective, I am ashamed of these judgments, which are harsh and ethnocentric. I had anointed myself the critic who decided what style of interior self-expression was correct and (secretly) what was “primitive.” My color-coordinated mother had taught me, and my elegant grandmother before her, the “proper” way to keep house, including their rendition of how to be stylish. Now I know about various kinds of capital, and globalization, circulation of resources, semiotics, and socialization, and historicity, and relativism. But back then, I was simply mesmerized, and not in a positive way, by comparative aesthetic preferences. That Nicaraguan travel experience is what sparked my interest in why people around the world with relatively comparable incomes and life ways have such a different sense of beauty, identity, and cultural norms.

Later that interest began to concretize and branch into many questions. From where do domestic aesthetics derive? Why do the interior spaces of middle-class Americans not look like those of similar families in similar settings around the world? Are middle-class families locked into a set of domestic commodity selection behaviors and aesthetic preferences?

In this dissertation I explore two cultures' household aesthetic material culture, asking 48 dual wage-earner middle-class families (32 in Los Angeles and 16 in Lima, Peru) what domestic art they like to display, and why. I explore changing consumption patterns that highlight how class and income are less useful aspects of "capital" to analyze compared to new forms of social, cultural, and global connectivity in shaping people's aesthetic values and preferences. The families in this study have definite aesthetic taste preferences, with humorous and insightful stories to tell, and the objects and décor in their homes hold deeply rooted meanings for the Angeleno and Limeño families.

### **Implications**

Since at least the evolution of archaic *Homo sapiens*, our species has differentiated itself from our ancestors by making symbols and art. We intentionally place symbols in positions that allow us to communicate messages, not necessarily to please the eye. We show who we are, and who we want to be, where we have been, and what lies ahead. This behavior has proved adaptive, for we still do it. The messages must always be embedded in political, economical, and cultural contexts, which are changing ever rapidly. The study of artistic forms, and their roles in societies, is an obvious one because such objects are ubiquitous through time and space. Art objects are some of the most powerful signifiers, because they are nearly wholly symbolic in their utility. Studying art has been fundamental to anthropology and sociology since the

formulation of those sciences (e.g., Boas 1897, 1927[1955]; Mead 1950; Turner 1967; Weiner 1992; and many others).

Our home serves as a cohesive showcase unit, so we strategically place household art in places that state what we want to project about ourselves on an everyday basis. In so doing, we are aware that a specific audience will read the message we are transmitting. The audience is whoever enters our intimate domestic sphere: our family, our network of guests, and ourselves. Yet perhaps due to its inherent normalcy, the domestic realm is often bypassed by sociocultural anthropologists, who discount it as not a valid and interesting field of inquiry (Cieraad 2006; Gullestad 2001).

Archaeologists traditionally focus on the decorative wares found in prehistoric and historic residential sites in order to decipher the quotidian behaviors of people who preceded us. A handful of archaeological anthropologists and other scholars (e.g., Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton 1981; Miller 1998, 2008) do attend to modern domestic artifacts and the contexts in which they are displayed, consumed, as indicative of today's social values. Sociologists, such as Pierre Bourdieu in his "big book" *Distinction* (1984a), have tended to determine people's class membership by employing survey-based aesthetic preference measurements, usually ignoring domestic likes and dislikes and the significance of specific examples of interior material culture. Aside from research conducted by investigators such as Daniel Miller (1987, 2001, 2008) who have asked people what their domestic aesthetic assemblage means to them, there is limited scholarship on the topic.

Because the home is such an intimate site of knowledge transmission, it is an ideal setting to learn more about (in this case urban) men, women, and children and their everyday challenges. It helps us to better value how contemporary society replicates itself (Miller 1984:11), structures

itself (Lévi-Strauss 1958), and diverges from society *en masse*, as commodities travel across visible or invisible cultural boundaries (Buchli 2004). The transmission of the cultural knowledge of the private domestic sphere is often the responsibility of women, even as in many settings they enter the public workforce in numbers equaling those of men (McCracken 2001; Nash 1990; Pink 2004; Straight 2005).

Domestic material culture and household aesthetic preferences allow observers to gain insight about the adoption and maintenance of social values, what inspires and sustains varied aesthetic preferences among peers, and, in the case of this study, the aesthetic variability of economically comparable families who live in particularly rapidly changing urban contexts. This is not a study of the “disinterested contemplation of objects as art objects removed from instrumental associations” (Marcus and Myers 1995:3); it is a study of the integrated everyday art that people pass by in their homes, every day.

By quantifying and comparing the qualities of rich assemblages of aesthetic objects in modern middle-class homes, we can effectively explore taste preference and variability among self-identified middle-class urbanites with a range of levels of education, experiences, and incomes<sup>1</sup>. Further, recording the art in today’s middle-class families’ homes is a way by which to document what will soon become the history of the 21<sup>st</sup> century’s everyday urbanites. Herein I present a typology of all the aesthetic objects in the four most visible rooms in the homes of 48 families. My study empirically investigates people’s aesthetic taste, their stated opinions about it, and what aspects of culture influence them. This study is the first effort to generate multi-sited studies to compare relationships among taste preferences, class, and modern domestic art objects from both an empirical and ethnographic standpoint.

## Definitions

Throughout this dissertation I use certain terms in specific ways. I introduce the most important examples here.

### *Aesthetic Material Culture*

Every object features characteristics that allow it to perform its intended functions (Schiffer with Miller 1999); these are sometimes called “performance characteristics.” Aesthetic performance characteristics affect any one or more of an audience’s five senses, often also triggering emotions and other reactions such as memories.

In addition to aesthetically impacting the household residents, artful domestic material culture functions to transmit information about the social identity of members of the household, principally the person who decides about purchases, positioning, and household display<sup>ii</sup>. In homes like those in my study, plastic-framed posters of sports figures, or similarly framed Monet prints, as examples, present readable identity information to those visitors who can decipher the cultural symbols. The Monet print might convey regarding its owner: “I have the cultural capital to understand the aesthetic (or historical or otherwise semiotic) significance of this artifact, and so I chose to buy a print of it from a museum I visited in France. I now display it prominently in my living room.” Aesthetic objects may also have been gifted to the family, indicating that the family maintains object-mediated relations beyond the home.

I limit my analysis to 14 categories of household objects, or material culture, using the terms “aesthetic,” “decorative,” and “artful” interchangeably to describe those categories. The CELF material culture team headed by Jeanne E. Arnold and Anthony Graesch initially coded

dozens of household object types in the L.A. homes; I then developed a more detailed list (with input from Arnold) using the CELF data. We selected those objects that had primarily aesthetic performance characteristics, those objects for which enhancing space via form is the primary function. Since I relied on photographs and videos to classify the material culture in the 32 Los Angeles homes, I chose to analyze those objects with visual, tactile, and occasionally olfactory performance characteristics rather than those objects that affect the auditory, tactile, or taste senses. In my interviews with participants I asked about the meanings of these sorts of objects.

Paintings and sculptures are examples of primarily aesthetic domestic artifacts, having little or no function beyond the aesthetic. While a lit candle functions to cast light, which in a power outage is a primary performance characteristic more relevant than the aesthetic, in contexts applicable to this research people use candles for aesthetic performance. Candles transmit ambient light, warmth, color, and possibly fragrance. Conversely, a wall calendar is both aesthetic and functional as a chronological instrument. But its primary function is to tell time, not to enhance space and affect senses, so I do not count it as an aesthetic object. Similarly, in the domestic context, a table may be exquisitely polished wood, with legs of carved scrollwork: these are its aesthetic performance characteristics. But because it is foremost a table, designed to hold other objects, I do not treat it as primarily artful material culture. Even though the table may be very expensive table and indicate to guests that the owner has significant cultural capital and/or substantial economic wherewithal, because the table is not a primarily aesthetic object, I do not discuss its semiotic capacity herein.

*Class*



The definition of the term “class” is extremely contentious, so many researchers have sidestepped it, hoping, presumably, that their readers share the same perception of the term (Ortner 1998:2). Alternately, social scientists consider class to be all but synonymous with economic capacity, essentially a Marxist take on the subject (Marx 1844). Karl Marx noted throughout his canon that, within capitalistic societies, people either own the mode of production, or they are subjects to the owners of the mode of production, and their role within the factory-like system is akin to their class positioning. The contemporary middle class in Los Angeles and Lima consists neither of elite owners nor the lowliest workers but of broad swaths of people leading characteristic types of lives. Of course, there is much variability within this sector, and within that variability lies much of the difference within householders’ aesthetic material culture assemblages and taste preferences. While he attended to inequities, Marx seems to have ignored middle classes (as well as gender, ethnicity, and other sub-categories within the system of production).

Max Weber modified Marx’s ideas, finding them too reductionistic, based only on two fundamental dichotomous characteristics: whether a person works for an employer or whether the person is him or herself worked *for* (Weber 1946). Rather, Weber noted that people belong to a class (economic wherewithal), have status (prestige), and associate, at least emotionally, with a political party (even if they are not active within that party) (Weber 1946, 1968). Through communal action, people can move about in each of these categories, which is not something Marx acknowledged (Weber 1946:180). One way people can mobilize is through consumer actions, such as boycotting products. Of Weber’s tripartite, status is the most relevant to this study. People can acquire status when guests see the art they display in their home.

Ortner advanced ideas about the relationships between class and identity, focusing on the growing middle classes that Marx ignored (1998). She writes that she takes a Bourdusian approach (1998:8). She sees class as:

... economic-cum-cultural locations defined within an objectivist perspective. Classes are not objects ‘out there,’ but there is something out there in the way of inequity, privilege, and social difference, which the idea of ‘class’ is meant to capture specifically in its economic dimension. At the same time ... class is an identity term and is ... the only American identity term that is organized around an economic axis.

Later, Ortner (2006) furthered practice theory, which “seeks to explain the relationship between human action and some global entity” (Ortner 1984:148), or structure, which in the case of this study applies to the international web of access to aesthetic material culture and ideas, everyday middle-class conditions, and the derivation of individual and collective aesthetic taste preference, which is usually social networks.

Because this study is about consumerism of aesthetic products as well as expression of meaning, I use education level, lifestyle, earned income, objects in the home, neighborhood of residence, and other variables to explore class membership and status, rather than adopting a model of demarcation provided by another scholar, marketing data, or national censuses. Adjusting for cost of living, the families in Lima and Los Angeles earn somewhat similar incomes. I also take an ideological approach to class and status. While culturally salient, traditional socioeconomic status-related variables, as well as the history and families’ experience of middle-class membership, are so different between the cities that sometimes comparisons – especially quantitative comparisons – seem unscientific.

### *Cultural Capital*

Cultural capital facilitates some social mobility but not enough to transcend the habituated behaviors, according to Bourdieu (1984a), that ultimately render us stagnant within our class. Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron (1973) first explored the term cultural capital in *Cultural Reproduction and Social Reproduction*, warning readers to avoid the epistemic trap of reducing all exchanges to the mercantile. Cultural capital often transfers into economic capital and perceived social status. Especially salient in France, most cultural capital, according to Bourdieu and Passeron (1973) derives from traditional education. However, because formal education is not equivalent from place to place and inaccessible to many, I add that other experiences such as travel and exposure to media contribute.

As with Weber (1946:180), Bourdieu (1984b) noted that cultural and resultant social capital facilitates some movement within one's class stratum, but did not acknowledge that a wealthy family might exclusively display decorative items from a franchise department store such as Target, and a less wealthy family might display original paintings they purchased directly from the artist. Cultural capital can transfer to children via display of household objects, and children choose whether or not to display similar items when they are grown. Thus, economic capacity (which is usually construed as class) and cultural capital (also usually construed as class) are not synonymous constructs, as this dissertation shows.

### *Socioeconomic Status*

Socioeconomic Status (SES) is a measure of a person's access to social and economic resources. Usage of SES data is contentious (Mueller and Parcel 1981), because SES results are generally considered to equate to a person's class standing. The most commonly used indices to determine SES are income, education, and occupation. "Wealth" is also used as an indicator of

SES, which in some measurements combines with liquefiable financial resources only and in other cases combines all financial resources. In order to discuss class variables in a quantifiable way, most sociologists, psychologists, and health researchers operationalize the concept of socioeconomic status (SES), but the quality of SES-related data is limited.

Problems with this measure are plentiful. In the U.S., parents might have quite different access to social and economic resources. Measures are not standardized across disciplines (for example, the National Institute of Health and anthropologists do not always use the same matrices, thus measures have resulted in varying degrees of statistical reliability) (Duncan et al. 2002). The ways scholars have employed and defined SES variables have changed over time, so even a recent study's results might not be relevant to a population in the same regional unit. Additionally, the measures are useless in many non-westernized cultures. In social arenas where people do not maintain the occupational constructs characteristic of industrialized settings, occupational power and education are irrelevant, just as in Lima and Los Angeles, occupational power and education are not measured the same ways.

A person's ethnicity has a strong influence on the way that researchers categorize their SES. In many cases, research protocols do not take subjects' personal ethnic identification into consideration (aside from the possible "other" or write-in category), relying instead solely on researchers' objective observation. Researchers consistently underestimate the SES of subjects, especially those of mixed-race backgrounds (Williams 1996). Misrepresentation of a person's or a community's access to resources to a government agency can lead to misallocation of resources and underfunded community relief programs, such as those based on research reliant on the relationships between SES and health outcomes (Williams 1996). Interpretations of SES have

resulted in other types of discrimination, contributing perhaps most infamously to controversial uses such as improper IQ assessments (Cirino et al. 2002).

Researchers (e.g., Cirino et al. 2002), particularly those in the field of medicine, call for a simplified, standardized SES measurement system. I agree with Williams (1996), who calls for a more comprehensive measure that takes a holistic approach to determining a person's access to resources. This approach would take into account variables like social networks, access to government assistance, and migration-based acculturation that reduce or increase people's access to resources. However, it is difficult, if not impossible, to quantify the sum of these variables – that is, to bracket or rank people's cumulative SES. Moreover, SES changes throughout their lives.

For these reasons, I avoided the use of SES while exploring Los Angeles and Lima families' class-based relationships with domestic art. I did take earned income, education level, and occupation type into consideration when I inquired about sources of material culture and taste. I also considered Angelenos' ethnic heritage, marital satisfaction, and overall reported health, but I did not measure all of these variables in Lima. Most importantly, I considered class to be a subjective measure. All families defined *themselves* as middle class and self-selected into the study.

### **Research Model: Center on Everyday Lives of Families**

This dissertation uses data from the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation's Center on Everyday Lives of Families (CELf) at the University of California Los Angeles, for which I was a graduate student researcher from 2006-2010. Headed by Elinor Ochs, interdisciplinary CELf researchers, including anthropologists, ethnoarchaeologists, applied linguists, psychologists, and

education specialists, studied how middle-class, dual-wage earner families balanced work, school, and family demands. According to the CELF website, the Center had four aims, all of which it achieved. The aims were:

- Generating detailed, ethnographic research on the home life of middle class working families
- Creating a digital archive of everyday family life
- Providing research training opportunities for scholars of family life
- Informing public dialogue on working family life

For recruitment, advertisements were placed in local newspapers and flyers were circulated to recruit families to participate in CELF research. After an initial screening process, eligible families were offered a stipend of \$1,000 to complete each part of the research project. A total of 32 families participated in the full study. CELF ethnographers identified each participating family with pseudonyms, which are used throughout this dissertation to protect the anonymity of children and adults.

Each family participated in filming and interviews for four days – two weekdays and two weekend days, which were not strictly consecutive. All of the families had to meet the basic CELF criteria: they lived in Los Angeles County, both parents were dual-earners who worked at least 30 hours per week (and who self-identified with the “middle class” category), they owned and mortgaged their own house, and they had at least one child between the ages of 7 and 12 living at home (called the “target child”). All of the families in this particular analysis had two or three children. A team of interdisciplinary researchers gathered many types of data from December 2001 through January 2005. The current CELF data set includes but is not limited to:

- Approximately 20,000 still photographs
- 1,540 hours of video ethnography footage
- Interviews and activity logs
- Ethnoarchaeological tracking

- A coded photographic archive describing every visible object in every home

CELF data also include videotaped “home tours,” wherein each family member age 4 and older narrated and filmed their home along loosely guided questions (e.g., “What do you like about your house?” “What do you not like?”). This provided ethnographic insight as to families’ domestic aesthetic taste and priorities. CELF also has documented extensive demographic data for each family, as well as results from health interviews, Marital Satisfaction Tests, time diaries in which family members recorded how they spent their days, and floor plans of the families’ homes. CELF teams have also coded every object in every household, an invaluable resource for future archaeologists and other scholars who are interested in the contents of average urban American family homes during the early 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### *Ethnoarchaeological CELF Studies*

Previous CELF studies discussing the formal aspects of houses have included Arnold and Lang’s 2007 look at the history and changing uses of domestic space in Los Angeles; Graesch’s 2007 working paper about the ethnoarchaeology of contemporary Los Angeles households; and several other analyses of household use of space and time (e.g., Arnold et al. 2012; Graesch 2009; Graesch et al. 2006). Papers about material culture include my working paper about aesthetic preferences among 13 Los Angeles families (Orlando 2007); and my analysis of the aesthetic object variability in 32 contemporary Angeleno homes (Orlando 2009).

Arnold et al. (2012) features analyses of time-use data to document how families allocate their time at home to various activities in different spaces. The authors also document the thousands of objects in typical homes and how family members interact with their possessions, with reflections on consumerism, clutter, leisure, scheduling, and related behaviors.

## **Methods: Ethnoarchaeology and Ethnography**

### *Behavioral Archaeology*

It is important to clarify what is meant by behavioral archaeology, as it is one methodological premise of this dissertation. Reid and colleagues (1975:864) defined it as “the study of the relationships between human behavior and material culture in all times and all places.” Behavioral archaeology as applied to modern material culture attempts to render social processes, and all other large-scale abstractions, “expressible in behavioral terms” (Schiffer et al. 2001:731). The approach breaks these behavioral terms into components of objects’ life histories, and the way that humans behave in their roles with respect to the objects.

In this case, I am concerned with modern artful objects in four of the most public rooms in everyday family homes. Specifically, I examined contemporary human behaviors pertinent to the acquisition of aesthetic objects (e.g., whether objects are gifts or purchases, or whether people took the objects with them upon moving to Lima or L.A.); how families use the objects (in this case, where they display the objects and why they do so); and the reasons that the objects have yet to be discarded or re-circulated into the flow of commodities (Majewski and Schiffer 2001; Schiffer et al. 2001). These data are quantitative. Then, employing behavioral ethnoarchaeology, I asked people about their relationships with the objects.

Evidence I procured for this research encourages the inference that class membership alone neither generates nor reinforces families’ consumer beliefs or behavior. Archaeological middle-range theory – the construct that only from empirical data can researchers begin to develop theories (Tschauner 1996) – applies here. In this case, emergent theories pertain to the relationships between traditional class markers, aesthetic object display, and aesthetic taste



preference in these 48 everyday families. Counting and describing the assemblage of objects in the homes of middle-class families in two cities allows me to make definitive comparative statements about density, placement preferences, and color choices, for example.

The data, however, do not derive only from studying the artful domestic objects families own. Equally important is what people *say* about their objects and related taste preferences: the ways that objects hold deep meaning for them and their families. Using a blend of ethnographic and ethnoarchaeological approaches, I show that family members exercise agency and have distinct opinions about what they purchase or otherwise acquire in order to aesthetically enhance their homes.

Occupation, income, and family of origin help inform people's purchasing power and display decisions or artistic and less aesthetic material culture. Such behaviors, however, are neither autonomous nor stagnant. Processual and systemic factors like the stage of the development the household is in – for example, whether small children are in the home (Schiffer et al. 1981) or whether the home is undergoing a remodel (Graesch 2009) – influence the objects therein at a given time. Changing family- and globally-situated consumer values influence household contents, just as they influence taste preferences.

This is not a longitudinal study, but I do use several ethnographic methods to determine some facets of change over time. In Lima, I explore the acquisition of the objects and how objects' meanings and uses have changed throughout the families' histories. The house and the individual are sites of cultural change. They are also sites of cultural reproduction and negotiation via socialization of and compromise with family members. Thus, I asked Limeños about the sources of their aesthetic inspiration, how their aesthetic tastes changed throughout the courses of their marriages, and the ways they acquired particularly meaningful objects. I

compared their answers to what I saw in high-definition<sup>iii</sup> photographs and videos that participants and I generated.

## **Methods: Lima**

### *Lima Overview*

The data I collected in the capital city of Lima, Peru, augment the CELF data. I worked with 16 families in 2009 and 2010, conducting similar research with the middle-class participants who self-selected into the study. I interviewed mothers, fathers, and target children who were between the ages of 7 and 13. Parents owned, rented, or mortgaged their own single-family dwelling or flat in a multi-dwelling building. All families had the freedom to modify their spaces any way they saw fit. (Some families could not demolish certain walls.) Limeños provided demographic information as well as data about the square footage of their homes, monthly income, expenditures, and family of origin, and much more. Most Limeños preferred that I use their real names; some asked that I use pseudonyms. Appendix 1 shows the Lima Family Background Questionnaire.

I conducted open-ended, semi-structured interviews with all members of the family who were present. As with the CELF study, each family member also narrated and videotaped a guided home tour of their house. Most performed a preference-ranking exercise using 20 laminated photographs of interior spaces from around the world, commenting on what they liked and did not like about the images and providing data that I used to determine degree of taste preference similarity and dissimilarity among participants. I took photographs of the four most public rooms in the houses and obtained descriptions of what household objects meant to family members.

### *Selection Criteria*

Families who considered themselves to be members of the middle class –broadly defined – participated in the study. There are income-based “outlier” families in each city, but I take their ideas into consideration because income is but one measure of socioeconomic status and class. (Other measures include education level and occupation type, for example.) As such, CELF researchers decided to allow families to self-select into the study as members of the American middle-class, and I did the same in Lima.

Although incomes and occupations fluctuate, I believe that all the families would likely still self-identify as middle class today. In Lima, outlier families are represented on the economically disadvantaged side of the sample (LF04 and LF09) and on the economically advantaged side of the sample (LFs 13 and 16). But middle-class belonging is difficult to define and sometimes all but arbitrary in Lima, so I am including those outlier families in the study.

The Limeño families are distributed throughout the city in a spread-out manner (see Figure 6.1 in Chapter Six), so I visited neighborhoods I had never been to. This reflects my snowball recruitment efforts as well as the way wealthy and less wealthy neighborhoods geographically interrupt the city’s middle-class neighborhoods.

### *Ethnographic Method One: Open-ended Interviews*

All family members participated in the semi-structured, open-ended interview, which in every case occurred in the family’s common room. The first component of the semi-structured interview was designed to encourage the family to discuss their individual and collective aesthetic taste preferences, and the origins thereof. Then the interview unfurled to generate

answers pertinent to the sources of aesthetic objects in the home, which I analyzed in order to better understand topics such as general consumerism. I inquired whether families stigmatized certain stores or shopped at nicer department stores or boutiques. I also inquired about the families' consumer values. I designed these questions to understand family members' perspectives about how globalization and large-scale corporations impacted their busy lives. Of particular interest was consumer behavior as applied to non-essential household items such as artistic material culture. Another subset of questions generated a cluster of topics involving family busyness patterns, their social networks, and the assistance they have or do not have managing their homes.

When determining research participants' home interior preferences, some scholars have asked interviewees to assess a given environment using provided categories, such as "homey," "artistic," or "livable" (e.g., Weisner and Weibel 1981). Many sociologists of aesthetic preference have also provided a list of options from which to select or rank with regard to individuals' own living rooms (e.g., Peterson 1992; Richens 1994; Segal and Felson 1973; Sewell 1942). The results of these studies determined the participants' social class belonging. Other measures of preference ask participants to free-list or free-recall characteristics (Thompson and Zhang 2006; Weller and Romney 1988; Ryan and Bernard 2003), but the methods I employed in Peru engaged participants to think about the topic while not specifically asking them to free-list positive and negative attributes of a home. Instead, my questions included: "who do you know that has good taste?" and "what does their home look like?"

Participants provided enough ethnographic material to locate response salience between and across families along several semantic domains (Thompson and Zhang 2006). A semantic domain is "an organized set of words, concepts, or sentences, all at the same level of contrast,

that jointly refer to a singular conceptual sphere” (Weller and Romney 1988:9). Semantic domains are useful categories for analyzing types of data and determining if they are comparable between individuals or aggregates.

To better understand the meaning of the preference-related statements and the degree of agreement between and across families and individuals, it was most useful for me to allow semantic domains to emerge organically from our semi-structured talk, instead of providing pre-determined options. This is because I was unsure of what categories would be significant to ask family members to address or rank. I could not assume that a list of features that I provide Peruvians would be culturally appropriate. Further, I might have missed some of the most important shared values that the participants expressed. In fact, I would have: it never would have occurred to me to suggest airiness as a preferred home quality, which turned out to be the case among Limeños.

#### *Ethnographic Method Two: Preference Ranking Laminated Photographs*

Preference ranking is a technique that marketers often use to determine the shopping climate of their target market and the viability of their product. I adapted it to my research with the Limeño families. I asked 39 of the participants to rank 20 identically sized, laminated, full-color photographs depicting living rooms from around the world. Mothers, fathers, and children put the cards in order of favorite to least favorite. Then I asked family members to explain to me why they liked their five favorite and five least favorite images.

I sought to avoid bias in creating my preference-ranking cards, but this exercise was not formally designed or tested. I obtained the images from interior decorating magazines. They depicted diverse spaces from Latin America, France, the United States, and Japan. My main

objectives in selecting the images were to frame the same amount of space (e.g., to have the same area of the living room showing in the photograph) and to ensure that the photographs were of the same quality (e.g., the images were of the same saturation and dots per inch). It was important that the motifs depicted were not too similar so participants did not reject them or select them because it was the easiest selection criteria. Some are modern, some are rustic, some are filled with primarily aesthetic objects, and others have few pieces of art.

Each card has a code on the reverse side, designed not to affect the participants' reactions as my assistants and I wrote down their favorite and least favorite cards. We tried to ensure that participants could not hear one another's responses to the exercise, in the hopes that their responses did not influence other family members'. I then asked the participants to explain why they liked their favorite card and did not like their least favorite card. After transcribing these interviews, I summarized the responses by aggregating them across participants. Patterns, including a definite favorite and less definite second-favorite card, and a definite least favorite card, emerged. In Chapter Ten I discuss these preference patterns.

### *Ethnographic Method Three: Videography and Home Tour Analysis*

Each family member filmed and discussed the interior and exterior of their house, creating a "home tour." Family members were instructed to relate what they liked and did not like about their houses and their favorite objects. I had hoped that each participant would conduct their tour alone as family members in the CELF sample had, but most Limeño parents conducted their tours with their children, to prevent their children, it seemed, from breaking the camera.

Responses to these topics offered clues about family members' individual aesthetic preferences. Certain family members provided more comprehensive tours, while others provided

quicker tours and scarcely self-reported information beyond the most basic orientations.

Whether they provided an in-depth home tour or a whirlwind one, narrators tended to take one of two approaches to their tour, and family members tended to take the same approach as one another. In the first approach, home tour videographers narrated descriptions of the rooms as they passed through them on the tour (“this is the living room ... this is the kitchen, it’s too small”). Videographers who took the second approach described activities that commonly took place in each room (“this is the den, it’s where we play video games after our homework”). The second tour types occurred less frequently, but they were most helpful to this research because they tended to disclose more self-reported information about aesthetic preferences.

Family members often spoke about the aesthetic function of certain objects or spaces, and only occasionally said something about the feeling the room evokes for them. Most participants remembered to discuss their favorite room or place in the home. As I discuss in Chapter Nine, filming seemed to excite many of the participants and inspire memories about their home and material culture therein.

## **Two Cities**

I conducted this research in these particular cities for several reasons. The middle class in Lima may or may not be experiencing the trickle-down effect of Peru’s new prosperity, that nation having Latin America’s fastest-growing economy (Los Angeles Times 2011). Both parents have to work full time to make ends meet. Family structures are changing and sometimes fathers are leaving to find work. Upscale parts of the city have new parks, new roads, new public schools, and many residents have Internet in their homes for the first time. But only certain neighborhoods are reaping the benefits of these improvements. Regardless of the costs and

benefits of the effects the economy has on this sector, the scope and rapidity of the changes of the everyday lives of middle-class families in that city warrants much more examination.

The same is true for Angelenos. At the time that CELF researchers completed the research upon which the Los Angeles component of this dissertation is based, the U.S. economy was beginning to show signs of slowing. But parents in each city exerted a similar amount of effort for their families to thrive. They were all busily balancing working and home lives. The sample shows ethnic and occupational diversity, and parents taking interesting approaches to raising their children and solving challenges of balancing all components of their busy lives.

Specific aspects of globalization, including the flow of human labor and tangible capital, have impacted both port cities. These cities are particularly diverse because of that. With migrants seeking new opportunities come new objects, ideas, aesthetic preferences, food ways, architectural styles, languages, and eventually norms, mixing into the matrix of previous exchange patterns. Residents of these cities who earn equivalent incomes, however, have differential access to goods, a factor I always considered as I compared their interior aesthetic material culture assemblages. Due to import costs and high tax rates, middle-class Limeños pay up to five times more than Angelenos for standard household technologies such as televisions. Many web sites will not ship to Peru and those who do charge exorbitant rates for the service.

### **Brief Chapter Summaries**

In the next chapter, I address historical approaches to the relationships between class, material culture, and consumerism, explaining that people have choices with regard to what they like and why: it is not predetermined by habitus. In Chapter Three, I explain why anthropologists pay attention to domestic material culture, clarifying how household objects perform to create



meaning for householders and their guests. The fourth and fifth chapters provide overviews of the 32 Angeleno families and the aesthetic objects in their houses, respectively. The sixth chapter explains the ambiguous ways that class belonging is demarcated in Lima. In the seventh and eighth chapters I describe the 16 Limeño families and the contents of their homes, respectively. Chapters Nine and Ten address what the study participants said about what their domestic aesthetic material culture means to them and their specific taste preferences, respectively.

In the final chapter, I conclude with an analysis of why I think these families' homes look so different between the cities. I discuss the families' material culture assemblages, and why family members like what they like. While these families stand as proxies for middle-class, dual wage-earner families in many urban settings around the world, I feel that Bourdieu's construct of habitus needs more attention in the context of extremely busy families coping with rapidly globalizing economies. A family's social standing – at least as determined by economic class – does not seem to affect aesthetic domestic material culture selection or taste as much as cultural capital-related factors and simple personal preference.

### **This Study's Contributions**

I strive to advance theory about the relationships between people and artful modern material culture. I examine the applicability of prevailing social theories about consumption, aesthetic taste, and class as they pertain to families living in two major metropolises in the Americas, all of which many scholars have subscribed to and modified.

Ultimately I aspire to contribute to a growing body of literature and interdisciplinary thought that prioritizes the analysis of consumption of domestic artifacts and pertinent ethnographic data as indices of individual and familial identity and taste. I do not, however, seek

to prioritize objective measures of class or cultural capital as determinants of aesthetic taste or householders' reasons to display particular artful objects. Rather, household aesthetics, both materially and verbally expressed, are manifestations of deep individual meanings: byproducts of and vehicles for global and personal change.

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<sup>i</sup> All exchange rates cited throughout this research were recalculated in March 2012. Peruvian *nuevo soles* are represented in their U.S. dollar equivalent.

<sup>ii</sup> Traditionally it was stay-at-home women who made household aesthetic decisions and purchases (e.g., Rich and Jain 1968), controlling object- and space-mediated social relations, if little else. In this dissertation, I explain that, due to dual-earner parents' busyness, this process is becoming outmoded and less gendered. In both Lima and L.A., fathers are asserting their interior taste preferences, and sometimes such decisions and maintenance of household aesthetics is allocated to domestic helpers in Lima.

<sup>iii</sup> High-definition quality film allows me to see details such as signatures, for example. Signatures help me determine whether certain art forms are original or mass-produced, for example.

**Chapter Two:**  
**Class, Consumerism, and Decorative Material Culture:**  
**A Brief History of the Theories of the Relationship**

Without looking into everyday life and consumption patterns in middle-class households, Max Weber and Pierre Bourdieu formed high theories about entire classes of people, stating that their lifestyles, consumer values and behaviors, and social statuses are implicitly intertwined with and demonstrated through their aesthetic taste preferences. Elite people prefer and own, they said, “high” culture, while lower classes – the masses – prefer and own “popular” culture.

Coining the term “social class” in accordance with Marxist ideas about the inequities of resource allocation, Weber (1968) wrote about stratified linkages of possessions and preferences. External factors, not individualized experiences, control these and amount to lifestyles, which is the vehicle for expression of status. Throughout his canon, after Marcel Mauss (1934), Bourdieu wrote that, via *habitus* and *praxis*, class standing generates and reinforces homologous taste and consumer behaviors. Individual agency is all but absent from these grand theories; people, these scholars said, are stagnant within their strata. If properly socialized, they develop a sense of differentiation-based tension in relation to the other classes (Baudrillard 1969:68; Coulangeon and Lemel 2007; Shatzki et al. 2001).

This social structure is composed of and maintained through long-habituated practices that keep people in order, but also enable them as agents (Ortner 1984, 2006). Giddens (1984) sees individuals as tied to everyday routinized actions, but allows for a bit more agency than the construct *habitus* permits (Schatzki et al. 2001). Giddens (1984) writes that human actors are conscious of their standing and that their personal experiences help generate their ideals, but they

are still muted by durable external entities that encourage their cultural goods selections and taste preferences (as well as the other facets of their beliefs and behaviors) (Karp 2009).

By participating in arrays of activity, we socialize our children to become members of our strata (Bronfenbrenner 1971), replicating their situated position within larger society. Children eventually embody their parents' consumer behaviors and aesthetic sensibilities (Ochs et al. 1996). Activities are gendered too: cross-culturally, women commonly regulate domestic versus public fields of practice (Hale 1987; Massey 1994; McCracken 2001). Objects mediate and spaces situate these relationships (Shatzki and Knorr Cetina et al. 2001:11).

Many scholars who preceded or amended practice theory, however, collected and analyzed middle-range empirical data sets to show how, in fractured postmodern society in particular, cultural goods do not always mediate or reflect our class belonging. These researchers instead privilege the individual and families' lived experiences. In fairness, although the principles are the same, comparing material culture taste is a different sort of research than Bourdieu's comparison of taste regarding ephemeral forms such as music (Masuda et al. 2008). Material culture is tangible: it might be easier to quantify pieces displayed in a home and for participants to point to what they like or dislike than it is for researchers and participants to discuss aesthetic aspects of music, literature, or film.

In this chapter I first present a brief description of Bourdieu's notions in *Distinction*. Second, I address why many quantitatively oriented theoreticians of modern material culture refute these ideas and related findings, especially when applying them to contemporary, middle-class, urban families. Third, I delineate the theories I employ in this research.

## **Distinction**

At the time that Bourdieu researched and wrote *Distinction*, no social theorist had undertaken such a grand-scale analysis of the relationships between cultural taste preferences and social class. Bourdieu chose an apt title for his “big book,” as *Distinction* operates on the basic premise that, while people are unconscious of it and likely could not articulate it if asked, their personal taste is based strongly on habitus – deterministic, internalized, seemingly inescapable social structures that form people’s actions, thoughts, and tastes (Throop and Murphy 2002:186-7). Habitus is “both the generative principle of objectively classifiable judgments and the system of classification ... of these practices” (Bourdieu 1984a:170).

As they consume a specific type of symbolic commodity, Bourdieu said, people use habitus-based systems of classification to create for themselves a disposition of aesthetic taste preference that generates “meaningful practices and meaning-giving perceptions” that are totally reliant on a cyclical system distinct from other schema (Bourdieu 1984a:170). These systems define and are defined by intrinsic relational properties, primarily class standing. Since the dominant classes in a given society control the distribution of symbols and economic capital, they mediate the lower classes’ habitus (Bourdieu 1984a:260) and set the configuration for the society’s lifestyle/s and preferences.

### **Historical Problems with Studies about Taste and Class Relationships**

The class-taste homology argument leaves little room for individual agency, and therefore little room for invention and modification processes. Bourdieu ascribed minor significance to people’s cognitive processes and consciousness as they categorize social strata, but longitudinal change is missing from his book. Social movements and resistance did not enter his theories of preference. These ideas are ahistorical: they do not acknowledge large-scale social

transformation except as potentially organized within nearly impossibly unified and structured conditions (Calhoun 2006). People's specific practices, contextually situated within social fields or structures, hang powerless in a web-like larger field of cultural production. Even if people make choices outside of their class-determined rules, including unexpected art purchases, they cannot generate new systems of distinction, lifestyle, or roles within social structure (Bourdieu 1984a, b; Bourdieu and Johnson 1993).

### *Methodological Issues in Survey-Based Assessments*

Due to statistical biases and absence of in-depth interviews, quantitative sociological methods are insufficient to deeply understand people's taste preferences. Researchers, who often come from different backgrounds from the people they study, usually determine the SES of research subjects. SES measurements are not replicable or empirically provable and thus are not valid systems of categorizing people. Chapin (1928) generated elaborate protocols by which to measure the relationships among the cultural and instrumental contents of family homes, paternal salaries, and paternal group membership in order to assess household class. These foundational studies set a precedent for the inclusion of cultural artifacts such as musical instruments and literary books as status markers and became the basis for future quantitative psychological and sociological measures and protocols.

Throughout his canon Bourdieu set out to empirically demonstrate his ideas using surveys to measure the degree to which the "dominant" class in France in the 1960s and '70s affected the aesthetic preferences and consumptive practices, and related behaviors, of their lower-class counterparts. Survey questions – sometimes asked of his own family members – included favorite qualities of an interior space, recent furniture purchases, and frequency of visits

to the Louvre. Questions he used to divide his sample into sectors included age, income, and father's occupation. Although he said it "constitutes the most powerful explanatory factor" (Bourdieu 1984a:261), he did not ask participants their subjective opinion of their own class positioning in the survey. Instead, he and his assistants classified them.

At about that same time, in a survey-based study, Laumann and House (1970) worked with more than 1,000 white American men and found homologies between interior aesthetics and ambitions, but their system of categorization of people and interior spaces was subjective to the research assistants. For example, they decided that people who decorated their living room in a "traditional" style tended not to be upwardly mobile" (Wilson and Mackenzie 2002), but the researchers described the living rooms' aesthetic and not that of the respondents.

These studies do not account for the change over time of the relative importance of objects and houses' features. Sewell's (1942) attempt to build an American sociometric scale, using agricultural implements to measure farmers' statuses, illuminated that problem. In order to determine the relative status of Oklahoman agricultural families, Sewell ascribed weight to house attributes, most of which are no longer relevant to the middle class. The fourth weightiest attribute was heating, and the fifth was running water in the home. And as Sewell notes, the applicability of this sort of measurement to other groups of people such as "broken families, Negro families, and non-farm families" requires restandardization (Sewell 1942:297), which is self-evident.

Sociological measures seldom account for *why* the objects are in the home. Without the life histories or contextual information about the artifacts' presence (or absence) in the home, we can only blindly categorize people's class belonging. Householders' determinations of material value, their own status within the community, and their rationale for owning or preferring objects

do not emerge organically from open-ended interviews. In surveys, researchers who earn more money and have more cultural capital than farmers, impose their own rationales onto the farmers. It is the researchers who ultimately ascribe preferences to structural homologies, habitus, and praxis. Questionnaires privilege the protocol designer and the researcher and his or her subjective perception of normative value constructs, sometimes reproducing class stratification within the protocol itself.

When researching household material culture it is advisable to adopt behavioral archaeological methods and to avoid errors such as blindly trusting respondents' counts of their own possessions. Several famous studies have demonstrated the ways that surveys soliciting such data can go awry. The Garbage Project of Tucson shows that "what people report they do and/or what they themselves believe they do is often very different from their actual behavior" (Rathje 2001:64; see also Rathje 1978). It is important that we take into consideration what people actually *do* with artifacts (in this case, whether aesthetic material culture is displayed and not just stored), as opposed to whether they own or enjoy or want to own the artifacts (Arnould 1989). This is central because visibility of objects is the root of their capacity to convey identity (and thus class). Therefore survey-based research about consumerism, cultural artifacts, and aesthetics is less than useful when generating measures to categorize people into classes.

Regardless of the type of cultural form, and barring exclusive objects only available to the wealthiest individuals, when we employ middle-range ethnoarchaeological methods, ethnographic methods, or both, we tend to find that middle-class people around the world exercise strong preferential agency. We have empirically demonstrated how income (as a traditional class marker) and consumption of most objects, cultural or otherwise, seldom correlate. Per Felson (1976:398):



Economists have not only found that income elasticities are often low (i.e., that the correlation between income and particular consumer items is small), but also that the relationship between income and consumption is often logilinear, since the marginal propensity to consume declines as income rises.

### *Three Capitals*

There are more types of capital than money and material assets. Bourdieu offered the construct of “cultural capital” as a holistic, individual-centered extension of economic capital as an indicator of individuals’ class positioning within stratified society. It includes factors such as travel, educational experiences, film viewing, and museum visits. These help form aesthetic taste, but it is still habituated. Cultural capital consists of three interrelated components. The “embodied state” encompasses life experiences – internalized physical and mental states, in relation to class. An example of this is how class standing correlates with health outcomes in most societies. Second, the “objectified state” includes the physical goods that denote a person’s cultural capital. The third component is the “institutionalized state,” the external world’s categorization of a person’s class positioning.

Although Bourdieu said that, along with educational capital, economic capital influences taste most efficiently (Veenstra 2005:276), barring outliers, within my sample set it is the least relevant of the three in influencing what people have in their homes. While money shortages preclude some family members’ dreams of art ownership and fresh house paint, some individuals said they did not want new cultural objects or aesthetic motifs in their homes; they did not shop for household enhancements. They were not cogs in the wheels of the stereotypical middle-class hunger to acquire (Wallerstein 1976).

People act agentively when they select a response from a set of taste-based choices. Really, though, by selecting the “appropriate” response from a set, they are indicating compliance with cultural competence that external forces determine to be correct (Bourdieu1984a:399). In the end, classes *classify* taste preferences and sociopolitical ideologies according to what is expected of them, a competency of sorting that habitus instills. Although money is not the only aspect of class, Bourdieu says that habitus ultimately forms praxis and people are locked into the strata into which they are born. I show that this idea is outdated. Not only has it never been an adequate theory for articulating the complexities of the relationships between taste and class, but globalization, writ large, is deconstructing once-impermeable social borders. Working conditions, the qualities and quantities of social interactions, and access to commodities, technologies, and information are in flux – improving for some, and worsening for others – on both a global and local scale, affecting taste and capital of all three sorts. Status mobility and varied cultural competencies is changing among people of all strata.

### **Alternative Theories**

The theoreticians that inform this dissertation diverge from a strictly homology-based analysis of the relationships between taste and class, privileging such factors as the agentive individual’s ideals and impacts of new global phenomena such as the rapid spread of popular culture. They also provide methodological alternatives to the sociological tradition.

In their particularly pertinent writings, members of the Frankfurt School, such as Herbert Marcuse (1964) and Max Horkheimer and Theodore Adorno (1972), question whether possession of or desire for cultural items are sufficiently powerful phenomena to structure classes and differentiate them from one another at all. Rather, we all have the capacity to enjoy

and create art as an escape from the mechanization of capitalism (Horkheimer and Adorno 1972). Cultural items and the want to have them are simply one small part of a larger system of mass commodification and ideological domination that powerful institutions such as corporations and “Hollywood” push upon the middle and working classes (Halle 1993). The Frankfurt School critiques the overemphasis of the dichotomy of “high” versus “popular” culture and realizes that false contradiction to be a deterministic evaluative schema, as culture is just a part of the larger industrial system.

No scholar who would self-identify as a member of the Frankfurt School, however, to my knowledge, specifically addresses the bourgeoisie’s preferences regarding domestic decorative objects, which have a separate commercialized life history from museum pieces: they are seldom rarefied. That is to say, the Frankfurt School would ignore the fact that if a person walks into a very wealthy home, they are likely going to see rarefied art, and if a person walks into a middle-class home in the same city, they are very likely not going to see rarefied art. But that, the Frankfurt School would say, is not enough to forge class strata; it just demonstrates an extant difference in income and socially mediated ideologies. Further, it is presumptuous to believe that just because a person does not display a certain type of art, they do not know of it. Observable material indicators do not reflect a person’s history of gift giving, the possibility that they may have needed to sell a precious art object, or the notion that the resident has minimalist taste.

In the 1980s, Richard Peterson and others (Peterson 1992; Peterson and Kern 1996; Peterson and Simkus 1992) began to consider a new facet of consumerism: audience segmentation. Peterson and his students put forth the useful omnivore theory, which explains how, even among consumers who might on a survey self-select into the same class stratum, those with access to more types of capital (not just economic) have knowledge of and access to more

types of cultural goods. This is not a homologous, linear relationship – there is no one-to-one mapping of capital to taste.

More recently, Chan and Goldthorpe (2007 a, b, c, d) began to describe consumerist “univorism.” They reject the idea that corporations and corporate media dominate the ideologies of the masses, arguing instead that people of all classes exercise preference with regard to available aesthetic goods.

Ethnographer Daniel Miller (1998, 2005) and his students have produced a large canon of literature regarding the subjective meanings of quotidian contemporary material culture and middle-class individuals’ decision-making processes when shopping for items. Such objects include such obviously identity-transmitting objects such as clothing. Using traditional anthropological ethnographic methods, they also found fascinating variation with regard to Londoners’ relationships with household objects that might be less obvious in the way they communicate information about the people who own them (Miller 2001, 2008).

### *Omnivorism*

The most widely accepted criticism of the observable relationship between class and consumption patterns is Peterson’s. He and his mentees have, for the last several decades, advocated omnivorism (e.g., Peterson and Kern 1996; Sullivan and Katz-Gerro 2007). Problematizing Bourdieu’s premise that members of upper occupational groups prefer so-called high-brow art, Peterson and his co-authors demonstrate, using some quantitative and many qualitative methods, that they also engage in a wide range of previously non-elite cultural practices — they are omnivorous in the variety of their cultural consumption patterns. People in

blue-collar occupational groups, however, can usually only consume from non-elite strata of cultural goods [elite objects being limited in number by their very nature, per Arnould (1989)].

DiMaggio and Useem (1978) found a similar pattern: better-educated (not necessarily wealthier) people consumed culture and media of all sorts, not just elite art forms. Veenstra (2005) conducted a survey among Canadians (people of several ethnicities, representatives of several of what he called “powers/capitals,” and both men and women), to explore whether they consumed a breadth of cultural goods. This study generated inconclusive results, but in general, educational capital and power in the workplace influenced cultural knowledge of several types (literature, financial magazines, and the like).

This is a useful theory for several reasons. First, omnivorism helps challenge the traditional, often political, and what I consider suspect division of art forms into high and low categories. Gans (1985, 1999) agrees that this divide is false because if the elite classes determine taste stratification, and the wealthy classes are, as we see, consuming all types of cultural goods, then the classification of high and low is tenuous. To illustrate, in Los Angeles, wealthy people consume counterculture street artist Banksy’s urban modern art, which was once a series of underground political statements emblazoned illegally on buildings. His now available as rare, framed pieces selling for millions of dollars. We also see wealthy Angelenos wearing gold hip-hop style neck chains – a cultural form once restricted to lower-class individuals.

Now some low art forms are construed as acceptable – and, in the case of the work of former social commentator-cum-street artist Banksy, originals extremely desirable to collect – among the elite crowds. High formal art may remain financially inaccessible to most, but as my data show, middle-class people know how to recognize it, may save money to eventually own, and often are in possession of, original, framed works by local artists and prints of museum

pieces. In conjunction with *Distinction*, however, omnivorous taste becomes synonymous with cultural capital (Lizardo and Skiles 2008).

Domestic display of kitsch is considered ironic among the elite and upper-middle classes, because equivalently savvy viewers sense that people with cultural capital know that these objects are actually in “bad” taste (Solomon 1991:2). Such objects do not evoke the “sweet emotions” that they do in people with less cultural capital. Thus, by displaying kitsch, people who know more about aesthetics, or are immune to Goethe’s “naïve style” (in Schiller 1795), may be demonstrating that they are powerful enough to be immune from judgment: they are almost shark-like in their omnivorous capacities.

Omnivorism functions in the other direction too. Middle-class people do consume what might traditionally be construed as elite, or authentic, goods and services. Although he was arguing for the applicability of habitus and against omnivorism, I find Holt’s discussion about a middle-class individual’s life-long passionate connoisseurship of Turkish rugs convincing (1998:241-242). An expert collector of such one-of-a-kind and costly items can inform hobbyists about natural versus artificial dyes and the monetary worth of the rug, for example, regardless of either party’s class membership. People use art objects and experiences to identify with members of other classes; therefore the boundaries of classes become blurred and the objects can belong in either category (or none at all).

Omnivorism also negates the habitus-based construct of class-fixed tastes, stating that consumers of all classes actually choose from art forms that they enjoy, as long as they can afford them (Peterson 1992). All parties can, in an ideal free market setting, empower themselves with options to participate or exit: they are not fixed within it. Elite trendsetting members of a population set the purchasing price – often a high price – for forms that once belonged

exclusively to lower classes. Resultant sales financially enable the less wealthy artists or designers until the meme ends and a new one begins. In the interim the less wealthy artists sometimes become culturally and financially elite. The elite sector usually starts the top-down cycle, but eventually, as both supply and demand increase, unless the form is very rare, the cost of the style of form decreases, and consumers of all classes can choose new aesthetic goods and experiences. This is important because it indicates that, except for rare pieces, art ownership does not always denote a specific class membership.

Holt (1998:240-241) divides country music into two types: what he calls “hard,” early, Appalachian music, featuring singers like Hank Williams, and “contemporary” or “new” Country Western music with singers like George Strait. He sees elitists as consuming only from the latter while lower-class people can identify with the “my dog died” stories that the former offer. This is another example of a high-theory statement that is in desperate need of ethnographic middle-range evidence: one might argue that an elite consumer would not listen to Country Western music at all or would rather appear “real,” or “hard,” by listening to Hank Williams.

Bourdieu might say that the elite only consume from their own strata, determining what the rest of the world should aspire to consume but will never reach. While this does happen in all cultures, it is overly deterministic and outdated, as it links individuals and families with less money and access with cheap, mass-produced, non-exquisite objects.

While Bourdieu claims that class habitus dictates the consumption of different types of physical products, his data belie this generalization and indicate class differences significantly smaller than those revealed in nonmaterial culture. In the field of food, for example, Bourdieu claims that the working class taste for necessity dictates foods that are fatty and heavy, while the bourgeois taste for freedom dictates lighter, leaner foods. Yet data on the distribution of expenditures among the various food categories are surprisingly similar across classes (Gartman 1991:430).

These leaps of logic punctuate *Distinction* and the work of researchers to follow. Even though the number of people Bourdieu surveyed is impressive (typical of sociological surveys), his conclusions do not derive from rich ethnographic data or from participant observation. Nor are Bourdieu's data longitudinal. Sometimes the data indicate a blurred line between "class" as defined by external factors and as defined by cultural goods.

### *Univormism*

In some cases, however, class lines are sharp: there are extremes at either end of the economic spectrum. The Amerindian people who comprise 45 percent of Lima, Peru (Central Intelligence Agency 2011) are often discriminated against for their dark skin when they try to purchase tickets at the entryway of the lovely opera house at the city center (Higgins 2005:228). The 43.9% who constitute Lima's lowest classes D and E (Ipsos APOYO 2011) cannot afford to attend. Likely, these subalterns<sup>i</sup> do not have the proper attire for such an occasion, or other factors apply that do not pertain specifically to class standing. Ramifications of class stratification, such as fear of intolerance and violent acts, however, are very real.

Chan and Goldthorpe (2007 a, b, c, d) emphasize that the relationship between consumption and class is politically complicated, specifically with regard to oppressed peoples. Challenging Peterson and Kern's theory, they write that advantaged sectors consume whatever they choose (cultural omnivores), whereas disadvantaged people consume from only one stratum of available objects or aesthetics, terming them "univores."

Maintaining a strict differentiation between Bourdieu's "class" and Weber's "status," and preferring to work with the latter, Chan and Goldthorpe model their UK-based sociological method after Laumann (1966). They work with a network of similar-status friends and former



classmates throughout London, employing Laumann's predefined occupational categories. They assume that close friendships indicate comparable social statuses, while occupations "are among the most salient social positions to which status attaches" (Chan and Goldthorpe 2007b:1098). They write that people of similar social positions would have similar aesthetic taste and consumption patterns. When they analyze newspaper readership they find a linear relationship between education levels and degree of difficulty of the reading material (Chan and Goldthorpe 2007b), but their music consumption analyses among the same group show weaker, or absent, correlations (along the lines of omnivorism) (Chan and Goldthorpe 2007c:14)

Chan and Goldthorpe's empirical data demonstrate that even within their small data set, individuals' aesthetic taste preferences co-vary with household income, head of household's level of education, and place of origin. People with more money and other sorts of status-indicating capital do have the ability to identify with more types of goods. While lower-status people might not have the same ability, class membership is not the most determining variable. It could be, for example, that busier people do not have time to come to prefer a specific newspaper. The homology argument is less useful here than the eclectic consumerism (individualization) argument or the omnivore argument.

### *Heterogeneity versus Homogeneity*

Bourdieu's argument for strict homology of class-based preference is under attack in this day of fractured postmodernity. Consumption of cultural items and experiences is culturally stratified. Increasing heterogeneity of education within societies introduces wealthy people to music they might have missed (and vice versa) and therefore art is blurring the class boundaries (Coulangeon and Lemel 2007; Daugavietis and Lāce 2010). A modern attitude of acceptance

toward diverse preferences is emerging among elite people. Expressing that attitude actually indicates their class belonging: a distinction based on the *opposite* of habitus.

Saito (2007) noticed maintenance of homogeneity of upscale Japanese-ness in the home via reinforcement of strictly traditional aesthetics and the enforced appreciation of those aesthetics in wealthier Japanese homes:

There is a prevailing aesthetic sensibility that permeates everyday objects and activities such as cooking, packaging, and seasonal celebration. I regard those everyday objects and phenomena to embody Japanese aesthetic sensibility most eloquently, which in turn sharpens people's aesthetic sensibility and nurtures aesthetic appreciation of the mundane (Saito 2007:3).

Both the maintenance of tradition/homogeneity hypothesis and the heterogeneity hypothesis are viable, gaining favor, and empirically measurable, and proponents of each accept omnivorism with few minor exceptions.

### *Critiques of Omnivorism*

There appears to be a correlation between consumerism and income. Sullivan and Katz-Gerro (2007) discuss how in the contemporary United States class stratification is marked by the degree to which one's life is harried. Consumption of culture is marked by breadth. This is achieved by multitasking and relaxed enjoyment of art or music or film is not possible. Class is not marked by "high," "low," or "middle," but amount of leisure: the "leisure class" is either the elite or the underemployed. The busy middle-class families I researched in both cities say they have very little leisure time, just as we have seen in the past in metropolises (e.g., Simmel 1903[2002]). In both cities, however, the families are developing a new, hyper rhythm of time management that allows for speedier consumerism of culture, particularly when working with digital technologies including cellphones and the Internet (Good 2007).

## **Ethnographic Contributions**

Ascertaining the subjective meanings of aesthetic objects for individuals and families is intrinsic to the anthropology of material culture, whereas it is less important to sociology of art. Bourdieu wrote of a mistrust of “native accounts” (Throop and Murphy 2002:199). Many research participants state that their household aesthetic helps determine the quality of their lives (Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton 1981; Miller 2008; Saito 2007). For the sake of intra- and intersocial analyses, sociologists seek larger-scale patterns: flows and movements of art objects as cultural commodities, not meaning-laden artifacts.

Anthropologists gather and analyze real-world observations of behaviors. The behavior in question is that people seem to prefer different types of art, though they grew up in analogous social contexts. These researchers have explained questions about domestic art.

### *David Halle*

After both quantitatively and ethnographically researching art in the homes of upper-middle-class families in New York, Halle (1993) came to the conclusion that taste in household art is more complicated than previously thought. Halle presents the perspective that both external and internal causal factors affect preference, leaving a bit more room for agency than habitus permits but still referring to vague constructs such as “modern family life” as exercising control over individual artistic taste.

I am not proposing an individualistic model according to which people ‘create’ meaning in their private homes. ... The meanings uncovered in this study are patterned and ... repetitive. Rather, I am arguing that these causes derive as much from the interaction of the residents with social forces such as suburbanization, modern family life, and racial segregation as from the impact of such external forces as artists, critics, and large corporations (Halle 1993:194).

However, Halle points out that there is no “democracy of the (art) market” (1993:193), for the market is skewed in favor of those who can afford to pay. That is why abstract art, which appeals mostly to a limited section of the upper-middle class, has made fortunes for its major artists while religious iconography, which appeals to a numerically larger section of the Catholic working class, has not allowed the flourishing of a comparable number of artists.

*Daniel Miller*

Revisiting the roots of traditional ethnography, Miller (2008) and his doctoral students conducted a project wherein they asked the residents of one side street in London what meant most to them in life. The vast majority of respondents answered with ideals about relationships with family and friends, but Miller and his students quickly noticed how aesthetic and non-aesthetic material culture mediated those relationships, playing a part in rituals, structuring daily life, and helping them differentiate themselves from others. He then delineated which objects meant most to his research participants, and saw that it was not class-based differentiation that beloved objects facilitate, but occupation (tools that only members of their profession knew how to use), hobbies, and tangible memories of family and friends.

Miller writes that on a singular street in London he noticed more interior material culture diversity than homogeneity. Even though some were recent immigrants, the people living on that street belonged to the same class and were socialized toward the same British sensibilities. He found that taste preference among the Londoners in his study is individualized, eclectic, diverse, and object ownership is more personally motivated than economically motivated.

## Concluding Thoughts

Presupposing the existence of normal human patterns of change, cosmopolitan influence, and tastemakers' effects on adoption processes, individuals still have agency with regard to their cultural taste. Their class standing within that society is immaterial. Although local models vary as to why people like what they like, the notion that we use cultural forms to distinguish ourselves from members of other class strata is true, but to a limited extent. Omnivorists show us through mostly quantitative methods that people consume from all strata of cultural goods, as long as they have the economic wherewithal. Ethnographically oriented social scientists such as Halle and Miller demonstrate that New Yorkers and Londoners who belong to the same class strata consume all sorts of aesthetic items – sometimes to differentiate themselves from others, but usually not.

Although it is not perfect (bereft, for example, of the acknowledgment of gendered and ethnic inequities), omnivorism (Peterson and Kern 1996; Sullivan and Katz-Gerro 2007) is a useful framework by which to understand and explain people's consumer behavior. Bourdieu's and many sociologists' arbitrary protocols do not account for the lived experiences of real people (Gartman 1991), at least not today's middle class. Omnivorism is the most useful of all critiques of the homology argument. It offers a flexible explanatory model that facilitates the expression of individuals' lived experiences that are easily combined with ethnoarchaeological methods that assess middle-range data.

Neither members of the Frankfurt School nor Peterson and his advocates go far enough to refine Bourdieu's notions of *habitus* and *praxis* as they apply to modern, middle-class families' household aesthetic values and possessions. While we all may be under the influence of large-scale corporations and other political global factors, I doubt they fully dominate middle-class

ideologies. Lived experiences are more reflective of aesthetic material culture and the values people place on the art in their homes.

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<sup>i</sup> Subaltern peoples are often anthropologically defined as: “oppressed, minority groups whose presence (is) crucial to the self-definition of the majority group” (Bhabha 1996:192). In this case, the economically oppressed peoples of Peru sharply contrast with the wealthier classes in their very inability to access the same aesthetic forms, even though they may provide the intellectual origins and the raw materials that constitute those forms.

### **Chapter Three: Domestic Material Culture and Semiotic Performance**

Domestic material culture performs powerful communicative social functions. Decorative artifacts in particular reflect the varied and non-habituated nature of middle-class families' taste preferences. An artifact is only powerful enough to strap people into a class stratum inasmuch as the signal that the object emits is readable to all its viewers. But regardless of the viewers' class membership, they can never perfectly transmit or receive messages via aesthetic objects alone. Here I explain why domestic aesthetic objects are not indexical of people's mutual class belonging.

#### *Aesthetic Performance Characteristics: Mechanisms of Semiotics*

Ethnoarchaeologists analyze objects in order to understand their past or present relationship with humans. One way to do this is to parse out their performance characteristics.

The artifacts ... taking part in an activity, by virtue of their material composition and form, have specific properties that affect their suitability for interacting in particular ways. These activity-specific capabilities are known as performance characteristics and can pertain to any kind of interaction – mechanical, thermal, visual (Schiffer 1976:645).

The objects I discuss and quantify in this study feature primarily aesthetic performance characteristics that evoke visual, olfactory, sensory, and/or tactile reactions. When aesthetic artifacts are displayed in a home, especially when they are arranged in a manner designed specifically to interact with one another (i.e., photographs in a cluster), performance characteristics can trigger both pleasant or unpleasant memories and emotions. According to Dormann and Zijlstra (2003), who worked with middle-class families in occupational and

residential settings, aesthetic artifacts can spark emotions including arousal, elation, quietness, boredom, pleasantness, calmness, unhappiness, and distress.

To explore these relationships, ethnoarchaeologists can map the life history of an aesthetic object or a collection of aesthetic objects in the home – what Harris and Sørensen (2010:145) call the “affective field” wherein people can “feel (emote) through objects”. By tracing an object’s life history and creating a flow model of behavioral units, a longitudinal study could plot a life history of a family’s time spent in the home (both day-to-day and long-term), the family’s travels, and the family’s network of relationships as mediated by aesthetic artifacts. Combined with ethnographic fieldwork and house floor plans, these techniques help contextualize domestic material arrangements.

### *Art Objects and Agentive Performance*

People’s identities and values, roles in the public sphere, and perceived social standings, evolve during their lifetimes. Domestic artifact ownership denotes these aspects of beliefs and behaviors. As a consequence, they are universally integral to constructing and reflecting people’s relationships with themselves and outsiders (Appadurai 1986; Bourdieu 1984a; Csikszentimihalyi and Rochbert-Halton 1981; Douglas and Isherwood 1996 [1979]; Schiffer with Miller 1989; Smith 2007). To be successfully enculturated members of society, individuals must develop an ability to interpret the symbols that another person presents and to adequately present their own legible symbols. However, there is much room for error in the processes of symbolic transmission and receipt, whether messages are sent through displayed artifacts or through other forms of communication.

The mechanisms by which objects deliver private and interpersonal messages are



contested in the social sciences and other disciplines. Some scholars (e.g., Tilley 2001) write that artifacts themselves are discursive vehicles for communicating meaning – that when humans interact with objects, the objects’ formal and aesthetic qualities (the way the objects look or smell, for example) engage with internalized identities. These scholars would say that the features of objects, spaces, and landscapes relay meanings to their audience. That relay renders them powerful agents: upon being created, the inorganic thing has its own drive, its own aims to fulfill (Harris and Sørensen 2010; Hodder 2003). From the perspective of these scholars, per Ahearn’s oft-cited 2001 definition, agents need not be living entities in order to act in a socially mediated manner.

One controversial theory states that art objects have inherent agentic capabilities that emerge upon passing an aesthetic threshold of mastery. Gell (1992:44) writes:

Things have agency because they produce effects, because they make us feel happy, angry, fearful, or lustful. They have an impact, and we as artists produce them as ways of distributing elements of our own efficacy in the form of things.

I agree with Knappett (2005), who wrote that it is living human actors who interpret artifacts’ meaning, mobilize them, and otherwise operationalize their symbolic power, thereby granting them agency. As Knappett writes (2005:29): “If an artifact holds any kind of psychological presence, it is only a secondary effect of its human connection with human protagonists, the ‘real’ and primary agents.” By choosing when, whether, why, and how to interact with objects, humans, including inventors/creators, users, and interlocutors, are the sole source of material performativity.

*Semiotics: Intelligible Objects*

After householders engage in what behavioral archaeologists call the “behavioral units” of object creation, modification, selection, and display, aesthetic artifacts begin to function semiotically. They communicate information to whoever encounters them. This information can be about the object’s creator, the family that displays it, or both.

Positing that all artifacts function beyond their use values and represent something else, Roland Barthes (1957) and Jean Baudrillard (1968) showed how material culture implicitly communicates just by being tangible. Barthes (1957) elaborated on Saussure’s “object-signifier” concept. Baudrillard (1968, 1969) put forth a theory that, while objects are expendable and transient, they are also useful signifiers. Baudrillard (1994) demonstrated that artifacts are agentive in their sheer materiality and aesthetic value. They are powerful enough, he wrote, to transcend reality and travel into the symbolic and literary realms. He concluded that the design of the product and the system in which the design is embedded performs to transmit grander-scale values (Baudrillard 1994).

Marxist-leaning, Baudrillard explained the concept of subalternity<sup>1</sup> as it applies to aesthetics. He wrote that non-elite aesthetics perform to define elite aesthetics, and vice versa (1994). If non-elite people can purchase an aesthetic object (or a class of objects) and the object popularizes, the object becomes non-elite. When this happens *en masse* within a society, elitehood shifts, because the elite are only separated from the masses inasmuch as they are the “haves” and not the “have-nots.” Although the subjugation that less wealthy people experience at the hands of the wealthier classes is real, object-demarcated social stratification is tenuous, Baudrillard wrote (1994). Class and aesthetics sometimes intertwine but the relationship is unreliable.

Latour also illustrated how objects' aesthetics shape and then reflect people's lived experiences, including their struggles (1990, 2000). The extraordinarily complex shape of the Berlin Key deterred theft but primarily reflected the city's post World War II devastation, confusion, and general dysfunction. These ideas are useful because they show how some objects convey meaning through their very form or function (or, in the case of the key, absence of function). People of all classes can understand that it would take a long time to open a lock with the key and that the key is a metaphor for the city's sociopolitical climate. Latour's metaphor, however, showed how aesthetics could perform a more legible textuality that transcends class belonging instead of dividing populations.

As with Baudrillard and Latour, Gell (1992, 1998) views cultural products as tangible manifestations of an agentive society and its context, rendering the object itself agentive. Gell's theory is useful for this research because it is not time-fixed: not a snapshot in time like the Berlin Key. It contrasts with Bourdieu's structuralist, praxis-fixed approaches to class-based aesthetic systems of preference. Gell (1998:7) sees objects, particularly art objects, as agentive vehicles of action, practice, and social processes; he has defined the anthropology of art as "the theoretical study of social relations in the vicinity of objects mediating social agency."

Certain objects in the home are especially semiotically intelligible, both to the displayers and to the audience. I term particularly evocative domestic artifacts "powerful art." These are objects laden with personal meaning, embedded with memories of family members, evoking a sense of morality, and conveying a feeling of generational familial belonging (Wadler 2008). The most common example in my sample is family photographs, but powerful art encompasses the categories of "esteem objects" (trophies) and "collective objects" (indicators of belonging to a larger group, such as religious artifacts and national flags) that Riggins (1994) isolates. Other

examples I include are art that family members made, including children's art; objects that evoke memories of particularly special events or places; and most heirlooms. Powerful art tends to signify so strongly that non-family viewers have no doubt the depth of emotion that the displayer is conveying. This is not a class-based phenomenon.

### *Unintelligible Objects*

The aesthetic use of material culture is polysemic, varying through time, space, and the social role of the person perceiving or displaying the object. Everyone in a society – everyone in the world, really – has a different frame of reference. Frames of reference can be thought of as dictionaries. Who within a society has which dictionary usually depends on their earned or ascribed status. If a person is high-ranking within a society, they have a bigger dictionary – they have access to more words and concepts – than someone who is born into a less powerful position. Dictionaries contain the translations of social and cultural capital, which usually permit more access to resources. This permits the reading of more objects. However, because everyone has a different frame of reference, in keeping with the dictionary analogy, no one is reading objects exactly the same way. For these reasons some scholars would argue that objects are unintelligible.

Further, people with different positions in society, even those with comparable power, have different motivations to interpret artifacts in different ways. As Mary Douglas writes (1994:18), “the insurance agent is entitled to his definitions, so is the antique dealer.” Object interpretation is always situated within dynamic social, cultural, familial, and personal contexts. Temporal conditions are also vital to interpreting objects. Traditional archaeologists who study history or prehistory through the lens of artifacts can have a difficult time reading objects like text.

The life history of the object and resultant formal characteristics (e.g., use wear's marks versus the appeal of newness) affect how its meaning is perceived. The interpretation of an object also depends on an individual's gender: men in a given cultural context are socialized to attach different meanings to some objects than women.

Per Beaudry et al. (1996), the messages that objects convey are:

1. Subjective to the object's meaning for the family or person who acquires or displays the object
2. Plural, in that objects' meanings can be polysemic, which means that they can have public and private meanings, or that they signify more than one thing to both the person doing the acquisition or display, and to the interpreter of the object
3. Temporal, in that objects' meanings shift over time, and
4. Culturally and socially subjective, in that meaning changes depending on the larger audience.

This useful delineation of the problematic nature of the semiotics of material culture indicates that evaluating aesthetic systems is only applicable inasmuch as scholars study "the maintenance of aesthetic principles (or something like them) in the course of social interaction" (Gell 1998:4). Coote and Shelton (1992) explain that any other approach is too functionalist and acontextual; it is temporally and socio-environmentally deterministic.

### **Aesthetic Material Culture in Circulation**

#### *Agency in Selection*

Eric Wolf (1982:6) wrote that culture is not a "bounded billiard ball" but a fuzzy amorphous construct. Rather than ricocheting off one another, any groups that once may have been perceived as distinct were enmeshed. Populations and objects were always migratory, but especially recently, individual cultures have grown increasingly indistinct due to global

phenomena such as labor-based immigration and outmigration, tourism, consumerism interfaces, the Internet, and “McDonaldization” (Appadurai 1990) since aspects of culture have become more Westernized. According to Sullivan and Katz-Gerro (2007), global citizens experience a “voraciousness” to consume cultural products and information, living on Facebook, YouTube, and Tumblr; we have access to this pixilated inspiration anywhere we can reach an Internet café. Thus nearly all members of all but the least wealthy classes have unlimited access to the “highest” or “lowest” of cultural forms.

Aesthetics and cultural value are not autonomous but forever entangled (Sullivan 1995) and changing. Anthropological scholarship on the relationship between so-called “high” art and the international art market and intellectual property rights, for example, addresses these topics, and longitudinal scholarship regarding how global influences expand heterogeneity of taste (e.g., Daugavietis and Lāce [2010] on Latvian subcultures’ musical preferences). Bourdieusian theory on the topic of art and class lacks acknowledgment of historical and unfurling effects of capitalism and globalization in general. These are important influences on everyday people’s household aesthetic sensibilities and choices.

Global interchange of goods and ideas accelerates the exchange value of creativity, simultaneously facilitating the diversification of some cultural forms and the homogenization of availability of others across national borders. Someone must design original products, but a person or organization with money and decision-making control generally sponsors the designer when the artful object enters circulation. As such, powerful corporations shape what people acquire to display in their houses. Just as the upper classes have the mindfulness to be choosy when they buy art, however, non-elites are conscious and agentive as they select and display expressive culture in their homes.

When an object gains popularity, designers will mimic it and the middle class will gain access to the form. An Angeleno can find successful knock-offs in the Fashion District downtown, or a Limeño can find ones in Gamarra. Maybe the middle class does not have access to original elite styles, but many middle-class individuals are well aware of them. They are not locked into an object-mediated stratum unless it is due to choice or financial priorities.

Well-buried in *Distinction*, Bourdieu has a passage that indicates an understanding of two class-based aspects of aesthetic preference. Less wealthy individuals would probably like to have a wider array of aesthetic options from which to choose, but cannot and will not be able to, for people are class-fixed and consumer capacity is part of that, according to Bourdieu. Wealthier people are also fixed in their class stratum, but that presents them with more aesthetic options. However, the popularity of aesthetic forms is fluid, so restricted access is temporary. If class is fixed then it cannot rely on appreciation of aesthetic objects. Class is fluid, too, especially if aesthetic objects, fluid in value as they are, denote class membership.

The wealthy may use kitschy objects ironically to indicate their knowledge of less elite aesthetic forms. However, those in power still get to decide what is and is not classified as kitsch. Further, the rule of supply and demand ensures that those who are financially better off are in control of the availability of goods: they have more purchasing power (Halle 1993:193-194). The art market is indeed “skewed in favor of those who can afford to pay” (Halle 1993:194). It is doubtful, however, that the non-elite really care that the elite do or do not like their tastes.

### **Conclusion**

Ubiquitous, art objects form a vital part of what generates external perceptions of a family’s or an individual’s class belonging. However, my data indicate that acquisition, meaning,

and display of domestic aesthetic objects transcend several class variables. This may be because most objects' meanings are too subjective, temporary, and encoded to transmit reliable information about their owner. The notion of artifact "authenticity" is partially determined by people in power but is also subject to an audience experience with that object or class of objects. Thus viewers' judgments about the object and its owners' class belonging, if based solely on the objects, are usually biased and often incorrect.

The individual meanings that an object holds – the reason that the acquirer/displayer has the object – are personal to him or her and the rest of the household. These intimate sentiments are not immediately accessible to outsiders (they are at least semi-private and situated in a private place), and they are often plural (i.e., the object holds several meanings for one or more of the family members). Even if a viewer is a member of the displayer's class stratum and has a comparable cultural construction, unless she asks or is told, it is unlikely that she is able to "read" the object's value – economic, historic, or otherwise – or translate its meaning. The converse is also true. Even if a person understands an artful domestic object's value or can decode it semantically, we cannot assume shared cultural capital between the interlocutors.

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<sup>i</sup> Subalterns, in the case of material production, are at the bottom of the *chaine d' operation* (DiMaggio and Useem 1982; Gartman 1991:422; Giddens 1984; Karp 2009; Mauss 1934) and are the butt of hegemonic forces of globalization including civil and intellectual property rights robbery (García Canclini 1993; Myers 2002).



## **Chapter Four:** **Thirty-Two Middle-Class Families in Los Angeles, USA**

My overarching goal is to demonstrate how and to what degree traditional class-marking variables affect the aesthetic material culture that 48 busy dual-earner families – 32 in Los Angeles and 16 Lima, Peru – choose to display in their homes. Although all of these families are part of the broadly defined middle class, in accordance with Weberian thought I believe that class and status are multidimensional constructs, seldom reducible to quantitative variables' influences. Bourdieu, throughout his canon, discussed how capital includes social and cultural as well as economic components. I have found that the amalgamations of qualities and motivations that have inspired these families' domestic preferences are highly personalized, and I have located some patterns linking material culture and aspects of capital – especially cultural capital – that are not easily measured.

Class belonging and SES are subjective to temporally and locally situated contexts. In one place, at one time, an individual could be a member of the elite class, whereas in another part of the world, that person would be a middle-class citizen, or vice versa. Nor does SES represent an adequate justification for why people consume what they consume. Rather, family histories and experiences generate and maintain people's desire to surround themselves with specific objects that have certain performance characteristics: these transcend sheer functionality and instead stimulate the senses, evoke emotions, and trigger memories. But lives change and people consume new commodities as they become available, and preferences and possessions reflect that.

This chapter addresses the 32 Angeleno families – all of whom participated in a study by the Center on Everyday Lives of Families from 2001-2005. I describe their demographic

qualities and discuss the possible relevance of social and economic variables to the objects in their homes. The following chapter describes the CELF neighborhoods and homes and quantifies the identity-transmitting material culture therein. Subsequent chapters address the families and homes in Lima. I then turn to the meanings that family members in both cities say these objects hold for them and the aesthetic taste preferences that they developed as a result. I argue that the aesthetic material culture in these homes, and the meanings families ascribe to it, derive from the families' intimate life experiences – far more than from traditional, measurable economic factors.

### **The City of Angels**

To situate the Angeleno families, I first discuss the geographic terrain that they spend so much time navigating. Los Angeles County sprawls across Southern California, comprising beautiful valleys and deserts, high snowy mountains, and the two busiest ports in the U.S. The ports facilitate local consumers' immediate access to all imaginable household commodities, especially goods imported from Asia.

“Considering geographic spread, the city of Los Angeles’s 496 square miles exceeds but certainly does not dwarf New York City’s 303 square miles” (Halle 2003:4). Los Angeles County, however, with its 4,089 miles, encompasses “over twice as much as the combined land of New York City and the six New York/New Jersey counties that surround New York City, which together constitute 1,746 square miles” (Halle 2003:4-5). As with Lima, the region’s tectonically active and erosive mountainous terrain prevents the development of some areas. The Pacific Ocean halts westerly development while attracting tourism and immigration of people and industries.

## **Neighborhoods**

Sprawling in all directions, seemingly without a core, Los Angeles can feel disorganized. In some parts of the city, people consume conspicuously: wearing expensive clothes, driving status-symbol vehicles, and drinking lattes that cost more than what half of the world's population earns in a day. Embedded in other parts of L.A., such as East L.A. and throughout urban areas south of Downtown, rival gangs battle, selling hard drugs and defending their territory by engaging in shocking acts of violence.

Although no one seems sure of when or where she said it, Dorothy Parker once declared that Los Angeles is made up of “72 suburbs in search of a city.” Now there are 88 incorporated cities throughout Los Angeles County, each with its own mayor, city council, and laws. It is a young city – only 230 years old – and county zoning can be confusing. After a history of politicized annexations and redistricting events, middle-class population-dense sectors usually feature schools and homes alongside commercial and industrial facilities.

### *CELF Family Distribution*

All 32 families who participated in the CELF study live in Los Angeles County, many in incorporated cities within and abutting the City of Los Angeles (see Figure 4.1). Where a person lives within L.A. County is a clear class and status marker. Wealth is generally concentrated on the west side of the city, near the ocean, in parts of the San Fernando Valley, and toward the hills and mountains. Los Angeles is characterized by racialized geographic segregation and many researchers have shown how wealth coincides with whiteness of skin (e.g., Frank et al. 2007; Montgomery 2006). Nonetheless many areas of L.A., particularly squarely middle-class

neighborhoods, sometimes feature a surprising amount of demographic heterogeneity within their borders. Residents' income levels, ethnicities, and family compositions can vary significantly.

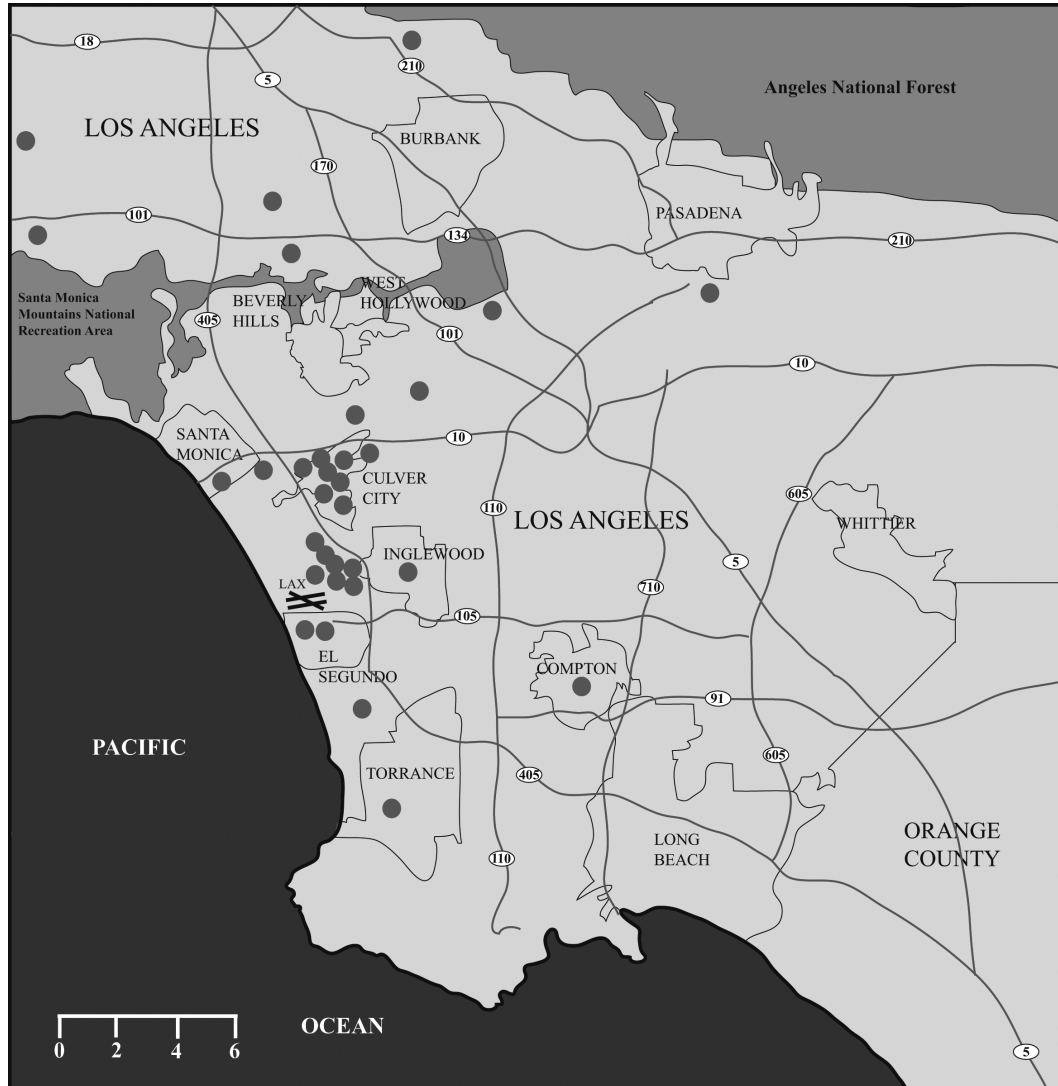


Figure 4.1. Location of Participating Families, Los Angeles (Graesch 2007:4)

That is partially because specific neighborhood boundaries in L.A. County are quite ambiguous. Their borders tend to be subjectively defined by the residents who live there (Sastry et al. 2002). This contrasts with Lima where barrio borders coincide with official voting districts.

In order to avoid researcher bias, we use family-identified neighborhood names. The neighborhoods in which these families live can be thought of as stereotypically middle class, except for a few. Family 19 lives in working-class Inglewood and Family 17 lives in the troubled incorporated town of Compton. Hancock Park, where Family 16 lives in their 1912 home, is a regal neighborhood with streets lined with old sycamore and oak trees. Seven families live in squarely middle-class Westchester, an unincorporated neighborhood of L.A. near Los Angeles International Airport.

### **Class and SES in Los Angeles**

According to uninformed outsiders peering in to the developing world, class can appear to be unambiguously dichotomous: residents either eat or they starve. In industrialized cities, class is a fuzzier notion. A broad swath of the developed world self-identifies as middle class, a very small percentage of the population enjoys great wealth, and a substantial (and growing) sector suffers poverty.

The middle class has long had a powerful foothold as a sector of the U.S. population. According to a recent Gallup poll, 47 percent of Americans classify themselves as middle class, and another 17 percent as upper-middle class (Newport 2012). In the United States, including Los Angeles, economists argue about whether the population count of the middle class is increasing, decreasing, or staying the same compared to a specified or imagined time in the past. Rhetorically it needs to be “saved.” Other economists wonder if the population should now be divided into an increasingly bipolar construct (e.g., Foster and Wolfson 2009), perceiving 1 percent of the population as having nearly all fiscal and political control, and the remaining 99 percent subservient to them.

An American person or family's class membership hinges mostly upon economic capital as revealed by their consumer purchases and privately assessed financial worth, since we are a culture of people who tend not to disclose our earnings except to government agencies and possibly pollsters. In Los Angeles, class membership tends to manifest as the vehicle a person drives, the neighborhood or type of house a person lives in, which school a person's children attend, and an individual's personal look. Class in L.A. is highly polemical and lower or working class membership can correlate with ethnic minority status and unfortunate discriminatory practices that coincide with it.

### **The Angeleno Families**

As with most nuclear middle-class families in the United States, those who participated in CELF research are no longer following a stay-at-home-mother/working father model. They are busily personifying an American lifeway that, while in many ways is normalizing, challenges them to solve increasingly complicated time-management puzzles. Parents are, consciously or not, reflecting new middle-class renditions of gendered roles and responsibilities, and they are socializing their children to recreate these norms through their performance of quotidian actions and utterances. When Angeleno family members are at their jobs or in the car transporting the kids to school or sports practice, there is strong likelihood that they are at home, not participating in after-work activities.

Contemporary middle-class American families have been socialized to aim for home ownership (Arnold and Lang 2007), but now lead what they perceive to be frantic lives in order to achieve this. They see themselves as having "heightened levels of busyness, increasingly hectic daily schedules, and an overall time deficit" (Graesch 2009:85).

### **Similarities and Differences: Economic and Cultural Capital**

While the 32 L.A. families are similar to one another in many ways, unique ethnographic, video, and photographic data provided insights about variation within the subculture of the modern, dual wage-earning, Angeleno middle class. The distinctions are reflected in the choices these families make in their homes – choices about the material culture through which they transmit their identities. Demographic information helps researchers compare and contrast the families, providing an overview of factors that may or may not help shape a family’s social and cultural capital. I found that cultural and social capital most affect a family’s interior domestic aesthetic material culture and related preferences. Applicable variables include income, occupation types, education levels, overall health, marital satisfaction, and what is probably the most important variable to determine material culture: affiliations. These include where families feel they belong ethnically, their homeland, their religion or spiritual system, and their political affinity.

#### *Income*

In order to meet everyday household needs such as paying their mortgage, buying groceries, and paying bills, in Los Angeles it is becoming increasingly necessary for both parents to bring money into the home. Decorative material culture is, of course, deprioritized if the family is not meeting basic needs. Available economic capital logically helps determine what kinds of artful commodities a middle-class family can acquire for their home and where they would shop for it, if the selection process were a priority<sup>1</sup>. Most families said they either had “considerable discretionary income” and/or “were able to deposit money into savings on a

regular basis.” They could afford to buy artistic artifacts for their homes, embark upon remodeling projects, and otherwise modify their living spaces.

The L.A. study sample is fairly homogeneous in income, lifestyle, and family composition. In 2002, 28<sup>ii</sup> of the 32 L.A. families’ combined incomes ranged from \$58,500 to \$217,000, with a mean of \$137,750 (see Figure 4.2). Women’s and men’s incomes differed predictably: men earned an average of \$68,750 annually and women \$51,778.

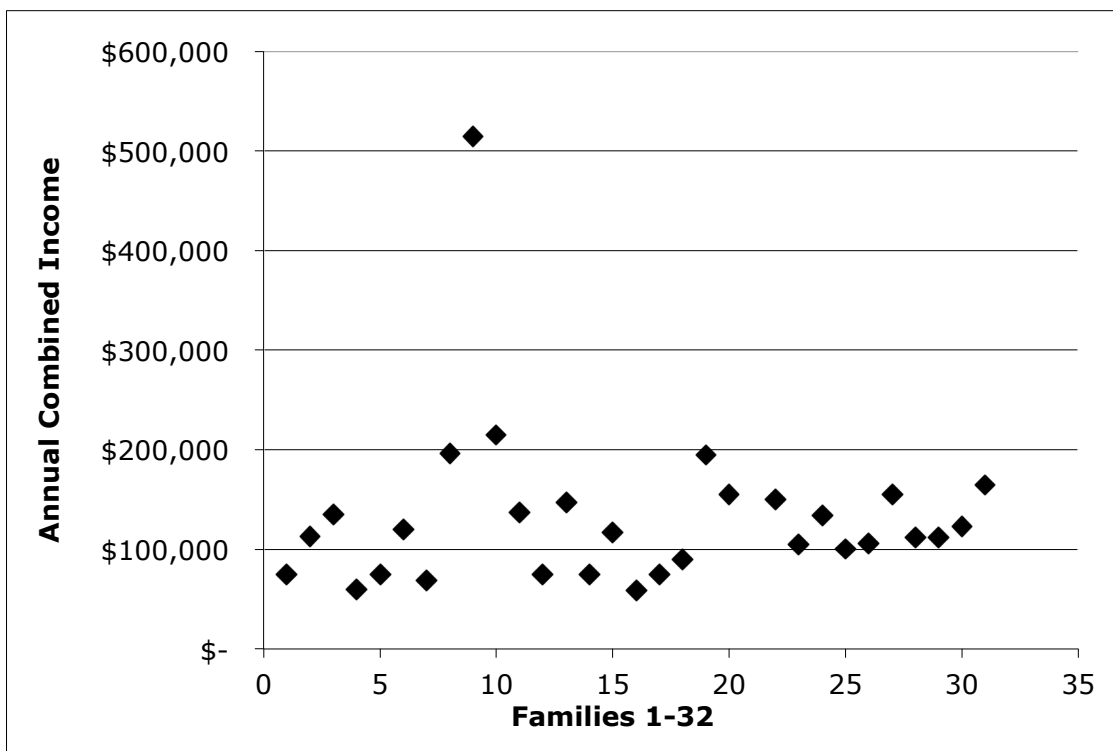


Figure 4.2. Angeleno Families’ Combined Annual Incomes (2002)

Income alone is not enough to determine people’s relative economic comfort; we must also consider expenditures (another problem with typical SES measures is that they tend not to take household or individual budgets into consideration, but only income).



### *Occupation Types*

Occupational prestige is a traditionally ranked SES measure. In this research I did not mathematically measure perceived prestige (which I believe can vary too much to be an adequate variable), the amount of time each parent had served in their position at work (which seems irrelevant to determining the rationale for or access to the material culture at home), or the amount of power or influence over others that each parent had at work. In fact, it can be discriminatory to quantify prestige, power, and influence from an anthropological perspective. A maintenance professional or a short-order cook can have as “much” cultural capital, exposure to aesthetic commodities, and masterful taste as a Hollywood set designer. Further, some family members work from home, negating the relevance of power-over-others measures.

Certain jobs imply that a person will have exposure to interesting types of aesthetic motifs and commodities. In Los Angeles, creative jobs ranging from hair styling to acting are common, as are jobs in the tourism industry. Such positions expose employees to outside aesthetic influences. I was particularly interested in the houses of parents who held creative jobs. In the Angeleno sample, a handful of parents had cultural capital-rich positions such community relations for the international airport, television producer, and airline pilot (see Table 4.1).

*Table 4.1 Angeleno Parents' Occupations*

<i>Family Number</i>	<i>Mother</i>	<i>Father</i>
1	Freelance Illustrator	TV Executive Producer
2	Family Childcare Provider	<i>ND</i>
3	Recruitment Coordinator Foster Care Agency	Legal Staffing Recruiter

4	Construction Company President	Technician for Communication Company
5	Payment Processing for Cable Channel Entertainment	Film Editor
6	Elementary School Special Ed. Aide*	President of Small Restaurant-owning Company
7	Teacher	Manager of Small Business
8	Consulting Co. District Administrator	Company Manager
9	Chair, English Dept./Teacher	Lawyer
10	Lawyer in Small Firm (Father A)	Chief of Staff for LA City Council Member (Father B)
11	Dentist (Father A)	Sales Dir. (Father B)
12	Elementary Teacher	Avionics Engineer
13	Literacy Coach/Consultant Mid. Size School	Film & TV Producer in Small Production Co.
14	Social Worker/Case Manager	Human Resources Manager
15	Accounts, Ordering, public Relations for Small Book Dist.	Marketing & Promotions Dir., Squash Coach/Teacher
16	Financial Aid Program & Public Relations at Small Private School	Attorney - Solo Practitioner
17	Clerical Assistant at Public Library	<b>ND</b>
18	Secretary at Preschool & Graphic Artist at Small Co.	Self-Employed General Building Contractor
19	Assistant Registrar at Medium-Sized School	Union Electrician
20	Community Relations for LAX	Computer Programmer

21	Ocean Lifeguard for County Youth Programs	Fire/Paramedic Captain
22	Self-employed Accountant	Manager - CPA Firm
23	Actuary/Employee Benefits Consultant	Actuarial Analyst
24	Registered Nurse	Controller for Small-Mid. Printing Company
25	Category Manager at Large Company	Construction Framing Company Foreman
26	Personal/Executive Assistant at Small Firm	Postal Service Supervisor Customer Service
27	Graduate Student Affairs Officer at Large University	Accountant
28	Accountant at Large Company	Entrepreneur
29	Acupuncture Therapist	Acupuncturist Practitioner/ Chinese Medicine (Self-Employed)
30	Hearing Officer for City Attorney Office	Owner of Small Print Shop
31	Traffic Supervisor	Deputy Sheriff
32	Information Technology Manager at Large Company	Airline Pilot

\* Moonlights as a waitress at a large franchise restaurant

### *Education*

Education is an important component of cultural and social capital. If a person is highly educated, he or she is more likely to exhibit cultural competency. While no participant in specifically mentioned formal schooling as a source of his or her aesthetic taste, aesthetic ideas may derive from books, teachers, other pupils, class material, or institutional socialization. Angeleno families in the study have education levels similar to middle-class families throughout the United States (see Figure 4.3). Women and men in the sample have similar levels of

education.

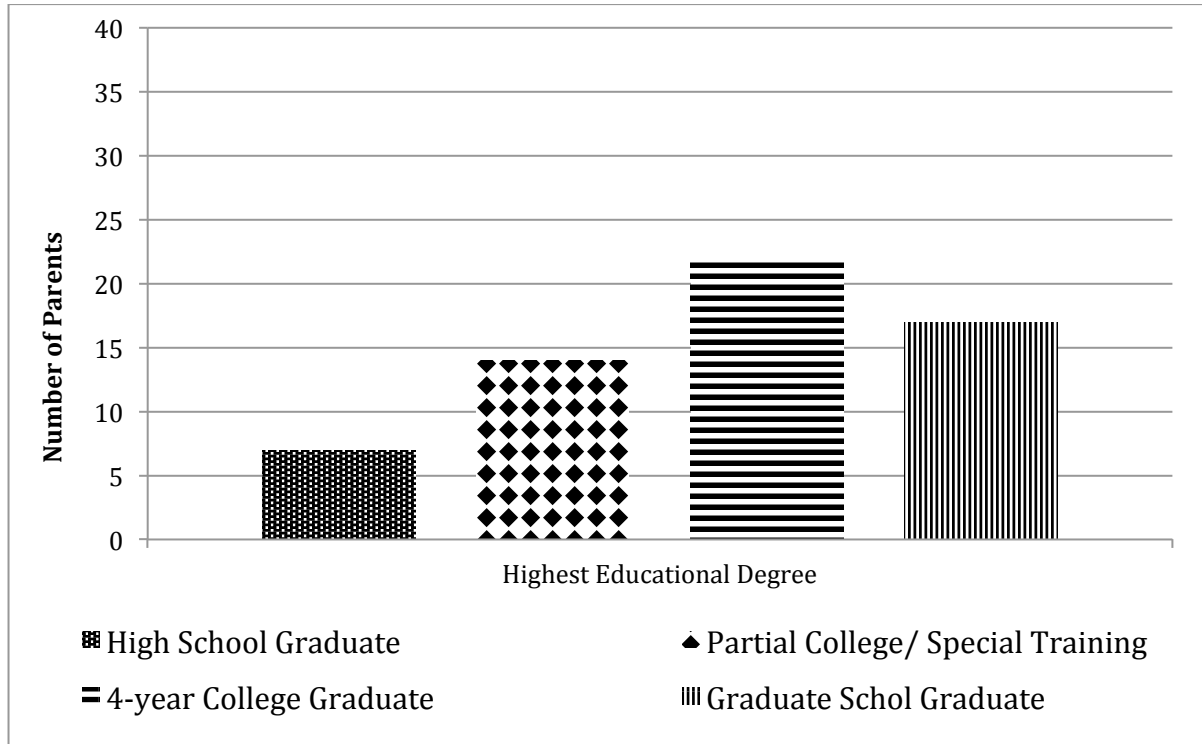


Figure 4.3. Highest Educational Degree for All Angeleno Families

We often perceive people with more education to have more social clout. I devised hypotheses, tested in the next chapter, to correlate levels of schooling and types and quantities of aesthetic material culture that families publicly display. To denote parental education levels, I simplified Hollingshead’s (1971) measure of education levels<sup>iii</sup>. I then classified each parent’s level of education, ranked from 4 (highest/graduate school) to 1 (completed high school), the baseline level of education for all participating parents.

### *Affiliation*

Goffman (1961) called the sum of a person’s possessions his or her “identity kit,” and some of those possessions, as indicated by their prominent display in a (ideally) safe and private

dwelling, say more about individuals' identities than others. The display of what I call "powerful art" indicates, for example, a family's affiliations. Family members most frequently said that they have particularly significant relationships with these types of objects, and people sometimes mentioned that they feel best in the rooms or spaces in which such objects are situated (examples are discussed in Chapter 8). I have identified four types of affiliation that most affect the display of material culture in people's homes. These are ethnic affiliation, place of origin or homeland, religious affiliation, and political affiliation.

Until 2011, Los Angeles was the most ethnically diverse city in the United States, with more than 200 languages spoken throughout the county. Late that year, Houston surpassed both New York and Los Angeles to claim that honor (Gates 2012). L.A. hosts more Koreans than anywhere outside of Seoul. China Town thrives alongside many other ethnic districts such as Little Tokyo, Thai Town, and Taiwanese Town. Ethnically, while the families who participated in the CELF study are not a perfect statistical representation of Los Angeles, the sample incorporates people from many backgrounds (see Figures 4.4 and 4.5).

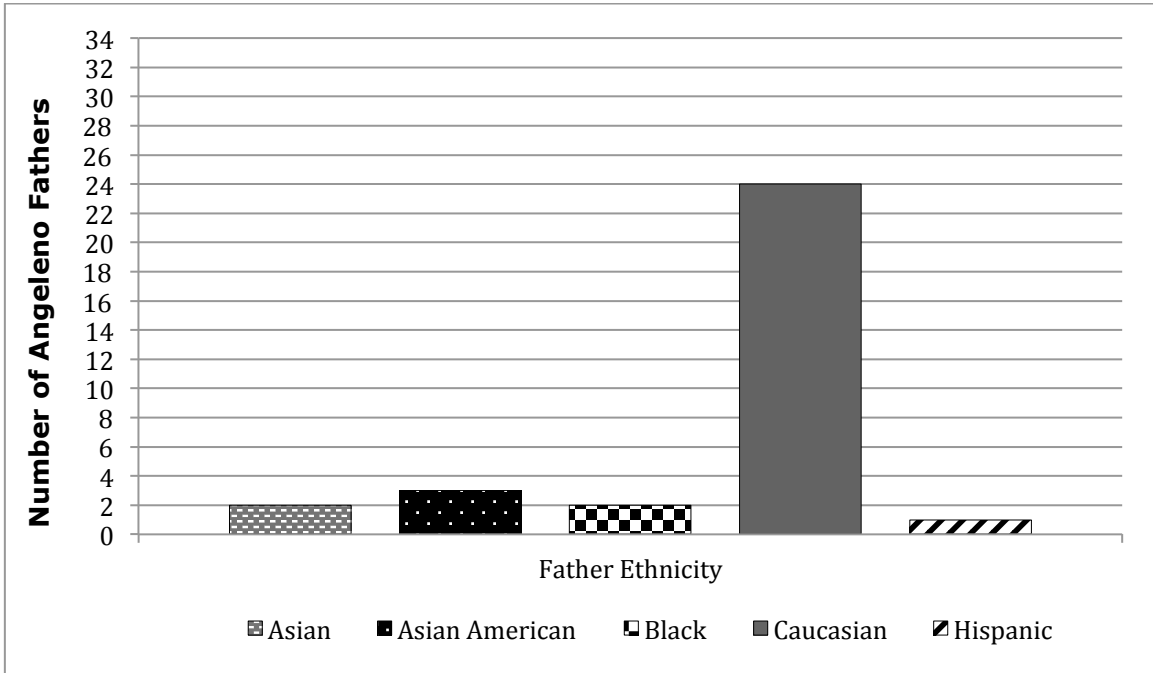


Figure 4.4. Number of Angeleno Fathers in Defined Ethnic Categories

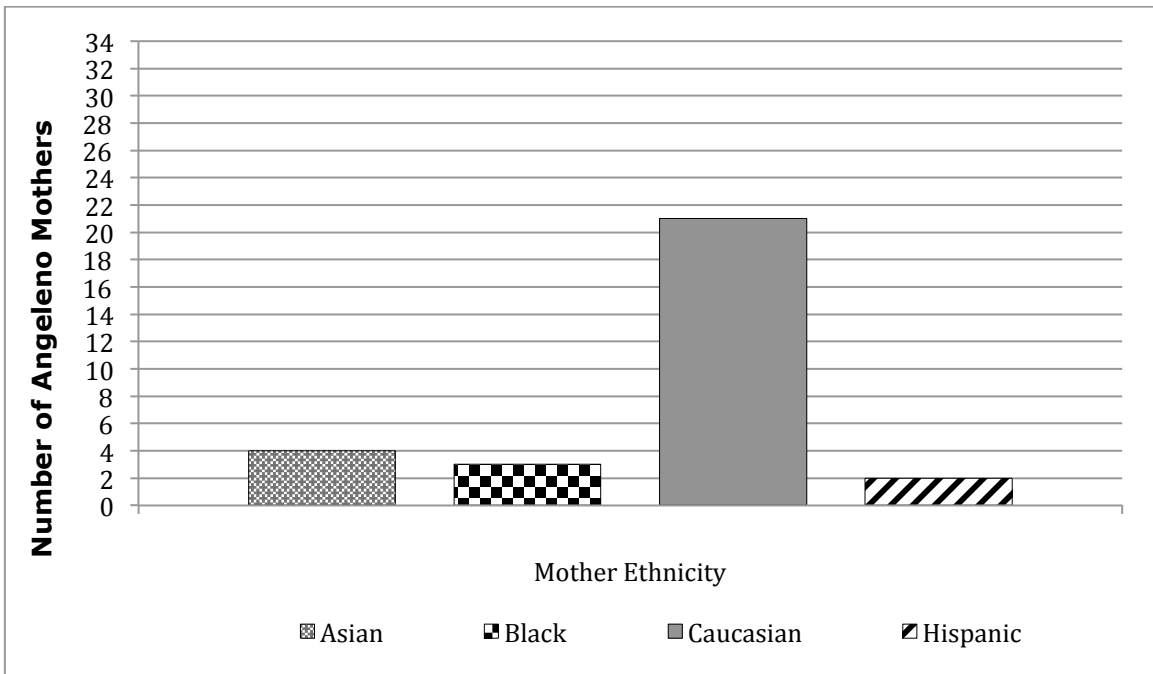
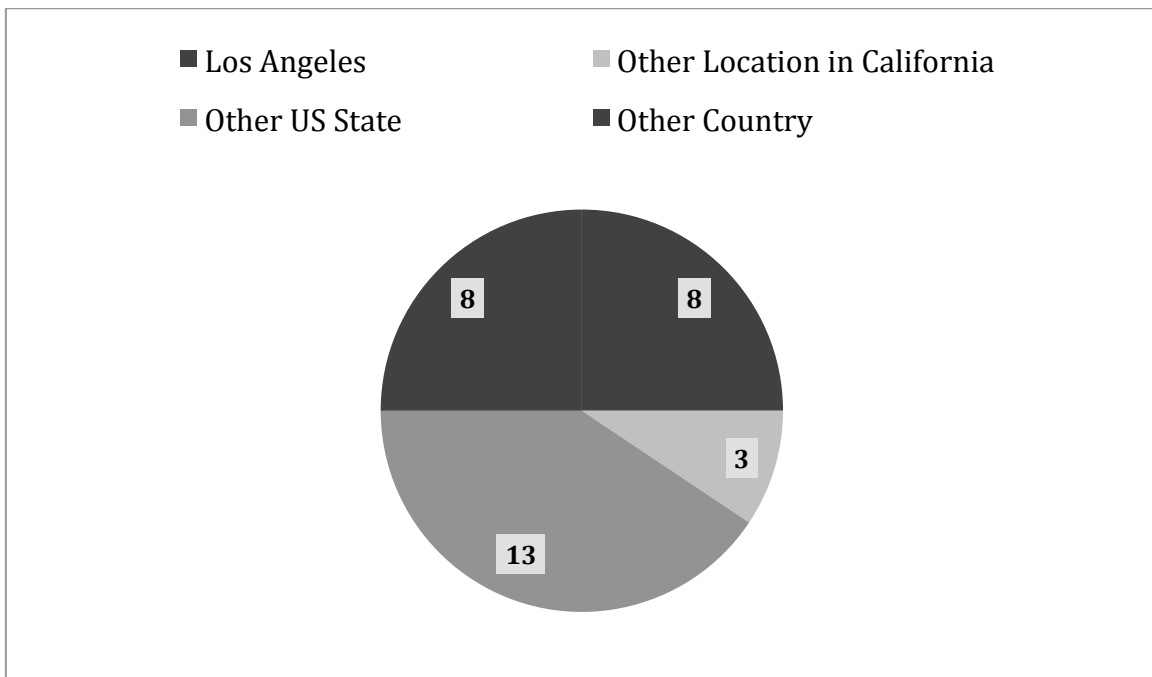
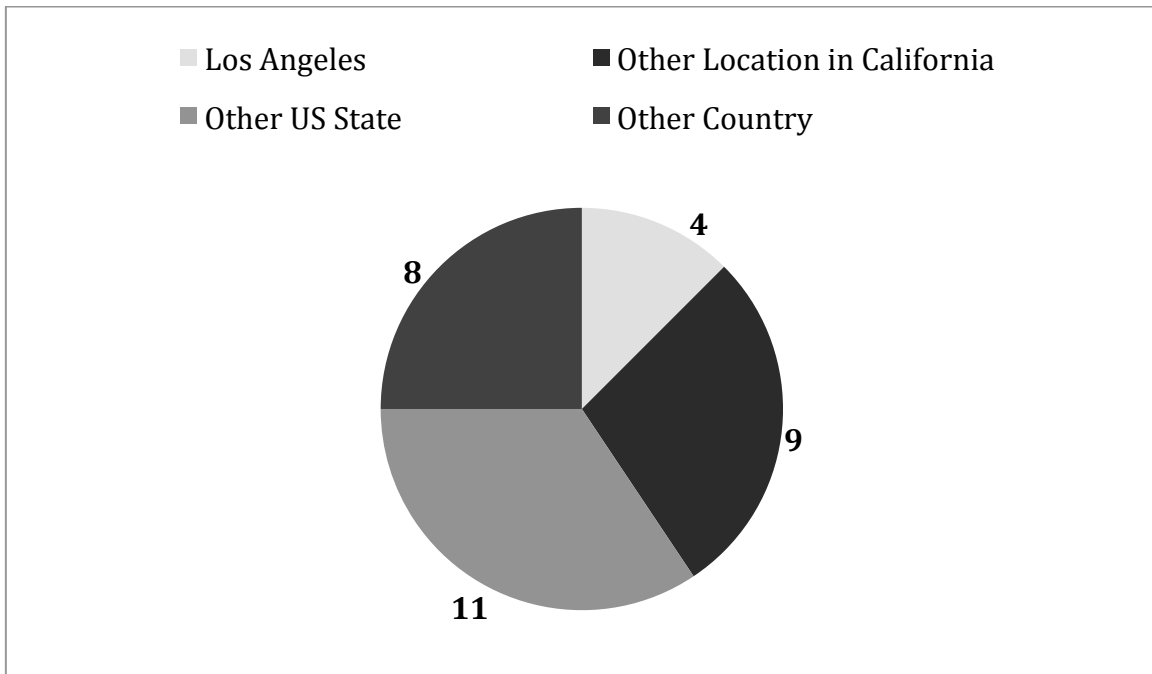


Figure 4.5 Number of Angeleno Mothers in Defined Ethnic Categories

Meaningful objects come to represent extensions of our self, our past, and the people, ideals, and places we hope to keep nearby even as we migrate from residence to residence (Metha and Belk 1991; Pieris 2002). Family members' homeland or place of origin can have as strong an effect on taste as self-identified ethnicity. Los Angeles is traditionally a host to migrants and the CELF sample reflects that (see Figure 4.6 and Figure 4.7). Parents immigrated from as far away as India and Bosnia; foreign-born and foreign-raised parents' domestic material culture has a strong tendency to reflect their place of origin.



*Figure 4.6 Number of Angeleno Fathers Born in and Outside of Los Angeles*



*Figure 4.7 Number of Angeleno Mothers Born in and Outside of Los Angeles*

Religious and political affiliations also strongly influence the visible way that families choose to keep their homes, and Hart (2009) found that in Chicago, some Jewish American and African American people completely dismissed the economic worth of certain costly historical religious material culture and perceived it instead as priceless: integral to who they were as people.

### *Overall Health*

On average both mothers and fathers in the L.A. study rated their health as “excellent” or “very good” (see Figures 4.8 and 4.9), and most parents classified themselves as happy. This is relevant because if parents or children are not healthy then aesthetic purchases or modifications are not likely to be prioritized.





Figure 4.8 Number of Angeleno Fathers in Defined Health Categories

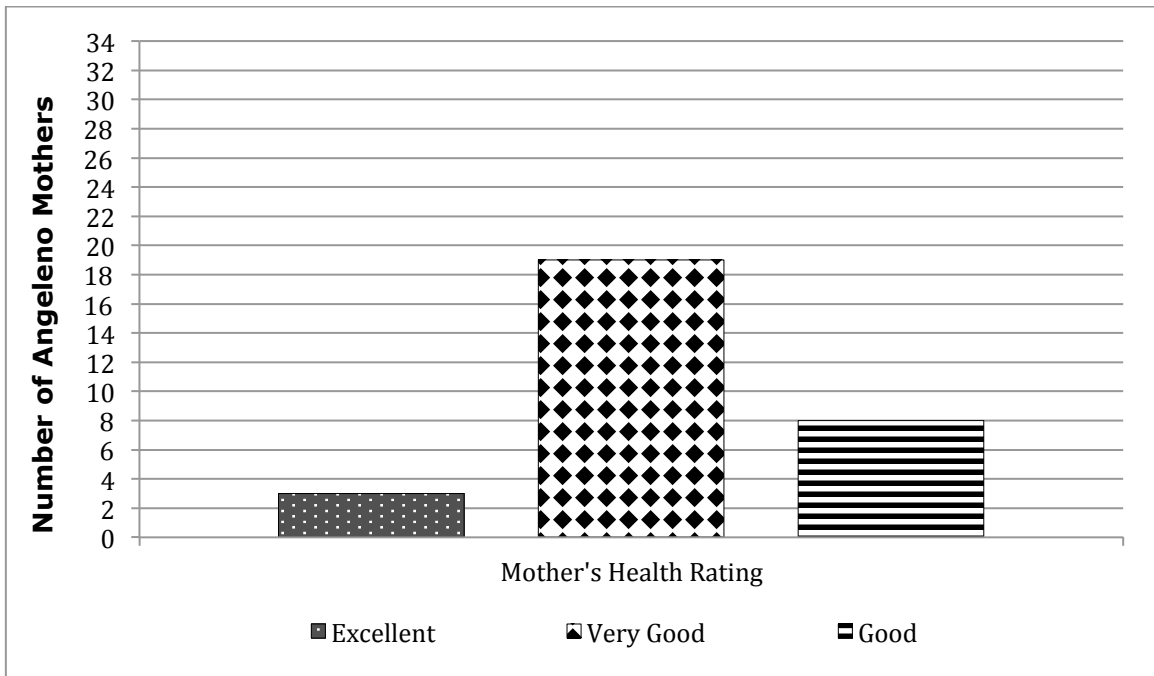


Figure 4.9 Number of Angeleno Mothers in Defined Health Categories

### *Marital Adjustment Scale*

If the time spouses spend together is both frequent and happy, taste and material culture might be affected. I tested the idea that dissatisfied married couples may not enhance their homes aesthetically as much as satisfied couples, and they might have more objects lying about than satisfied couples. CELF researchers assessed MAT using the Locke-Wallace Marital Adjustment Scale (1959). The MAT is a widely used instrument that researchers employ to identify satisfied and dissatisfied couples, and it has been found to have split-half reliability of .90. Higher scores on the MAT are associated with better marital quality. Average scores are around 115. Scores below 100 indicate some distress in the marriage. Scores below 70 indicate severe distress.

CELF researchers asked each spouse about agreements and disagreements with their partners in a variety of areas, such as handling finances, sex relations, in-laws, and disagreements. In the full CELF sample of 34 men and 30 women, scores indicated average levels of marital satisfaction. Of note, 19 of the 64 participants scored below 100 on the MAT, indicating that about a third of the study sample was experiencing a range of some distress to severe distress in their marriages.

### **Busyness as a Variable**

One aspect that may differentiate Angelenos from residents of many other cities, and that rendered the CELF study particularly important to conduct in L.A., is that dual-earner middle-class families there are exceptionally busy. Angelenos commute for a significant portion of the day, and children often attend schools and participate in activities particularly far from home. Angeleno families tend to travel in private vehicles, so family time often occurs in the car. Parents also tend to work while they are at home (40 percent of mothers work 1 to 5 hours during

weeknights).

Families do not have much time to spend on decorating. Busyness may prevent families' connected orientation toward aesthetic-related acts and sensibilities: manifestations of shared social behavior (Weber 1997) as expressed through aesthetic object displays in the home. Children perform very few chores in the home (Klein et al. 2008), which probably took time away from extraneous household activities. The majority – 79 percent – of parents report that they do not employ a nanny; some had a part-time housekeeper<sup>iv</sup>. This contrasts with middle-class families' historic and contemporary behavior in major cities including L.A., where domestic laborers, especially female migrants, work inexpensively (Meyer 1987; Salazar Parreñas 2000; Thornton Dill 1994). This is a pertinent factor because a domestic worker living in a middle-class home wherein parents are often not present could influence aesthetic decisions or free time for family members to decorate.

Although the relations of the people living together in a house are ever shifting and unbalanced, household activities, including aesthetic tasks, are at the heart of social reproduction and family solidarity. Maintenance activities (Coltrane 2000; Putnam 2006) and aesthetic personalization (Arnold et. al 2012) can help make a house a home, even for the busiest families, if they choose to prioritize these activities. For example, middle-class families might embark upon do-it-yourself projects that can serve as a memory that will solidify their unity. Many families in the Los Angeles sample make personalized labels for the doors to children's bedrooms (Arnold et. al 2012:155), demarcating for the child an individualized “mine” niche within the larger context of “ours.” In such personalized arenas, family members can use aesthetic choices such as color and light levels to escape from the buzz of the external world.

Los Angeles home interiors look different from one another. Parents have, over the history

of their union, forged a distinct aesthetic identity manifest in their domestic material culture. There are, however, commonalities among middle-class dual-earners with busy lifestyles. Family members spend more time, according to scan-sampling data, participating in leisure activities at home than in any other activity (Beck and Arnold 2009; Broege et al. 2007; Graesch 2009). Still, mothers in particular have little leisure time at home.

Resultant domestic “time crunch” emerges in a division of use of domestic space. After dinner, for example, fathers often head to a part of the house that is their own (now popularly termed a “man cave”). Children retire to their bedrooms or to the family room to watch television (assuming they do not have their own TV in their bedroom), and women go ... clean. The aesthetic traits that middle-class North American mothers usually desire, according to Munro and Madigan (2006:116), are those which are socially expected of them: a clean and welcoming home. Demands for householders’ time come from all angles of their busy lives: the workplace, the family, and extracurricular activities. The demands materialize in the aesthetics and spatial arrangements of the house. Because middle-class dual-earner families are stretched so thin, the continuity of the household aesthetic – however unified householders might like it to be – can break and leave them wanting.

### **Social Networks**

Most scholars find social networks to be a main source of aesthetic inspiration and creativity (Bourdieu 1984a, b; Hallam and Hockey 2001; cf. Perry-Smith and Shalley 2003), because as a collective the people with whom a person relates constitute the culture that in turn provides ideas as well as objects that families use to decorate their homes. Because displayed material culture is a primary vehicle by which people transmit identity information to guests, if

there are few guests, then material culture displays, along with the general condition of the interior of the house, may become quietly deprioritized. However, although families have few houseguests, an inherent aestheticization expectation appears to linger.

North Americans and residents of other industrialized nations seem to be increasingly deprioritizing extra-familial social interactions and tend to live far away from their kin. Many move out of their parents' homes well before they marry. In the United States, most adult social interaction takes place in the workplace (Putnam 1995). Children's non-sibling dealings occur primarily at school, although parents do spend much of their weekend and after-school time transporting them to and from extracurricular activities such as gymnastics class and soccer practice. Increasing the children's social network may be a primary reason that Angeleno parents do this; playing in the streets is no longer a safe alternative for city kids.

Table 4.2 shows the number of individuals that visit the inside or outside of each Angeleno family's home at least weekly. The data derive from social network questionnaires that each parent filled out. Families' contacts include community members such as delivery people, nannies, gardeners, the mail and newspaper carriers, carpool members, relatives, neighbors, and friends. These people may never see inside the family's home and may be unaware of aesthetic tastes and material culture displays therein. It is unclear what how many of the visitors have seen the families' home interior and have interacted with the material culture therein. Considering how house-based social exchanges, which, as so many anthropologists and ethnoarchaeologists have noted (e.g., Allison 1999; Blanton 1994; Vom Bruck 1997) facilitate and situate cultural norms and cohesion, the number of personal interactions in and around the contemporary middle-class Angeleno home seems small.

These data reveal no apparent relationship between each family’s number of visitors and their class as defined by wealth. The highest-income family (Family 10) does not report the most household visitors (which may be a measure of social capital, or human resources upon which the family might draw), and the lowest-income family (Family 17) does not have the fewest visitors. However, hosting guests – sheltering the epicenter of the bustling practices of everyday cultural life – may no longer be a complete or adequate measure of a family’s social capital because so many worldwide communications now occur via telephone or the Internet. This precludes the previously necessary situatedness and materiality of homes for transmission of ideas and maintenance of habitus. Angeleno parents’ questionnaires indicate that telephone calls, emails, and instant messages are indeed very common ways by which they communicate and maintain relationships with contacts, whether they are friends, relatives, hired helpers, or coworkers<sup>v</sup>. Identity transmission that once took place via domestic displays and material embodiment of meaning is taking on new relevancy.

*Table 4.2. Weekly Visitors to the Los Angeles Families’ Homes*

<b>Participant Identification</b>	<b>Number of Contacts That See Family Homes Weekly or More Often</b>
Family 1	22*
Family 2	11*
Family 3	16
Family 4	15
Family 5	5
Family 6	15
Family 7	7

Family 8	11
Family 9	12
Family 10	8
Family 11	18
Family 12	18
Family 13	19
Family 14	8
Family 15	9
Family 16	10
Family 17	8
Family 18	9
Family 19	13
Family 20	13
Family 21	6
Family 22	5
Family 23	30**
Family 24	21
Family 25	12
Family 26	11
Family 27	17
Family 28	11
Family 29	20
Family 30	14

Family 31	13
Family 32	3

\* These families filled out different questionnaires than subsequent families. The number indicates all social contacts that Angeleno parents see face-to-face at least weekly. Some of these meetings probably took place in the home.

\*\* This family hosts a weekly Chinese study group and its attendance varies; this number is an estimate.

### Summary

A suite of demographic variables that researchers traditionally combine to assess class standing, in combination with beliefs, affiliations, and social behaviors, contribute to shape household aesthetic decisions. But the degree to which each of these variables affect choices is difficult to measure. The number and type of displayed artful objects, their arrangement, as well as spatial motifs helps define the household aesthetic. The effect is a product of intentional acquisition in combination with less-than-intentional haphazard accumulation.

The families who participated in this study also share many attributes including overall busyness. They tend to be healthy overall, and relatively happily married, though there are distinct exceptions to this. They tend to enjoy few adult friendships. They identify as members of the American middle class, as does the majority of the country's population, and they share many middle-class attributes, such as education and income levels (adjusting for cost of living).

However, the 32 families are ethnically diverse, reflective, if not perfectly representative of, the city in which they reside. Each family and individual therein has had a wide variety of life experiences and probably has different reasons for being in Los Angeles. They have different types of jobs and varying levels of interest and expertise with regard to decorating their home and shopping for art. I reemphasize this profound qualitative heterogeneity because the interiorscapes of the families' homes reflect it. Although the families do not appear to spend much time shopping for artistic objects or consciously modifying their homes in aesthetic ways,



the objects in the houses reflect the families' diverse tastes, cosmologies, emotions, and memories. In seeking the sources of this variability, in the next chapter I quantitatively demonstrate that traditionally *class*-denoting variables do not correlate with aesthetic typological differences across houses.

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<sup>i</sup> Although income and original art did not have a statistical relationship in the sample of Angeleno households, it could be due to the small sample size.

<sup>ii</sup> Two families did not provide income data.

<sup>iii</sup> Hollingshead ranks education levels from 1-7.

<sup>iv</sup> It is unclear how frequently housekeepers and nannies came to the Angeleno families' homes.

<sup>v</sup> At the time of filming, texting and Internet-based social networking sites were not as popular as they are now.



## **Chapter Five:**

### **Angeleno Houses and Domestic Aesthetic Artifacts**

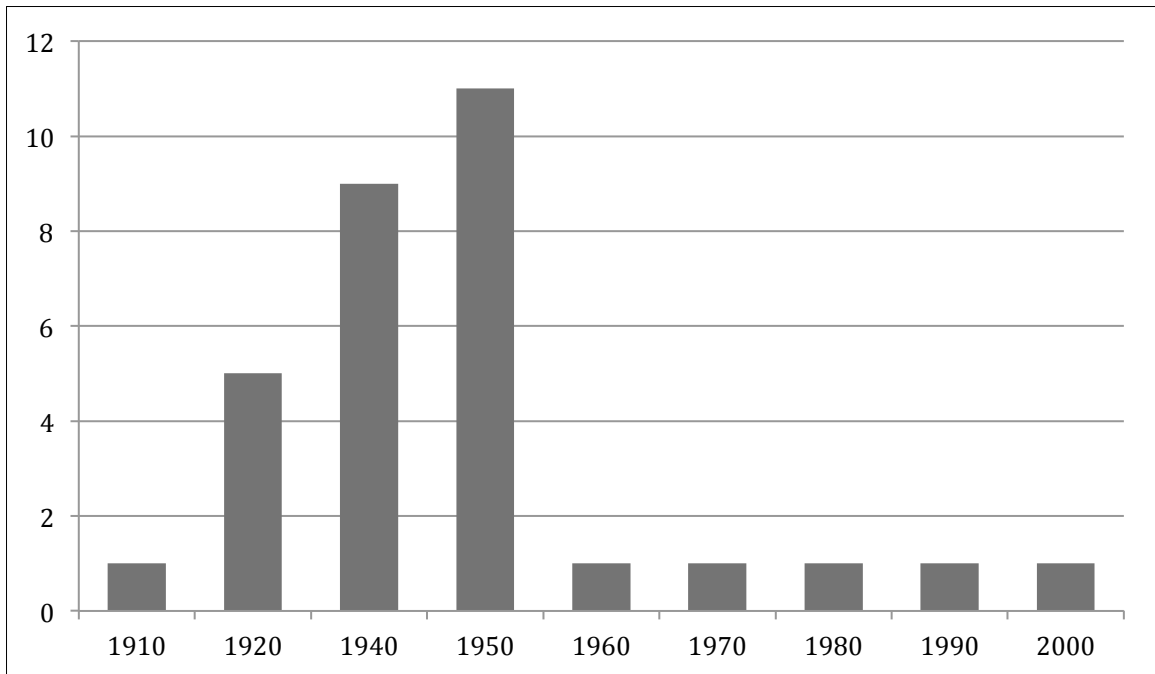
Metropolitan Los Angeles is a tapestry of residential streetscapes so varied that when driving through a neighborhood it can seem as if a giant plucked houses from other eras and distant parts of the world, rolled them like die, and celebrated a large straight as they landed next door to one another on the same street. In any middle-class neighborhood, for example, a 1920s Mock Tudor home might be situated adjacent to a 1950s ranch-style dwelling that sits next to a mid-century modern apartment building. The interiors of the homes are as diverse as the exteriors, both architecturally and decoratively. In this chapter, I present the aesthetic objects in the four most “public” rooms of the 32 Angeleno homes, and demonstrate their relationship to the middle-class study sample, focusing on quantity of objects, quantity of original art pieces, density of art, and household income variance.

#### *Overview of Home Ownership*

Middle-class Americans have come to understand that in order to be considered valid social members with what Dupuis and Thorns (2002) call a sense of “ontological security,” they must achieve homeownership. Middle-class Americans strive for this ideal even in expensive cities like L.A., where owning a house is an increasingly difficult goal for most people to reach. After making the initial down payment, homeowners must keep up with mortgage payments as well as continual maintenance. That requires money and time that busy dual wage-earner families are often pressed to find. As average house sizes increase, they require still more upkeep. Tasks of quotidian domestic upkeep still usually fall to women, as many researchers

note (e.g., Coltrane 2000; Pink 2004; Shelton 1996; Straight 2005). Thus, women are working increased hours in the home in addition to fulfilling the role of a full-time breadwinner outside of the home.

Attributes such as the size, appearance, form, and site of a family's home reflect a series of choices the owners have made that manifest in this epitomic example of "inalienable wealth" (Weiner 1985). Domestic architecture is "a highly visible means of signaling wealth and status" (Graesch 2007:44), and the choices that families make are imbued with a range of cultural values. Some families who have the same income as others in the sample may take a luxury-based approach to home ownership, prioritizing the ownership of a spacious home with expensive fixtures, while others are more pragmatic, as indicated by the fact that "some of the smallest houses are owned by some of the least wealthy households in the least affluent neighborhoods" (Graesch 2007:44). Homes in the CELF sample were constructed during a range of decades (see Figure 5.1), often contributing to the assortment of house layouts in the sample and required levels of maintenance.



*Figure 5.1. Decade of Angeleno home construction.*

Per Arnold and Lang (2007), Angeleno consumers prefer that their single-family dwelling have at least a small, private yard. Although Arnold and Lang (2007) found that CELF participants seldom spend leisure time in their yard, the desire to be surrounded by green space reflects, I think, the individualistic and privacy-centered standards of this generation of Angelenos.

### **Inside**

Excluding garages and other unheated spaces, the homes range in square footage from 3850 ft<sup>2</sup> (belonging to the family with the highest salary) to 735 ft<sup>2</sup> (the lowest salaried family's house) (Graesch 2007), with a mean of approximately 1725 ft<sup>2</sup> (Table 5.1). None of the homes in the sample would be considered unconventional to an American. They all feature the usual

fixtures of room-dividing walls; standard furniture such as beds, tables, and chairs; and appliances such as televisions and refrigerators.

Contents of a home depend on the composition of the resident family. Families with young children, like those in this sample, are likely to own more objects of a wide range of types compared to households without children (Schiffer 2011), because kids need toys and technological devices like computers so they can complete their homework. Among the middle-class majority, American children receive countless such objects, especially for birthdays and other holidays. These gifts often include objects to make children’s art, a category of aesthetic material culture that I attend to in this research.

*Table 5.1. Angeleno Family Home Sizes (Graesch 2007)*

<b>Family Number</b>	<b>House Area (ft<sup>2</sup>)</b>	<b>Estimated Area of Public Rooms (ft<sup>2</sup>)</b>
1	980	245
2	1374	515
3	1520	608
4	3055	764
5	745	248
6	1050	315
7	880	352
8	1736	434
9	1455	582
10	3850	1733

11	2035	1018
12	1340	440
13	1950	975
14	2095	524
15	1690	784
16	1915	632
17	735	257
18	2030	670
19	1105	442
20	2060	515
21	2925	731
22	1185	415
23	2290	916
24	1500	450
25	1985	496
26	1625	406
27	980	313
28	2190	547
29	1355	243
30	1291	516
31	1970	650
32	1005	503

## Material Culture Typology

In the sample of 32 L.A. households, I located 14 classes of primarily aesthetic domestic objects (Table 5.2).

*Table 5.2. Aesthetic Material Culture Assemblage in Los Angeles Homes*

<b>Artifact Type Number Code</b>	<b>Artifact Category</b>	<b>Description/Examples</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Approximate Percentage of Sample</b>
1	Original wall art	Paintings, lithographs	87	5
2	Mass-produced wall art	Posters, framed or unframed	66	5
3	Other types of wall art	Plaques	55	3
4	Kids' art	Drawings or sculptures	68	4
5	Figurines	Anthropomorphic or animal representations	139	8
6	Vessels	Baskets, pots – aesthetic, not for holding other artifacts	213	12.5
7	Other three-dimensional artifacts	Non-anthropomorphic, non-vessel sculptures	337	19.5
8	Natural aesthetic artifacts	Plants, aquariums	145	8
9	Floor treatments	Rugs, inlays	45	2.5
10	Wall treatments	Non-white or beige paint	29	1.5
11	Trophies	Trophies, tiaras	12	1
12	Family photographs	School, team, pet photos	496	28.5
13	Religious artifacts (not 2-D)	Menorahs, crosses	32*	1
14	Other aesthetic artifacts	Stained glass windows	6	.5
			<b>TOTAL: 1,730</b>	<b>100</b>

*\*Twenty-seven three-dimensional saint-like figurines were displayed in a cluster on a surface in Family 27's living room. They may have been part of a nativity set and only displayed during holiday seasons.*



These categories refined categories that Arnold and I developed during my preliminary analyses of these data in 2007. I used the CELF Digital Archive high-resolution photographs and video to analyze the objects. The coded photographic archive describes and codes every object in every family's home, which I cross-referenced. Moreover, family members often commented about specific objects during filming, which yielded rich data and helped to definitively categorize particular forms.

### *Category Descriptors*

Certain art objects and aesthetics speak of “high” or “low” class membership (e.g., Kopytoff 1988; Marcus and Myers 1995; McCracken 1988; Myers 2002), and when they are displayed in a home, especially in concentration, a message is sent to visitors that the homeowners have some cultural wherewithal. The majority of members of the culture, regardless of class positioning, can read these messages, because there is an inherent beauty or at least fine quality to expensive handmade art objects. However, art objects move in and out of a state of commodifiability (Appadurai 1986; Kopytoff 1988) and thus readability. Status-laden significance and value are contextual – and meaning is subjective to the family who possesses and displays the art (Mills 2004). Many art pieces are to the family “inalienable” (Weiner 1992) but they may be meaningless to outsiders.

Thus the authenticity of aesthetic artifacts – a construct that is often synonymous with “finess” – must also be culturally construed (Attfield 2000:xi). I hesitate to classify art as “fine” because regimes of value are also subjective to the setting, consumer, and displayer. Most anthropologists who study authenticity and art agree upon the universal existence of aesthetic systems, but not upon a sense of what is beautiful (Layton 1981; Coote and Shelton 1992:7). A

dichotomy of high or fine versus low art is false, socially constructed, and often more than a little hegemonic. Instead, I classify two-dimensional art as either original or mass-produced, focusing not on quality but on production rate.

Mass-produced art includes unframed, thumbtacked posters, inexpensively framed prints, and sculptures available from sources such as franchise stores. Coding two-dimensional original art is more difficult, as even in CELF's high-resolution photographs, signatures are difficult to see (signatures and series numbers indicate limited edition handcrafted pieces). Generally I also judge limited production and cost by frame quality. It was sometimes easier for me to determine whether ceramic pots and sculptures and blown glass pieces were mass-produced than it was for me to determine the originality of wall-hung art, even though I could seldom see signatures on the former.

I count original framed photography as original art and do not make a separate category, concurring with DiMaggio (1991) who writes that the increased availability and decreased cost of such technologies and formats as photography have reduced the traditional distance between the elite and the upper middle-class art consumer. (Consider the rampant use of cell phone photography technology both in the U.S. and Peru: even the least wealthy art consumers and producers can generate and display mass quantities of beautiful one-of-a-kind images for the home.) Family photos and children's art constitute their own categories. Kids' art has a strong, if nuanced, effect on the transmission of identity in a home. Plants, aquariums, and floor treatments are also in their own categories.

## **Hypotheses**

A primary goal of this research is to determine the relationships between types and quantities of art in the homes of middle-class families, and families' class belonging (in this case, using income as a class determinant). Thus I devised three hypotheses that seem most useful for quantitatively exploring these ideas, to complement qualitative findings. My hypotheses are largely inductive and relate to combined household income and its relationship to art in the home. I consider the household as the unit of analysis.

**Hypothesis 1:** Economically wealthier families (as defined by combined incomes) will place more decorative objects in the house's public rooms than will those with lower incomes.

**Hypothesis 2:** Economically wealthier families will have a higher number of pieces of original art in the house's public rooms than lower-income families.

**Hypothesis 3:** Economically wealthier families will have less densely decorated public rooms.

I tested the overarching assumption that wealthier families have better taste as indicated by the "fineness" of art that they display: wealthier people would have more original art. I propose, however, that economically wealthier families place fewer total aesthetic objects in the four "public" rooms, so these families' rooms are sparser and less "jumbled" looking. This would make wealthier people's homes more "artful," possibly evoking the sense of an art gallery. Therefore more income is associated with overall fewer but finer pieces, and more income will mean sparser decoration in a given space (the four public rooms). Below, I test each of these hypotheses individually.

## **Methods**

I counted all objects I considered to be primarily aesthetic in each of the pertinent rooms, and categorized the objects into 14 types (Table 5.2) finding a total of 1,730, and a mean of 54.06 per house. I coded each of the objects into one of five positions (1 = on a wall; 2 = on the surface of a less aesthetic object; 3 = on the floor; 4 = hanging from the ceiling; 5 = other, such as adhered to a window pane). I also use the square footage of each home's public rooms (living room, family room/den, dining room/eating area, and foyer/entryway) in order to calculate object density

*Table 5.3. Variables Used to Determine Relationships between Aesthetics and Income: Los Angeles.*

<b>Family Number</b>	<b>Combined Annual Household Income (dollars)</b>	<b>Number of Aesthetic Objects – Public Rooms</b>	<b>Number of Pieces of Original Art – Public Rooms</b>	<b>Density of Art Per Square Foot – Public Rooms</b>
1	No Data	51	1	.21
2	107,500	35	1	.37
3	80,500	40	10	.07
4	135,000	50	1	.07
5	60,000	27	2	.109
6	75,000	105	6	.33
7	119,500	32	0	.09
8	69,000	53	0	.12
9	196,000	33	1	.06
10	515,000	31	6	.02

11	215,000	60	6	.06
12	137,000	45	5	.10
13	75,000	162	5	.17
14	147,500	51	3	.1
15	74,500	45	1	.06
16	117,000	71	4	.11
17	58,500	24	0	.01
18	74,500	57	1	.09
19	90,000	29	1	.07
20	195,000	80	2	.16
21	155,000	42	0	.06
22	No Data	25	0	.06
23	150,000	105	5	.12
24	105,000	70	0	.16
25	134,000	65	2	.13
26	100,500	28	5	.07
27	106,000	86	9	.28
28	155,000	111	4	.2
29	112,000	15	1	.06
30	112,000	5	1	.08
31	123,000	42	1	.01
32	165,000	55	1	.11

Table 5.4. Rank Order of Variables Determining Analysis Results: Los Angeles.

Rank: Family Income*	Rank: # of Art in Public Rooms	Rank: Family Income*	Rank: # of Original Art in Public Rooms	Rank: Family Income*	Rank: Density of Art in Public Rooms
1	24	1	4	1	29
2	10	2	4	2	25
3	22	3	20.5	3	27
4	6	4	14	4	6.5
5	12	5	20.5	5	12.5
6.5	2	6.5	10.5	6.5	4
6.5	18.5	6.5	28	6.5	27
8	3.5	8	7.5	8	10
9	14	9	12	9	15
10	16.5	10	7.5	10	14
11	15	11	20.5	11	23
12	9	12	14	12	8
13	30	13	20.5	13	30
14	23	14	28	14	17
15	7	15	10.5	15	11
16.5	18.5	16.5	20.5	16.5	19
16.5	29	16.5	20.5	16.5	24
18	21	18	20.5	18	1
19	5	19	2	19	3
20	8	20	28	20	6.5
21	26	21	7.5	21	20
22	25	22	20.5	22	21.5
23	20	23	1	23	21.5
24.5	1	24.5	7.5	24.5	2
24.5	3.5	24.5	4	24.5	5
26.5	11	26.5	20.5	26.5	18
26.5	16.5	26.5	20.5	26.5	27
28	13	28	28	28	9
29	27	29	14	29	12.5
30	28	30	28	30	16

\* Two families did not provide income data.

### *Placement: Rooms and Surfaces*

The 32 living rooms have the most objects (n=981; mean=30.7); then the 18 family rooms/dens (n=345; mean=19.2); then the 26 eating areas (n=332; mean=12.77); and finally the 12 entryways/foyers (n=32; mean=2.67).

In keeping with the fact that vessels and figurines dominate numerically in the sample (and many family photographs are in frames on tabletops and shelves), the majority of aesthetic objects are located on surfaces (n=1,165; mean=36.4 per house). Smaller numbers of objects are affixed to walls (n=389; mean=12.15 per house); then on floors (n=118; mean=2.18 per house); then positioned elsewhere in the room, such as adhered to a window pane (n=30; mean=.094 per house). The least common placement of aesthetic material culture is hanging from ceilings (n=28; mean=.088 per house).

### **Analysis Results**

I used SPSS (statistical software for social sciences) to determine Spearman's rank correlation coefficients of the variables pertinent to my hypotheses (Table 5.3 delineates variables for all families). Testing each of the hypotheses illustrated emergent patterns of either moderate (weak) or no significance. The single moderately significant correlation relates to density and combined household income.

### *Total Art and Household Income: Hypothesis One*

My first hypothesis, that economically wealthier families will have a higher number of art pieces in the house's public rooms than lower-income families, is not substantiated. Those variables are not significantly correlated. Spearman's correlation coefficient ( $\rho$ ) is .15. The range in the number of art pieces the L.A. families own is 5 to 162 items (Table 5.3).

#### *Original Art and Household Income: Hypothesis Two*

My second hypothesis, that economically wealthier families will have more original art in the house's public rooms, is also unsupported. The quantity of original formal art, which would seem to be a status marker, does not significantly correlate with income variance within the sample ( $\rho = .18$ ). Wealthier families in the sample do not have more or less original art than the less wealthy families (Table 5.3).

The range in the number of original art pieces among the Los Angeles families (n=88; mean=2.75) is zero to 10 items. Only one family has 10, while four families have no original art displayed at all. I hypothesized that families on the poorer side of the middle class spectrum would be more likely to have relatively inexpensive object types in their four public rooms. Regardless of cost, certain knickknack-type objects hold meaning for their owners, and they may be heirlooms or represent life events. I find that families have an average of 2.75 pieces of original art and only one mass-produced piece per household. And although some of the higher-income families, Family 10 in particular, have original art collections, there appears to be no relationship between counts of less expensive objects and families who earn less money.

The most frequently occurring aesthetic objects in public rooms are family photographs, with a mean of 15.5 across the families. The least common object types are trophies and other indications of team membership and/or achievement (n=12), along with objects that fell into the



“other” category such as stained glass windows (n=6). These are very important findings, indicative of family values and meanings, and I discuss them at length in subsequent chapters.

#### *Density of Art in Public Rooms and Combined Household Income: Hypothesis Three*

I then examined the relationships between income and density of objects in the home. Spearman’s correlation coefficient shows a very weak negative relationship between these variables, indicating that higher income may be weakly related to less dense art displays in public rooms. This relationship is not statistically significant, however ( $\rho = -.22$ ).

### **Family and House Life Histories**

Contributing to the amount of decorative material culture in the home is the length of time that the family has occupied the residence, which varied. A short span may not permit much time for settling in or “nesting” behaviors conducive to establishing a permanent décor scheme, nor for acquiring objects that fit in specific parts or niches of the house’s interior. However, some people plan and execute a décor scheme immediately upon moving in to a new home or in decorating a newly remodeled home themselves, as Family 31 (the Baker Family) did, using a Pottery Barn catalog for inspiration. The family that had lived in its house for the shortest time (one month) was among the families with the lowest numbers of aesthetic artifacts.

#### *Remodel Events*

Instead of moving, the L.A. families frequently chose to modify the home to better fit their changing needs. The same number of families said they “planned to remodel their home” as

“did not plan to remodel their home,” but only 37.8 percent of respondents said they had not remodeled their home at the time of questioning<sup>i</sup> (Graesch 2007). At the time that a family completes its home remodel, they reveal their aesthetic choices and keep them for a while. They do not alter the motif of the new space for some time.

While the most frequent remodel event the families engaged in involved master bedrooms, a room I did not examine for the purposes of evaluating aesthetic identity transmission, it is important to note that this research assesses middle-class families’ lives during a snapshot in time. For example, the family with the fewest aesthetic objects in the four public rooms (n=5) was in the process of remodeling and had not yet finished unpacking. Although I did not compare these variables, it would seem that the density of objects on display in a home would temporarily decrease when a family adds on to their house.



Figure 5.2. Number of years Angeleno families lived in their home.

### **Specific Aesthetic Objects and Surprises**

I examined 81 public rooms in the 32 houses, and I found just 29 walls were painted a color other than white or near white. The sample suggests that middle-class families do not choose colorful walls to create thematic space.

I was also surprised to see so few decorations in foyers. Even though the entryway is generally a small space, it represents the prime opportunity for the expression of familial identity via artful material culture and home features. That is because all visitors who come to the door will see its contents and effect. Families' foyers showcase plants (the most frequent decorative object in foyers), painted walls, and three-dimensional wall hangings. Family 22, with the most aesthetic objects in their average-sized entryway, also has figurines and vessels displayed in that room, totaling nine objects.

### **Family Structure, Values, and Decorative Complexity**

In their 1981 quantitative assessment of diverse California home interiors, Weisner and Weibel (1981:433) tested some of the above hypotheses using ANOVA tests. They noted that high “decorative complexity,” a measure they defined as “the amount of embellishing items introduced into the home environment, and not their type or quality<sup>ii</sup>,” tended to correlate with certain family structures. Families with parents who were not traditionally married (e.g., living in a commune or parents bound with a social contract) were more likely to score high on a Disorder/Functional complexity rating scale than those in a nuclear family (1981:454-455). Weisner and Weibel (1981:454) write that sparseness of decor, on the other hand, did not

correlate with family living arrangements or socioeconomic measures such as income. Instead, they say that sparseness of décor is often ascribable to phenomena such as ideological renouncement of objects and other “cultural phenomena.”

Perhaps time-strained families in this sample prioritize the execution of quotidian tasks over shopping for art. These families seldom have leisure time or time to accomplish tasks beyond quotidian necessities.

### **Summary**

Middle-class families in the U.S. are socialized to want to own a home. After purchasing it, they must maintain it, including making aesthetic decisions, even if that means not decorating much at all. Homeownership and all that goes with it complicates these families’ already busy lives but appears to give them a sense of gratification.

Houses and domestic aesthetic artifacts conventionally reflect the life history of the families who live inside them. Homes are diverse in many ways, including the decade in which they were built, exterior style, and interior contents. Middle-class homes are generally less populated with aesthetic objects than I had assumed they would be. Walls are less colorfully painted, there are fewer decorative accouterments, and families display less art in general.

Spearman’s correlation coefficient tests assessed relationships between income variance (probably the most traditional indicator of class belonging) and aesthetic display in four public rooms in the 32 homes. There is no statistical evidence for a correlation between income and the quantity of art families display. Nor is there a significant relationship between families’ wealth and their original versus mass-produced art, negating a commonly assumed indicator of a

family's household display of cultural capital. Economic wherewithal and the quality (as defined by rarity and other visible attributes) of art in these families' homes do not match up.

While many more interesting questions could be asked of these data, I think that my assessment would hold true. Overall, we find no clear quantitative relationships between art and economic class. Instead, what matters more is what aesthetic objects to people and the ways in which they reflect the families' lived experiences.

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<sup>i</sup> Every family's remodel event resulted in an increase in the home's square footage, never a decrease.

<sup>ii</sup> Weisner and Weibel's (1981) Decorative Complexity scale also measured the degree to which families painted their homes' walls.

## **Chapter Six: Middle-Class Lima, Peru: A Path Shining with Promise?**

Over the last 11 years, since I first visited Lima in June 2001, I have observed one constant in the city: extraordinarily rampant modernization. This does not just apply to the destruction of decrepit buildings and apparent quadrupling of vehicular traffic. It does not simply apply to the spread of electrical wiring and Internet connectivity to every part of the city – desperately needed improvements rumored to have been granted in exchange for district candidates' votes. It also applies to the increasingly busy hum of middle-class people as they rush to their cashiering or engineering jobs, and afterward to pick up their children and meet their spouses at home in time for dinner (which may well be a bucket of Kentucky Fried Chicken). Dual wage-earner families' daily lives are framed by Lima's developing infrastructure, and they are running to keep up – running almost as fast as their counterpart Angelenos have been running for years. However, the middle-class Limeño's track to legitimacy is just now being paved.

It is undeniable that the average resident of Los Angeles and the average resident of Lima, Peru are embedded in immeasurably different sociopolitical realities. Lima is marked by an infamous history of political instability, featuring presidents and other leaders who have embezzled billions of dollars that should have been reinvested in public services such as libraries and hospitals. Peruvians of all classes suffered through that history. Many non-elites found themselves either jobless or struggling to make ends meet by amalgamating a living in the informal sector. The middle class has only recently emerged as a visible social division, insisting that the government meet its needs (Parker 1998). While seldom upheld, these include improved

labor conditions.

Although they live in a socialized democracy with free health care and free education (both very limited in availability and quality, especially outside the capital), Limeño families operate with little assistance from their government or unions (Parker 1998). Income tax is 30 percent and sales tax is currently 19 percent, but public funds tend to be diverted toward the centers of power and wealth. The services that should “trickle down” to the city’s neediest residents and three middle classes are often reserved for maintaining and manicuring the more affluent streets and neighborhoods. Disproportionate use of city funds is visibly reflected in the lack of proper landscape irrigation, unpaved roads, inconsistently running water, and other faulty local services. Municipal services are regularly provided to the homes that border the most privileged communities, or members of *Clase A* (Class A – the wealthiest social class).

Lima’s middle class generally does not partake in stereotypical American middle-class consumer behaviors. They tend not to have life insurance, credit cards, or a personal vehicle (although a 2011 study by the marketing firm ipsos APOYO indicates that the latter is quickly changing in Lima), and for members of the middle-middle class and lower-middle class (*Clases C and D*, respectively), dining out is a special treat. Full-time workweeks are supposed to be 48 hours, although many people work more than that, amalgamating a living by working more than one job. Although the monthly minimum wage<sup>i</sup> increased 3.7 percent from 2010 to 2011 (North and South American CEIC Database 2011), it is a meager \$225 USD<sup>ii</sup>. Women, now comprising nearly half the workforce, only earn 68.5 percent of men’s average salaries (North and South American CEIC Database 2011). Unions allegedly guarantee workers’ rights, but many members of the middle class say that they are dissatisfied with their personal working conditions and ashamed of the poverty and discrimination in their country and city.

Many of the young Peruvian families that I interviewed now earn a wage comparable to what the 32 L.A. families make, adjusting for the cost of living in the two locations. Unlike in Los Angeles, families take comfort in one another and in their friends – asking for, receiving, and giving assistance with juggling the responsibilities of family and work life. In-laws are likely to live nearby, spending their days doting on their grandchildren, cleaning the house as they go along. Residential interior spaces seem to reflect the presence of close relationships and the help that family members provide (although many children complain that their parents’ house is too disorganized – usually when filming their home tours alone). Interiors also reflect the strong identities that middle-class families derive from their extended families’ place of origin.

Dissimilarities aside, for families in both L.A. and Lima, “design, meaning, and use of home interiors are intimately related to a range of socio-demographic and psychological factors” (Lawrence 1987:155), and among the Angelenos and Limeños in this research, these traits are comparable. Limeño families may be growing even more like U.S. families as middle-class Lima alters its work/home balances to accommodate encroaching changes.

### **The City of Kings**

Loud, lawless, and dense, cars – mostly taxis – swerve dangerously as their drivers careen over cracked streets, honking and shouting incessantly at nothing. Inexperienced pedestrians find it almost as treacherous to dodge vehicles in a busy crosswalk as it is to jaywalk, which is the preferred way to maneuver from the grocery store to Starbucks or the street market. Nearly everyone ignores the rare traffic signals that punctuate particularly ugly intersections; they seldom function anyway. Standing on elevated structures, female police officers patrol some



crossings. The Department of Lima employs them because local lore has it that women officers are less corrupt than men, but most drivers disregard or bribe the “lady cops” too.

Lima’s streets are peppered with thinly disguised advertisements of corporations like Gloria (dairy) and Bimbo (bread), political graffiti, and gang members’ amateurish street art, spray-painted on already ugly walls. Except in touristy Miraflores, few beautiful murals grace the sides of buildings. The roadsides are strewn with trash. Unlandscaped and park-poor, there is nowhere to rest one’s eyes. If spatial organization, maintenance, and public art reflect social values, Lima’s civic aesthetic exhibits a hurricane-like turmoil ironically situated in consistently mild weather. One might think that the interior spaces in places like Lima should be Eden-like reprieves where a person can hide from such a tumultuous and depressing-looking city.

Until recently, Lima was an inexpensive place to live and visit, and many expatriates started businesses there, gentrifying the nicest Colonial neighborhoods. Since about 2007, Peru has experienced an economic boom. More people of all financial statuses from other parts of the country and world have relocated to the capital, while others can no longer afford to live in the city and, displaced, seek work elsewhere. Newly arrived migrant workers build more corrugated steel, tin, and asbestos-cloth shanties on erosion-prone, toxic sandy hills near the sea. In the news, urban planners and engineers lament what they consider the futility of their tasks. Town-planning expert Günter Doering correctly anticipated in 1990 that:

If Lima’s demographic and urban growth continues ... there is no doubt that the city’s only future is one of chaos, anarchy, and a worsening of poverty that already afflicts a large part of its population. The city will go on expanding in a disordered fashion, based on the construction of wretched hovels ... By 2010, the city will have overspilled into the inhabitable areas of Lima province that lie between the Pacific Ocean and the Andean cordillera (in Higgens 2005:227).

The formal unemployment rate decreased approximately 6 percent between 2009 and 2010 (International Monetary Fund 2011), but lower-income and rural-to-urban migrant residents find only humble positions and genuinely struggle, usually working part time in the informal sector. They can be found selling odds and ends such as pre-read newspapers and Chinese-made plastic toys on street corners. Middle-class and privileged residents often seem rushed, numb, and somehow as grey in pallor as the city's ever-misty sky.

### **Lima's Absence in the Literature**

Considering its population of 8.7 million in 2009 (Central Intelligence Agency 2011), or 2.275 million households (ipsos APOPYO 2011), its turbulent history, and increasingly impactful role in the global economy, Lima is ripe for more anthropological attention. A quick search yields no recent social science research about the city's contemporary middle-class families, that sector's consumer behavior, or taste (though the World Bank and marketing organizations are conducting economic research on such topics). As President Ollanta Humala took office in September, 2011, implementing new taxes on mining, oil, and gas operations, corporations continue to invest in Peru's ample natural resources. In contrast to the rest of the world, Peru remains economically stable.

### **Ethnographic Methods and Data**

Harried as Limeños are, raising their kids and working their 48-hour workweeks, most people eventually warm up to visitors, becoming as friendly as Latino stereotypes prescribe. They are generous with beer, Inka Cola, *postres*, and their limited free time. Once a person asks about their children, Limeños are willing to share stories about growing up in the country and

then migrating to the city. Even the most hardened urbanites are agreeable to allow a strange scrutiny of the intimate sphere of their home. Hesitant at first, the participants in my study imparted memories about some of their most sacred belongings, and men and women seemed to enjoy telling personal anecdotes about the origins of their taste preferences.

I designed the selection criteria for the Lima study to locate families comparable to those who participated in the Los Angeles study. I use “LF” to refer to “Limeño Family” throughout this dissertation. The Lima component of my study specifically addresses domestic material culture and related taste preferences. After recruiting families (the procedure is detailed below), I documented demographic information about each participant, including:

- Household total monthly income (and that of each parent)
- Parents’ weekly hours worked
- Family’s place of origin (including grandparents)
- Time spent on the Internet

Assisted occasionally by my three Peruvian volunteer assistants, I then engaged each family member in three types of ethnographic inquiry. First I conducted hour-long semi-structured interviews with all members of each family at the same time, including extended kin when they were present at the home (some lived in the home). Appendix 2 shows the semi-structured interview protocol. Questions designed to address relationships among preference, material culture, and traditional class/SES markers include:

- Origins of personal taste
- What an attractive (and unattractive) house looks like and why
- What a dream house would look like
- Where parents shop for household decorative items and where they refuse to shop

My assistants and I also administered to each mother, father, and the “target child”

(between 7 and 13 years old at the time of the research), a simultaneously quantitative and qualitative preference ranking exercise, using 20 laminated photographs of living rooms from international interior décor magazines. Each person engaged in this ranking exercise alone, out of earshot from others, so as not to influence one another's preferences<sup>iii</sup>. I selected and cropped these particular photographs because they seemed different enough from one another to encourage discussion about tastes regarding diverse objects and styles. Participants ranked the photos in order from favorite to least favorite and we discussed their rationales, concentrating on their favorite and least favorite card. I find this exercise to be useful because participants can point to what they like and do not like, leaving little room for ambiguity, and most people seem to enjoy the tactile and visual nature of the exercise.

The preference-ranking exercise is not statistically valid because I did not conduct a viability pilot study before using the photos, nor is the sample size large (n=38). However, Wilson and MacKenzie (2002) tested British university students' domestic aesthetic perceptions using magazine-derived photographs and found the process to yield relatively unbiased and interesting results (see also Stamps 1990). Further, distinct patterns of qualitative significance emerged from this exercise. Limeño participants showed a strong preference for one particular interior and a strong dislike for another, which did not prove to be the case when I administered the test to my international friends in Los Angeles. Discussion of these and several other emergent patterns appears in later chapters, and I show the ranking results in Chapter 10.

The third ethnographic method that I employed asked each participant to film the home, using three guiding questions: "what is your favorite part of your house," "what is your least favorite part of your house," and what would you most like to change?" I also asked participants to show me the aesthetic objects that held the most meaning for them. This method was inspired

by CELF research, but I tailored it for my purposes. Finally, we photographed every angle of each of the four relevant rooms in each of the 16 homes, and I coded the aesthetic objects therein, using the same criteria as I did for the L.A. homes.

A total of 19 UCLA and West Los Angeles College undergraduate students and I transcribed the video and audio data verbatim into English. I then coded the transcripts for emergent themes. I provide analyses of these findings in subsequent chapters.

### *Recruitment*

A sample of 16 families<sup>iv</sup> took part in the study. Limeño families self-selected into the study after an extensive recruitment process involving two trips to the city, one in 2009 and one in 2010. After becoming familiar with my criteria, identical to the CELF criteria of middle-class, dual wage-earner families who owned their home, and target child age of 7-13, Peruvian friends asked their friends and the parents of their children's friends to participate. The study snowballed from that point. Families received no payment for participation, but I did bring the families pastries upon my arrival, which is in accordance with Peruvian etiquette.

Sara, the mother in LF08, said she liked that the whole family got together on a Saturday to participate. Even if it was just for a couple hours, she said, they were in the same room together and not watching television.

### **Neighborhoods**

Spatial disorganization and visual clutter reflects Lima's well-known social fragmentation. In the upscale neighborhood of San Isidro, landscaped world-class golf courses abut infrastructureless barrios that are marred by shameful poverty. The fact that Limeño Family

09 lives in a refurbished series of stalls in the *hipodromo* (racetrack), adjacent to some of the most expensive race horses in the world, is a microcosmic metaphor for the geographical distribution of assets in the city. Topographical limitations no longer contain the city's sprawl as shanties crawl up the steep silt that Andean earthquakes and landslides can unpredictably deposit. The port of Callao secludes the airport and most industries from the rest of the city. In Lima commercial districts are separate from residential areas and schools are close to residential districts.

### *Limeño Family Distribution*

The Limeños who participated in this study are dispersed throughout middle-, upper middle-, and lower-middle class neighborhoods in the city and around the Department of Lima<sup>v</sup>. Four are in the neighborhood of Chorrillos; the rest are evenly scattered throughout middle-class (Class B, C, or D) districts in the sprawling city (Figure 6.1).

Families whose income falls between the top and bottom fifth quintiles of the spectrum are not socially restricted to certain parts of the city. Lima neighborhoods tend to be more demographically homogeneous than those in Los Angeles, although immigration from other parts of Peru and the world is introducing more demographic variation to the city as a whole. All the participating families live in middle-income Limeño neighborhoods, broadly defined. While scant formal research exists on the subject, except that conducted by Avelar et al. (2009), my observations are that such sectors are: (1) distributed randomly throughout the city, and (2) quickly transforming into increasingly dangerous neighborhoods as regional social tensions rise.

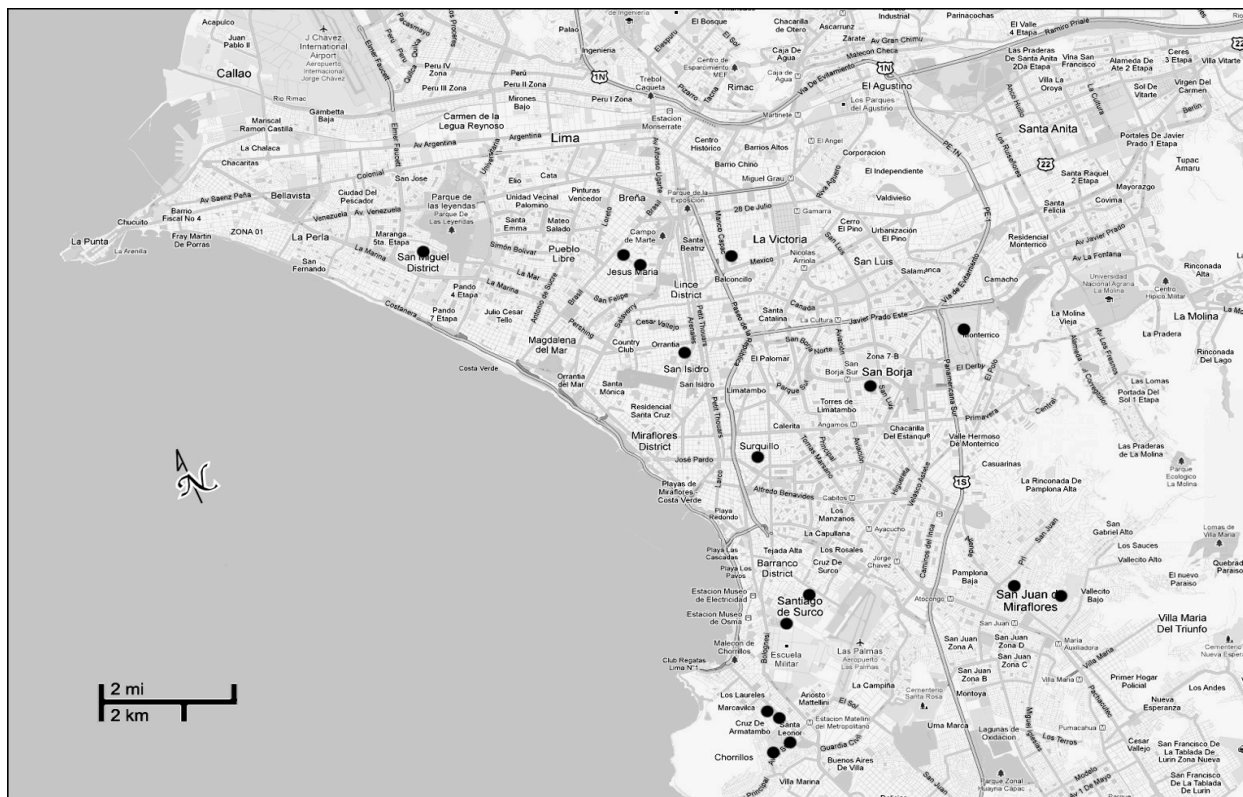


Figure 6.1. Location of Participating Families, Lima

Middle-class Limeño family members told me that when they face the rising cost of living in their city, they have two choices regarding where their home is situated. They can live in a distant, upscale suburb far away from slums, but a consequence seems to be a commute of several hours to get to work. Conversely, their children tend to travel less to get to school because better schools are usually situated in these better neighborhoods.

Other families opt to live in less costly neighborhoods nearer to their place of employment. Children either attend faraway, better schools or nearer, inferior schools. Several parents defended this choice, such as well-traveled Monica from LF01, who sends her daughter Michaela to a nearby Waldorf school. She and her husband are saving money to purchase a single-family dwelling in the semi-ritzy neighborhood of La Molina. Monica is upset that,

although they are saving money by living below their means, the family will likely never realize their goal. She said that people do not move out of La Molina neighborhood anymore. It has become too desirable. Residents keep their house and enlarge it if necessary, so there may not be an affordable vacancy for her and her family.

Three of the families I interviewed choose the first option: to live in the nicest parts of town that they can afford. The wealthiest districts that participants live in are San Isidro, Lince, and San Borja. Families there cite nighttime safety and walkability as rationales for the expense. These are families who will probably never move from their home: they are “grandfathered in” to a good mortgage rate. One family acquired its home when the father was young. But even in the nicest residential neighborhoods, including gated communities, most windows feature crime-detering bars across the panes and high barbed wire or electric fences.

Over the last 15 years, gated communities have become increasingly common in Lima and the rest of urban Latin America (Coy 2006), fostering a spatial class-based fragmentation that further separates the less wealthy residents from members of the middle- and upper-middle social strata (Borsdorf et al. 2007). This is increasing extant tensions between social classes (Low 2001:45; see also Blakely and Snyder 1997; Higley 1995). In Lima, upper-class residents have long tended to live in guarded, gated compounds with green space and other hard-to-find amenities. Such communities provide refuge from the city as well as from real or perceived enemies. However, the Limeño middle class is encroaching on these sorts of communities by moving into them whenever possible, saving money to do so if necessary. Even some less expensive neighborhoods are gating themselves off from outside areas. This is the case with Limeño Family 08, which lives in the squarely middle-class neighborhood of central San Juan



Miraflores. That part of San Juan Miraflores just became a gated community, even though it is relatively inexpensive to reside there.

Four of the families I interviewed live in spacious apartments in the most tectonically solid part of an eroding squatter settlement.<sup>vi</sup> They inherited these apartments from their parents and pay no rent or overhead (although since I completed this research, some of the families acquired Internet service, for which they pay). From that neighborhood, though, at least one parent can either walk to work or work from home, avoiding the need to pay for public transportation, which in that part of town is provided by motorized rickshaws. Limeño Family 09 earns the least money in the sample but self-selected into the study. They live on the grounds of Lima's upscale racetrack (Hippodrome Monterrico); the father is a racehorse attendant while the mother is a domestic employee. The family's home, originally a stable, is included in the father's compensation, but his wife said that it is barely large enough to house the family's extended network of people that sometimes live there with the core household.

### **The Limeño Class Conundrum**

The Peruvian class system includes five quintiles from Class A to Clase E, each of which is broken into "high" and "low". The divisions of these segments can seem arbitrary. According to Franco et al. (2011:8), the "plurality or absence of definitions" of the term "middle class" is specifically complex in Latin America. This is because researchers have tended to conduct studies with a small number of Latin American individuals in Mexico, for example, applying those overly generalized findings onto other "middle-class" individuals, making "conceptually hyperbolic" statements about a body of people that is already difficult to define. According to Franco et al. (2011), researchers tend to select traits of middle classes from other temporal and

cultural contexts (specifically their own) and apply them to Latin American populations, as they deem appropriate.

The construct of Latin American class division is more difficult in Peru than in most other Latin American countries. Peru, and Lima in particular, has one of the fastest growing economies in Latin America, and possibly in the hemisphere (Los Angeles Times 2012), and has for some time. Thus, the notion of class is there very ambiguous at this time, heightening the difficulty. The country's economic growth was steady from 2002-2006 and then jumped substantially in 2007 because of international investment in its natural resources, specifically metal and natural gas. Like many other countries in South America – notably Brazil – the geographic and sociopolitical disparity of access to resources and wealth in Peru renders class incomparable from one part of the country to another. Indigenous people living in rural areas and recent migrants to Lima experience extreme discrimination. The isolated peoples of the Andes and the Amazon, where the nation's natural resources are (except Pacific species of fish, which are an important export), receive too few monetary benefits from the extraction of their labor and land: it all goes to other countries' corporations and to rich Limeños.

Due to economic shifts and household needs, Peruvians are migrating around the nation and to other countries. For that and other reasons, census counts are particularly inaccurate. Local, regional and national governments have notoriously committed tax fraud and embezzlement, so business and individuals allegedly tend to over- or underreport their income, depending on which they perceive to be advantageous at that time<sup>vii</sup>. Families may be part of Clase A but government income charts would deem them members of Clase B, for example. The Peruvian middle class is therefore tenuous, as yet unentrenched, and, like the majority of Latin American countries, has a history of infrequently revolting and relatively frequently destabilizing

the federal government. These are traits that do not apply to most of the world's middle classes: by definition, they should be predictably unlikely to revolt or destabilize the government (Ehrenreich 1989).

Most Peruvians I asked expressed financial and emotional stress. They have little hope that their country's climate of political corruption will change anytime soon. The wealthiest citizens enjoy the benefits of a top-driven economy that makes the rest of the nation (Classes B, C, D, and E) – especially people outside of Lima – experience a “frustrated awareness of the limitations that lack of education – and in particular higher education – may pose to further upward mobility” (Birdsall et al. 2000:11), and quality higher education is all but unattainable for many Peruvians who are not members of Clase A or at least Clase B. They have to work 48-hour weeks to make ends meet, especially now.

### *Comparing Several Measures*

Ipsos APOYO compiles data from the federal census as well as generating its own data to annually measure Lima's socio-economic levels. Their data are based on many factors, ranging from traditional SES measures to less intuitive variables such as ownership of household appliances (Table 6.1). I discuss the participating Limeño family incomes at length in the next chapter, but for quick reference I provide the data in Figure 6.2. The data rely on participants' reported income.

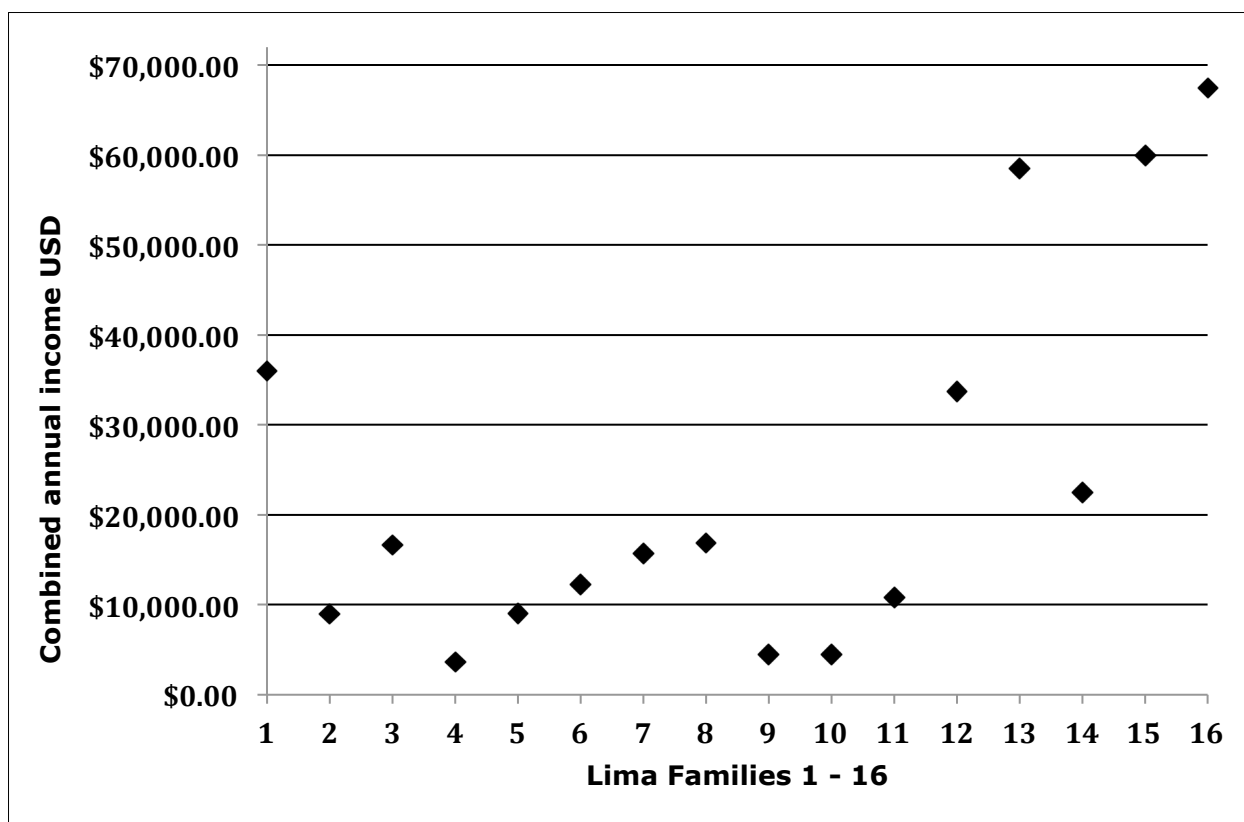


Figure 6.2. Annual income of Limeño families in the study (March 2012 exchange rate; U.S. dollars).

Mean = \$23,817; Median = \$16,194; Range = \$63,888

Table 6.1 Household- and Socioeconomic-Determined Income Levels: Lima (ipsos APOYO 2011)

Clase	Percentage of Limeño Households	Monthly Family Income – USD (February 2011 Exchange Rates)	House Characteristics
A	5.1	\$3885	Most own a finished home; few rent
B	16.1	\$1156	Most own a self-built home; others rent
C	34.9	\$574	More than half live in their own self-built home; some rent; others live without paying (e.g., inherited the dwelling)
D	31.3	\$403	The majority own their home; some rent and share the dwelling with other tenants; sometimes have no title to their home
E	12.6	\$331	Many build a home without a title (often squatter settlements in poor condition)

The most recently updated data available for Lima, ipsos APOYO (2011) cites the variables in Table 6.1 as relevant class strata markers. Considering all of the variables in Table 6.1, two of the families I interviewed would qualify as Clase A; six as Clase B; three as Clase C; three as Clase D; and two as Clase E. Using only the house characteristics in Table 6.1 (column 4), however, none of the study participants would be members of Clase E and nearly all of them would fit into Clase A. The “self-built” versus “finished” home aspect of the ipsos APOYO study may not be useful here. Many of the families I interviewed built a home, working with an architect, to their own specifications, as opposed to buying a used home. Even with limited means, they purchased land and demolished the structure that was on it, then built a home in its place (usually a multi-family dwelling to house an in-law or another relative). It is increasingly difficult to find a vacant upscale (Clase A or B) home in Lima; too many foreign investors are moving there and purchasing them.

Table 6.2 provides yet another relevant interpretation of a Limeño class structural schema, using income in combination with house attributes. This was generated with earlier ipsos APOYO data (2006) and organized by social geographers Avelar et al. (2009), who added GIS information and aerial photography analysis to the discussion. By their measures, eliminating income as a variable and looking only at minimum house type, green space, and security and road improvement, the vast majority of the families with whom I worked would be considered Clase C, D, or E. One or two families might be considered Clase B (but not the ones who made the most money), and none would be in Clase A.

Table 6.2. Income and Space-Use Construct of Lima Classes (Avelar et al. 2009)

<b>Limeño Class</b>	<b>Monthly Income Minimum - 2005 (USD)</b>	<b>Minimum House Type</b>	<b>House Green Space</b>	<b>Security and Road Improvement</b>
<b>A</b>	\$2712	Large; 2 floors; 3 bedrooms and 4 bathrooms	Private green areas in back, front or both; 2+ car garage; swimming pool	High walls/fences; asphalt-paved streets
<b>B</b>	\$745	Medium-sized; 2 floors; 2.7 bedrooms; 2 bathrooms	Some private green space; garage for 1 or 2 cars; often a small swimming pool	Walls/fences; asphalt-paved streets
<b>C</b>	\$325	Small to medium; 2 floors; 2.3 bedrooms; 1.2 bathrooms	Seldom a garden, garage or pool	Terrain almost completely built; streets paved with low quality asphalt
<b>D</b>	\$239	Small; 1 or 2 floors; unfinished; 2 bedrooms; .8 bathrooms	No garden; no garage; no swimming pool	Building occupies entire terrain without free areas between neighbors; paved or unpaved streets
<b>E</b>	\$163	Small; 1 floor; unfinished; 1.7 bedrooms; .3 bathrooms; constructed with low-quality materials	No garden; no garage; no swimming pool	Unpaved streets (bare soil)

Ipsos APOYO (2011) provides a household-goods classification system (Table 6.3) that is useful and pertinent to helping decipher a Limeño family's class belonging. It also ignores income and family size as determinants. I do have data about family expenditures but found them to be irrelevant except for understanding Lima's cost of living.

The household object-based classificatory data in Table 6.3 and the resultant implications might change soon if the economy in Lima continues to grow in the manner that it has for the last five years (or decade, depending on who is benefiting), because nearly all homes will have Internet service. Tentative and basic as this classification system is, I believe the categories are useful foundations for future studies about Lima – much more so than arbitrary income markers that the government and certain marketing agencies generate from a notoriously problematic census<sup>viii</sup>. This categorization system applies only to Limeños, not to Peruvians living elsewhere in the nation.

*Table 6.3. Limeño Household Goods Classification (ipsos APOYO 2011)*

<b>Criteria</b>	<b>Clase A</b>	<b>Clase B</b>	<b>Clase C</b>	<b>Clase D</b>	<b>Clase E</b>
<b>Home</b>	Own or mortgage; single- or multi-family dwelling	Own, rent, or mortgage; single- or multi-family dwelling	Own, rent, or mortgage; multi-family dwelling	Rent, multi-family dwelling	Struggle for shelter
<b>Personal Vehicle Ownership</b>	Likely	Likely and increasing	Possible	Unlikely	No
<b>Television in the home</b>	More than one	One or more	One	One	Possibly
<b>One paid in-home help (live-in or not)</b>	52%	10%	4%	0%	1%
<b>Internet in home</b>	100%	85%	28%	3%	1%
<b>Washing machine in home or building</b>	100%	89%	56%	14%	1%

The difficult nature of determining class belonging in Lima is the primary reason I chose to allow my participants to decide for themselves if they belong to the middle class. Families were not hesitant to tell us their monthly income, but on occasion I wondered if they were over- or underreporting these amounts. We tended to estimate their income by the objects in their houses or the houses themselves, as well as the neighborhood in which they lived, but I use their reported earnings in this work.

As in the Los Angeles sample, the neighborhood a family lived in was not always a good marker by which to judge where they fit in the class schema. They may have inherited their home or be living beyond their means (though the latter is not a typical Peruvian behavior). The opposite is more likely. Limeño Family 10 said they made the equivalent of \$370 per month (using today's exchange rate – at the time it would have been about \$320), but they own a flat-screen television that cost at least thrice that and, while they live in the informal settlement of Chorrillos, they own a large apartment building with no mortgage and have a beautiful view of both the ocean and a large section of Lima.

### *A Better Classification?*

Attributes such as the possession of certain categories of objects, a family's self-perception, cultural capital (broadly defined), and art ownership, are useful when discussing flexible constructs such as class, particularly as economies change. This is especially true in Peru and other nations wherein income-based thresholds for class markers appear to have been invented by interested parties. To be a member of Lima's Clase A, and receive the benefits that go along with it, is a difficult achievement indeed, and the bar keeps moving up as the economy prospers.



In Lima, better status indicators include ownership of objects such as vehicles and televisions, what neighborhood the family lives in, what occupation type the parents have, and what school a child attends. Income is usually implied. Deciding a person's class standing is intuitive for native Limeños and comes quickly to outsiders, arbitrary and judgmental as the categorization model is. Many people told me that class is "what you feel," and "*eso si que es*" (that's just what it is).

The most useful way to determine class belonging in Lima is via cultural capital. I agree with the parents in LF16 when they said that they prioritized travel/cultural experiences over objects. Occupation type is informative too, though there is nothing to say that a plumber might not have a well-chosen art collection. As with the CELF study, I have "outlier" families on the economically disadvantaged side of the sample (LF04 and LF09) and on the economically advantaged side of the sample (LF16 in particular). Because this dissertation relies greatly on qualitative data, especially in Lima, I am including these families' opinions in the narrative analysis.

In the next chapter, I introduce the Limeño families and discuss their attributes and how they provide a foundation for the ways aesthetic objects and qualities make their houses homes.

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<sup>i</sup> As of February 2011, the average individual's monthly wage in Lima, according to the ISI Emerging Markets (2011), went up 3.7 percent from the previous year to \$430 USD.

<sup>ii</sup> Median monthly disposable salary after tax is \$640 in Lima and \$3,440 in L.A. (Numbeo 2012).

<sup>iii</sup> Wohlwill (1976) found that if during a preference-ranking exercise participants can hear one another, they tend to follow one another's social cues and results have a strong tendency to agree.

<sup>iv</sup> 38 individuals participated in all components; more participated in some components.

<sup>v</sup> Departments in Peru are equivalent to states, but in this case the Department of Lima is analogous to Los Angeles County in size and composition.

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<sup>vi</sup> Chorrillos is located near the southwest corner of the map. The extreme southwest corner of the map depicts beachy sand combined with toxic alluvial runoff that has eroded from approximately 50 years of building the neighborhood.

<sup>vii</sup> This fact likely affected my research, particularly regarding LF10, the father of which I believe may have told me half his actual income for fear that I might report him to the authorities.

<sup>viii</sup> As a caveat, INEI, the national census bureau, performs its duties in a generally responsible manner and publishes its data immediately. However, there have been rumors of miscounts regarding the census not being properly administered to non-Spanish speakers, among other such problems.

## **Chapter Seven: The Limeño Families**

I chose Lima as a site to witness and document middle-class, dual wage-earner families just as that sector began to emerge as a recognizable portion of the city's population. I wanted to see how the families balanced careers, caring for young children, making long commutes to and from distant neighborhoods, and, most of all, what choices they made regarding display of art in their homes. I wondered if they would choose new aesthetic household material culture to reflect their new status.

Peru's national economy is booming in contrast to the relative poverty and jobless rate that non-wealthy citizens knew just a few years ago, and certainly since the tragedy of *Sendero Luminoso* (Shining Path, the violent Peruvian revolution that killed at least 70,000 citizens. It occurred throughout the 1980s and into the early 1990s). As such, I thought that newly emerging middle-class families would be consuming new forms of identity-transmitting goods for their homes. Many do appear to be enjoying their new status. A few are even buying personal vehicles and looking for fancier residences in up-and-coming neighborhoods. I wondered, though, if there was a correlation between their new status and expressions of aesthetic taste in their material culture at home.

I have noticed some ways that facets of the changing economy may be affecting purchases and displays of artful items. An example is the influence of increasing numbers of domestic helpers on middle-class home interiors. Peruvians' workplace rights are too often not enforced in Peru and parents – the fathers in my sample and frequently the mothers – are seldom home, even on Saturdays. To ease the consequences of this, typical upper- and middle-class Peruvian

urbanites now almost always have some form of domestic assistance (ipsos APOYO 2011). As a result, domestic helpers tend to change the household aesthetic to some degree, demonstrating their own style in the home. They often shop for household items, and make decisions regarding the display of objects – including artful material culture – in the home.

It appears, however, that middle-class consumer behaviors are not changing at a tremendously accelerated rate overall, and not because families must adhere to class-regulated behaviors. Rather, consumerism patterns may remain stagnant or only slowly evolve. This is because the Limeño middle class is as yet neither a stable or defined entity. Politicians and the revolutions have immobilized the group in the past. Now the class as a whole seems cautious. Formation of a macroscopic dual-earner middle-class identity is not going to transform the aesthetic of domestic interiors with immediacy.

Class-related variables including income, occupation types, and affiliations may affect the material culture families choose when decorating their homes. Ethnic affiliation, religion, and political affinity also affect such assemblages, but for various reasons the effect of these factors is mild in this sample. Family composition, income, place of origin and social networks are more important factors influencing participating families' home aesthetics. Factors affecting domestic taste preferences do not hinge on the family's class belonging as much as they depend on the family's heritage and life choices.

### **Similarities and Differences: Economic and Cultural Capital**

#### *Ethnicity and Identity*

Lima is ethnically diverse, perhaps as diverse as Los Angeles. The majority of the city is made up of mestizos (Central Intelligence Agency 2011). The next most populous ethnic group

is the European Peruvians, who consider themselves to be white. Minorities in the city include Amerindians (Quechua and Aymara), Afro-Peruvians, Jews, and descendants from Chinese and Japanese slaves (Central Intelligence Agency 2011). Peru has the second-largest Japanese colony in the world, after Sao Paulo, Brazil (Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada 2010). Regardless of occupation, income, education level, or achievements, if people are black or indigenous, they will not be considered to be part of the middle class.

I tried to interview a diverse selection of representative families, particularly Asian families. The statistics above seem to underrepresent the number of Chinese people in middle-class Lima. The city is known for its hundreds of *chifas* (Chinese restaurants), most of which people of Chinese heritage own and operate. Owners of middle-class restaurants in nicer neighborhoods were ideal candidates for this study, in that they worked full time (often with their spouses), likely had children in the target age range, and had to understand and express interior aesthetics. I was very interested in understanding and comparing their opinions, so I haunted *chifas* soliciting their owners and managers, but no Chinese-Peruvian family wanted to participate. In the end my study consists exclusively of mestizo (n=13) and white families (n=2), and one mixed-ethnicity family (white and mestizo).

No examples of art in these families' homes indicated racial pride, but indigenous objects, signaling ethnic Peruvian pride, occurred nearly ubiquitously across the sample. Afro-Peruvian, Chinese-Peruvian, or Jewish-Peruvian families may have powerful material culture signaling that aspect of their heritage, but, again, these groups were not part of my sample.

### *Affiliations*

Unless a Peruvian is participating in a union-sponsored strike, which is a frequent activity

for teachers, nurses, and public transportation workers, religion and politics are sensitive subjects throughout Peru. Lima is primarily a Catholic city, and secondarily evangelical, according to census data (ipsos APOYO 2011). According to casual mentions in the semi-structured discussions, Limeño families seldom engage in publicly religious actions, such as going to mass, except for special occasions. Limeños do, however, conduct private religious actions and engage in religious discourse in their home, including prayer (see also Williams and Fuentes 2000:92). Yet, it appears that middle-class Peruvians are not transmitting religious or political affiliation information in the public rooms of their houses via three-dimensional household artifacts such as crucifixes. Parents and children tend to display such iconographic object somewhere in their homes<sup>1</sup> but not in the four public rooms.

### *Family Composition*

An impactful difference between middle-class Limeño and Angeleno lifestyles is typical family composition, which is changing quickly in Peru and all of South America (Jelin and Díaz-Muñoz 2003). While still the norm in Lima, patriarchal nuclear families are decreasing in numbers. Female-headed households with an absent father are increasingly common. Some people consider this decline of the heterosexual monogamous conjugal household to be a form of social “disintegration” (Jelin and Díaz-Muñoz 2003:124); others, including me, see these changes as empowering to women:

What is going on is a process of crisis of the patriarchal model of the family, a model that involved strong authoritarian tendencies. ... Some voices express the urgency to intervene and ‘save’ the family from crisis. ... Such a simplified view of reality, though, has to be changed. New family forms are to be seen in part as the expression of choice and of more freedom on the part of the traditionally subordinate members of families, and it is their freedom and principles of democratic equality that have to be strengthened (Jelin and Díaz-Muñoz 2003:125).

### *Family Composition: Influence on Participating Families' Home Aesthetic Choices*

My interviews included two families wherein single mothers raised the children, though one had extensive help from kin. In these cases, the mother and father lived separately because the fathers had found work outside Lima and created other family lives elsewhere. In both cases, however, the fathers provided more than half the household's income. Both mothers said they were unsure what portion of their husband's total income they received or how many hours he worked each week, but his remissions to the family were enough to render the household a member of the middle class by ipsos APOYO's (2011) income-based definition.

Though these fathers are absent, I can address these single-mother households' material culture from a qualitative perspective. In both cases family members were able to discuss, at least to some degree, the father's preferences. The mother could address his influences on the house and the aesthetic objects he left behind. The ghost of his style preference remained on display in the home. The estranged husband in LF05, a journalist who returned to his native Finland, left a substantial mark on the family home, for example, while the father in LF04 took nearly everything with him.

Of course, if the mother and father were present, as is the case in 14 families in the sample, both exert influence over the way the home interior looks.

### *Income*

Nine of the 16 families in the sample met or exceeded the dual-earner workweek requirement I had set. The Limeño income data (Figure 6.2) need interpretation. In my sample, which I believe adequately represents a range of current middle-class Limeño economic

experiences, four families said they sometimes faced unjust wage- and job-related challenges and that they were either patching together a living in creative ways or tolerating a deeply entrenched, abusive system.

Peruvians confided to me that their employment conditions were unfair and that they should be making more money to reflect their actual working life<sup>ii</sup>. They were working overtime and not receiving their legally entitled additional pay; they could not take a contractually promised paid vacation; days taken off to tend to sick children resulted in unfairly docked pay. Still, they felt that they could not quit. The unemployment rate in metropolitan Lima is decreasing, so parents have more competition for jobs; many feel that they should keep even these jobs with such unsavory working conditions for fear they would not be able to find work quickly.<sup>iii</sup> Middle-class individuals also stay in such positions because they seek upward mobility but increasing numbers of compatriots and expatriates are moving to Lima to compete for these jobs, so quitting is “not a choice,” according to the father in LF14.

### *Expenditures*

Spending priorities are different in Lima than in the U.S. Many of the families I interviewed own their homes outright and have no car, no credit card debt, and no form of insurance. They tend not to have Internet in their homes yet, but almost everyone has cable TV (Table 6.3). Fresh food is less expensive in Lima than in the U.S., especially fish and produce, and out of habit people do not buy more of it than they need because not everyone is accustomed to having a refrigerator. All but the wealthiest people spend far less money on consumer goods such as electronics than residents of the U.S. [although this is changing (ipsos APOYO 2011)]. Most forms of health care are free, but middle-class and wealthy individuals usually pay to go to



a clinic or herbal healer instead of federally funded hospitals. Taxes are higher than they are in Los Angeles, and the majority of children attend private schools so they have a chance to get into a good university. As of April 2012, consumer prices in Los Angeles are 48.33 percent higher than in Lima; rent prices in Los Angeles are 147.53 percent higher than in Lima; and local purchasing power in Lima is 222.56 percent higher than in Los Angeles (Numbia 2012).

Limeños do not seem to prioritize shopping specifically for aesthetic objects any more than shopping for other household items, nor any more than the Angeleno families do. When they do shop for household commodities, if they have the time, they travel to the underdeveloped and crime-ridden neighborhood of Santa Rosa de Lima, where Gamarra is. Gamarra is a huge indoor/outdoor market that carries the same clothes and domestic objects that one can find in the fanciest franchise department stores in Lima (Ripley and Saga Falabella). One can also find mass-produced art and possibly authentic archaeological artifacts excavated from other parts of Peru. When Limeños want furniture, those in the know (all the families in my sample) take a bus, time permitting, to Parque Industrial Villa El Salvador. Local shipping is inexpensive, and everything from folding chairs to handmade mahogany armoires are available for purchase.

No family member was disdainful about shopping at Gamarra, not even people in the wealthiest family, LF16 (who made the equivalent of \$5,624 USD monthly). Rather, many parents mentioned that it was smart to shop there rather than paying cash or using a store credit card for almost an identical product at the franchises. Said Cinthia, the mother in LF03:

You have to find what's best for you. Like for decorations I go to Central Lima (Gamarra) where you would find a frame for I don't know, \$45 dollars, \$52, you find it there for \$11, \$13. So I don't buy where things are expensive.

When I expressed interest in going, I learned that shopping at Villa El Salvador can be riskier. The father in LF07 indicated that, “you have to watch out because a lot of the furniture there is *china* (cheaply made). Just be careful,” he said.

Convenience is quickly becoming a factor for these busy families: some parents said they wait to shop for domestic artful objects or buy them spontaneously, “like candles at the grocery store,” the mother in LF11 said. Parents expressed the desire to acquire art at special times, spontaneously, but I never heard anyone talk about hunting for an art piece to fill a blank space on the wall (as opposed to upper- or middle-class Angeleno hobbyists who might “go antiquing”). Overarching consumer values include conservation of funds, even in times of relative excess.

### *Occupation and Prestige*

Occupation type is an important aspect of cultural and social capital that theorists such as Bourdieu (1984a) said affects taste and the household art one owns. Occupation was the first variable I used to determine whether to include a Limeño and his or her spouse in the study. Usually I knew a parent’s job type before I went to their home and asked their income, and before they agreed that their family fit the class-based criteria. I often recruited families in Lima by asking my middle-class friends to help me find participants at their workplace, so the parents sometimes held job types and levels of status that I had prescreened.

Table 7.1. Limeño Parents' and Grandparents' Occupations

Family Number	Mother's Occupation	Father's Occupation	Mothers' Parents		Fathers' Parents	
			Mother's Father's Occupation	Mother's Mother's Occupation	Father's Father's Occupation	Father's Mother's Occupation
LF01	Travel agent/Independent tourist consultant	Consultant for the Ministry of the Economy	Insurance sales	Housewife	Tailor	Primary school teacher
LF02	Insurance customer service	Cotton fabric/textile factory worker	Bank maintenance man	Housewife	Teacher and newsstand owner	Housewife
LF03	Coordinator of Accidents for insurance company	Set designer - commercials	ND	Housewife	ND	ND
LF04	Avon saleswoman and money loaner	Civil construction foreman	Painter	Housewife	Civil construction foreman	Farmworker
LF05	Physical therapist	Journalist (Finland)	Policeman	Teacher	Lawyer	Lawyer
LF06	Grocery store meats counter worker	Taxi driver	Car mechanic	Housewife	Car mechanic	Nurse (Argentina)
LF07	Assistant manager - retail	Construction business owner	Textile worker	Housewife	Financier	Housewife
LF08	Hair salon co-owner	Hair salon co-owner	Traveling doctor	Housewife and catalog sales	Policeman	Domestic employee
LF09	Trained as podiatrist; now domestic worker	Racehorse stable operator	Lumberjack	Domestic employee	Racehorse stable operator	Housewife
LF10	Police officer	Retail clerk	Woodworker	Housewife	Factory worker	Teacher
LF11	Hotel receptionist	Bricklayer	Papermaker	Merchant	Farmer	Housewife
LF12	Accountant for major airline	Medical representative	Restaurateur	Restaurateur	"Employee"	Housewife
LF13	Industrial engineer for public sector	Metals engineer for mining company	Teacher	Technical administrator	Farmer	Housewife
LF14	Systems engineer	Civil engineer	Military	Housewife	Military	Housewife
LF15	Dental hygienist	Merchant marine	Accountant	Accountant	Accountant	Housewife
LF16	Director of Curriculum at a girls' school	Professor of Postgraduate studies	Human resources	Human resources	Accountant	Housewife

I soon learned that my cultural bias interfered with my assessment of which professions provided more social prestige. To illustrate: I had often heard Peruvian men call one another "Engineer" as a greeting, but I thought it was similar to saying "Hi Buddy!" It was instead an honorific. I had incorrectly assumed engineering to be a middle- or upper-middle class

occupation worldwide, but among the Peruvian middle class it is traditionally considered elite, even though increasing numbers of people are now entering the field and the job pays little. The mother in LF09 is trained as a podiatrist, an occupation that commands some respect in the U.S., but many Limeños would consider it a Clase C profession because it requires only a high school degree. Sometimes police officers are held in high regard, but I have observed that many members of the Limeño middle class disrespect police officers who often take *mordiditas* (literally nibbles; figuratively bribes) from those conducting minor illegal acts. Thus cultural and economic capital and occupational status are not interchangeable or mutually exclusive<sup>iv</sup>.

The very nature of some parents' jobs affords them extra cultural capital. The objects in these parents' homes and their statements about preference demonstrate this. Parents like the airline employee mother in LF12 and the merchant marine father in LF15 have traveled to many other countries for work and pleasure. They brought home souvenirs and photographs, and anecdotes about their experiences. Many use the Internet daily, read current international fashion magazines, use other media to keep up with new styles, or some combination thereof. Some, like the set director father in LF03, are employed in a position that encourages an active interest in cutting-edge art or interior design. While it is not a given that these individuals are their household aesthetic decision-makers, they tend to be most inclined to assert opinions about aesthetics. They have thought about their dream homes, what they would like to change in their own homes, and what they love about where they lived.

### *Place of Origin*

Just one generation ago 11 of the parents who participated in this study lived in rural parts of the country such as Mala on the coast south of Lima and Abancay near Cuzco in the Andes

(Table 7.2). In-migration rates are rapid in Lima just as they are all over urban Latin America, but they look different in Peru. Sendero Luminoso’s guerilla activity in the 1980s through mid-1990s killed many indigenous people and mestizos throughout rural Peru, forcing families out of their homelands (Frisancho Robles and Oropesa 2011). They often left parents and siblings behind. Also, new livelihood opportunities, however humble, have now opened up, luring migrants to the city (Escobal and Flores 2009).

Table 7.2. Limeño Parents’ Birthplace

Family Number	Mother’s Birthplace	Father’s Birthplace
LF01	Lima	Lima
LF02	Lima	Lima
LF03	Cajamarca	Cajamarca
LF04	Lima	Lima
LF05	Lima	Finland
LF06	Lima	Lima
LF07	Lima	Lima
LF08	Piura	Lima
LF09	Ayacucho*	Huancavelica
LF10	Iquitos	Lima
LF11	Mala	Piura
LF12	Lima	Lima
LF13	Abancay*	Trujillo
LF14	Lima	Piura
LF15	Lima	Lima
LF16	Lima	Lima

\* Sendero Luminoso was particularly active here. These families display many objects from their places of origin in their living rooms (n=23).

Families took the *chakra* (rural hinterland), and by extension memories of people and places from their past and sentimental feelings about pre-revolution security (e.g., Belk 1990; Cupchik 1995), with them when they moved to the city, in the form of household material culture. This why so many homes evoke a feeling of native-ness: household material culture often includes brightly colored textiles, or pottery from places like Arequipa, the Amazonian city of Iquitos, and the Andes. They have now become heirlooms and many family members say they hold them dear.

Monica, the mother in LF01, was born in Lima but lived with her land-owning grandparents from the age of 10 to 18 in a rural Andean chakra outside of Ayacucho, known for crafts such as pottery and textiles. She keeps many objects from that region in her living room, noting that growing up in the mountains is a main source of her grown-up domestic aesthetic preferences. “It is a very important phase, when you are forming your tastes and preferences and all that,” she said. “And I have lived there. You ask me where, and I am inclined to say that my fantasy house would be in the *sierra* (forested high mountain ranges).”

In 1982, Manuela, the mother of LF09, was about to turn 2 years old. Her parents, unlike Monica’s grandparents, were forced to leave Ayacucho for Lima. The leader of Shining Path, Abimael Guzmán, was gaining followers in that city, and the revolution began to grow more violent. Manuela’s home is one of the least decorated, with only 12 decorative objects in the four public rooms, but 11 of them are hand-painted tiles depicting scenes of Ayacucho (see Table 8.3). The parents in Limeño Family 13 are both from towns in Peru other than Lima. The mother’s home of Abancay is another area where Sendero Luminoso was particularly violent. She displays indigenous figurines and vessels in her living room (n=12).

To an outsider looking in these Limeños’ homes, the indigenous aesthetic objects therein might look like kitsch or cheap touristic memorabilia, but for the owners of these pots, weavings, and ceramic figurines, they might evoke memories of a life left behind. Certainly they remind them of a sense of place.

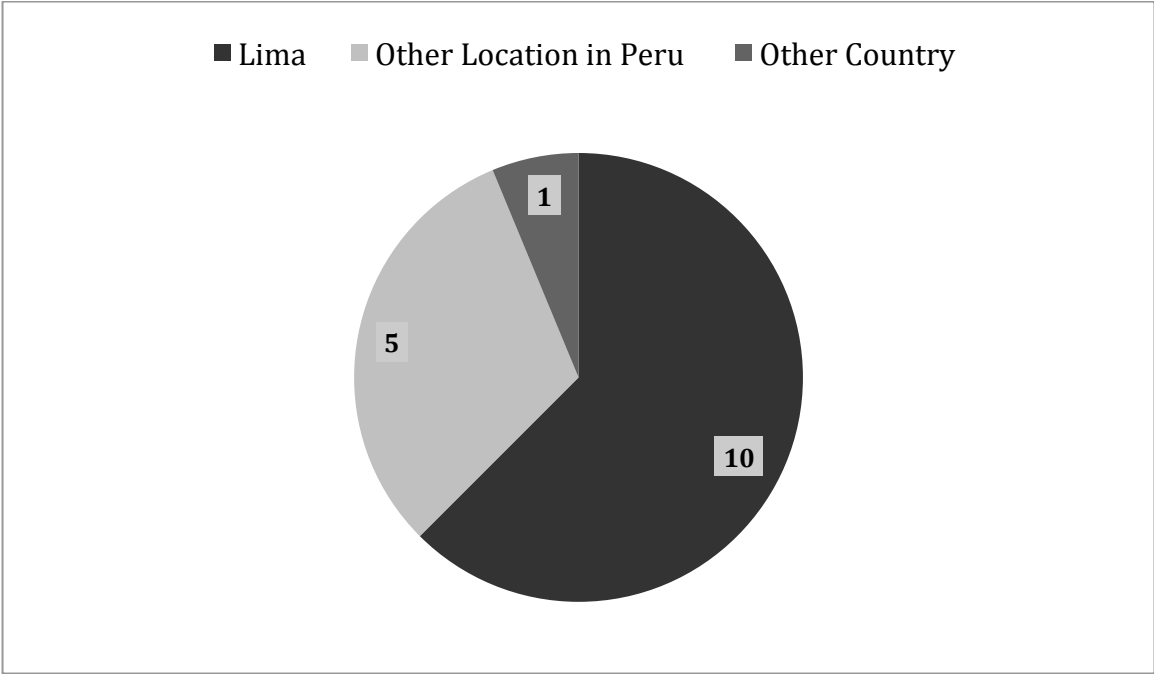


Figure 7.1. Limeño Fathers' Birthplace

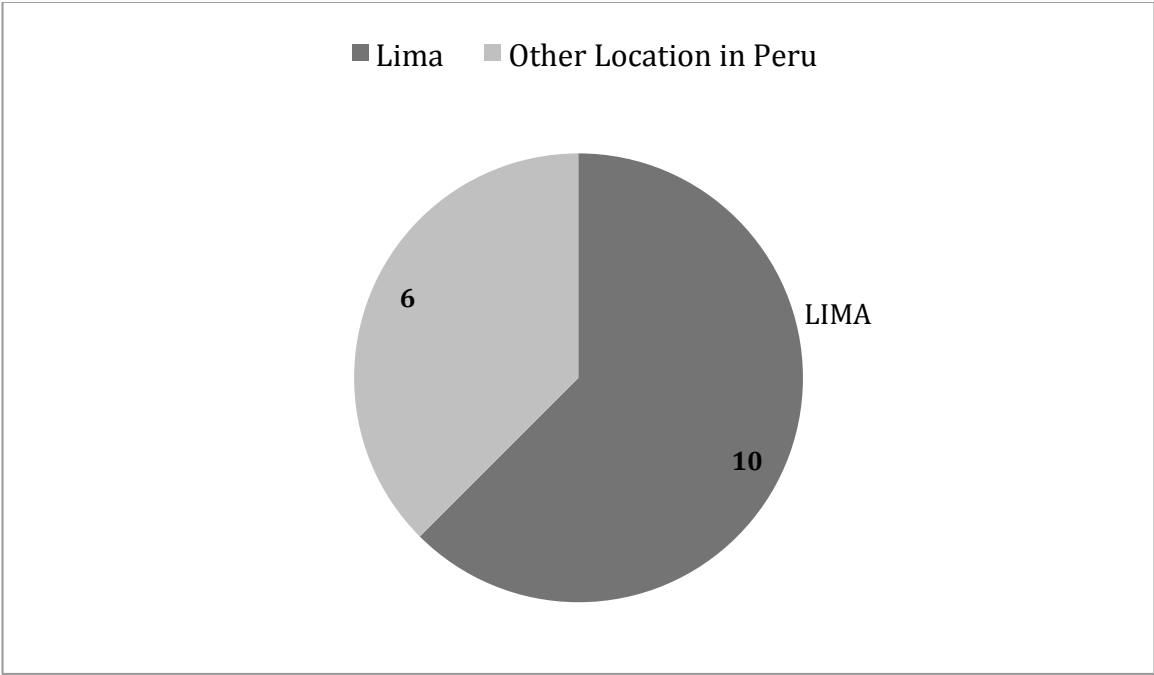


Figure 7.2. Limeño Mothers' Birthplace

## Busyness

Busyness for Limeño families, as for Angelenos, seems to result in some difficulties balancing work and home demands. This might result in deprioritization of household enhancement. Limeños have a solution that Angelenos usually do not employ.

### *Empleadas and Apoyo*

To manage their household needs, middle-class dual-earner families maintain the Limeño tradition of keeping in-home *empleadas* (hired domestic help, often live-in). An empleada can represent a major household expense. Often the family feeds her (empleadas are almost always women), houses her, and takes care of her medical bills, as well as pays her a meager wage. It is as if the empleada is another family member, albeit of a unique type.

Table 7.3 delineates which families have empleadas or other sorts of *apoyo* (free household help such as childcare from an in-law). Most houses have bedrooms and sometimes bathrooms to accommodate the empleada. Empleadas exert influence over many aspects of the home. Not only do they help socialize the children, but also they can shape the household aesthetic. Domestic helpers determine how clean a home is and the placement of objects, maintaining what some call a peasant identity in the household (e.g., Radcliffe 1990) because most of them are immigrant workers from rural Peru or other South American countries.

In one female-headed household, LF05, the mother has live-in help Mondays through Saturdays. But in the other female-headed home, LF04, the mother said she has “no help at all,” and no kin live nearby. Female-headed households with absent fathers and households with no *apoyo* are particularly busy. Typically the mother starts preparing lunch at breakfast time, especially when the children need to take a lunch to school. Of course, when present, fathers are



busy too.

Table 7.3. Limeño Families' Domestic Help

Family Number	Type of Apoyo (Domestic Help)	Hours	Monthly Pay (USD)*
LF01	Mother's sister	Live in; sister helps for 2 hours daily	\$152
LF02	Mother's mother	Occasional	N/A
LF03	Empleada	Live-in; starts work at 8 a.m.	\$170
LF04	None	N/A	N/A
LF05	Empleada	7 a.m. to 8 p.m.; sometimes sleeps at family's home	\$180
LF06	Wife of brother, mother's parents	8 hours daily	N/A
LF07	Mother's father	Lives in front house	N/A
LF08	Empleada	Monday through Saturday, 8 a.m. to 10 p.m. (Also mother's sister helps 3-4 days per week)	\$204
LF09	Father's mother	Friday night through Monday morning	N/A
LF10	Empleada	Monday through Saturday, 4 hours daily	\$23
LF11	Empleada	Live-in Monday 8 a.m. through Saturday 5 p.m.	\$152
LF12	Empleada	Live-in Monday through Saturday	\$208
LF13	Empleada	Live-in Monday through Saturday	\$265
LF14	None	N/A	N/A
LF15	Empleada	Full-time live-in	\$170
LF16	Empleada	Live-in Monday through Saturday	\$265

\* Usually in addition to room and board, as well as other incidentals.

## Social Networks

Social capital, as defined by one's network and the access to resources that it potentially provides, is reliable and extensive among Limeños. When I struggled to determine whether a

family should be considered middle class and appropriate for this study, friends told me that they know what class a person belongs to after visiting their home (including judging by what sorts of domestic objects they own). Paying visits is a frequent pastime in Lima, and it is rare that people spend social time with people outside their social class.

The paternally controlled nuclear family is changing among members of the middle class in urban Peru, and whether parents are living separately or cohabitating, both usually work to meet the family's needs in the face of increasing costs of living. Even if they are separated (the Catholic Church frowns upon divorce so it is relatively rare but increasing), and the father is in another country or has formed a new family elsewhere, he almost always sends money to support his original wife and children. In Peru, family crosses class boundaries and is reinforced by the church and state.

Extended kin have traditionally lived with or near the younger families. Kinship patterns are in flux in Lima, and family members are beginning to live farther from one another. Grandparents stay in the rural parts of the country, or they must work full-time themselves until they retire and move in with their children.

### **Summary**

This chapter illustrates some relevant attributes of the 16 middle-class Peruvian families that participated in this study. As the middle class gains a foothold in the new Lima economy, urban Peruvians appear to be growing more similar to the Angeleno families in several ways. For example, Peruvians' consumer desires (e.g., a bigger house, new electronics) are slowly Westernizing, but given their history of being used for their labor, the middle-class is reticent to give in to these wants. Peruvians do not yet go into debt for what they consider to be unnecessary

purchases, and they do not seem to go out of their way to buy household art.

In Lima, income does not reflect how hard individuals actually work, and they work longer hours than the Angelenos, so it is difficult to compare the earnings of the two cities' middle classes. How much a person earns is not an adequate index for class standing. Occupation-based prestige is perceived differently in the two cities, so that particular measure of cultural capital is not comparable either. The parents in the Lima component of the study, however, have a wide range of middle-class occupations, and, as in Los Angeles, several offer them exposure to cultural capital in the forms of travel and media use. This has affected parents' taste preferences and material culture selections.

Due to historic and current migration patterns, Lima's population is culturally diverse. I think that I would have seen more varied ethnic art in the families' homes were I to have had a chance to interview people of more ethnic backgrounds. Many of the parents that I interviewed are children of parents who relocated to Lima during or directly after Sendero Luminoso. Alternately, they fled to Lima alone, seeking shelter or work or both. Indigenous types of material culture in the homes (e.g., ceramics or textiles from the Peruvian chakra) indicate that most families feel a strong connection to their place of origin, or that of their parents or other relatives. Many of these parents would like to return to rural settings, as I discuss further in subsequent chapters.

Adults also appear to have more meaningful – or at least better-maintained – friendships with one another, according to frequent social visits I observed. Nearly all the Limeño families also had some sort of hired domestic help who may have some control over the household aesthetics. Some families had more than one form of help. Strong support systems represent not only assistance for the dual-earner families as they balance the demands of work and home life,

but more people seeing the home interior than in the case of an average Angeleno family.

In the next chapter, I describe material culture in Limeño homes and reveal relationships between the assemblage and various traditional indices of class.

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<sup>i</sup> Videotaped and narrated home tours permitted me to see inside families' bedrooms, bathrooms, and kitchens, but I did not count the artifacts therein.

<sup>ii</sup> I think participants told me this because they sought some sort of assistance from an American anthropologist.

<sup>iii</sup> Unemployment decreased 3 percent from 2010 to 2011 to 6.8 percent, and underemployment is a widespread problem in the city (CIA World Factbook 2012), particularly in certain sectors.

<sup>iv</sup> I do not address education levels in this chapter for at least two reasons. First, I found that many participants did not finish high school and were ashamed to talk about this subject, changing the topic when I asked. I found it insensitive to continue asking. Additionally, I found no aesthetic objects in the home that were specifically related to educational experiences or institutions. It did not seem appropriate or pertinent to continue asking participants about their educational achievements or related taste preferences.

## **Chapter Eight:**

### **Limeño Houses and Domestic Aesthetic Artifacts**

Situated along the west coast of South America, Lima skirts the driest desert in the world, the Atacama. From the city the range is invisible through the perpetual haze of a grey sky, but about 70 kilometers to the east the 20,000-foot-tall Andes rise sharply, a harshly jagged spine that divides Peru in half. Because the mountains block moisture that would arrive from the Amazon Basin, and because of atmospheric phenomena, Lima experiences low precipitation levels: it is the world capital with the least annual precipitation (CIA Factbook 2012). Trees and succulents extract the moisture that never falls from the humid air, so in the most upscale neighborhoods gardeners irrigate the soil to landscape using non-native plants. Because of low-lying and ever-present fog, annual sunlight is measured in hours [1,474; CIA Factbook (2012)].

Initial impressions of middle-class Limeño homes included their starkness and orderliness, their cleanliness, and the walls painted colors I had never seen before, not even in other Latin American countries. They were not as bright as colors in Mexico or Central America, but they were colorful indeed. I noticed the prevalence of ruffled rugs, plastic artifacts displayed on shelves, and indigenous Andean material culture. Slippery, highly polished parquet flooring is popular, as are ceramic kitchen and bathroom tiles called *mayólica*. Not every home has the same overall aesthetic, but they share pan-Latin and pan-Limeño features. Many such commonalities are probably due to access to raw materials and artful commodities; a shared history of Spanish colonization; a shared experience with globalization including easy access to domestic helpers; and the cultural understanding of aesthetic themes.

### Introduction to the Middle-Class Limeño Home

Lima’s middle-class houses tend to be multi-family, or at least multiple-floor, condominiums without garages for parking or storage. Average home size in my 16-house sample is 1280 ft<sup>2</sup>, and as a rule, these homes are not surrounded by yards. The Lima dwellings were built in various decades over the last century (Figure 8.1). In general, Limeño homes in this study are newer than their Angeleno counterparts<sup>i</sup>.

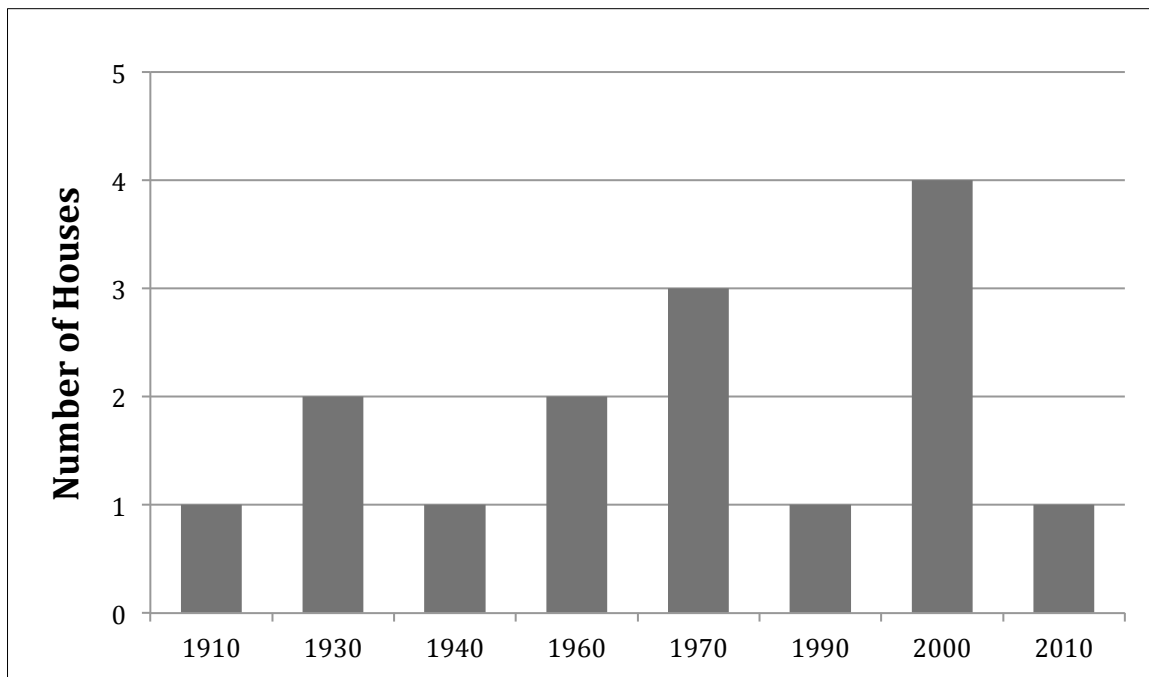


Figure 8.1. Decade of Limeño home construction.

Having a yard around one’s home, or acquiring a house with at least some outdoor space, is the foremost ideal of Limeños of all ages: this would be a major feature of their dream home’s aesthetic (outdoor swimming pools are children’s close second desire, even though it is never really warm enough to swim). They want a garden in which to grow food and flowers, an outdoor place to play, and simply some green space, which Lima sorely lacks. Many, such as the

parents of Limeño Family 15, specify that a yard could accommodate more guests and barbeques. Presence or absence of green space at home could be considered a class marker.

*Table 8.1. Limeño Demographic Data, Family Home, and Public Room Sizes.*

Family Number	Participant Name	Participant Family Role	Participant Age	Home Size (ft <sup>2</sup> )	Estimated Area of Public Rooms (ft <sup>2</sup> )
LF01	Monica	Mother	38	648	220
	Michaela	Daughter	10		
	Anthony	Father	39		
LF02	Sandra	Mother	37	1,025	475
	Piero	Father	37		
	Samantha	Daughter	12		
LF03	Sara	Mother	ND*	900	320
	Pepe	Father	ND*		
	Javi	Son	8		
LF04**	Flora	Mother	37	1,100	800
	Rodrigo	Son	7		
LF05**	Marilyn	Mother	31	1,829	780
	Daniela	Daughter	11		
LF06	Maridel Lidia	Mother	31	980	360
	Jean Eduardo	Father	33		
	Alexander	Son	12		
LF07	Betsy	Mother	37	1,292	520
	Cesar	Father	37		
	Fernando	Son	12		
LF08	Sara Vela	Mother	27	1,507	750
	Julius Cesar	Father	40		
	Hugo	Son	9		
LF09	Manuela	Mother	28	409	150
	Marco	Father	40		
	Romina	Daughter	8		
LF10	Irma	Mother	32	2,152	800
	Fernando	Father	36		
	Hamilton	Son	10		
	Roger	Son (TARGET CHILD)	8		
LF11	Consuelo	Mother	47	1,722	605
	Antonio	Father	47		
	Diego	Son (TARGET CHILD)	11		

		CHILD)			
	Victor	Son	11		
LF12	Rosario	Mother	44	1,216	485
	Juan Carlos	Father	45		
	Adriana	Daughter	10		
LF13	Gisela	Mother	29	2,098	840
	Nicolas	Father	48		
	Angelita	Daughter	13		
LF14	Margarita	Mother	41	1,506	880
	Jose Enrique	Father	47		
	Adriana	Daughter	9		
LF15	Zarina	Mother	47	947	420
	Francisco	Father	56		
	Flavi	Son	13		
LF16	Acebeto	Mother	52	2,497	1,020
	Dante	Father	54		
	Alejandro	Son	12		

\* These parents were both probably in their mid-30s.

\*\* The fathers in these families had moved away but continued to support the family financially.

An example of this longing for outdoor space comes from Michaela, the little girl in LF01. She and her parents, aunt, and cousin live in a nice apartment building, but they are actively seeking to buy a larger single-family dwelling or condo nearby, in San Borja, preferably with a yard. Michaela said of her favorite house, which belonged to a friend of her mother:

[I remember] the house in Chiclacayo that has two floors. On the first floor are the kitchen and her bedroom. And the room is big and has a door that is see-through. That opens and closes. And has a garden that is everybody's, everybody can go in because it is enormous and doesn't end.

I learned that when Michaela said that the house has a “garden that is everybody's,” she was referring to the public park that backs up to her mother's friend's home in the medium-sized town of Chiclacayo. Her mother's friend hosts frequent outdoor get-togethers.

Home ownership appears not to be an aspiration or a marker of adulthood as it is in the United States, but having green space – living in a single-family dwelling surrounded by a yard –



might represent high status to Limeños. Every middle-class family in my study mortgages or owns their residence outright, but only 6 of 16 live in single-family dwellings. Of these, the Boycos (LF16) and the Santos (LF07) families live in Lima proper, and the four others live in the incorporated settlement of Chorrillos. These families make good brief case studies because they illustrate the variety of middle-class Limeño house configurations.

The Boyco family earns the most money (Figure 6.2 in Chapter 6) and has the largest house: 2497 ft<sup>2</sup>. According to the class criteria set out by Avelar et al. (2009) (Table 6.2 in Chapter 6), the Boycos are members of Clase B, although the parents may earn enough money to be considered Clase A (ipsos APOYO 2011). The Boyco home features green space (the father loves to garden) but no swimming pool or garage. The Boycos have owned their house for 12 years, and unless they have extensive savings, inflation would likely prevent them from purchasing it outright today.

Limeño Family 07, the Santoses, devised a creative way to surround themselves with the green space they so craved in Surco Viejo, a middle-class neighborhood near the center of Lima. They reside in a detached, 1292 ft<sup>2</sup> three-bedroom guesthouse that they had finished building the prior year. It sits behind the maternal grandfather's home, sharing the large lot that he had purchased in the 1970s. Of the homes in the sample, this one was special because it almost perfectly matched the ideal home that the young family had wanted to build all of their married life. The house is constructed of double-thick, coffee-colored adobe that blends into the desert background. The living room has curved interior walls with built-in shelving, and most of the furniture is handcrafted from dark wood. The Santoses raise chickens and grow their own vegetables. They said they were happy with their yard, and they used it. Betsy, the mother, told me:

I grew up being around trees and plants all the time. When my father bought the (front) house, he is from Provencia, and he really enjoyed growing things because it brought fond memories. So our house was like an orchard. There were a lot of plants. I grew up among bananas, sweet potato, yucca, and grapes. So, I enjoyed it and I have always wanted my children to grow up surrounded by nature, plants, trees, birds, and tranquility. And my husband also likes the fields. We like this space in which we got to live because we are isolated from the noise. We don't really like noise, and we have plants and so it feels very natural as if we were in the country. I really like it like this. It is very calm.

The Santos Family may or may not have known that they were living a dream shared by nearly every Limeño family in my sample, a dream borne of characteristics so many of them had in common: a love of nature and open space and memories of childhoods spent playing in the majestic natural wonderland of the Andean sierra, where many still have family. The fact that the Santos parents had the chance to build a home in this particularly overbuilt metropolis is rare indeed.

The four families who live in Chorrillos have ample outdoor space for the children to play, but it is all sand. Simple visual assessment indicates that buildings, even schools, are vulnerable to seismic activity in Chorrillos, because it is difficult to create proper foundations due to the soil composition (Meneses-Loja and Aguilar 2004). Residential roads in Chorrillos are not paved, and the parts of the neighborhood where I worked would be considered Clase D by most measures. The families' homes, however, are surprisingly upscale inside. Limeño Family 10 (pseudonym surname Condor), has a 2152 ft<sup>2</sup> home with three pink interior walls and nearly no furniture. Some of the rooms are empty, although the family has lived there for seven years. One of the living room walls is entirely made of glass: a window overlooking the sea. The appliances in the kitchen are expensive, as is the television. The father, a police officer, showed me his pistol-shaped cigarette lighter. Guns are illegal for most Peruvians, but not for police

officers. It was so realistic that I was glad my assistant Andrea was with me. The lighter, which did not work, is displayed on top of the entertainment center in the living room near a large framed poster of the Al Pacino film “Scarface” in the entryway. Those two items are the only examples of aesthetic material culture in this large house.

What most people like about the structural features of their homes are size and light from windows. Light is vital in Lima, where sunlight is so rare. These themes – natural features, plentiful light, and airiness – reappear in the preference-ranking exercises and open-ended interview results, discussed below and in subsequent chapters.

### **Assemblage Characteristics**

I counted and categorized all the objects that I considered to be primarily aesthetic in the 16 homes I surveyed in Lima, finding a total of 620, with a mean of 38.75 (Table 8.2). I used the same 14-object-type coding system with the Limeño data as I did with the Los Angeles data. The Limeños display fewer aesthetic objects than the Angelenos, who have a mean of 54.4 in the public rooms. In Lima, I used photos and video to ensure that my counts were correct. I also documented material culture while I was in the homes and asked questions about aesthetic objects during interviews.

Table 8.2. Aesthetic Material Culture Assemblage in Lima Homes.

Artifact Type Number Code	Artifact Category	Description/ Examples	Lima Total	Lima Approximate Percentage of Sample	L.A. Approximate Percentage of Sample
1	Original wall art	Paintings, lithographs	15	2	5
2	Mass-produced wall art	Posters, framed or unframed	29	5	5
3	Other types of wall art	Plaques	42	7	3
4	Kids' art	Drawings or sculptures	3	.5	4
5	Figurines	Anthropomorphic or animal representations	96	15	8
6	Vessels	Baskets, pots – aesthetic, not for holding other artifacts	104	17	12.5
7	Other three-dimensional artifacts	Non-anthropomorphic, non-vessel sculptures	154	26	19.5
8	Natural aesthetic artifacts	Plants, aquaria	24	3	8
9	Floor treatments	Rugs, inlays	6	1	2.5
10	Wall treatments	Non-white or beige paint	14	2	1.5
11	Trophies	Trophies, tiaras	2	.5	1
12	Family photographs and portraiture	School, team, pet photos	118	19	28.5
13	Religious artifacts (not 2-D)	Menorahs, crosses	5	1	1
14	Other aesthetic artifacts	Stained glass windows	8	1	.5
			LIMA TOTAL: 620	100	100 (n=1,730)

Table 8.3. Assemblage Count by Family: Lima.

Type	LF 01	LF 02	LF 03	LF 04	LF 05	LF 06	LF 07	LF 08	LF 09	LF 10	LF 11	LF 12	LF 13	LF 14	LF 15	LF 16
Original Wall Art	0	1	0	0	0	2	0	1	0	0	0	1	1	1	4	4
Mass-produced Wall Art	2	2	3	0	5	3	0	6	0	1	6	0	0	0	2	1
Other Wall	0	2	9	11	0	0	1	4	11	1	5	0	0	0	0	0
Kids' Art	0	2	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Figurines	14	8	7	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	24	4	15	4	0	18
Vessels	10	13	5	0	11	5	5	1	0	0	24	16	3	3	0	10
Other 3-D Art	11	27	6	0	13	4	8	3	0	0	15	16	9	6	4	39
Natural Art	1	3	1	0	1	2	0	1	0	0	1	11	0	2	1	0
Floor Treatment	0	2	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Wall Treatment	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0
Trophies	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Family Photos	8	10	9	0	8	14	9	0	0	0	17	5	18	0	6	14
Religious Art	3	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Other	2	1	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	2	1	0	0	0
Total N=620	51	72	43	11	40	33	24	17	12	2	94	55	47	16	17	86

## Hypotheses

I tested three hypotheses in order to determine relationships between types and quantities of art in the homes of middle-class Limeño families, and families' class belonging (as determined by income, an economic class marker).

**Hypothesis 1:** Economically wealthier families (as defined by combined incomes) will place more decorative objects in the house's public rooms than will those with lower incomes.

**Hypothesis 2:** Economically wealthier families will have more pieces of original art in the house's public rooms than lower-income families.

**Hypothesis 3:** Economically wealthier families will have less densely decorated public rooms.

### Methods

I estimated the square footage of each Limeño family's total living space (mean=1,440 ft<sup>2</sup>), relying on families' reports and images of the spaces in my archive. Three families did not know the size of their homes. The mean of the Limeño houses is about 15 percent smaller than the Angeleno homes (mean=1,716 ft<sup>2</sup>). I then coded the positions of the objects in the rooms, using the same schema as for the L.A. data.

*Table 8.4. Variables used to determine relationships between aesthetics and income: Lima.*

Family Number	Combined Annual Household Income (USD)	Number of Aesthetic Objects – Public Rooms	Number of Original Aesthetic Objects – Public Rooms	Density of Art Per Square Foot – Public Rooms
LF01	36,000	53	0	.23
LF02	8,988	72	1	.15
LF03	16,644	41	0	.13
LF04	3,600	11	0	.01
LF05	900	39	0	.05
LF06	12,240	33	2	.09
LF07	15,744	24	0	.05
LF08	16,872	16	1	.02
LF09	4,488	12	0	.08
LF10	4,488	2	0	.003
LF11	10,800	94	0	.15
LF12	33,744	58	1	.11
LF13	58,488	46	1	.06
LF14	7,500	16	1	.02
LF15	60,000	18	4	.04
LF16	67,488	88	4	.09

Table 8.5. Rank order of variables determining analysis results: Lima.

Rank: Family Income*	Rank: # of Art in Public Rooms	Rank: Family Income*	Rank: # of Original Art in Public Rooms	Rank: Family Income*	Rank: Density of Art in Public Rooms
1	2	1	1.5	1	6
2	11	2	1.5	2	11
3	6	3	7.5	3	8
4	5	4	13.5	4	1
5	4	5	7.5	5	4
6	12.5	6	7.5	6.5	13
7	12.5	7	7.5	6.5	12
8	7	8	3.5	8	3
9	10	9	7.5	9	10
10	9	10	3.5	10	5
11	1	11	13.5	11	14
12	8	12	13.5	12	9
13	3	13	7.5	13	2
14.5	14	14.5	13.5	14.5	7
14.5	16	14.5	13.5	14.5	16
16	15	16	13.5	16.5	15

*Placement: Rooms and Positions*

The system of categorizing rooms that I used to code the Los Angeles sample was not exactly transferrable to the Limeño homes. Limeño floor plans are different from most homes in the CELF sample. In Lima, there are fewer room-dividing walls, regardless of when the home was constructed (Table 8.6).

Table 8.6. Distribution of aesthetic objects in Lima public rooms.

Family Number	Living Room (n=16)	Eating Area (n=10)	Family Room/Den (n=2)	Entryway/Foyer (n=5)	Total Objects
LF01	13	40	0	0	53
LF02	66	5	0	1	72
LF03	32	6	0	3	41
LF04	0	11	0	0	11
LF05	37	2	0	0	39
LF06	7	2	24	0	33
LF07	24	0	0	0	24
LF08	11	5	0	0	16
LF09	12	0	0	0	12
LF10	1	0	0	1	2
LF11	57	37	0	0	94
LF12	55	2	0	1	58
LF13	46	0	0	0	46
LF14	15	0	0	1	16
LF15	18	0	0	0	18
LF16	58	20	4	6	88
Total	449	130	28	13	620

Walls divide bedrooms and bathrooms from the rest of the home, and the rest of the rooms flow into one another without separation. The Boyco house (LF16) is the only one that has a distinct entryway or foyer, but it still flows into the living room, hourglass-like. Oddly, the next most distinct and decorated entryway belongs to LF09, the least wealthy family with the smallest house (409 ft<sup>2</sup>), situated in the hipodromo. I suspect that the space was separated for the purpose of cleaning boots after people walked across the muddy track. Four other families had objects on display that were obviously intended to greet visitors. I coded these objects as being in an entryway.

Only the Boycos had a separate family room or den. In each home there was always one big open space downstairs for socializing. It always housed a TV (except for the Boycos' case: they kept their TV in the den). The Boycos are also one of the three families with a separate



dining room, but they do not dine there. They use the table for building intricate jigsaw puzzles, an activity the family enjoys doing together. In Lima, nearly everyone eats in the kitchen, and the table is in or very near it in the big open room (sometimes placed in front of the television, which to the chagrin of some parents is almost always on). Seldom does a wall separate the kitchen from the rest of the home; rather, the table on which the family eats serves as a divider, or the kitchen is around a corner with the table inside. When appropriate, I coded aesthetic objects in the kitchen as being in the eating area. Most kitchen objects have performance characteristics that are not primarily aesthetic, so when I coded artful material culture therein, the room-coding issue was a matter of word choice: “kitchen” or “eating area.”

Clearly, the Boycos, with the highest income represented among the Limeños, have a home that is unusual for the area. It is the largest house in the sample and it reveals a different structural design and cultural understanding of aesthetics. It departs from middle-class Peruvian architectural qualities and is stylistically more European. Marilyn, the mother in LF05, has a home with dividing walls, but the dining room table is in the kitchen. The kitchen shares a large pass-through window with the living room: the rooms are divided by a sort of half-wall.

As in the Los Angeles sample, I found that the 16 Limeño living rooms in my study have the most aesthetic objects ( $n=449$ ;  $\text{mean}=28.06$ ). Unlike in the Los Angeles houses, the next most frequently decorated parts of the Lima homes are the 10 eating areas ( $n=130$ ;  $\text{mean}=13$ ); then the two family rooms ( $n=28$ ;  $\text{mean}=14$ ). As in L.A., the foyers, or entry areas I counted as such, contain the fewest artifacts. The foyers contain 13 aesthetic objects ( $\text{mean}=2.6$ ).

### *Positions*

Families position their objects in different locations within their public rooms (Table 8.5). In Lima, figurines, vessels, and other three-dimensional objects occur most frequently on display shelves or tables. Most aesthetic objects in the Lima sample, as in the L.A. sample, are located on surfaces (n=480; mean= 30 per house); then affixed to walls (n=104; mean=6.5 per house). Few objects are on floors (n=34; mean=2.13 per house). One object, a pink gel sticker, adheres to a living room windowpane in the home of LF01, and one mobile hangs from a ceiling in LF16's eating area.

Objects on surfaces tend to be crammed on shelves that are specially designed and selected for the purpose of showcasing decorations. One often has to kneel on the floor and sometimes open glass doors to closely inspect the display. Assuming this is a middle-class trend, to whom are middle-class Limeños transmitting what sort of identity via the “display” of their artful material culture? Perhaps the family is cognizant of and comforted by some of these objects' presence in the public areas of the home without looking at them every day. These objects may be of sentimental value, so the family opts not to discard them but chooses not to view them regularly or show them to guests.

### **Analysis Results**

In Lima, as in Los Angeles, the hypotheses I tested using the material culture data involved the relationship between artifacts and income, because income is so often associated with a family's class stratum. First, I sought to determine whether Limeño families' incomes correlated with the total number of aesthetic objects in the home. Second, I sought to determine whether families with more income would have more original art. Third, I tested the relationship

between Limeño families' wealth and the density of the artful artifacts in the public rooms of their homes. Another aim was to quantitatively compare the samples' assemblages.

Just as I did to analyze the L.A. sample, I used SPSS (statistical software for social sciences) to determine Spearman's rank correlation coefficients of the variables pertinent to my hypotheses. Table 8.4 delineates variables for all Lima families.

#### *Total Art and Household Income: Hypothesis One*

I hypothesized that wealthier families would have homes with fewer artifact concentrations because I thought they would be more choosy than the less wealthy families in the sample. There does appear to be a weak positive relationship between the number of objects on display and families' combined household income in the Lima dataset ( $\rho = 0.43$ ). This relationship is stronger than in Los Angeles, where the relationship is unsubstantiated [ $(\rho) = .15$ ]. The range of number of art pieces a family owned is 2 to 94.

The family with the most objects (LF11) makes \$10,800 annually (combined household income) and displays 94 objects. The family with the fewest number of artistic objects is LF10, the family with the gun lighter and the "Scarface" poster. They have less combined income than most families but are not the least wealthy. They have lived in their home for seven years, and they said they had no desire to add more art. The Boycos, earning the most money per month, display 88 objects.

#### *Original Art and Household Income: Hypothesis Two*

My second hypothesis, that economically wealthier families in Lima will have a higher proportion and number of pieces of original art in the house's public rooms than lower-income

families, is weakly supported as well ( $\rho = 0.64$ ) (not statistically significant). The range in the number of original art pieces among families ( $n=15$ ; mean=.94) is zero to 4 items. Table 5.3 shows further relevant variables.

#### *Density of Art in Public Rooms and Combined Household Income: Hypothesis Three*

I then examined the relationships between income and density of objects in the home. Spearman's correlation coefficient shows an insignificant negative relationship between these variables ( $\rho = -.18$ ).

### **Powerful Art**

As with the Angeleno sample, what I call powerful art is the most commonly represented type of aesthetic material culture represented in the Lima homes. Powerful art is the sort of object that transmits the most identity information about a family – their place of origin, their ancestors, their religion, their ethnicity, and their political affiliation, for example.

Peruvians are exceedingly nationalistic, and most Peruvians (particularly urbanites but also residents of tiny villages) share *peruismo*, or *orgullo Peruano* (Peruvian pride). Peruismo is a strong, proprietary feeling for the nation, more powerful than basic nationalism. Peruvians brag about the country's terrain, climate, underdog soccer team, and gastronomy. Peruvians share an impressive knowledge of the history of the country. Peruismo manifests in a profound hatred for Chile. Objects<sup>ii</sup> that project this peruismo are perfect examples of a powerful type of material culture that oddly does not occur as frequently in Lima as in the United States sample. I differentiate tangible indicators of peruismo from heritage art, below, because peruismo-related material culture reflects contemporary phenomena, while heritage art usually evokes memories.

In Chapter 10 I discuss specific meanings that objects in each of these categories hold for various family members; here I address the quantity of the objects in the homes.

### *Heritage Art*

The most visible and powerful commonality among the homes in Lima is the presence of indigenous crafts, or *artesanía*, including weavings and pottery and region-specific objects. This was a very important finding, because *artesanía* indicates that nearly all families held dear a sense of place, time, and memories of people and events. Usually these objects come from parents' home villages, many of which they or their parents had to flee after Sendero Luminoso. Other times, parents (or their parents) moved to Lima for work. Either way, the objects reminded the family of sacred people, events, and places.

Acebeto Boyco, the mother in LF16, collects an example of "other three-dimensional objects": 17 small, expensive, traditional ceramic houses that she buys when she travels to the Peruvian city of Ayacucho. She displays them like they are situated in villages, clustered throughout the four relevant rooms in the home (there are more in other rooms). Display of indigenous art from one's own country is much more prevalent in the Peruvian sample than in the American sample, with at least 50 such objects in the Lima homes.

Juan Carlos, the father in LF12, is one of the several Limeños intent upon keeping indigenous Peruvian heritage alive. He said:

In the real Peru you can show the artifacts that our ancestors have left us, there is a rich culture that we have. What I would like to have is from the culture of Chavín de Huantar, a race of slaves. I want a rattle or a rug. So it is important, no? You take comfort from what you have had from the past.

This reinforces my argument that etic differentiations between high and low art (or touristic kitsch, in this case) can be snobbish and ethnocentric. What outsiders might consider trinkets can hold great significance to families and might even be pieces of an urban aesthetic identity formation process.

Two examples of three-dimensional objects mounted on walls are powerful art. Commemorative plates indicate the origin of specific neighborhoods in Lima. Sandra (LF02) displays a plate commemorating the advent of the municipality of Surco, which is where her parents are from; it is mounted over the front door (a rare example of a true entryway object). It depicts Surco's administrative building in the center and the date of the neighborhood's incorporation is written around the edges.

Flora, the single mother of LF04, lives in Chorrillos and has a plate that looks just like Sandra's mounted above the television in her living room. It too commemorates a neighborhood in Lima (I cannot tell which). Hers is the home with the second-fewest objects, but she built it only six months ago and plans to build about another 110 ft<sup>2</sup> onto it. Her walls are bright green, but this plate must be very important to her, because it is almost the only artifact that she has intentionally displayed to transmit identity information or evoke an aesthetic response.

### **Surprises**

Children's art is all but absent in the Lima sample. I saw children making art, but only three examples are displayed on public walls<sup>iii</sup> (and not on the refrigerators either, a common place that Angelenos display children's art). The rest of the kids' creations are on the walls in children's bedrooms, and once in the parents' bedroom. This piqued my curiosity, because Peruvians shower their children with so much affection.

Nearly all the family members expressed a craving for green space, so I find it interesting that so few natural aesthetic objects such as plants (n=24) occur in the Limeño homes, representing only 3.9 percent of artifacts. Sara, the mother of LF03, has a golden pothos ivy growing in a pot in the corner of the living room. Its unruly branches and leaves extend to cover the house's inside front wall. The majority of the natural aesthetic artifacts in the sample are part of Rosario Reyes' (LF12) shell collection, a reflection of her beachcombing hobby. There are no aquaria represented in the sample. I looked in Lima's telephone directory and there is one aquarium store in the city. It is in the most expensive district of San Isidro, and when I visited it, there was only one other customer inside, a Canadian. Apparently fish tanks have not become popular among middle-class Limeños. Rugs are common, but most are used to catch dirt so I did not count them in this sample; aesthetic floor treatments such as inlays and decorative carpets are rare (n=6).

### *An Absence of Crucifixes*

A surprising finding regarding the Limeño assemblage is that among all 16 homes, there are only eight three-dimensional religious artifacts, crucifixes and statues, displayed in the relevant rooms. I had anticipated them to be the most prevalent of all types of figurines. They are the second most rare of all artifacts, after trophies and awards, of which there are two (Sandra, the mother in LF02, had won one for customer service, and the other was on a bottom shelf in the Santos' living room). The family with the most religious artifacts is LF01. Michaela had made large nativity sets that the family displays in the corner of the living room.

There is, however, a substantial amount of mass-produced two-dimensional Catholic wall art in the homes (n=31). One is a large non-original velveteen framed image of Jesus on the

Zelenas' (LF03) living room wall. I had trouble deciding how to categorize this object because the image was almost three-dimensional, but I classified it as a mass-produced two-dimensional piece. Kitchens in particular feature artifacts like clocks and calendars decorated with Catholic iconography. However, these objects are not primarily intended to function to evoke sensory or emotional responses, but to tell time, and secondarily to remind family members of their faith. Some Limeños have crucifixes in the bedrooms, usually mounted over their beds. I know this from family members' home tours and personal inspections, but these are not part of the present analysis. The crucifixes represent an excellent example of less-than-conspicuous, backstage display of identity-transmitting and identity-affirming material culture.

### *Family Photographs*

I found 118 family photographs in the four main rooms of the 16 Lima houses (average = 7.38 per house) and 496 in the 32 Los Angeles houses (average = 15.5 per house). I anticipated finding plenty of family photographs in Lima homes, but I assumed that there would be far fewer than in Los Angeles, because most Limeños see their family so frequently. As in the Los Angeles sample, though, family photos are the most commonly occurring aesthetic artifacts in the Lima assemblage.

As in the Angeleno homes, photographs are frequently clustered. Sometimes, as in LF03 (the Zelena family), the photos are stacked behind one another in frames, rendering several only partially visible. Although nearly all the families keep pets (mostly dogs and cats), no photos of them are displayed. This may be because the pets are often mostly functional, sometimes living mostly outdoors. Dogs guard the home and cats keep vermin at bay.



I also counted family portraiture in this category, not as original art. Limeño Family 06, the Santiagos, displayed a beautiful example of this. Four sepia-toned portraits depict the progression of the mother, Mariel Lidia, growing up from infancy. They are clustered in one frame with oval cutouts that accommodate the drawings. Juan, the father, says his young daughter looks just like her mother did as she grew, and this is his favorite object.

### *Not-so-powerful Art*

Other types of aesthetic three-dimensional objects, vessels, and figurines are the next most common artifacts in Peruvians' homes, in that order. These three categories total 57 percent of the total Lima assemblage: 354 of the total 620 objects. Of course, many of these objects have identity-transmitting components and some should be considered powerful art; further, the meaning of these objects is unknown until one asks about them.

“Other three-dimensional objects” is the category include objects such as miniature cars (there were two); “figurines” includes the nearly ubiquitous, inexpensive plastic dolls that Limeños display; and the small porcelain flower vases holding plastic roses and carnations belong in the “vessel” category. The latter two categories of objects often surround the framed family photographs situated on display shelves with glass doors, or they are centerpieces on coffee or end tables. They are also the aesthetic material culture most likely to be positioned low to the ground and difficult to see.

## **Personalization of Objects and Spaces**

Families talked about what they would change about their homes in their home tours and semi-structured interviews. This was after I asked them what they would do to make their home “more ideal.” I also asked what they would do to their home if “they had all the money in the world.” I was hoping to understand what sort of material culture, specifically artistic artifacts, they would love to own to enhance their lives. What participants said during their home tours and interviews revealed surprises that often countered my observations.

### *Wall colors*

I was surprised that more walls were not more colorfully painted in the Lima homes, as they had seemed so brightly painted during my first visit to the city. Many families had painted at least one wall a bright color, ranging from bright medium green to terracotta orange, but families painted far fewer walls than I had assumed. (The number of painted walls in the Lima sample is 14.) Sandra, the mother in LF02, had devised a motif using yellows: each of her living room walls featured a slightly darker value of the same hue. But in 2003 and 2010, the last times I lived in Peru, it seemed that everyone except members of Clase A (and sometimes them too) was competing for a prize for the wildest interior color scheme. This sample, however, features mostly beige and white walls. Many parents spoke about wanting to paint their walls colorfully, but had not. This may be an indication of how busy they were becoming, as this is not a job a family would delegate to an empleada. The painting craze seems to have passed. It has been replaced, apparently, by the growing popularity of floral- and faunal-themed wallpaper borders, which occur in three homes.

### *Larger and more fluid spaces*

In the Lima sample, two of the families (LF04 in Chorrillos and the Santos, LF07) had moved within the last year or so, and both built their new homes to their specifications. The others lived in their homes for an average of 10.5 years, and many are not free to remodel because they are situated in a multi-family dwelling. For example, Gisela Mososco, the mother in LF13, owns one of the few homes with a wall that divides the kitchen from the front room. She wants to knock it down but the wall bears weight in a multi-family condo. She and members of other families are left to dream about the interior improvements they wish to make, most of which involve increasing the size.

### **Summary**

Married, middle-class home ownership in Lima seems to be more attainable than it is in Los Angeles. That is likely because the price for a similar house is *currently* relatively less expensive in Lima than it would be in L.A. However, as wages rise and unemployment decreases, young dual-earner families who want to live in a larger space – almost everyone I interviewed – feel immobilized. They face hyperinflation and there are few vacancies in the desirable neighborhoods they work so hard to live in. Two of the 16 families recently managed to find land upon which to build: one in the children's paternal grandfather's backyard, and the other in the low-income neighborhood of Chorrillos. They both compromised in order to have some sort of yard, which is the feature most people want for a home. They also want windows and pay more for homes, according to the mother of LF01, with more light and ventilation. This is because of Lima's limited sunlight and perpetual humidity, which creates mold.

Families usually cannot remodel their homes because they are almost always in multi-family buildings. Personalization they can do includes painting their walls, and sometimes they

talk about knocking them down. There are seldom any walls *to* knock down, as Limeño floor plans are set up differently than Angelenos'. They are more open, usually with no distinct dining area and sometimes not even a distinct kitchen. Thus I coded the rooms in the Lima dataset a little differently from the way I did the L.A. sample, but the two systems are compatible.

The two families who could be considered to have the most cultural capital (although I do not believe that term can be quantified) have the most original two-dimensional art on display, with four pieces each. But in one of these cases, the art was created by a family member's father – not indicative of cultural capital. And the fact that the two families with the highest incomes have some art pieces does not mean that other families with cultural capital do not aspire to have original art.

The vast majority of the objects in the homes I studied are displayed on surfaces, specifically shelves, and most of the shelves have doors. This renders the objects hard to see. While family photographs are the most frequently occurring single type of object in the sample, figurines, vessels, and other three-dimensional objects, or a group, comprise nearly half of the total. They are often displayed on lower shelves, also difficult to see. If families are demonstrating pride in their economic and cultural capital, many are doing so quietly.

The rarity of religious figurines, is balanced by religious two-dimensional art in high numbers. Indigenous art occurs in most homes, and it transmits much information about the current (or recent, after Sendero Luminoso) state of migration in that nation, as well as family connections, memories, and sense of place. Upon moving to Lima, Peruvians brought their heritage with them. And, as expected, other forms of powerful art occur in most homes: even homes with few aesthetic artifacts, such as LF04, have place-of-origin, identity-transmitting

material culture on display in at least one public room. I discuss the meanings that each of these object types hold for families in greater depth in the next chapter.

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<sup>i</sup> Because their home is part of a multi-family dwelling, LF01 did not know the exact date of its construction.

<sup>ii</sup> Peru's national colors are red and white, so I would have counted any rooms painted this way as reflective of peruismo. However, no such cases occurred.

<sup>iii</sup> I had a difficult time deciding how to categorize Michaela's nativity scenes: religious 3-D art or children's art. These represented two examples.

## **Chapter Nine:**

### **Material Meanings**

Within the same household, individual family members have divergent values, ideals, goals, aspirations, and motives, which may or may not be reflected by the dominant aesthetic displayed in their shared domestic structure. According to Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton (1981), objects either signify belonging and social integration, or they enable the opposite modality of stratification and difference. This concept represents two sides of the same coin. Primarily aesthetic objects help knit a family into a household unit; simultaneously they differentiate the family from others. Artful domestic artifacts can be a “manifestation of class membership” (Bourdieu 1984a:177), but they represent much more than that: they make a house a home.

In this chapter, I address how participants conveyed that primarily aesthetic domestic objects bring their families together and help individuals feel part of a larger whole. I relate anecdotes and examples from family members about specific types of artful objects to show how making meaning is an important role of a household material culture assemblage.

### **Methods**

In Los Angeles, CELF researchers gathered the data before I joined the project, and while project researchers did not inquire specifically about the meaning of material culture in the home, dialogue along this theme frequently emerged naturally. Prompts such as “what do you like about your house” and “what do you want to change about your home” for their narrated home tours gave Angelenos the opportunity to comment on their things and offer opinions from which I could cull illustrative examples of their materialized meanings.

When I asked Peruvians about the significance of particular objects or special attributes in their homes, their faces often went blank. I noticed interviewees actively constructing meaning as they answered my questions, selecting words to appease me. My assistants and I could see, though, that they were searching through deeply meaningful memories for times and places when they acquired important objects and displayed them in a specially selected place. Participants frequently went directly to objects that were meaningful. It seemed as though the camera and the kinetic act of filming while walking empowered them and triggered a pride-filled show-and-tell response. As they filmed their home tours, emotions such as embarrassment regarding messy spaces also were evident.

### **Senses and Memories: Family Unity**

Miller (2008) notes that while some families are collectors and others minimalists, their significant relationships with their household objects and how they arrive at those meanings do not reflect the value of their relationships with other people, their social roles, or their rank. The soft, unkempt bed onto which a girl collapses after her teenage crush breaks her heart, the laminate dinner table around which a family safely discusses that day's particularly stressful events, the gilded mirror into which a man practices a soliloquy: the aesthetic performance characteristics of these quotidian objects channel personal interpretations of the significant narratives that frame emotions and experiences (Goffman 1978).

Household objects mediate and reflect the family's more private feelings and experiences. They are not always displayed with concern for the opinions of others in the cultural whole except sometimes for guests. Aesthetic objects in the family house are particularly powerful because residents interact with them regularly and privately, compared to cultural

goods that are far less accessible, such as museum pieces (Kleine III et al. 1993; Smith 1999). When family members experience emotional reactions to these objects, these feelings consciously and subconsciously generate a cohesive household identity (Cieraad 2006). In public spheres such as museums or theaters, in contrast, family members are expected to perform their meaningful relationship with art in the presence of others. That generates a different sort of aesthetic-mediated *communitas*: performative, ritualistic, and public (Turner 2001).

Arturo, the father in Angeleno Family 27, values the ways that so many of the artifacts in his home evoke emotion for him and his extended network. “As far as I am concerned ... and I am concerned ... the house is to enjoy,” he said. His coffee table represents his family’s tradition of collecting oak furniture. He frequently looks at his poster depicting Madrid because it reminds him of his native Spain. The old stove that he and his wife Ann bought when they wed says to him, “we are married.” The couple intends to restore the stove soon – a symbolic renewal of their commitment. Arturo and Ann’s daughter Claribel said her “gazillion” Legos in her room make her feel peaceful, and let her know that she is home. The table, the stove, and the Legos are not primarily aesthetic artifacts, but in this case, their performance characteristics generate a feeling of togetherness. The oak table prominently embodies the family’s hobby of acquisition, through which they have created a bond.

Spaces within the home can also evoke a sense of family unity: the fireplace area in Limeño Family 16 provides mother Acebeto and father Dante a deep sense of warmth, although the family does not use the fireplace for heat.

**Acebeto:** I like when it’s winter and we sit down here and put the fireplace on and sometimes we just cook marshmallows or just have a talk around here ... I like this room. We don’t use it as much because we’re not as much in the house altogether, but when we are I think this is a comfortable room to be in.



**Dante:** And there is a meaning too – a significance in every object where we're sitting. Because it's all from our mama's house, or our pictures. Our photos, or those little houses there. There's a memory there everywhere.

### **Powerful Art Objects Facilitate Family Unity**

Powerful art is the primary class of aesthetic objects that helps to establish a family's identity and togetherness. The objects also carve out the family's distinctiveness from other people. A prominently displayed crucifix indicates that the family is not Buddhist but likely Catholic and connected via spiritual beliefs. Similarly, material culture indicates oneness with other specific groups within the larger society. In my opinion, separation from other families is a secondary semiotic aesthetic performance characteristic; messages of unity are integral to powerful art. This particular class of aesthetic material culture does not say that all family members are the same and share all the same traits, but it helps the family remember that it is part of a cohesive unit.

Examples that family members described as particularly powerful art for them include: family photographs; gifts from one family member to another; original art made by friends of the family or family members themselves (including children); heirlooms; and art that indicates place of origin or heritage. In the case of Los Angeles, this category includes art reflecting family members' ethnicity and in one case gay pride. Among Limeños it includes art that depicts pride in Peruvian heritage via the display of indigenous material culture. The display of religious material culture in publicly visible places renders it another powerful example of aesthetic material culture. This phenomenon arises frequently in both datasets.

### *Family Photographs and Portraiture*

Family photographs are close to ubiquitous in the relevant rooms of the homes in both cities (although the density is approximately 50 percent lower in Lima), providing an excellent example of objects that speak loudly and, by being on daily display, help bond the family. They remind family members of what they (usually) have in common: one another and shared kin. Halle (1993) also noted family photographs in nearly all the New York houses in his study of that topic. Families, he found, displayed such photos regardless of their class or ethnic composition, just as I see in these data. Family photographs are often displayed clustered together in frames holding several photos at once or grouped on walls. This indicates to viewers an even stronger sense of familial togetherness (Drazin and Frolich 2007; Halle 1987, 1991; Riggins 1994). The psychological mechanisms by which grouping photographs and other artifacts increases the intensity of their aesthetic effect involves a series of complicated cognitive and emotional responses that appear to be universal (Rafaeli and Vilnai-Yavetz 2004).

In Lima, where I had the opportunity to ask participants about the meaning of their photographs, nearly all respondents said that they were the first type of object that they would save if there were to be a natural disaster. They were frequently described as the “most important objects in the home.”

### *Gifts from One Another and from Others*

People obtain art for their homes intentionally or unintentionally, choosing it themselves or receiving it (Lomnitz et al. 2001; Miller 2008). When they choose it themselves, it is a conscious, sometimes reflectively or morally conscious action. It is a social practice, communicating denizens' collective identity to family members, houseguests, and themselves

(Saito 2007). The receipt of gifts might seem less agentic, but the choice to receive, maintain, display, or discard household art is a personal communicative social action that is arrived at consciously (Mauss 1934; Woodward 2001, 2012).

Several of the families said that the most important aesthetic items in the home were objects that they had gifted to or received from one another. In Limeño Family 01, husband Antonio had learned to make pottery for Monica. She treasured what he gave her for their wedding: a figurine of a couple embracing. The pot was painted in “a sort of Mexican style,” she said as she showed it to me. It was particularly symbolic because they went to Mexico for their honeymoon. After family photographs, she said, this was her most treasured artful object in the home. When she married, Marilyn, the mother in Limeño Family 05, received an original art piece from Finland from her former in-laws. It is still her favorite art in her house, except, again, for family photographs. It does not evoke memories of their wedding or now-defunct marriage, she said, but it is expensive and stylish.

### *Friends' and Family Members' Handmade Art*

Gazing at art that family members or friends made is, I think, akin to looking at a family photo. It evokes memories of the person who created the art, and if made specifically for the family in question, it can forge a special bond between the giver and the recipient. When displaying family-made art, a person is indicating his or her connectedness with the creator of the object: a bond of kinship. Other sorts of original art can proclaim that the owner has cultural capital.

The Boycos of Lima have a family member (the children's maternal grandfather) who enjoyed painting as a hobby during his retirement, and the family displays four of his large

pieces. Acebeto is somewhat dismissive of the art, but her daughter cherishes it and said it makes her feel connected to her grandfather, whose company she loved before he died.

The Morris mother of L.A. has a friend who is a “*professional* photographer” (her emphasis). She has several of this friend’s framed pieces throughout the house. A friend’s original painting in the Andersons’ Los Angeles living room has contributed greatly to the household aesthetics – they used the background cadet blue color for their conspicuous front entryway. (The family’s young daughter called the color the family “logo.”) The Richardson family prominently positions what the mother called “some really cool vases” that a friend made. The Broadwell and Lewis family also has a piece of art that a friend created – a friend who no longer works in the medium – and some photographs taken by other friends. Father B said that these friends’ pieces are particularly meaningful to him “because (they) know the artist very well and have known him for years.”

The Angeleno families the Andersons, Zapatas, Tracys, Richardsons, and Broadwell and Lewises all demonstrate that they place a particularly high value on their children’s art. All of these families, especially the Tracys and the Richardsons, have many pieces of kids’ art on the walls of their houses, and they seem especially proud of their children’s self-portraits. The Tracy family has kids’ art on nearly every wall of the house, plus the kitchen cabinets. Although the Tracy family father said he is proud of his children’s art, he said he thinks the brown cabinets “look better with nothing on them.”

Even with the family’s notable collection of powerful art, Father A in the Broadwell and Lewis family said during his home tour that the kids’ self-portraits are the “most important artwork in the house. They’re self-portraits by (the children) from when they were in kindergarten. They’ve kind of faded – we’ve had them up the whole time but they still have our

old, (and) their old memories.” Aside from these five families, the other households have little or no children’s art displayed in rooms beyond the children’s bedrooms.

There is very little children’s art on display in the Lima houses. (One mother did complain about having to repaint the walls over what she called her kids’ “Crayola masterpiece,” but that child’s art is not counted.) Many families do mount handcrafted nameplates with their kids’ first names artistically rendered in one medium or another. These usually occur in the children’s bedrooms or on their bedroom doors.

### *Heirlooms*

Heirlooms are laden with personal meaning. Sometimes they evoke in the owner a moral obligation to keep them. They may transmit through generations a sense of familial belonging as well (Wadler 2008), materially perpetuating memories and tangibly facilitating cultural replication (Joyce 2000). Sandra, the mother in Limeño Family 02, for example, takes care of her mother’s plants, including the ivy discussed in the previous chapter. She cited it as one of her favorite objects: it reminds her of her distant mother and her childhood, taking care of something living as her mother took care of her. Of course these heirlooms can be burdensome, contrasting with the recipient’s taste. An example of this appears in the next chapter.

### *Place of Origin*

Some family members said that for them, meaning derives from the maintenance of memories of their place of origin, especially when they or their family had recently migrated to L.A. or Lima. In the United States, many of the families display American flags or flags from other nations for which they feel nationalistic affinity. Ethnicity-indicating art is one of the most

commonly occurring representations of powerful art in the Los Angeles sample, as families come from so many countries and ethnic backgrounds. The Tracy family father of Los Angeles commented on the flags he waves in his backyard: an American flag and a Cuban flag celebrating his wife's heritage.

Through the use of iconographic artifacts, the Angeleno families the Morrises, Kormans, and Richardsons use art and decorative artifacts to communicate their ethnic affiliations – Afro-Cuban, Swedish, and Filipino, respectively. The Tracy father consistently chose art that he said looks like his wife. One piece is positioned in the living room near a statue representing La Calidad, the patron saint of Cuba. He also displays African female-shaped woodcarvings because, he says, “some of his wife's ancestry is from Africa.” The Korman family has very little art on the walls (amid all the family photographs), but the mother's favorite piece is a painting depicting a ship in the bay at Stockholm, near where she was born. The Richardsons have objects from the Philippines in nearly every room, including in the mother-in-law's bedroom and in the children's bedrooms.

Considering Peru's strong sentiment of nationalism, I was surprised to find only five examples of flags, banners, and other types of material culture proclaiming this *peruismo*. Teenage boys tend to have examples of such objects displayed in their bedrooms, particularly in affiliation with *fútbol*, but I do not count these toward the total because they are not in public rooms. *Peruismo* manifests instead via the display of indigenous art, another almost ubiquitous type of object.

Five Peruvian families display cultural identity markers that remind them of their place-of-origin. Indigenous art that reveals a profound love for their ancestors occurs in nearly every Peruvian home, from the highest-income family to the least wealthy. The family who lives in the

hipodromo has a collection of hand-painted tiles mounted in the living room; they are from the mother's grandparents' village. Speaking about the (undoubtedly very old) weavings on his coffee table that he treasures, Francisco, the father in LF15 said:

There are places, for example, where people enter the *huacos* (looted sites). You understand? And they take *huacos* (looted artifacts), they take *telares*<sup>i</sup> (textiles), and they put it in their living room, because that's allowed. The thing, no the crime, of extracting huacos is taking them to another country, but one can have them (in Peru), and also they make decorations mixing the modern furniture with Incan motifs.

### *Political Art*

As gay rights proponents, the Broadwell and Lewis parents display “powerful art” throughout their house; it occurs in nearly every room, including in the seldom-used downstairs basement den. A friend who died of AIDS gave the family several pieces of the “powerful art” they have on display. One of these pieces is an original by Ellsworth Kelly that commemorated an “illegal fundraiser,” according to Father B in that family. Other art in that family home, including pottery, mobiles, and textiles, celebrates a specific Latin American country and the event of the adoption of their two children from that country. Additional art in the Broadwell and Lewis house is political, commemorating a March on Washington or raising campaign funds for particular mayoral candidates.

### **Aesthetic Art and Differentiation From Others**

Another way of perceiving the use of material culture in the home is that it differentiates the resident family from others in their society, emphasizing their specialness. Even though the objects in the home are at least somewhat readable to nearly all other members of the culture, primarily aesthetic objects usually project subtle meanings for their owner/displayer

(Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton 1981; Miller 2008). People use the consumption and display of artful household artifacts to demonstrate their social position (McCracken 1988), while non-family members read the objects and then assign worth to the owners (Douglas and Isherwood 1996[1979]). Thus these objects can enhance or obstruct social closeness with other members of the community.

Rarity and cost may be universally important factors that determine how a household object signals its owner's status. Halle (1993) found that throughout New York City, wealthy families often exhibit extravagantly expensive paintings or sculptures, the type of which museums or galleries display, in a prominent part of their homes. This indicates to guests that their host family belongs to an elite class, assuming that the guests know what they are looking at. Along similar lines, a framed or unframed mass-reproduced art print can convey middle-class belonging, but were this art print to be augmented with nearby one-of-a-kind ceramic vases, the overall aesthetic of a household space, partially created by the art therein, might hint at upper-middle class membership.

#### *Knowledge of Value as a Mechanism for Differentiation*

Scholars who study art agree upon the temporally and culturally universal existence of aesthetic systems, but usually not a universal sense of what is beautiful (Layton 1981; Coote and Shelton 1992:7; cf., Washburn 1998). Rather, the beauty of an art object is subjective to contextual constructs of economic and personal value, which sometimes depends on the piece's market price.

Many of the family members indicated that they derived personal satisfaction and even pride from the art they displayed on their walls, as in one case when the art was assessed at a



higher monetary value than the purchaser paid. The Morris mother purchased and framed a picture for \$40; it is on her kitchen wall, and she said it was recently appraised at \$2,500-\$3,000. She is also proud of several mixed media ocean-themed pieces displayed in her bathroom and which she purchased at a neighborhood yard sale. Although she does not explicitly say so, by showing off her finds in her home tour, she indicates that her aesthetic choices reflect her expensive taste and finely tuned artistic judgment.

None of the families in Peru talked about the economic value of the original art in their home except Marilyn of LF05, who discussed the painting she received from her former in-laws. Possibly middle-class Limeños' sense of value of household art is more about the beautification it brings their home and less about money and status.

### *One-of-a-Kind Art*

The acquisition and discard of original art is a bit different from the life history of everyday household art. While still enmeshed in a globalized political network, the ways that people go about acquiring the more valuable category of objects tend to be more romantic. It is intuitive that certain art objects and aesthetics do speak of high or low class membership (e.g., Marcus and Myers 1995), and this is readable to all members of the same culture, regardless of class positioning. At least in the United States and other Western countries, this sort of authenticity extends to home décor: the impact of the space in which we dwell with our family members.

During his home tour, Father A of the Broadwell and Lewis family said that the family sometimes marvels at the cost of a piece of art in their living room. He said, "That piece is a Mapplethorpe we bought at a show, a Robert Mapplethorpe. We only think it's cool because we

spent so much on a piece of art, which we never thought we'd do." During his home tour, Father B discussed the positioning of the in the living room, which he said is not the type of living room that "you use everyday." The family uses this room when they are entertaining, allowing them to show off their art collection; the art is transmitting identity information to guests. Everyone sees the Mapplethorpe, among other expensive pieces.

### Summary

Art in the home conveys to the family and to guests that the family members have shared experiences and have acquired objects that generate a shared aesthetic. This serves to create familial unity and sometimes to distinguish the family from others. Certain types of objects perform the function of unification better than others: such objects I call "powerful art."

Powerful art is a category of art that strengthens familial bonds.

Categories of aesthetic material culture that people sometimes construe as competitive, I think, are the expensive pieces that loudly transmit the family's cultural capital, making them seem somehow more "classy" than the other families around them. Acquisition of cultural capital can require knowledge of the ever-changing and subjective constructs of value that deem art "fine." However, in neither Lima nor Los Angeles does original art correlate with income or other class markers. Sometimes people "luck into" cultural capital-denoting objects. One Angeleno mother even commented on her ability to hunt down deals on original art (a hobby that is not shared cross-culturally, and is unheard of among most middle-class Limeños, who often say they hate *antiguas*, or antiquated objects). But another Angeleno enjoys hunting down a specific type of furniture because it is something he enjoys doing with his wife.

Marcus and Myers (1995:3) noted the rapidly changing ways that powerful individuals and institutions endow art objects with symbolic and economic value. In the contemporary art world, communities of culture and consumerism are no longer isolated, because exchanges of information and aesthetic commodities are flowing across real and imagined borders. Access-related inequities are relevant, however, and the Angelenos have more access to types of art that endow them with an air of cultural capital. It would be unfair to judge a middle-class Peruvian's cultural capital in American terms, because it is less likely that he or she will find a Mapplethorpe to purchase in Lima than it would be in Los Angeles. Peruvians cannot acquire political art at a gay-rights rally without fearing retribution for attending such a rally, for example, so the displays of such powerful art are unlikely. It is very expensive to ship objects, including art, to Peru from other countries where such commodities are easier to obtain. Lack of access to original art (because of expense and unavailability, for example) may encourage art-savvy middle-class Peruvians to purchase mass-produced aesthetic objects, and the data in this study indicate that may be the case. The absence of these potentially meaningful objects in the Limeño homes is not indicative of an absence of cultural capital among the families.

The meaning-laden reasons that people own and display their domestic aesthetic objects are personal, not stringently class-based by any socioeconomic measure. The most inexpensive object in a family home might hold deep meaning for a family member, while the most costly piece of antique furniture could represent a burdensome heirloom to someone else. Peruvian families might not prominently display inexpensive porcelain vases that hold plastic flowers. But they do not discard them. Instead, they are still on display – albeit on low shelves – in the front room, because they mean something to the family, helping to make the house a home.

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<sup>i</sup> Preservation of textiles in the Atacama Desert is excellent and some Inca Culture textiles have been found intact in and near Lima. Peruvians are technically allowed to hire looters to sell artifacts in certain cases (Smith 2005).

**Chapter Ten:**  
**Middle-Class Families' Preference: Household Taste and Its Origins**

*“Things are not pretty or ugly; the ugly thing is not knowing how to combine them.” Francisco, the father in Limeño Family 15*

Individuals living in the same household can have clashing aesthetic taste preferences even if they are members of the same class stratum. This is because objects' and spaces' meanings and sensory evocations are shared only to a degree. Preference displayed in the family home is not a matter of one person's superior system of aesthetic values, but a result of a complex network of commodity exposure and availability, socialization, negotiation, and compromise. Alternately, what ends up in the department store shopping cart after a long and exhausting excursion may not be a deep reflection of a busy middle-class family's identity so much as a reflection of a quick event. Sometimes a family member just buys a picture frame.

Conditions contributing to taste preferences vary. Preference for artful household material culture and décor sometimes develops as a component of moral behavior. As with other forms of etiquette, the way a house “should” look is often conveyed from parents to children as a social norm and varies from place to place and time to time. Children born into a family with substantial wealth are more likely to know about the existence of costly household art objects than people born into a family that is financially struggling. Wealthier individuals may come to prefer costlier domestic art, but not always. Birthright, acquired financial wealth, and adulthood class standing, however, are not what respondents reported to be the sources of their domestic taste preferences. Rather, they derive decorative taste from observation of friends and family members. Preferences may also evolve via from exposure to new forms of cultural capital

through travel and other experiences. We may surmise that domestic aesthetic preferences emerge from innate vision and creativity.

### **Analyzing Ethnographies**

When I conducted the three types of interviews in Lima, I used a standard list of questions to avoid obtaining inconsistent or incomparable data across participants. I encouraged spontaneous emergence of beliefs and preferences regarding interior aesthetic material culture, “good and bad” taste, the origins thereof, and the meanings of special objects. I then conducted a modified version of cultural consensus modeling (Romney et al. 1986; Weller 2007). Cultural consensus modeling is “an analytical model that estimates the culturally appropriate answers and the degree to which each informant shares those beliefs” (Romney et al. 1986:213).

### **Cultured Preference? Textual Analysis Methods**

The analysis of semantic domains, according to Thompson and Zhang (2006:409), “falls in a no man’s land at a point of articulation between qualitative and quantitative methods and approaches to social research.” The point of articulation between the two, fuzzy as it may be, has proven useful in determining patterns of similarity of participants’ meaning within the Limeño sample. Listing common adjectives Limeños described regarding their preferences helped me determine salience. I conducted textual analysis of all interview transcriptions: the open-ended interviews, the preference-ranking discussions, and the home tours.

My goal was to determine themes of interior aesthetic preferences across the 16 Limeño families. To do so, I conducted a word count of descriptors and then modified a version of Key Words in Context (KWIC) analysis (Dixon 1978) for a sample of 23.5 hours of talk that interns

had transcribed and translated into English. I cannot statistically verify cultural salience of preference because the sample is too small (19 descriptors of preference occurred a minimum of five times each with a maximum occurrence of eight; see Table 10.1). I can, however, discuss emergent themes regarding origins of taste and overall preferences (Jang and Barnett 1994; Schnegg and Bernard 1996).

*Table 10.1. Descriptors of Preference among Limeños, Listed by Number of Occurrences*

Descriptor Number	Preference Descriptor	Referent	Number of Occurrences in Ethnographic Data
1	Big, <i>amplio</i> (ample)	Space	8
2	Bright	Space	8
3	Clean	Space	8
4	Organized	Space	8
5	Peruvian/indigenous	Object or space	8
6	Rustic/Natural	Space	8
7	Vivid	Object	8
8	Colorful	Object or space	7
9	Happy ( <i>allegre</i> )	Space	7
10	Natural	Object or space	7
11	Not too colorful	Space	7
12	Antique	Object or space	6
13	Sparse	Space	6
14	Combines with itself	Space	5
15	Comfortable	Space	5
16	Modern	Object or space	5
17	Airy	Space	5
18	Pretty	Object or space	5
19	Valuable	Object	5

The 19 key words I coded are descriptive constructs. They are specific adjectives such as “bright” or “disorganized,” and adjective clauses such as “clashing colors” that the participants spoke about when discussing objects and domestic interior spaces. In the tradition of sociological text analysis, I code for themes as opposed to utterances. I seek the gist of the stated preference:

“cluttered,” “messy,” and “disorganized” count as the same descriptor, and as such I did not seek inter-coder agreement. This also eliminates translation issues. In order for the descriptor to be counted it had to occur at least five times throughout the course of the total recorded interviews. Descriptor inclusion criteria consist of indications of desires, the converse (e.g., “not too colorful”), what participants like about their own and other people’s homes, and discussions about the photographs of living areas that the preference-ranking cards depict. These findings are generalizations: interior aesthetic preferences are changing facets of individual identities, which are reflective of changing cultural contexts.

### **Preference Ranking: Analyzing Lima Data**

Chapter One describes the preference-ranking technique I used to encourage Peruvian participants to explain their aesthetic taste. Participants put 20 laminated cards that depict living rooms in order of favorite to least favorite, and explained why they like and do not like the images. The Peruvians’ favorite and least favorite cards are Card 2 and Card 1, respectively (see Figures 10.1 and 10.2). For comparative purposes, Figure 10.3 shows Card 9, a card that Limeños neither preferred nor strongly disliked.





*Figure 10.1. Limeños' favorite preference-ranked card, Card 2.*



*Figure 10.2. Limeños' least favorite preference-ranked card, Card 1.*

Participants selected Card 2, with its A-frame-type ceiling and cabin feeling, as the favorite 30.5 percent of the time (Figure 10.1). Many referred to the interior space as “rustic.” It features a wall of windows, lots of wood beams, and a wicker desk with a Macintosh desktop computer. A few Asian-themed ornaments are scattered around the room, and a plant sits in the corner.

Card 1 was the least favorite, named by 20 percent of Limeños. Participants called it “disorganized” (Figure 10.2). The card depicts a room with shelves that are full of books. The room is visually busy, crammed with art from around the world, including giraffe-themed

pillows, abstract statuettes, and tribal rugs. Every surface has something on it, like candles in a chrome candelabrum adjacent to a vase full of dried lavender. People commented most negatively about the television, which shows human eyes peering out from a light blue background. The white ceiling has white exposed pipework.



*Figure 10.3. One participant favored Card 9 and five found it to be their least favorite.*

Table 10.2. Preference-ranking results by participant.

PARTICIPANT NUMBER	FAMILY NUMBER	PARTICIPANT	FAVORITE CARD	LEAST FAVORITE CARD
1	LF01	Mom	2	1
2	LF01	Female Child	6	4
3	LF02	Mom	11	12
4	LF02	Female Child	11	12
5	LF03	Mom	7	***
6	LF04	Mom	4	6
7	LF05	Mom	5	20
8	LF05	Female Child	8	20
9	LF06	Mom	8	1
10	LF07	Mom	17	7
11	LF07	Dad	2	4
12	LF08	Mom	17	20
13	LF08	Dad	13	5
14	LF08	Male Child	8	15
15	LF09	Mom	2	11
16	LF09	Dad	2	9
17	LF10	Mom	11	13
18	LF10	Dad	7	15
19	LF10	Male Child	2	12
20	LF11	Mom	16	15
21	LF11	Dad	2	9
22	LF11	Male Child	9	12
23	LF11	Male Child2 twin	10	18
24	LF12	Mom	7	1
25	LF12	Dad	19	6
26	LF12	Female Child	5	4
27	LF13	Mom	5	18
28	LF13	Dad	5	9
29	LF13	Female Child	3	1
30	LF14	Mom	5	1
31	LF14	Dad	7	18
32	LF14	Female Child	5	6
33	LF15	Mom	2	1
34	LF15	Dad	7	1
35	LF15	Male Child	2	5
36	LF16	Mom	2	9
37	LF16	Dad	2	5
38	LF16	Male Child	2	9
Frequencies			#1: 0 %	#1: 19%
			#2: 29%	#2: 0%
			#5: 16%	#5: 8%
			#7: 13%	#7: 0%

Table 10.3. Preference-ranking results by card.

Card Number	Favorite: # of Times Selected (38 possible)	Least Favorite: # of Times Selected (37 possible)
1	0	7
2	11	0
3	1	0
4	1	3
5	6	3
6	1	3
7	5	0
8	3	0
9	1	5
10	1	0
11	3	1
12	0	4
13	1	1
14	0	0
15	0	2
16	1	0
17	2	0
18	0	3
19	1	0
20	0	3

Participants conducted the exercise in separate rooms, and they could not hear one another's statements of preference. The cards have numeric codes on the back, further preventing response biases. I analyzed whether Limeños rank the cards and/or make statements about the cards that would indicate intrafamilial associations between:

1. Mothers and daughters
2. Mothers and sons
3. Spouses

Six mother and daughter pairs participated in the exercise, and two of these pairs (33 percent) shared a preference for the same card. Under a null hypothesis that family members do not share taste and pick cards at random, that is that any one card has a chance of being picked by a pair of people 1 in 20 times (5 percent), we would expect approximately 0.3 matches (less than 1 match) in 6 pairings. Thus, mother-daughter matches occurred at a rate that departs notably from random, or about 6 to 7 times more frequently than expected. Mother and daughter

pairs also disliked certain cards at an identical rate (two pairs picked the same card). Mothers and sons have similar scores.

Spouses favorite cards matched at a high rate. Ten spousal pairs participated in the exercise, and three of these pairs (30 percent) shared a preference for the same favorite card. We would expect approximately .5 matches in 10 pairings. Thus, favorite-card matches again occurred about 6 times more frequently than a random draw would yield. However, only one pair of spouses shared a least favorite card. The trends that this test reveals require many more cases in order to be statistically valid. With a larger sample, such emergent patterns would prove interesting and worth further exploration.

*Table 10.4. Preference-Ranking Exercise Matches*

	Children and Parents			Spouses
	Mothers and Daughters	Mothers and Sons	Fathers and Sons	
Likes	LF02: Card 11 LF14: Card 5	LF15: Card 2 LF16: Card 2	LF16: Card 2	LF09: Card 2 LF13: Card 5 LF16: Card 2
Dislikes	LF02: Card 12 LF05: Card 20	LF16: Card 9	NA	LF15: Card 1

After a family finished the exercise, I revealed the results. We discussed their selections, and used them as a springboard for qualitative discussion. Children who did not share their parents' preferences often had strong reasons for their opinions. Limeño Family 11 has twin

boys; I asked both to participate. Diego soon became the “target child,” as he was so opinionated that I predict a great future for him in interior design. He and his twin brother shared no agreement between their favorite and least favorite cards (or much of anything else, for that matter).

All three participating members of Limeño Family 16, the Boycos, liked Card 2 best, and the mother and son both disliked Card 9. The father liked Card 5 least; these are all common choices. That this particular family has such high intrafamilial agreement is interesting because they arguably have the most cultural capital, the highest income, and the largest and most elegant and cohesively decorated home in the Lima sample. Yet their preferences align with choices made by many other families.

### **Specific Preferences**

Below I examine families’ comments and the ways they spoke about the most important home and art objects.

#### *Big*

True to the American stereotype, the L.A. families participating in this research continually indicated preferences for large items. Participants tended to value big objects and plentiful space. Beyond being aesthetically preferred, big rooms permit freedom of movement and the ability to spread out to execute tasks. The Broadwell and Lewis family knocked down walls in order to make three small rooms into one big one, indicating a preference toward non-compartmentalized public living areas. This is in accordance with the way Limeño homes are constructed.

On the contrary, small spaces create tension in many L.A. households. Assuming equitable distribution of space in their house, the five Kormans each only have approximately 300 square feet of room to themselves. Frustration with small spaces is apparent in their home tours. For example, the Korman daughter does not like her home office because “it’s small and crowded with pictures.” Although she does not elaborate this point, clearly a living space’s aesthetic properties - in this case size in relation to clutter – may evoke or prohibit enjoyment of quotidian activities.

### *Organized and Clean*

Families in both cities demonstrated a great preference for organized spaces. Due to time constraints, however, in Los Angeles, laundry and dirty dishes simply piled up. Somewhat embarrassed, Adam, the father in Family 28 explained while showing researchers his laundry room, “it’s ... a little bit of a jungle. Tons of stuff. (We’re) trying to organize this space better but this too needs some work. And we have some ideas but we haven’t gotten around to it.”

Monica, the mother in Limeño Family 01, and her daughter Michaela, agreed that organization is a priority. They spoke about Michaela’s uncle Mario and his home.

**Interviewer:** Why do you like his house?

**Michaela:** Because it is big. It has a lot of things but ... I see it as well organized ... a lot of things, but not too many, and not too few either. How they decorate his house, how they organize it, how they maintain it.

**Monica:** Yes, it is ample. And I like his decorations. And it has few things but he knows how to distribute them.



### *Natural*

Limeños' fondest memories and aesthetics, whether related to domestic material culture or spaces, evoked a childhood spent in nature or visiting relatives in the chakra. Nature impacted almost every respondent in a positive way, so even though the word or some variant of it only arose seven times, it is important to discuss. Nearly every family featured a parent, and some a child too, who dreamed of moving to the sierra someday, raising their children there. They wanted to be outside of Lima. They linked the sierra to spacious houses, clean air, and sunlight, and those attributes were what they sought to create in their homes if they could not leave the city. Fewer people preferred a sparse, cold, "modern" aesthetic, as the preference-ranking exercise results suggest. Zarina, the mother in LF15, said, "I love the effect that a plant gives to a house, in the living room. Well, I love nature, and since I don't have it at hand, at least it's a sensation that at least I have contact with nature. That means a lot to me."

### *Modern*

Many children and a few parents predictably preferred a modern house style, modern objects, and the newest technology. According to several participants, the epitome of a stylish home involves a centrally placed, brand new, flat-screen plasma television. As Adriana, the 10-year-old daughter in Limeño Family 12 said during her home tour, "I want a Sony flat-screen plasma TV like (they have) in America."

## *Bright*

Residents of both cities specified that they like their homes to be bright, not *oscuro* (dim, darkly colored). Limeños also mentioned that they needed their home to feel “airy.” Family members said they require good ventilation to prevent the buildup of mold and mildew.

According to Father B in the Broadwell and Lewis family, the “big windows in the formal dining room make it cheerful.” Although windows improve the house’s mood, the overarching reason people place such a high value windows is that they increase indoor natural light level. High light levels, like certain color schemes, is physiologically linked improved moods (e.g., Dunham 1992; Kwallek et al. 1997). Families often go to great expense to alter light levels in their houses, and they express preferences for rooms with high ceilings, a sense of spaciousness, and ample natural light. The Morris mother’s favorite architectural element in her house is the front door with its art glass window. When this family remodeled, she said the door was one of the biggest single expenses, but she loves it because it “lets the light in” down the long, dark hall to the bedrooms.

The Tracy father complained that even though his living room has two windows, the trees in the backyard tend to obscure the interior light; the Walters father said he loves his living room because it has so much light. Absences of light are a source of discontent in both cities, on the other hand. The Walters mother of Los Angeles does not like her kitchen because of the low natural light levels, and she says the same about her den. She does, however, like her bedroom because it faces east and “it inspires her to start her day when the sun is shining.”

The Angelenos in the study also said they like windows so they can see outside their homes. The Baker mother said she loves that from her kitchen window she can see her children climbing in the front-yard tree. The two sons in the Castillo family fought, according to their

father, for the front bedroom with the better view. Tellingly, each member of the Castillo family videotaped and narrated the nearly 360-degree view from their newly constructed high deck. (Many home tours feature low levels of attention to outdoors or the view.) Broadwell and Lewis' family's views of downtown Los Angeles were a talking point for both fathers and for their son. Among the Angelenos, views and windows are among the most frequently cited favorite house features.

Limeños also expressed a value of views, showing me, my assistants, and the camera what they could see from various rooms. A few parents and children expressed a desire for views in their imagined dream home, the house they would have if they had “all the money in the world.”

### *Colorful*

In nearly every house in both cities, at least some walls are painted a color other than plain white or beige. In L.A. (but not Lima) decorative trim moldings and baseboards are often painted in a contrasting color to the wall. During their recent remodel, the Fishers of Los Angeles chose to paint each room's ceiling a different color, which the father said “came out looking nice.” But the newness of the whole-house remodel and subsequent repainting prevents him, he said, from associating moods with each room as of yet.

“This [pale buttery] yellow is one of our favorites – and I love our stairwell because of that color and the beautiful wood floor, which kind of pushed us out of our [remodel] budget, but it makes all the difference,” said the Baker mother, whose household spaces (L.A.) are delineated with different colors. The Anderson family (L.A.) demonstrates this concept in their house as well. Both the mother and the father commented extensively on the bright magentas, blues, and

greens that they painted the majority of their interior walls. The Anderson father said the family's front door was painted blue to represent "heart and warmth," and he added that it made him feel happy that he works so hard to pay his mortgage on a house that he can cherish. The Anderson mother noted that the house's interior colors "make [the house] more alive and more fun to live in," and that she thinks it is good for the kids to grow up with "a lot of color." She adds that she would have loved to have grown up in a house with so much color inside.

The Morris family hired a colorist to help decide their L.A. house's aesthetics. The colorist encouraged the painting of almost all the main rooms in the house, including the hallway (what the mother calls "a really pretty blue color"), and their baby daughter's room, which has three colorful stripes and which the mother said she is unsure how to continue decorating. Her older daughter said these colors are supposed to be "all bright and lovely," demonstrating that she knew her parents' rationale for the color scheme they selected. The colorist also had input with a bathroom in this house – it is decorated with browns and grays. During his home tour, the son in this family noticed that the colors in the front guest bathroom had changed.

In Lima, color was an important topic. Nearly every respondent had a strong opinion about it, and most people preferred light colors for both furniture and walls, although there are exceptions. Most people specified something to the effect that they did not like too much color. Marilyn from LF05, whose home features an orange and white palette with brushed stainless steel fixtures throughout, said,

I don't like (uhh) houses with strong colors. I mean inside, you know? I don't like (ahh) green houses. Oh, I don't like when they make combinations with walls. You know, some walls are one color and another is another color. (Ahh) some ... some houses have this kind of these *china* paints, you know. These kinds of *chifa* paints. They look, to me, horrible. And (ahh) too many flowers, too much (ahh) color. So much stuff on the walls. Pictures of the family, like, without taste, you know? Yeah. Or, or the combination they have, like metal

and (umm) this kind of (ahh) gold, or like a shiny ... you know. I don't like it.

### *Motif*

In Los Angeles, the Tracy father acknowledges an unintended green and “woody” (his word) theme permeating his living space, but otherwise decorative themes are all but unrepresented in the public rooms. An exception to this is the Broadwell and Lewis house. The Broadwell and Lewis family hired a decorator friend to help them with their home. The decorator used a mid-century theme in the family’s living room and den. That house’s several public spaces feature light-colored wood paneled walls in the family room; carpet in the living room; a 1950s-style settee in the kitchen; deep mahogany and red colors in the dining room; and parquet floors in the foyer. And even though Father A said the anachronistic 1970s wood wall paneling is “too dark” to complement the decorator’s attempted effect, the paneling was original to the house. He said they did not change it when they redecorated because he felt like they “just couldn’t,” indicating a sense of loyalty to the original owners’ aesthetic sensibilities, or to the perceived aesthetic of the house in general.

In Lima, the preferred *tema* (theme or motif) is the aforementioned love of rustic décor and natural living spaces. Many people shunned themes; in fact, no respondent spoke of a preferred theme, even when prompted.

### **Sources of Taste for Participants in Both Cities**

Participants attribute inspiration to many sources, but none are based on the drive to climb a social ladder. Instead, families from both cities discuss how the source of their aesthetic taste derives from their own creativity, influential people in their lives, their jobs, or travel.

Rarely, however, do they cite television, which most people in Lima say they seldom watch (even though all families in the study have one in their living room). People also seldom cite the Internet as a source of inspiration.

### *Taste is Within*

People do not shape their tastes, or the expressions of their tastes in and around their houses, according to social norms. People enjoy, purchase, and display household art objects that others might consider uncouth. They paint the exterior of their homes colors some neighbors deem unfit for their neighborhood. Individuals display aesthetic objects in their homes without concern for class belonging.

I had assumed that it was a foregone conclusion that tastes evolved over the course of a lifetime, since the very materials that frame our realities change. Perhaps, people do allow their preferences to become routinized, meanwhile distinguishing themselves from others. “Tastes? Change? I don’t think so,” said Dante, the father of LF16. His wife Acebeto agreed. “We’ve always been simple. ... We don’t say ‘I think we need something to fill up that corner. We bought furniture when we didn’t have it to sit down.” Still, the preference for simplicity or the drive toward nature or modernity as reflected by the material culture in our homes – these are not class-based tastes. They are individualized.

Jose from Limeño Family 14 said, “In our case we don’t have any simple influence, like we don’t like something and that’s all. We don’t have anything from family or anything.” His wife Margarita agreed. She said, “At least in my case influence from my family is not (what formed my taste). It is just something comes out from myself. Maybe sometimes when I go to the store I just put it together and I know what I like.” Most people in Lima shop for artful

artifacts when they remember to, or they go to deep-discount markets such as Gamarra when they need aesthetic accouterments.

### **Personalization of Domestic Objects and Spaces**

Personalization of the house aesthetic can generate affinity for the space. A sense of family unity can emerge from the decisions the household makes collectively during the process of personalization. In the present time of rampant mechanized production, handcrafted objects demonstrate a sincere time commitment to the household aesthetic. Homeowners and other family members tend to create handmade objects for their houses in the spirit of personalization, sometimes generating new objects altogether and in other cases “tailoring” certain objects to better meet their needs and preferences. As Campbell (2005:37) explains,

[Consumers] might come to desire some small corner of their everyday existence to be a place where objects and activities possess significance because they are regarded as unique, singular or even sacred. Seen in this light, the arena of craft consumption [and production] could become highly valued because it is regarded as an oasis of personal self-expression and authenticity in what is an ever-widening ‘desert’ of commodification and marketization.

Angeleno families demonstrate flexibility and creativity in the objects they handcraft for use and display in their houses. Angeleno Family 21, the Castillos, has in their living room a large, handmade wooden birdcage for their pet cockatiel, and the mother of that family handmade her daughter’s bedroom curtains. She also designed and sewed her tropical purple window seat cushion. The Tracy family, Angeleno Family 5, painted and restored an old picket fence to be used along their entry hallway as a place to hang coats and backpacks.

Personalization of objects and spaces functions to narrate a family coalescence, hand-tailoring aesthetic indications of belonging (Woodward 2012:22-23).

## **Influential People**

American adults are experiencing a decline of interpersonal engagement outside the workplace (Putman 1995), and thus their social networks do not tend to extend beyond the office. Materially, this is marked, for example, by a relative dearth of trophies recently earned by the parents, as urban adults tend not to play sports. They also tend not engage in voluntary civic duties (Putman 1995) that could leave a mnemonic trace in the domicile. The Los Angeles homes feature children's trophies but seldom such awards that the parents won.

Networks ties people to their web of aesthetic understanding, and networks are of course based on (but not exclusive to) social strata (Bourdieu 1984a). For example, if we spend time with museum-goers, we are more disposed to go to museums (DiMaggio 1999), which can provide ideas for home décor.

Individuals often select material culture themselves, and chosen objects directly express preferences. Alternately, people receive objects as gifts (Lomnitz et al. 2001; Mauss 1934; Miller 2008), usually from the closest members of their social network, and if gifts are “inalienable” (Weiner 1992), their material presence in the home can paradoxically further embed the receiver into a Bourdieusian habitus – a never-ending, conspicuous cycle of class- and morality-based social replication. Conspicuous consumption depends upon an audience, however, and, among this middle-class Angeleno sample, it seems that the acquisition or maintenance of social capital is not a favored way to spend limited free time. The home is a locus for sociability (e.g., Putnam 2006), but as indicated by the Los Angeles sample, the home has become a private place valued for shaping self and our family without frequent external influence.



Families in Los Angeles and Lima are analogous in many ways, but two glaring differences are the intensity of socialization in which parents and children are regularly involved and the frequency with which families see their extended families. The Richardsons, Angeleno Family 23, are an exception because the maternal grandmother lives with the family most of the time. She is from the Philippines and has influence over the way the home looks. She sewed all the curtains in her daughter and son-in-law's house; vary by the room and are of designer quality, with valances and other complicated fabric flourishes. She also made a white diaphanous tulle canopy for her granddaughter Linda's bed.

### *Limeños' Family Influences*

Many women who I interviewed in Peru have overtly turned away from their mother's domestic style. The theme was so common that I wonder if there is an urban rite of passage of which I am unaware, involving ladies snubbing their mothers upon starting their own family. When I asked during the open-ended interview about a person whose house showed "good style," many women answered that their mother was one such person. They quickly clarified that their style is nothing like their mother's. Their mother likes "antiques" or "antiquated styles" while they themselves decorate in a "modern" fashion. In other words, the mother is out of touch, and the daughter is hip to the current aesthetic trends. During other interviews, when I asked a typical question about a person with bad domestic style, three women answered, "my mother," and two "my aunt."

In two cases, women proudly stated that their mother is the source of their domestic aesthetic inspiration. We then talked about how she learned to sew and the beautiful material culture in the home that the mother had handed down. Sara, the mother in LF08, lives far from

her own mother, who stayed behind in the chakra. Sara says that her mother always maintains in her home “a sense of warmth, a sense of nostalgia” which she strives to create in her home too.

Limeño parents of both sexes commonly cite their uncles, grandmothers, and aunts as their primary source of home décor inspiration. When I interviewed LF11, the Jaramillo family, they had invited extended kin to join in the interview process. When I started the group conversation with the usual, “tell me about a home of a person with good taste,” they all pointed to the children’s aunt, who was sitting on the floral sofa. “My house is very comforting,” she said, “because all of my family goes there.” Nearly all the Limeños seek a larger home. Unlike the Angelenos, who appear to want larger homes to accommodate their belongings, the Limeños want to entertain guests, in particular their family.

Explaining what a home with bad taste entails, and by default what her home is not, the aunt started to go on, until Diego, her outspoken nephew, interrupted:

I’ll tell you what a bad house is. It’s the house of my other aunt, Maria ... The couches are all scratched up because of the dogs. Shoes all over the floor. And whenever I go to her house, her little dog always bites me. It’s the truth! Even Joana (his cousin, visiting from Australia) has seen it!

### *Friends and Trends*

Occasionally, people cite friends as a main source of aesthetic inspiration. Adriana, the young daughter in LF14, spoke for almost one minute about how her best friend had a pink and white bedroom with marble floors, while her father Jose rolled his eyes. Jose, however, also has an interesting story about the impact of friends, and roommates, on his interior tastes.

**Jose:** I’ve always thought that colors should contrast. Nowadays if you use maroon the contrast should be beige, which is just the opposite. One time my friend and I thought of implementing the theories of feng shui (in our apartment). Bad experience! A fiery green with one of with a lighter tone? Never again.

**Interviewer:** Tell me about that.

**Margarita** (wife): Yellow.

**Interviewer:** A strong yellow? Dark or light?

**Jose:** No, highlighter yellow. According to feng shui. Never again!

However, in Los Angeles, the Castillo mother was specific in her taste for a feng shui-like “flow.” She said that when her family remodeled, the newly enlarged rooms created for her “an open feeling and a flow, because we do have people over quite often.” Her motivation for spatial openness seems inspired by a desire to facilitate her guests’ conversation and mobility. The Anderson father cites an article about feng shui as his rationale for hanging a mirror where it is. He said that in the feng shui philosophy, mirrors are said to attract, redirect, or move the house’s flow of energy.

Zarina, the mother in LF15, however, is about to paint the walls of her Downtown Lima apartment, which she wishes was bigger. The family is looking for another apartment or a larger house to buy, but in the interim, she likes:

Colors that are in fashion, and now the colors that are in fashion are the reds and the creams, and I would ... (use) a touch of black on the walls. I like spacious homes and we are looking for one now, in San Isidro, because I love gardens, because the families are always going to get together.

### *Spouses*

No woman indicated that her partner’s strong preferences insulted her, but three somewhat angrily acknowledged the degree to which she must compromise “her” home. Sara, the mother in Limeño Family 08, has hung her art on top of her husband’s – literally. She likes floral, natural motifs. He likes all things nautical and Roman (his real name, which he preferred I use, is Julius Caesar, and he said he likes his home to reflect a Roman and nautical theme). Some

of his objects, specifically a framed knot collection, are mounted on the wall behind their entertainment center in the living room. Visitors can only see part of the frame around the knots as Sara has ensured that just the corner peeks out from behind the furniture. This is a source of contention in the home.

Monica and Antonio, the parents in LF01, enjoy decorating their home together, and buying one another artful artifacts for the home. Monica emphatically emphasized that the secret of their marriage and their interior décor has been compromise, meaning it in a different way than Sara did. Bettsy, the mother in LF07 who, with her husband, had just built an adobe home of their own design, would probably say that spouses must complement one another by contributing their respective skills. When I asked her whom she knows with excellent interior aesthetic taste, she said her husband. When I asked why, she said,

He is very meticulous, very demanding, and very observant. He is very observant. I am faster, more active, and sometimes I overlook details, but he never does, he is very detail-oriented. He is more detail-oriented, more patient, more demanding, and more critical. He has very good taste.

Organization and cleanliness were two of the top ten values that Limeños associated with their household aesthetic, as indicated by my KWIC count. Card data show more spousal agreement than would be expected.

### *Occupations*

Occupation type and possible resultant cultural capital do not equate to taste, but a job can increase or decrease the frequency and immediacy of exposure to new aesthetic ideas and domestic objects. Sara and her husband Julius Caesar co-own an upscale beauty salon in San Isidro, one of the nicest neighborhoods in Lima. They attract foreign and Peruvian clients who,

as Sara said, know what they “want in their psyche.” If they do not know what they want in their psyche, she added, “They trust us to know (style) for them.” All sorts of inspiration and creativity must come from within her in order for them to successfully conduct their business. Their own home, however, does not reflect that the family owns a creative business. Sara and Julius’ values and tastes do not always coincide, as exemplified by their floral paintings and the framed nautical knots; in fact, they often clash. As such, they keep their home simple.

Consuela, the mother of LF11, works at the front desk in an upscale hotel. When I recruited her and her family for the study, I wondered whether the primarily European taste-making clients with whom she worked gave her inspiration for new types of style and taste that Peru had not yet been exposed to. Perhaps she had opportunities to see new décor motifs in the hotel rooms themselves, and she had integrated some ideas into her own home theme. She said no, though, because she “never relates to her clients.” By that she meant she only served her clients, and did not get to know them or inquire about their tastes. Consuela wants a big house in the country, like so many of the other women and men I interviewed, and she does not enjoy her job.

### *Travel*

Cultural capital derives from experiences such as travel and visiting museums. Travel is one source people in the study cited as inspiration, although not for domestic material culture. In Lima, well-traveled participants, especially those who had journeyed outside of Peru, tended to speak at length about their travel memories. During their home tours, they showed the many souvenirs they had acquired during their excursions. Some participants said that these experiences “changed them,” possibly contributing to their cultural capital, and exposing them to

new ideas for their home. Travel was definitely a source of indigenous objects, and people spoke of a desire to keep the home “Peruvian” and represent their heritage via the material culture therein.

### **Morality: A Taste for What’s Right**

An ingrained sense of “how things should be” is often a source of taste. Companies propagate this cycle by marketing domestic consumer goods, primarily aesthetic or otherwise, to female target markets. A growing rhetoric of morality and responsibility reminds women that aesthetics play no small part in a sense of self-worth. For the last decade or so, the media has capitalized on the time challenges working women face, compounding stresses by reminding them of the importance of fulfilling their responsibilities, including upholding some standard of décor. With their slogan, “We turn viewers into doers,” HGTV (Home and Garden Television) implies, “your house *should* and *could easily* look like the model home on HGTV. With a simple coat of rosy pink paint and a trip to the antique store, *you too* can have a shabby chic bathroom!” Viewers feel compelled to purchase sponsors’ products such as paint and new appliances, in order to keep up with their class-counterpart Joneses, aesthetically.

### *Décor and Decorum*

Researchers (e.g., Moira and Munro 1996; Woodward 2001) have found that the aesthetic meanings most important to middle-class families involved a gender-based etiquette, cleanliness, comfort, respectability, and the creation of a feeling of a welcoming haven. This concept is not always feminized, however. As Juan Carlos, the father in Limeño Family 12, stated, “I love having those original details around so guests can say, ‘How lovely is your home!’”

Madigan and Munro (1996) found through surveys that differences of household preference and priorities are not homogeneous. The study touches on the important factors of gendered aesthetics and related responsibility for household tasks, transmission and replicability of familial culture, and morality. Household aesthetics are often gendered and have an air of morality (i.e., “a lady’s house *should* look like this”) (McCracken 2001). These ideals are embedded in the moral systems of the wealthier classes as well as the middle class, but might be masked in other elements of social life, such as changing constructs of feminism among middle-class women working full-time in industrial societies.

The display of household material culture can convey a person’s morality. For example, many people display household gifts that we would rather hide. We are sometimes inconsistent in this manner because the sense of moral satisfaction gleaned from relationship maintenance becomes more important than maintaining tight control over the display of our personal aesthetic preferences (Money 2007:363). Family heirlooms are another example of a class of objects that carry with them a sense of obligation (McCracken 2001; Money 2007; Wadler 2008). The act of keeping and/or displaying an object that does not fit with one’s aesthetic – not disposing of an art piece, or in the case of Marilyn, a physical therapist and the mother in Limeño Family 05, a table, cat-shaped figurines, and a related assemblage of gifts from her own mother – represents a longstanding sense of obligation (and fondness) that Marilyn feels toward her mother. She does not, after all, put the artifacts somewhere else when her mother is away in their home village.

“I think that table is ugly,” Marilyn said, “because it is not my style. But it was hers and she gave it to me. She brought it to me and said, ‘you need that table,’ and those cats there that I think are horrible. But she came with them. She said, ‘you know your house is so empty.’ And I said, ‘You’re right.’” And there the horrible cats sit atop the ugly table.

Most guests cannot readily decipher the cats' and the table's semiotic code unless Marilyn explains it. Similarly, except for Michaela, Monica, and Michaela's father Anthony from LF01, and some of their relatives (a live-in aunt and her deaf son for whom the family provides), most people who see their growing collection of nativity sets would not consider them the powerful art that they are.

In accordance with the ideas that Beaudry et al. (1996) put forth, Marilyn's mother's table's meaning (1) is subjective; (2) is plural (has separate public and private meanings); (3) is temporal; and (4) culturally shifts. The other objects in her living room add complexity to the question of the meaning of the space; the table with the cat figurines would not seem so "ugly" and antithetical to Marilyn's stylish, worldly aesthetic if the rest of the room did not feature artifacts specifically selected to craft that very taste-based and cultural capital-based identity.

Otherwise "cultured," Marilyn and her daughter have lived in Finland, visited many European museums, and traveled extensively. Except for that one corner, Marilyn's house is pleasingly decorated with solid wood-and-leather imported Danish furniture and a cohesive theme of orange and white. She has extravagant stainless steel kitchen appliances and one of the most thoughtfully put-together interior spaces of the homes I studied in Lima. Notably, she is not a member of one of the wealthier families in the Lima sample.

A visitor might wonder what the idiosyncratic table is doing in the foyer, doubting Marilyn's style and classiness. Marilyn herself is ashamed of the table and cats, but she is exercising daughterly duties, confirming to herself that she is good (McCracken 2001). Even though Marilyn's family's combined monthly income is approximately \$742 (less than half the average), and even though she lives in the nice part of the shantytown of Chorrillos, her interior objects and taste preferences shout that she transcends her class stratum. Drawing aesthetic



inspiration from many aspects of her history, Marilyn is actually exercising agency by keeping the array of objects she chooses. She is free from the constraints Bourdieu's praxis.

### **Women's Work**

Traditionally, women have been associated with the maintenance of domesticity, while men have been charged with external occupations in the public arena. McCracken (2001) writes that cross-culturally, women's sense of value in relation to their neighbors often resides in the way their house looks. A woman's relationship with her own femininity is also often embedded in her own sense of aesthetic style. Assumed to be "better" than men at intuiting all things domestic, the task of aestheticizing one's home – in the form of choosing such features as throw pillows, paint colors, and curtains – might seem trite to men. But in many scenarios, women are responsible for how the house "should" and "should not" look, and to be skillful in the domestic realm is often vital to women's identity and even, in some cases, their marriageability.

After interviewing many middle-class participants in York, England, Shove (2006) found that most of the married, affluent respondents in her sample agreed that household material culture should have a meaningful aesthetic component and reflect the nuances of one's home. However, between domestic partners, décor can be a site of "negotiation and compromise between two equal parties" (Shove 2006:139). When encouraged, these same respondents (in addition to most of the less wealthy respondents) revealed a gendered vision of a homemaker. They stated that typical women simply "know" which colors look best together and they understand how they "should" hang curtains, while others indicated that men "have no idea" (Shove 2006:140).

If the supposition is true that women spend more money decorating their homes than their male counterparts do, and assuming that these married couples had equal budgetary control, it could be inferred that heterosexual families in the Angeleno sample (n=30) wherein the mother earns an average higher annual income than the father (n=8) might have more fully or competently decorated homes. However, these homes appear no more or less aesthetically pleasing (in my view) than the 22 households financially headed by men. Counts of certain classes of material culture (i.e., original art and painted walls) indicate that the 8 female-headed families do not have more aesthetic objects in their homes.

### **Transmitting Taste Across Generations**

Parents worldwide expose their children to values and taste via aesthetic decisions in the household (McCracken 2001). Just as housecleaning is a process taught to children (Fasulo et al. 2007), and food preferences are socialized (Ochs et al. 1996), so too are aesthetic preferences conveyed. I asked parents how they socialized their children toward such preferences. Limeño parents said they frequently permitted children to decorate their own rooms, to choose the color of the paint therein, and to mount artwork on the walls.

Most parents thought I was asking about training children to become conscientious of the household aesthetic, however. This yielded some interesting responses about their own parents and discipline, but also some fascinating responses about the relationship between a middle-class household aesthetic, the meaning of family, and a sense of home. Betsy, the mother from LF07 said:

Starting from when they were little kids, we have educated them in our home customs: the organization, the cleanliness, to take care of the environment, to recycle, to put everything where it belongs, telling them why, always

supervising them, because in the long run they're going to have their own customs, but the memories are going to linger. The memories of how they grew up, which is why I try to stay present. The time I have at home I am always helping them.

As with the other Peruvians in the study, Betsy seldom has time for leisure. Her workweek is up to 48 hours long, and she commutes from far away to come home to cook dinner for her husband and children. Her ideas are powerful because she implies that socializing her children toward a moral household aesthetic can enable a more conscientious family.

I had assumed that the socialization of children to an aesthetic would be gendered, and that women would transmit culturally subjective aesthetic knowledge to their daughters and not their sons. McCracken (2001) explains a history of women teaching their daughters how to avoid household aesthetic taboos, such as how not to make a bed and how to avoid clashing colors. But I did not find middle-class women (including Betsy, with her two sons) in Lima or in Los Angeles to be ignoring little boys' aesthetic socialization. Men and boys tend to have surprisingly distinct preferences regarding how a house should look, yet and none of the males said that they expected the spouse to execute that preference.

### **Summary**

In both cities, there is a definite intraclass preference for brightly lit, organized, and big homes (often in country settings). I do not think that homeowners around the world share these preferences. Additionally, stated preferences are not always reflected in home interiors. Many Angeleno homes are disorganized, while many Limeños live in dimly lit homes in hyperurban settings. The sources of the mismatches between taste preference and home interiors are several.

For example, many families are too busy to keep up with organizational tasks, and houses with better lighting and larger floor plans are unavailable to most Limeños.

Mothers in Lima spoke about how different their preferences are from those of the previous generation of women. The generation of Limeño parents and the generation of Limeño children I interviewed each have distinct preferences that emerged as qualitative themes and quantitative patterns. Parent and child agreement in the preference-ranking exercise is low.

A few children also chose the parents' favorite card, Card 2, as the photo most representative of their personal taste. The card depicts a rustic home set in the chakra. Parents and children who like the same card depicting décor do so for the same reason. They both enjoy the “rustic” and “natural” spaces that parents wish to recreate from their youth. Adult Limeños almost universally say that they like expressions of their heritage in the form of indigenous themes. Children do not: they were more likely than their parents to want modern spaces and objects.

Limeños and Angelenos, regardless of their age or gender, strongly value organized spaces. They are critical of their homes' “messiness,” but to my eyes Limeños' homes are uncluttered and generally very clean, while Angeleno homes are sometimes less so. It will be interesting to see if, in the future, the middle-class domestic material culture assemblage of Lima becomes more dense in accord with the new desires these families are expressing to own cars and larger homes.

In the following chapter, I examine why Limeño and Angeleno aesthetic preferences and domestic material culture assemblages are simultaneously similar and different. In some ways these 48 dual-earner families are sharing increasingly comparable experiences of middle-class belonging. They are busily balancing work and young families in hyperurban settings. But the

families have very different histories and are currently experiencing different manifestations of globalization, most notably Lima's booming economy as opposed the Los Angeles recession. These issues, more so than middle-class belonging, appear to impact individual and familial identities, which are reflected within the intimate realm of their home interiors.

## **Chapter Eleven: Conclusions**

As my introductory anecdote about my trip to Nicaragua suggests, 15 years ago I became intrigued about why middle-class families leading similar lives do not have similar home interiors. I assumed that the wealthier, more traveled, or educated a homeowner was, the “better” decorated his or her house would be, no matter where in the world he or she lived. “Fine art” would be the same “fine art” everywhere, as determined by powerful tastemakers. But these homology-based assumptions are not valid arguments, and I show, from quantitative and qualitative comparative approaches, why they are fallacies.

Upon joining the Center on Everyday Lives of Families research team in 2006 and investigating the interior spaces of the 32 middle-class L.A. families who participated in that study, I knew that a sample of family homes in Lima, Peru, would be excellent to compare to the Angeleno families’ homes. Similar middle-class Limeño families that I knew, wherein Mom and Dad worked and had a child within the 7-13 age range, lived in completely different styles of residences than those in the L.A. sample. Their houses did not stand alone, for starters – they were apartments or condominiums. Yards did not surround them; no playground equipment was available for children. Homes were always bustling with friends and family. And unlike L.A. interiors, they were kept meticulously clean, presumably by a woman, even though Mom worked full time just like Dad.

Most interesting to me, the 16 families I found and observed in Lima decorate the public rooms of their homes in different ways from the Angelenos’ homes in the study. In both cities, families use aesthetic household material culture to transmit information about their heritage, their desires, their beliefs, where they have been, and where they want to go. They also have a lot

of art that they simply find pretty. But in neither sample does art, when quantified and coded ethnoarchaeologically, correlate with income, occupation, level of education, or any other traditional class marker. This further piqued my interest as to why demographically analogous families express themselves so differently via material culture in the intimate sphere of their homes, and why they obviously had such different taste.

The 48 families I analyzed in Lima and L.A. self-identify as members of their respective middle classes, have typically middle-class occupations, earn comparable salaries, and have a range of education levels and backgrounds. These everyday families are culturally more savvy than many theoreticians gave them credit for. This is because theoreticians, especially those who subscribe to the concept of habitus-based preference and consumerism and class/taste homology, usually do not examine the meanings of material culture for families. Nor do they usually poke around in people's houses as I did in Lima and the CELF researchers did in Los Angeles, taking pictures and video of their belongings. People are not locked into habituated preference schemas, but rather they consume from (or sometimes desire to consume from, had they access) cultural forms characterized as "belonging to" a range of strata.

### **Collective Preferences**

Los Angeles and Lima share certain commonalities due to access to Pacific Coast raw materials and commodities, a history of Spanish colonization, a shared experience with globalization, and the acceptance and socialization of resultant aesthetic themes. Residents of the cities see the effects of in- and out-migration, feel the ramifications of inequitable and discriminatory distribution of resources, and witness the advent of new technologies that generate new commodities at high rates. All of these facets of postmodernity affect access to

material culture and inspire individuals and families to express themselves in the private domain of their homes. But different politics and forces have influenced the cities. They are situated in different urban environments and abide by varying politics and norms that orient consumers toward a divergent display schema.

The experience of “being middle class” is very different in Lima than it is in L.A. Middle-class belonging in the United States is normal: most people take for granted that they fall somewhere in that category. In Lima the middle class is just now emerging. The economy in which they shop and work is developing at what may be record rates. Economic changes have created a need for skilled employees in Lima, but employees need to work full time in order to meet the rising costs of living there.

Middle-class workers are being exploited for their labor. Exploitation of workers is typical in the history of Peru, and Limeño workers have few choices but to adapt to these conditions. As such, Limeños deal with these changes creatively. Some migrate to find work, separating the family. Fathers usually pay remissions to support their children and spouse. Parents rely on extended social networks to help them raise their children, hiring migrant laborers to clean their home. They are cautious consumers: they tend not to spend money unnecessarily, and their expenditure priorities do not involve fancy cars, paying off debt, or regularly dining out – yet. That sort of consumer behavior is reserved for the elite class, Clase A.

Lima is a city that lives in the present. It is, after all, just healing from a devastating revolution. The government and marketing firms have put forth income gradations and other determinants that indicate official Limeño class belonging. Now, everyone who is not elite or starving is officially clumped into one of the three middle classes, Classes B, C, and D, categories that barely existed 10 years before the CELF study began in 2001. Limeños inherently know who



fits into which portion of the convoluted five-stratum system (which also has subcategories), though, just by looking at a person or his or her home. Researchers cannot agree on how to classify Limeños, and the practice can be discriminatory. There is no doubt it that is racist (minorities cannot be middle-class) and sexist (census-takers and marketing organizations seldom consider females to be heads-of-household, for example).

### **Comparing Objects and Tastes Across the Samples**

#### *Similarities in Material Culture in Lima and Los Angeles*

Material culture assemblages vary more significantly across than within city samples; the quality of objects that I counted does not. No specific category of expensive aesthetic object directly indexes higher-class status. In both cities, the total quantity of original formal art that the families own, which would seem to be a status marker, is surprisingly low compared to other objects in both cities' assemblages. Quantity of original art does not correlate with income variance within the sample (in other words, wealthier families in the samples do not have more art than the less wealthy families). Those families with equivalent resources tended to have the same amount of original art.<sup>i</sup>

Further, those with equivalent resources decorate their homes similarly with regard to attention to wall treatment (i.e., wealthier families do not paint their walls colors other than beige or white more often than less wealthy families in the sample). Neither does attention to flooring (e.g., decorative rugs or inlays) relate to income. Colorful personalization of extant spaces is not associated with class if income determines class.

Families in both cities displayed more family photographs than any other type of artifact I counted. As Halle (1987) found in New York, I document that nearly every family in both cities,

regardless of income, education, household composition, or any other variable, display photographs of their family members or pets, living or dead (Arnold et al. 2012). I infer that the desire to see family faces, evoking memories and sentimentality, transcends class boundaries.

Family photographs are an excellent example of powerful art, the sort of art forms that convey to guests the most personal information about self and family, and evoke the deepest sense of meaning. Another example of powerful art that occur to the same very limited extent in both cities is religious art. This rarity is surprising, considering how many Limeños are Catholic. While many homes in that city feature Catholic or Evangelical iconographic wall art, I see fewer examples of the crucifixes and statuettes than I had seen in previous years. Another example of powerful art that is all but missing from both cities' assemblages in public rooms of the homes is trophies.

### *Similarities in Preference in Lima and Los Angeles*

Angelenos and Limeños both like large-feeling spaces, which the Angelenos achieve by living in bigger houses, and the Limeños achieve by eliminating (or never having had) room-separating walls. Both like views, and the Angelenos are usually privileged to have green space to look out onto. Limeños said they would pay extra for a home with better circulation and light, but the occupancy rates in the city prevent them from moving to a new residence. Most said they are looking for a new and larger home.

Some people in Lima expressed a preference for dark spaces and colors, but most prefer pastel colors that provide a brightening effect. Some family members in Lima, especially children, said they enjoy high-tech, modern aesthetics, particularly those featuring new technologies, while many Limeños stated a disdain for anything antiquated. Angeleno adults, and

Limeño children and adults, expressed a distinct preference for organized and clean homes. Limeño homes much more consistently display that preference.

#### *Differences in Material Culture Assemblages in Lima and Los Angeles*

Limeños have overall fewer aesthetic objects, which they tend to place on enclosed shelves or on tabletops, sometimes difficult to see. Less expensive items, such as plastic figurines and prefabricated ceramic vessels holding plastic flowers, are examples of items that many families keep in the living room on low shelves.

Limeños rarely display children's art, while several Angeleno families display it commonly. Instead, Limeños demonstrate a connection to their ancestry, and by default to their memories, by displaying indigenous Peruvian artifacts in public rooms. Nearly every Peruvian parent expresses a love for indigenous material culture. Angelenos have heritage-related art, but not consistently. I was surprised that, considering their oft-expressed love of the outdoors, the chakra, the mountains, and nature in general, Limeños have so few plants and natural decorative material culture in general.

#### *Differences in Expressed Taste Preferences in Lima and Los Angeles*

The most common intercultural difference in expressed taste preference is Limeños' consistent love for "rustic" or "natural" settings. During a preference-ranking exercise, regardless of sex, parents and young children, as well as spouses, preferred an image of an outdoorsy-looking interior space. They liked the big windows, wood beams, and bright lights. L.A. families do not consistently express a taste for any one domestic aesthetic style. No family, however, expressed an outright love of specific motifs in public rooms; only one family actively

sought that effect (Angeleno Family 10, with a mid-century modern living room and family room).

### **Three Types of Capital: Access**

Residents of the two cities have different histories of access to goods, experiences, and social resources, and those factors contribute to what they purchase and display and why. People's preferences are somewhat habituated because of reliable availability of specific commodity types. But global media and advertising, amplified tourism, and quickened circulation of people and aesthetic commodities has increased the reciprocal flow and scope of ideas, as well as diversified the availability of objects, in these and many other cities. Globalization exposes people to fresh aesthetic objects at high rates, but we must take into consideration the fact that money and power help determine whose ideas are produced.

Further, objects are polysemic, so we need to account for the ways that the meaning of a domestic aesthetic artifact can change as family members live with it on a day-to-day basis, and as their family lives and preferences change. A home with small children will likely not display as many fragile collectibles as a home with children away at college. A photograph from a vacation with an estranged wife may lose its joyful meaning when she remarries.

The simple fact that middle-class Limeños have overall less access to certain commodities than class-equivalent Angelenos should explain the difference between the home aesthetics in the two cities. However, Limeños have access to resources that Angelenos do not, and vice versa. Income is a limiting factor, but class, broadly defined, is not.

#### *Economic Capital*

Lima family consumer habits and lower cost of living render their net earnings comparable in some ways to the U.S. middle class. Yet Limeño families do not have debt, nor do they overspend in general, and their home interiors reflect that (excess objects are not strewn about). Some of the Limeño families whose incomes appear smaller than the others' do not have bills and/or they own their homes outright. Desirable consumer items, however, cost much more in Lima than in Los Angeles, and become high-status items. However, these items are not typically decorative but usually technological. International shipping to Lima is exorbitantly expensive. This limits their Internet shopping, which is a main source of Angeleno commodities of all kinds.

### *Social Capital*

One type of capital that Limeños have to draw from that Angelenos seldom do is apoyo. Angelenos usually must pay for childcare, which is probably more expensive than the traditional Limeño maid-cum-nanny. Apoyo is a great social resource, for an empleada may live in the middle-class home, helping raise the children and instructing them in etiquette that includes the morality of the household aesthetic: the way the home “should” look. Importantly, she ideally keeps the house clean and does all the chores, constituting one of the most noticeable differences between the two samples. Many empleadas are immigrants from other parts of Peru or other nations.

The homes in Lima are traditionally tidy and less densely packed with aesthetic objects. Busy Limeños have kin to help them, too. Grandmothers and aunts clean and provide childcare, teaching the children to keep house in the manner that they were taught (from which, many mothers indicated, most children will diverge). A recognizable aesthetic can transfer through generations to maintain a sense of heritage (Attfield 2006).

Few Angelenos see their kin as often as Limeños do. Busy Angelenos adults have few friends, but several Limeños expressed that their dream home should have enough space to accommodate all of the guests they wanted to host at frequent barbeques. This inspires a question that warrants further exploration: to whom are Angelenos and other busy middle-class American families projecting their family identities via aesthetic material culture if they are not hosting guests?

### *Cultural Capital*

Cultural capital is usually defined by education level, occupation type, and other such factors, but these are not comparable across the two cities. In Lima, access to education is limited, and I do not have data on the topic, because it is a sensitive subject. I learned that several parents in the sample struggled to attain a complete education. For example, graduate school is almost unheard of in Lima, whereas several Angeleno parents graduated with a post-bachelor's degree. Constructs of occupational prestige appear to be dissimilar among participants in the two cities. For example, medical doctors in the U.S. garner respect, but in Peru, because it is comparatively easy to become a doctor, according to many people I informally polled, the profession carries little clout. The same is true of lawyers and university professors.

Lima is attracting increasing numbers of museums, galleries, theatres, independent movie houses, and restaurant types, so residents of the city have the opportunity to expose themselves and their children to diverse art forms. However, Los Angeles has many more such options. Thus it is difficult to say that cultural capital has influenced the *quality* of the art material in the assemblages, which does not vary much from city to city, at least not on what might be perceived as the “high art” end of the scale.

## **Experiences and Meanings**

The ethnographic work I conducted in Lima and the ethnographic data I analyzed from Los Angeles show busy middle-class families' sources of positive and negative inspiration regarding their aesthetic ideas and values. The three most salient of these are: loved ones' and friends' homes; family members' travels; and place of origin.

Embedded in these influences are such phenomena as sentimentality (missing faraway family members, living or deceased); sharper nostalgia (an intense longing for places and times, nearly ubiquitous in Lima); and historic change (post-revolution forced migration and/or a quest for better-paying jobs). These feelings can cause insecurity, at least in Lima's tenuous middle class, which may be manifesting in a hesitancy to consume unnecessary items such as objects for home décor. However, the upper- and lower-classes are not immune to these forces; such feelings are not subject to SES markers.

### *Other Peoples' Houses*

Loved ones are the most commonly cited source of inspiration (positive or negative) for material culture and aesthetics. While Lima mothers were shunning their mothers' taste, they displayed in their own homes and spoke of a desire to return to where they grew up: the sierra or the chakra. People in both samples talked about the art that their friends had made for them, bequeathed them, or the beautiful homes they had visited. This applies to the wealthiest family in the sample and the least wealthy, the most educated and the single mother who I believe did not complete elementary school (she left her mother's village for Lima when she was very young).

### *Travel*

Long-distance travel is no longer restricted to businessmen and wealthy jetsetters. Seven of the Limeño families display aesthetic and meaningful objects that they had acquired while traveling internationally, and they are not the wealthiest families in that sample. Other families display, in addition to the indigenous art objects they purchased while touring Peru, gifts from people who had traveled. Once considered a vital component of cultural capital, travel is increasingly commonplace, but the artifacts family members glean from their shared experience still serve to solidify their bonds. This love of displaying a tangible, visible memory of a shared experience with one's loved ones is not correlated with income or education. It is not a class-based feeling, just as the ability and desire to travel is not class based any longer.

### *Place of Origin*

Two adults explain that they would pay more for a home with better ventilation, citing the mold in the ever-humid Lima air. I posit that this preference, along with the desire for a rustic, natural setting, is intertwined with the physical environment in which Limeños live. The absence of green space in Lima creates in residents a craving for clean air and room to run. Angelenos too seem to feel cramped, but their municipalities provide parks in which their children can play, they have private vehicles that permit them to drive to the beach and the mountains, and they can take at least some days off of work.

I think these preferences for rustic, natural, and indigenous material culture and spaces in Lima are also due to the fact that this generation of middle-class Limeños has witnessed extensive migratory shifts, including caused by the revolution Sendero Luminoso. Often the generation of participants that I interviewed (and their parents) had to leave their own parents



and grandparents behind in rural villages and move to the city to earn money to send back. Other parents or grandparents were murdered in the revolution. The indigenous motif, many told me, reminds them of home and heritage. Except for the wealthiest Peruvians, who fled to Europe to escape the revolution and came back, these feelings of longing and nostalgia transcend class. They commemorate home and social relations.

Feelings of nostalgia do not observably affect the assemblage of art-related material culture displayed in Los Angeles, even though the sample includes recent migrants from far away, such as India. There are some pieces of art that indicate ethnic ties inside the L.A. homes, but not because they are refugees craving the environment and warmth of homelands, recent or ancestral, that will never be the same. In Lima indigenous art, or “heritage art,” as I call it, is very nearly ubiquitous in the sample.

### **Busyness, Material Culture, and Aesthetics**

The amount of “stuff” lying around a house can indicate that the family is too busy to do chores. This possibly subconsciously indicates to guests that a household does not “have it together.” An untidy space might say that the family places little value on tidiness and is therefore “lower class.”

The Limeño preference for (and display of) an organized and clean home may result from the fact that they are accustomed to having domestic help. If they do not have an empleada to clean the house, they almost always have kin around to do so. In other words, Limeños have a strong preference for cleanliness, few objects, and organization, and they have a long history of this pattern. And while this is supposition, my observation indicates that a preference for sparse material displays may come from a long history of struggling to earn enough money to shop for

non-essentials. The philosophy of not over-consuming also shows in the middle-class Limeños' absence of debt.

My examination of these samples shows that, since nearly all the families are equally busy (within, not across, samples), quantity of object ownership and display is a cultural construct, not an economic or otherwise class-based one. In sum, the families in Los Angeles, regardless of their income, have more decorative objects in their homes than their Limeño counterparts, regardless of their income.

### **Conclusion and Contributions: Taste is Within and Interiors Matter**

My methods proved that families' evolving taste preferences and meanings and rationales for what they display are unrelated to income and education levels. Socioeconomic measures are minor factors in what a family chooses to display, whether it be an heirloom painting or a ficus in the corner of the dining room.

Families who self-identify as “middle class” in Lima and Los Angeles are consuming both so-called “high” forms of art and so-called “kitsch” – objects from many value strata. As Miller shows throughout his canon, people with this same income levels on the same street in London and in other parts of the world own unexpected cultural objects, too.

Omnivorism (Peterson and Kern 1996; Sullivan and Katz-Gerro 2007) proves a useful framework by which to understand and explain people's consumer behavior. It is more powerful than arbitrary protocols, which do not account for the lived experiences of real people (Gartman 1991), at least not today's middle-class. Omnivorism is the most useful of all critiques of the homology argument. It offers a flexible explanatory model that facilitates the expression of individuals' lived experiences that are easily combined with ethnoarchaeological methods

assessing middle-range data.

Neither members of the Frankfurt School nor Peterson and his advocates go far enough to refine Bourdieu's notions of *habitus* and *praxis* as they apply to modern, middle-class families' household aesthetic values and possessions. While we all may be under the influence of large-scale corporations and other changing political global factors, they do not fully dominate middle-class ideologies. Rather, meaning-making manifests via those aesthetic objects in the home with which we engage everyday. The display of, and taste for, these objects tangibly transmits our memories, our contemporary daily lives, and by extension, our identities. The objects convey this information not only to our visitors, but to ourselves. The selection, use, and discard of aesthetic material culture should be centralized as symbolic of our networks, our beliefs, and consumer behaviors. Approaching this topic from emic and etic angles will transcend previous notions of homology-based class-fixedness.

Two sets of photographic and videographic evidence document the contents of nearly every object in four rooms of the 16 Limeño houses, and all home spaces of 32 L.A. families. Scholars can use such research to explore cross-cultural aesthetic similarities and differences, and to investigate the advent or absence of cohesive municipal, regional, or national aesthetic identities. According to these data, the artful material culture in the homes of these 48 typical, busy families represents that we may be transcending class-based taste preferences and embracing individual diversity.

## APPENDICES

### *Appendix 1. Lima Family Background Questionnaire (English)*

1. Names and ages of all family members who live in the home
2. Contact information
3. Occupation of parents
4. Occupation of parents' parents
5. Household monthly income in nuevo soles
  - a. Mother's earnings
  - b. Father's earnings
6. Work hours per week (mother \_\_\_\_ father \_\_\_\_ )
7. How long married
8. Mother's birthplace
9. Father's birthplace
10. Number of years in house
11. Year home was constructed
12. Size of home in square meters
13. House payments
14. Bills
15. Do you have domestic help (apoyo)?
16. Live in?
  - a. Work hours?
  - b. Pay?
17. Do kin live nearby?

*Appendix 2. Semi-structured Interview Protocol: Lima (Spanish and English).*

1. *Hábleme de la casa de alguien con buen gusto.*  
(Tell me about the house of someone with good taste.)
2. *Hábleme de la casa de alguien con mal gusto.*  
(Tell me about the house of someone with bad taste.)
3. *¿Qué aspecto tendría su casa ideal?*  
(What are the characteristics of your ideal home?)
4. *¿Qué quieres hacer para que su casa sea más ideal?*  
(What would you like to do to make your house more ideal?)
5. *¿Lo que ha impactado a sus preferencias?*  
(What has impacted your aesthetic taste preferences?)
6. *¿En qué tipo de tiendas compras los artículos para decorar el hogar? ¿En qué tiendas no vas a comprar?*  
(In what types of stores do you shop to buy items to decorate the home? In what types of shops do you refuse to shop for these items?)
7. *Muéstrame algunas de sus más preciadas reliquias y objetos de uso doméstico.*  
(Show me some of your most special/precious relics and objects that you use around the home.)
8. *¿Cómo han cambiado sus gustos de hogares en el transcurso de su matrimonio?*  
(How have your household tastes changed during the course of your marriage?)
9. *¿Cómo que usted y su familia se las arregló su aumento de ocupaciones?*  
(How have you and your family managed your increased busyness?)
10. *¿Qué otros factores han influido en tu gusto?*  
(What other factors have influenced your aesthetic taste preferences?)
11. *¿Cuánto tiempo pasas navegando en Internet? ¿Y TV?*  
(How much time do you spend online? And television?)
12. *¿Donde sueles comprar cuadros u obras de arte para decorar tu casa? ¿Y artesanías?*  
(Where do you buy pictures and works of “high” art for the home? And indigenous crafts?)
13. *¿Qué tipo de arte tendría la casa de alguien con buen gusto?*  
(What kind of art does a house of someone with good taste display?)

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