Where the lawn mower stops: The social construction of alternative front yard ideologies

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Where the lawn mower stops: The social construction of alternative front yard ideologies

by

Andrew Jay Kaufman

A thesis submitted to the graduate faculty in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of

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Major: Sociology

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This is to certify that the Master's thesis of

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has met the thesis requirements of Iowa State University

Signatures have been redacted for privacy
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ABSTRACT

The front yard landscape with its trademark lawn has evolved to be woven socially within the fabric of our society. Associated with this phenomena, a rising concern has echoed about the environmental, as well as the social pressures caused by maintaining a lawn. In order to see if alternative front yard ideologies exist, and understand their social construction, a qualitative study was employed in three Midwest communities. This study was an attempt to try and understand what sociological factors may help to explain why people go against normative practices of having a lawn, while their neighbors reflect normative ideologies of having a well-maintained front lawn. To accomplish this, various sociological theories were incorporated including, Goffman’s dramaturgical analysis, Mills’ vocabulary of motive, Scott and Lyman’s accounts, and Sutherland’s differential association. In the Spring of 1999, data from 24 respondents of single-family-detached-houses were collected, 18 of which displayed Lawn Deviance (LD), and 6 of which displayed Lawn Conformity (LC). Results indicate LD respondents will give justifications for not having the conventional front yard; LD respondents will have had associations with people who are also lawn deviants; LD respondents will present themselves as environmentalists; LD respondents will indicate resistance to conspicuous consumption; LD and LC respondents will see their front yard landscape as an extension of their social self. Many differences exist between Lawn Deviance and Lawn Conformity respondents. Lawn Deviance respondents exhibit higher ethical values in association with environmental issues than Lawn Conformity respondents.
This study appears to reveal some interesting insights into the social actions and underlying themes of front yard landscaping within the Midwest communities that were studied.
PRELUDE AND INTRODUCTION

Prelude

It was around 9:00 a.m. in early June, a week after arriving in the Midwest from the Southwest United States, when I was on my ritual run to relieve the daily stresses of graduate school. As usual, I was enjoying a moderate paced stride while breathing in the fresh air that had a hint of humidity in it. The trees were now dressed in their full summer attire providing a respite for songbirds along with shade to all below with their green umbrellas opened wide. Blooming perennials painted the streetscapes of this small Midwestern suburban neighborhood with every color of the rainbow. I felt like I was back in the fifties starring in my own episode of "Leave it to Beaver", only this was in color! During my run, I encountered neighbors picking up the daily newspaper to bring inside, washing their cars, while other neighbors were chatting with each other, and children playing in their front yards with the family dog.

As I continued my run, my eye kept catching small green, orange, or white flags telescoping about six to eight inches above the lawns where they were planted so intently. Finally, my curiosity got the best of me and I decided to stop and see what these little jewels of attention were trying to represent. Much to my surprise, the stated that this particular lawn had been freshly treated with a variety of lawn chemicals and to keep off of the surface! This caused me great concern because many of the children and pets that I had been seeing along my running route were playing on lawns that had these flags. Many of them in their bare feet! This was in
addition to the now familiar odor of this liquid “green-enhancer” that was blanketing the lawns.

At the same moment I was surrounded by a loud buzzing like sound and became conscious that I no longer was hearing the delightful sounds of the songbirds. As I passed by a large well-clipped dark green shrub, I came upon a middle-aged man mowing his twenty by thirty foot front yard with a shinny green John Deer riding lawn mower. This seemed quite bizarre to me since a traditional sized gas/electric mower, or even a push reel mower would have been able to accomplish this task proficiently. As I continued I was noisily assaulted with seven more residents mowing their lawns; one of them was spreading something in a red hand-held broadcast applicator, probably fertilizer. I noticed many of them were mowing around those flags similar to the ones that I had seen earlier.

I began to wonder about this “American ideal” of having a well-maintained lawn, its costs of time, as well as costs to the environment. Then, I came upon a house woven in between all of these emerald carpets that had a prairie landscape. It was simply beautiful. In this small neighborhood oasis there were flowering perennials of majestic colors growing at varying levels, different types of ornamental grasses, all this without the manicured green carpet that was so dominant throughout the neighborhood. I stopped in an instant and just looked in amazement at this alternative front yard landscape, and wondered why the owners did this and what the other neighbors thought of it? Then another thought popped into my head. Why are the majority of people so concerned with maintaining this perfect green uniform carpet that dots the landscape in the United States from coast to coast?
Introduction

The experience that was described in the prelude is one that is not restricted to the Midwest and can be seen from coast to coast in the United States. Taking a visit in just about any American neighborhood there is more often than not, a unifying theme: a front yard landscape with a green, usually well-maintained lawn incorporated into it. Why is this lawn so woven into the social fabric of the country despite geographic and environmental differences? What are the social factors that contribute to these phenomena? More importantly, are there populations within the normative behavior of a "green carpet" in the front yard landscape that have alternative landscapes, those which do not incorporate lawns?

This thesis will argue that, at least in Central Iowa, having a front yard landscape with a well-maintained lawn is socially normative. Turner (1991) describes social norms as a process of mutual influences between members of a group. This concept of a social norm results from the similarities in the relationships and social interactions that occur within a social group. Another aspect of these similarities is represented usually by a prescriptive rule or social value and extends throughout the group and is widely accepted (Turner, 1991). Furthermore, Turner (1991) explains that this is:

thinking, feeling, or behaving that is endorsed and expected because it is perceived as the right and proper thing to do. It is a rule, value or standard shared by the members of a social group that prescribes appropriate, expected or desirable attitudes and conduct in matters relevant to the group (p. 3).

These social norms are not just limited to similarities, but also differences within a social group. Many of these properties of social norms can be seen
everyday across America in the choice of the front lawn yard landscape. The intensity of social approval or rejection of the norm will affect the conformity or non-conformity of members in the group. In addition, acceptance of a particular norm within a group will lead to conformity. Members who disapprove will deviate from the particular norm Turner (1991). Those who choose to deviate from a particular norm will stand out and risk being penalized or ostracized in/from a group. In the context of a lawn that is not well maintained, comments such as "oh, that’s such a dirty front yard" may be a very common remark from other neighbors, as well as less than friendly looks and actions. Also, there are often local ordinances, which require mowing to maintain grass/weeds at a certain height. This is in addition to CCR’s within certain neighborhoods.

There is more to a social norm than simply liking or disliking something. Turner (1991) refers to it as a feeling of "oughtness" about an act or conduct. It extends deeper than this notion of liking or disliking; it is almost a fundamental belief or moral obligation to adhere to, and participate in, even if one does not agree. As social creatures, we put a high value on the importance of social norms and they are prevalent in our day to day living at many levels.

The front yard landscape with a lawn, is the rule, value, or shared standard that almost everybody goes along with. It is seen as expected, appropriate, and desirable. Of course there are exceptions to every rule, but predominately a well-maintained lawn is the norm. At the surface, this may seem to be a very ordinary issue of people having or not having a lawn in the front yard of their single-family-detached-houses. If you consider the number of people in the United Sates that are
owners of single-family-detached-houses, however, the lawn can be considered a significant problem socially, as well as environmentally. Aldo Leopold once said, “a thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and the beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it does otherwise” (Leopold 1966, p.262). From this standpoint, it seems the American lawn with its chemical, water and labor dependent nature, along with its associated economic costs does not meet Leopold’s standard. Bormann et al., (1993) reflect on the front lawn in saying, “for the homeowner, the lawn is our piece of the biosphere, and through it we communicate our concern about the environment of the earth, our greater lawn” (p.2). The question comes to mind whether today’s modern society is more concerned with social status, than environmental status! Of course, since people do not believe they are being environmentally irresponsible, they do not see that there is a problem with their thoughts or actions. People intentionally choose to have a lawn, even though there is no real reason for having one, in comparison to substance, other than aesthetics. It is a strong social norm.

I believe that the design and maintenance of the front yard extends far beyond aesthetics. The lawn is a serious social statement that has many societal ramifications. The lawn is part of pop culture, as can be seen in television and radio commercials, magazines and store advertisements to mention a few, for lawn care products and services.

Lawn is conventional and resonates values rather than simply being the preference of isolated individuals reacting to the same stimuli. The lawn projects the self. It shows how individuals present and maintain themselves within the context of
their front yard (Goffman, 1959). A conventional presentation of self, (Goffman, 1959) comes at the cost of environmental problems such as ground water and soil contamination from lawn fertilizers, herbicides, fungicides, and pesticides, as well as using vital non-renewable resources: potable water. This is of course in addition to the hardly ever mentioned economic costs of maintaining the aesthetic green carpet. In addition, there are less obvious social implications such as the pressure of maintaining a consistent emerald carpet. Lawn deviance people, those not complying with the emerald carpet paradigm, are subject to negative looks, gestures, comments, and even legal action from neighbors, as in local weed ordinances.

In this thesis I will explore the nature of lawn deviance in Central Iowa. I will build theory qualitatively from survey responses, as well as use some existing theories to create a typology of lawn deviance and conformity. I will try to explain why people choose to go against the normative practice of having a lawn (this I will refer to as lawn deviance: LD); and why so many other people choose to have lawns in their front yard landscaping despite of the potential negative impacts (what I will refer to as lawn conformity: LC). There are many lenses that one could use to explain this type of phenomena, I will use a social psychological lens. Specifically, I will employ sociological theories in an attempt to shed some light on this subject.

Before I can address the studies hypotheses, a discussion of theories will help lay down a framework in order to understand a sociological study of this nature. From there, using Goffman’s dramaturgical analysis with additional illustration from Scott and Lyman’s accounts and Sutherland’s differential association theories,
should bring into focus a clearer perspective of lawn deviance and conformity. Lastly, other lenses will be presented in the discussion section of this body of research.

To really understand the impact of the lawn and grasp the essence of this sociological study, I feel that it is pertinent to start with an in-depth look at the history and evolution of the front lawn in America.

**History of the lawn.** Webster's dictionary (1982) defines a lawn as, "Land covered with grass kept closely mowed, especially in front of or around a house" (p.799). The lawn really started taking shape in the eighteenth century. A few wealthy Americans were influenced by French and English aristocratic landscape architecture. In fact, Thomas Jefferson has been credited with creating the first English style lawn at Montecello (Bormann et al.,1993). He was fascinated with many of the English gardens that he visited during his travels in Europe. Particularly, he admired the pastoral quality that a landscape had when the buildings were blanketed with green around their foundations. This is also the quality that Frederick Law Olmsted, who would become the father of American landscape architecture, captured years later.

Being that the climate in Europe was very suited for the growing of a lawn, it became a major design feature in many gardens. Landscape architects such as André LeNotre and Lancelot "Capability" Brown created magnificent gardens for the aristocracy of England and France. So, when European immigrants came to America they brought with them these garden concepts; this is in addition to the Americans who visited these places and wanted to emulate this affluent life style.
Around the mid-nineteenth century these early influences started to integrate themselves into American culture. Homeowners were being encouraged to cultivate their own “living green carpet” by popular garden magazines, the writings of Andrew Jackson Downing along with the popularity of golf, and even the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). In collaboration with the United States Golf association, the USDA developed lawn grasses that could grow in all regions of the country (Jenkins, 1994). The whole idea was to suggest to individuals and set examples to their neighbors, and people walking by their property, how a yard “should” look. The old cliché, "keeping up with the Joneses" can be a fair statement to make here. In fact, it became that you had to be better than the Jones! Most of this of course was done mainly among the upper class and only later became a status symbol and eventually status quo for the middle class.

Another aspect of the European influence is that Americans not only adopted garden aesthetics but industrial ones as well. Due to the industrial life, like that of England in the nineteenth century, Americans began to be concerned with the quality of life. Rural life became desired and new housing patterns emerged as the popularity of designers like Frederick Law Olmsted caught on so rapidly.

The lawn was not adopted culturally very easily even though today looking at most residential streets in America this is hard to imagine. One of the main reasons was that a lawn was very hard to care for. In order to keep it looking presentable, or for it to be used as a playing surface it had to be cut with a scythe or be grazed by livestock. Scything was very time consuming and cost a lot of money due to the labor involved. Also, there was not much information on the care of a lawn. This
started to change with the invention of the first lawn mower. In 1830 Edwin Buddy, an English textile engineer, developed the first reel lawnmower. Having a lawn himself and being an engineer he thought that a better way for maintaining the lawn had to exist, or should exist. So, on his spare time he worked on an idea until he came up with a workable design.

The need for such an implement did not really catch on until the late 1860's, to the early 1870's (Jenkins, 1994). With this one invention it basically revolutionized the way a person thought about lawns because mowing no longer took the countless hours to complete, and the cost was now becoming more reasonable. Although the lawn mower was a very crucial invention for the acceptance and popularity of the lawn, the development of piped water, the rubber hose, and most impressively, chemicals such as fertilizers and pesticides made the lawn more widely assessable and accepted. In addition to these developments, the knowledge of lawn care grew and was made available to not only professionals but to the homeowner allowing the latter to become masters of their "green jewel".

Evolution of the lawn. The lawn has evolved both genetically by hybridizing the grass to be adapted to a variety of climates, as well as socially by becoming as common as the streets needed for America's necessity: the automobile. Lawns, however, were not as common and accepted in the past as they are today. The way a lawn has been thought of has changed over the past 400 years. In the sixteenth century it was considered as an open space or glade in the woods. In the seventeenth century it was thought of as untilled ground with grass, with an obvious reference to agriculture since agriculture was the primary focus in regard to
aesthetics and recreation at that time. Then, in the eighteenth century it was referred to as a pleasure ground covered with grass that is closely mowed. Before the Civil War there were not very many examples of lawns. Houses were built close to the street with maybe a small fenced front yard of dirt. Pasture, fields, and beaten down dirt instead of grass usually surrounded farmhouses. In the United States in the 1950's lawn was redefined and thought of as land covered with grass closely mowed, especially around the house (Jenkins, 1994).

The climatic conditions throughout the United States resemble many around the world and yet America's tie with the lawn is almost as strong as the ideal of "apple pie." It has been said that the affluence of the American way of life is why the lawn is so widely accepted. There are many countries, and cultures that have not adapted to this form of vegetation. Perhaps "culture" which is influenced by "history," is really a social comment on experiences.

Currently in the United States, lawn covers approximately thirty million acres (Jenkins, 1994). This patch of green carpet seems to be woven into not only the American psyche, but also the American social fabric as a whole. In many other countries around the world the lawn is an unwanted form of vegetation because it is a habitat for insects and rodents, as well as being very expensive to maintain. In America, however, the lawn seems to be a part of the culture, and it is almost seen as a duty to have a well-manicured green lawn. Katherine White (1979) in her book Onward and Upward in the Garden says, "sociologists even refer to the lawn as a 'status symbol' and to a certain degree this is true" (p.159). In America, lawn supplies were once limited to garden centers. Now, supermarkets, drug stores, and
even some department stores carry lawn equipment. This equipment ranges from watering aids, mowers and trimmers, fertilizers and pesticides to even grass seed varieties. Media also has its influence as can be seen by the copious amounts of magazines and television commercials explaining what “your lawn needs” to have.

Human domination of nature has been well documented throughout history. Humans live in hostile climates of extreme heat or cold, convert wetlands into productive dry farming practices, and bring water from miles away to green far away deserts. These aspects of human nature are certainly monumental, yet they are accepted as the ordinary. Bormann, Balmori, & Geballe (1993) reflect on this when they state:

In terms of human history, the lawn is not an old tradition. Its popularity began in the eighteenth-century Europe, but its antecedents are deeply embedded in humankind’s struggle to understand and control nature (p. 13).

It would be hard to try and explain the immense impact of the lawn from any one discipline. Although, the focus here is a sociological one, anthropology and psychology also help explain this phenomena of our culture. Balling and Falk (1982) hypothesized that humans have an innate preference for savanna-like environments that arises from their long evolutionary history on the savannas of East Africa. These savanna environments can be likened to characteristics of the modern-day lawn, with its relatively smooth topography and color. In similar studies, Balling and Falk (1982) and Zube et al., (1982) used participants of various ages, from eight years old to senior citizens. They were shown slides of different biomes, ranging from tropical rain forests to deserts. It was found that the youngest children had a higher
preference for the savanna landscape more than any other age group, and any of
the other landscapes. As Lewis (1993) reports, "since none of the youngsters had
ever been in a savanna, the authors conclude that they were expressing a
preference for savanna that is innate rather than learned." The issue of nurture vs.
nature is not the emphasis of this study, but it is important to realize that there is a
dialogue across disciplines.

Today the lawn is truly an American image and can be seen in just about
every residential setting, as well as business parks, shopping centers, and of course,
parks and athletic fields. In the residential context, it is an extension to some extent
of who the person is. It tells others in the area usually, but not limited to housing
areas, what the owner thinks a front yard should look like. Looking deeper into this
thought, it is also telling others the way they should maintain their piece of
Americana.

Specifically, the American lawn really started to develop after the Civil War
along with other significant activities. The first was the expansion of the railroads,
streetcars and trolley lines. This enabled the first suburban communities to develop
on the East Coast.

Second, Frederick Law Olmsted, the father of American landscape
architecture, addressed America's need for better living environments with his
"parks" development, which heavily influenced suburban communities. Olmsted
wanted to improve the American way of life by incorporating the best that city and
country life had to offer. The way he did this was by incorporating culture and
recreation, including parks that could be used by everyone (Tishler, 1989). This can
be seen in Prospect and Central Park in New York, and in his 1868 planned community of Riverside, Illinois along with countless other projects. He wanted to give people a place to relieve the stress and toils of everyday life. This was accomplished by providing vast lawn areas that captured the "pastoral/park scenery" with undulating expanses of lawn incorporated with trees (Tishler, 1989). With Riverside, IL, each lot had a lawn, and the houses were set back thirty feet from the street to give the entire development a park like atmosphere. Today, this recipe has been incorporated into most of the nation’s suburban developments.

The next significant activities were the adoption of the automobile in the 1920s and the rising popularity of the game of golf. More Americans owned their own automobile and were able to buy houses in the suburbs away from the crowded cities. The game of golf also played a role in the popularity of the lawn. Americans were starting to have more time to pursue hobbies, and recreation was becoming more established. The lawn within the residential setting was thought of as an extension of the golf course (Jenkins, 1994).

Out of all of the activities mentioned, probably the one that had the greatest effect was the suburban development after World War II. This was generated by a combination of federal funding for highways and financing offered to veterans. Since the popularity of the automobile was increasing, the federal government started financing major highway projects. This in turn lead to large tract housing developments, which were being purchased predominately by veterans. Veterans were able to afford these new suburban houses from the low cost mortgages that the government was making available to them.
LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORY

In general, sociological studies have ignored the lawn. This is evident from the lack of literature available on the topic of lawns from a sociological perspective. The absence of sociological knowledge alone is a valid reason why this study was so important to conduct. This lack of attention is not very surprising since society at large does not pay very much conscious attention to things in the built environment. An exception would be, perhaps, when we are in need of something, or something is not functioning. Trees, shrubs, grass, etc. are for the most part, taken for granted. It is hard to deny that vegetation is of great importance to us, for the simple fact that it is an essential link in our food chain. In addition to plants in the context of subsidence, what is the sociological significance of ornamental plants? As mentioned earlier in this thesis, due to the uniqueness of this study a number of sociological theories will be employed to help understand Lawn Deviance and Lawn Conformity.

The Notion of Deviance

Since this thesis will argue that not having a well-maintained lawn as part of a front yard landscape is a form of deviant behavior, it is important to have a concept of what we mean by deviance. This of course, excludes heavily wooded lots that cannot support grass, or a steeply sloped lot. Usually, when the word deviance or deviant comes up, images of shady characters performing unlawful acts come to mind. Essentially, there is no agreement on whether deviance refers to behavior,
people, or conditions (Clinard and Meier, 1995). Crime, alcoholism, smoking, homosexuality and suicide are examples of deviance. Many would associate deviance with going against either moral or political laws. Within the discipline of sociology, there are those who feel that when society devalues certain behaviors, persons, or conditions (Sagarin, 1975: as cited in Clinard and Meier, 1995) and finds them offensive (Higgins and Butler, 1982: as cited in Clinard and Meier, 1995) then society considers them deviant. However, Clinard and Meier (1995) express that deviance may possibly be valued in some instances. This notion of valued deviance might be illustrated by not having a lawn, and opting for a flower, shrub, or rock garden instead. In these instances, the labor and environmental impacts have a tendency to be much less than those of maintaining a lawn. Therefore, refusing to conform to the normative behavior of having a lawn, and being deviant may actually be very positive.

Another way to define deviance is to consider it from the following perspectives: statistical, absolutist, reactivist, and normative (Clinard and Meier, 1995). First, statistical deviance refers to a behavior that is not “average.” Hence, anything that is not in the majority is a minority, and therefore is deviant. This perspective may lead to strange conclusions about deviance. For instance, a certain population that never wore red socks, ate any kind of meat, or never drank alcohol, would be considered deviant if the majority of the population did. Deviance from this perspective is a departure from an accepted standard of behavior (Clinard and Meier, 1995).
Secondly, from an absolutist point of view, deviance would be defined as something being very certain and an apparent behavior. From this view, members of society are in general agreement over what constitutes deviance because the basic rules of society are apparent (Clinard and Meier, 1995) and apply to everyone at all times. This makes the assumption that everybody is a team player and playing on the same court by the same rules that were agreed upon at an earlier time. This emphasizes tradition and traditional definitions. Clinard and Meier (1995) explain that psychiatrists and psychologists currently see deviance from an absolutist standpoint, as if it were a type of sickness resulting in alcoholism, crime, suicide, etc.

Next, a reactivist approach is illustrated when others place a deviant label on a behavior or condition. Something becomes deviant when the act in question is identified as such by the social group in control. Once a deviant label has been placed, it is easy to include the actor of the specific behavior in the deviant label (Clinard and Meier, 1995). This perspective clearly describes deviance as a social condition because the labeling of “deviant depends on the reactions of the social audience to the act” (Clinard and Meier, 1995, p.7). This reactivist approach may not make any sense, however. For instance, if someone steals an object and is not caught or seen, it therefore does not constitute a deviant act according to the parameters of a reactivist’s definition.

Lastly, is a normative definition. This definition was discussed in the beginning when deviant and normative behaviors were introduced. A normative definition states what “ought” and “should” be done (Clinard and Meier, 1995) according to a group. This is a dynamic situation that can alter with the changing
tides of a group's sentiment. Clinard and Meier (1995) explain that a normative definition of deviance, “constitutes only those deviations from norms in a disapproved direction such that the deviation elicits, or is likely to elicit if detected, a negative sanction” (p. 8). These norms are socially constructed, maintained and propagated by the group and at any time may fall into disfavor or be elevated to a stronger status. “Norms provide the basis for reacting to deviance, but it is through social reactions that norms are expressed and deviance is identified” (Clinard and Meier, 1995, p. 8). In essence, when a norm is violated it brings a type of negative response from the group.

The question of a norm can be interpreted or defined in many ways as previously outlined. For the use in understanding lawn conformity and deviance, I will use the normative definition to help guide this study. I will use this normative explanation not from a viewpoint that lawn deviance is necessarily negative, but that deviance is just simply different than the existing lawn paradigm.

Theories

What seems more illusive than trying to define deviance is the fact that we are social creatures who are also dependent on vegetation. To try to clarify that statement, the notion is that when people are in what is commonly considered a beautifully designed space, let’s say surrounded by large shade trees, or flowering shrubs, nature, etc., their tendency, though probably unconscious, would be to become more socially interactive (Dwyer, 1995; Eckbo, 1950; Kaplan and Kaplan 1982; Laurie, 1979; Ulrich, 1985). Generally, if people are at relative ease in an environment, they are more apt to relax and enjoy the surroundings and be more
socially inclined (Appleton, 1975; Relf, 1996; Ulrich, 1985). Gordon (1995) comments on the built environment when he states:

Ultimately, the nature of our species is based upon the ways in which we manage our relationship with the environment: the designed and built environment is a fundamental medium of that management (p. 256).

Once this ease of the environment is established, it seems that social interaction, at its various levels can take place. Within the context of management of the built environment, it becomes a very social issue as represented in the presentation of the front yard.

Since LC in this study is referred to as “normative” front yard landscape practice, an understanding of motive will help set a framework. In his work titled “Situated Actions and Vocabularies of Motive,” C. Wright Mills (1972) considered motives as, “typical vocabularies having ascertainable functions in delimited societal situations” and that “motives are the terms with which interpretation of conduct by social actors proceeds” (Mills, 1972, p. 394). People tell and ascribe their motives not only to themselves but also to others. It is not that they are trying to “describe” their action, but are giving “reasons” which ultimately are influencing themselves as well as others (Mills, 1972). When relating this to LC, it can be exemplified when a neighbor boasts about how green and/or weed free his or her lawn is, or the like. This particular situation may be in fact true, or believed to be true by the actor. It is also the intention to “promote a set of diverse actions with reference to the situation and its normative pattern of expectations” (Mills, 1972, p. 395). This concept can be seen very predominately in many residential neighborhoods throughout the country.
Boasting about one’s lawn is not to be confused with justifying one’s behavior, since having a nice looking healthy green lawn is the norm. Motives are usually established vocabularies that connect certain results with a particular activity and perpetuate various societal norms (Mills, 1972). To expand on this notion further, Mills explains that the word motive, “tends to be one which is to the actor and to the other members of a situation an unquestioned answer to questions concerning social and lingual conduct” (Mills, 1972, p. 396). It is also important to realize that as Mills states, “motives are associated with a norm with which both members of the situation are in agreement” (Mills, 1972, p. 397). Motives relate to typical everyday occurrences that are usually not questioned because they are generally accepted by the actors (Mills, 1972). In short, you don’t need excuses if what you are doing is normative. LC people do not have to justify themselves or their actions because having a nice front lawn is considered, for the most part in our society, “normal.”

To help with this understanding of LD, a look at Scott and Lyman’s accounts theory (1972) will be pertinent. As Mills (1972) refers to motives, Scott and Lyman (1972) discuss the notion of “accounts.” They explain that accounts are “a linguistic device employed whenever an action is subjected to valuative inquiry” (p. 405). Furthermore, an account is a “statement made by a social actor to explain unanticipated or untoward behavior” (Scott and Lyman, 1972, p. 405). Accounts are not used when a behavior is routine or is understood and accepted in a social environment (Scott and Lyman, 1972). This would help to explain LD. Not having a lawn goes against the normative behavior and would not fall under the explanation of a taken for granted motive as defined by Mills. It seems on the surface that having
a lawn in one's front yard would be a common sense practice, and therefore anyone not participating in this practice would need to, or at some point would be put into a social situation of justifying his or her nonconformity.

There are two categories of accounts, "excuses" and "justifications" (Scott and Lyman, 1972). Scott and Lyman (1972) define excuses and justifications as follows: "justifications are accounts in which one accepts responsibility for the action in question, but denies the pejorative quality with it" (p. 406). Excuses, on the other hand, are "accounts in which one admits that the act in question is bad, wrong, or inappropriate but denies full responsibility" (p. 406).

Given these definitions and the nature of this study, justifications are more likely to be used to explain LD rather than excuses. This is because people without lawns are unlikely to consider the lack of a lawn to be bad, wrong or inappropriate. They may see it as just different, or maybe even better. In addition, Scott and Lyman (1972) explain that, "justifications are socially approved vocabularies that neutralize an act or its consequences when one or both are called into question." They go on to expand that there is a "crucial difference: to justify an act is to assert its positive value in the face of a claim to the contrary" (p.411). It seems that a valid hypothesis would be that LD people would use justifications frequently. They would claim that having no lawn, or an alternative to a lawn would have some positive benefits over having a lawn. These benefits could come in the form of environmental, social, and economic qualities. Justifications like these are expected to be found in the data analysis.
In order to defend one’s position there must be an explanation. For this instance, a deviant may hold an alternative value system against a norm. Sutherland’s differential association theory (Sutherland and Cressey, 1974) suggests how lawn deviants might learn their values and techniques. Among the many propositions outlined, one of the ideas of Sutherland’s theory is that criminal behavior was based on affiliation with deviant and non-deviant social organizations (Clinard and Meier, 1995). Also, at the group level Sutherland stated that deviant behavior was a consequence of normative behavior, and at the individual level, learning criminal delineation of behavior is from personal relationships: differential association (Sutherland and Cressey, 1974). With this said, there are some specific assumptions that are outlined in this theory.

First, deviant behavior is not innate but is learned. Deviance does not result from lower aptitude or mental sickness, but from a learned process of socialization between people (Clinard and Meier, 1995). This learned behavior is fundamental in that it is associated with intimate personal groups (Clinard and Meier, 1995), including family, close friends, and mentors. Other associations with television, newspaper and the like, have less of an influence (Clinard and Meier, 1995). Another principle is “the idea that criminality is a consequence of an excess of intimate associations with criminal behavior patterns” (Sutherland and Cressey, 1974, p.90). Of course, I am not suggesting that not having a lawn represents criminal behavior. I am suggesting, however, that Sutherland’s theory may help explain LD. For example, these intimate associations could have been when LD people were younger and they spent time with parents, uncles and aunts or with
grandparents who did not support the lawn ethic. Sutherland and Cressey (1974) reflect upon this by stating that “any person inevitably assimilates the surrounding cultures unless other patterns are in conflict” (p.76). Modalities of associations such as frequency, duration, priority, and intensity (Sutherland and Cressey, 1974), would determine variations in deviance. Frequency and duration in themselves do not warrant explanation. Priority refers to behavior developed in childhood, which may persist all through life. The emotional reactions, as well as the prestige of the source of an association will determine the intensity. For instance, if a child spends enjoyable time with his or her grandparents at their house or farm helping in the garden, planting and caring for flowers and the like, this experience would provide for what Sutherland and Cressey are referring to as intensity. This is because figures such as grandparents usually carry with them a certain amount of prestige, which has the capability of making a strong impression on a child. In this example, the child might associate working in a beautiful garden with these significant older people as a very special and important experience. The application of differential association points outs that LD behavior may take on a very positive perspective. LD may reflect an emotional attachment to significant figures in one’s life associated with beautiful living processes: plants.

It is important to point out that this theory as well as the others being used in this thesis are based on criminals and the deviance parameters associated with crime. However, in addition to their intended explanations, these theories are very helpful in the explanation of Lawn Conformity and Lawn Deviance.
In addition to the aspects of motives, justifications, and associations, Thorstein Veblen’s conspicuous consumption theory is worth mentioning in relation LC and LD (Veblen, 1967). Veblen’s theory basically states that people spend money to show their wealth in regard to fashion and fad. Looking at the impact that lawns have in America, it seems safe to extrapolate this theory to cover this phenomena. Veblen states,

A major difference between any elite and the masses is leisure. The rise to civilization--the development of an elaborate culture--is rooted in the existence of a leisure class (Stark, 1992, p.259).

As mentioned earlier, the lawn in America was a direct influence from the elite of Europe, with an emphasis from the English (Bormann et. al., 1993). The owners of these great gardens, which included tremendous lawns, were people of leisure as Veblen mentions. Stark (1992) confirms this when he says, “The elite alone had leisure and were therefore the primary creators of culture” (p. 259).

Another factor that ties lawns with the affluent lifestyle of the English is culture. Since only the rich had the time and money, the lawns of the English were influenced by art, and vice versa. The pastoral landscape was of main interest to painters and poets in the eighteenth century. Landscape designers of the period emulated these works of art to capture humans and nature living in harmony; this is the essence of a "pastoral landscape." This has had a direct influence of the fascination of the American lawn since Americans have yearned for the status that was experienced by the English. Stark (1992) reemphasizes this when he comments, “The leisure of the elite was translated into a huge array of interaction
cues that strongly influenced how prestige was displayed, protected, and passed on” (p.259).

As upper class and then middle class Americans began to have more leisure time, the lawn became a growing part of the culture. Lawns became bigger and a whole lawn care industry grew from it: gardeners were hired to perform the weekend maintenance regimes of the rich. This in turn gave the elite even more leisure time and made the lower classes desire the life of leisure. In this case, having the perfect lawn on which to sip ice tea, play catch with one’s children, or simply discuss the latest invasion of crabgrass with a neighbor, was the status quo.

Veblen (1967) also expresses that the leisure class engages in not only conspicuous consumption, but in conspicuous leisure and conspicuous waste, along with the competitiveness of conspicuous consumption. This notion of leisure class is represented in other aspects of the lawn. Other than the representation of the lawn as a social indicator of affluence, there are wastes associated with its care. In relation of conspicuous leisure and conspicuous waste. Bell (1998) comments,

It is not merely enough to be socially powerful. We have to display it. Power in itself is not easy to see. We consume, we engage in leisure, and we waste in conspicuous ways to demonstrate to others our competitive power (p. 44).

As applied to lawns, there is not only a strong competitive nature to have the most weed free and lush green carpet, but wastes are constituted in the natural resources needed to maintain a lush green lawn such as, water, organic and inorganic chemicals, and fuels to power lawn equipment. Furthermore, by-products such as the emissions from fossil fuel powered lawn equipment, and left over lawn clippings generate additional environmental wastes. It is interesting to note that lawn clippings
are an excellent source of mulch and nutrients, yet are usually trucked off to a local landfill.

At the core of this study is an attempt to explain the most basic behavior exhibited in both the LC and LD people. An attempt to explain this can be constructed from theory in Goffman’s “Presentation of Self in Everyday Life” (1959). The center of Goffman’s theory is that social interaction is analogous to life of the theater, or stage. Specifically, Goffman claims that people’s day to day interactions and actions are similar to theatrical performances. These so-called “social performances” take place within the front region or stage, and in the back region, or back/offstage. In the front stage, people are actors using props and costumes, and are interested in appearance. In the backstage, actors can shed their roles or prepare for the next performance (Goffman, 1959).

In relation to this study, the back stage will not be the main emphasis, since most of the “performances” are done on the front stage. This front stage, I will argue, is very much like the “font yard landscape” for both LC and LD people.

People seek a sense of order in their daily contacts and interactions (Goffman, 1991) in order to give daily life a sense of purpose and reality. Within this order, Goffman, (1959) was interested in the “tension” between the “I,” “me,” and “self,” and the associated social constraints. He states that there is a, “crucial discrepancy between our all-to-human selves and our socialized selves” (p.56), meaning that there is a difference between what we do and what people expect of us. For people to find a balance and “in order to maintain a stable self-image, people perform for their social audiences” (Ritzer, 1996, p. 353). The notion of
"dramaturgical" refers to the notion that people's actions in everyday life are akin to life in theater, or stage: a performance.

Goffman discusses that there is an interaction between an actor and an audience, between an owner of a single-family-detached-house, and the neighbors for instance. A dramatic scene takes place between them. In addition, this performance or scene can be subject to a "disturbance," but that most of the time the performance is successful (Ritzer, 1996). This can be related to a front yard landscape in that, a show is being put on by the owner within the presentation of the yard. A disturbance can occur when the homeowner does not keep his or her yard up to the "societal norms" of that area. Hence, a conflict between neighbors can result. Also, this front yard presentation is representative of the "self." People want it, their lawn and their care of it, to be accepted (Ritzer, 1996). Therefore, the presentation must be up to a certain standard to be accepted. For LC, it could be reflected in a perfect living green carpet with timely mowing, fertilizer applications, etc. For LD, it may be a yard full of large beautiful flowers that are nicely mulched: a living Monet's painting.

Furthermore, Goffman's "social performances" are categorized within stages as previously mentioned. The front stage is usually where the main performances take place. Goffman (1959) indicates the front stage as,

that part of an individual's performance which regularly functions in a general and fixed fashion to define the situation for those who observe the performance. Front, then, is the expressive equipment of a standard kind intentionally or unwittingly employed by the individual during the performance (p. 22).
This is exhibited in the front yard itself, being a standard fixture upon the American landscape with the associated practices to maintain its aesthetic and social characteristics. Also, Goffman refers to the physical scene as the “setting,” the area in which the actors generally perform; and the equipment as the “personal front.” This could take on the form of lawn mowers, spreaders, underground automatic sprinklers and chemical sprayers for LC; and an empty bucket (for weeds), hand trowel, mulch, and garden hose for LD.

The front stage also involves appearance, which portrays the performer’s social status and manner, and which allows the audience to understand the role of the performer (Ritzer, 1996). This leads to a structural style that evolves from the performances: the stage or setting with a contextual performance that is expected. One would not expect a drag race on a theater stage, but a play is within a contextual parameter. An example would be the lawn maintenance in a front yard landscape. Ritzer (1996) comments that, “fronts become institutionalized, so collective representations arise about what is to go on in a certain front” (p. 354). This can be depicted through the relative uniformity of the American front yard with its trademark lawn. An important aspect of this is the exhibition of people’s front stage performance to be an idealist portrait of themselves (Ritzer, 1996), ultimately hiding certain aspects of their performances from the audience. The way that this can be linked to LC and LD may be the way preparation of maintenance or a planting in one’s yard is done backstage. To clarify this, a performer may repair or prepare the lawn mower in the garage, or sharpen and clean other tools such as pruning shears, shovels, hoes and the such. In addition, the selection and planning
of new plants or a new addition to one’s front yard may be done at a drawing table in the den, or the selection of plants and chemicals at a garden center. All this goes on backstage. Thus, the end product may appear as if the care of the yard is very easy or quick, reflecting on the performer’s skill and knowledge of lawn and garden care. Along these same lines Goffman’s idea of “mystification” can be incorporated. Since the audience is an integral part of the overall performance, Ritzer (1996) explains that performers create a type of “social distance” by limiting their contact with the audience, resulting in the likelihood of not being asked questions about the performance. Each gardener (performer) may have his or her own “special” way of keeping the lawn green and weed free. Along the same notion, one may have the biggest and brightest blooms in one’s own garden. This can also be referred to as “tricks of the trade” or the “old family secret” of lawn and garden care.

In addition to the notion of back stage, the back yard of people’s houses is frequently the site of yard waste accumulation and storage. Even though these aspects are not the focus of this thesis, it is important that they be recognized and may in fact add to the clean presentation of the front yard.

Hypotheses

Using a social psychological lens to look at this study the following hypotheses are presented.

• A population exists of single family detached residences in the Midwest that does not display the normative practice of having a lawn in their front yard landscape: Lawn Deviance (LD).

• LD respondents will give justifications for not having the conventional front yard.
• LD respondents will have had associations with people who are also lawn deviants.

• LD respondents will present themselves as environmentalists.

• LD respondents will indicate resistance to conspicuous consumption (by talking about frugality or conservation).

• LD and LC respondents will see their front yard landscape as an extension of their social self.

• LD respondents will be ostracized by their neighbors
MATERIALS AND METHODS

Participants

Participants were living in single family, detached homes in Central Iowa (Ames, Des Moines, and Gilbert). Their ages ranged from 28 to 74. Their occupations ranged from a retired telephone worker, auto mechanic, university professor to interior designer. Fifty-eight percent were male and 42 percent were female. In this group, 6 participants represented lawn conformity and 18 represented lawn deviance.

I operationally defined lawn conformity as having a conventional landscape with a front yard consisting of twenty-five percent or more lawn, and lawn deviance as having lawn grass in only twenty-five percent or less of the front yard landscape. The ideal lawn deviant was a person with no lawn present in the front yard landscaping. In addition to these definitions, it is acknowledged that the results generated from this study may not be precisely applicable to other community groups or general populations at a national level due to the homogeneity of the community from which the sample of this study was drawn. Acknowledging the limited generality of the findings, this study constructed a typology of lawn forms from a social psychological perspective.

Finding lawn conformity respondents was very easy. For instance a faculty member who was proud of his lawn volunteered to participate. I located other participants by looking for front yards that fit the criteria. Finding lawn deviance was much more difficult and I had to employ other methods.
Using a variety of methods I was able to locate lawn deviance participants. First, faculty members of the Landscape Architecture, Horticulture, and Sociology departments at Iowa State University were asked if they were aware of residents in Central Iowa that fit the lawn deviance criteria. Next, landscape architects, garden designers, landscape contractors and garden centers were contacted and asked if any home landscapes they knew of fit my description. In addition, friends and acquaintances were also asked if they knew of any residents with the described parameters. Furthermore, I drove around Central Iowa locating potential residences, a method which turned out to be very rewarding, though very time consuming. Finally, I used a snowball approach by asking each person I interviewed whether he or she could recommend another potential participant.

Procedures

After receiving approval of this project by the Iowa State University Human Subjects Committee, a letter was mailed to potential participants (see Appendix A). It outlined the project, and asked respondents to participate in a forty-five minute interview at their residence. In order to increase the probability of acceptance, the letter was drafted on Iowa State University letterhead. This was to give validity to the study (Dillman, 1978; Fowler, 1993). Also to increase respondent acceptance, a contact method (Dillman, 1978) was modified. Instead of a follow-up postcard, a telephone call was done approximately two weeks after the initial form letter mailing, and at this time I scheduled an interview with the willing respondents.

I conducted the face to face interview with participants, using a structured interview instrument (see Appendix B). The contents of the instrument consisted of
mainly open-ended questions about the participant's landscaping views and choices. It also included a section of attitude questions based on seven point Lickert response scales, and concluded with a number of demographic questions. In addition, the interviews were tape recorded for later transcription. No compensation was offered.

At the conclusion of the interview, I asked participants to walk outside with me and take a picture of their front yard landscape with a camera I provided. The only instruction was that they should take one picture that would epitomize their landscaping style. After the meeting ended, I made notes on how the house was organized: color, neatness, lawn ornaments and any other distinguishing features. Also, I took notes on the initial greeting, who was interviewed and who did the most talking, and where the interviewed took place. The survey was then numbered with the respondent's code as well as the taped interview. Finally, the interview notes were typed and cassette tapes were transcribed, and slide photos of participants' front yards were processed.
RESULTS

This chapter is divided into five sections. The first section describes the research participants. Descriptive statistics are used to show how LC and LD participants compare in terms of their demographic characteristics and their attitudes toward lawn-related questions. The second section of this chapter focuses on the nature of lawn conformity. This section reports the results of a content analysis of comments made by LC participants. The purpose of this section is to demonstrate the normative, almost obligatory status of the lawn in the front yard landscape. The third section of this chapter focuses on lawn deviance and hypothesis testing. This section reports the results of a content analysis of comments made by LD participants. The purpose of this section is to demonstrate the usefulness of various theories for understanding lawn deviance. This section shows whether or not LD participants expressed the hypothesized viewpoints. The fourth section of this chapter presents a typology of LC and LD participants. Finally, the fifth section compares two very different next door neighbors.

Demographic and Attitude Profiles

This section reports demographic and attitudinal data. These data should be interpreted with caution, however, because they come from small, convenience samples of respondents, rather than from probability samples of LD and LC populations. The reason for this convenience sample was to specifically look at social constructed ideologies of LD and LC participants. Participants in this research may not be representative of larger LD and LC populations. Attitudes and
background characteristics found in this research may not be typical. Furthermore, it is very likely that many of the differences found between the LD and LC participants in this study are due to sampling error. In other words, observed differences between LD and LC participants in this study may very likely not reflect average differences between LD and LC populations.

The completed sample for this research study consisted of a total of 24 respondents. Of the total, 18 of the respondents were LD people, and the remaining of 6 were LC people. Very few LC respondents were interviewed because the primary focus of the research was on deviance rather than conformity. Furthermore, it took very few LC interviews to fully understand the lawn conformity perspective. As shown in Table 1, the lawn deviants who participated in this study are significantly older (M= 55 years of age), than the lawn conformists (M= 40 years old). Their children are older. In fact, almost all lawn deviants’ children are over 18, whereas almost all of the lawn conformists’ children are 14 or younger. Both LD and LC respondents had high education attainment. There is a slight difference between lawn conformists and lawn deviants in their average household annual income with median of $40,000 per year for lawn conformists and median of $50,000 for lawn deviants. Sixty-six percent of lawn deviants grew up in a rural area, in comparison to only 40% of lawn conformists. All lawn deviants owned their houses while one lawn conformist rented. Lawn deviants spent almost the same amount of time (M=4.22 hours) working on their yards as lawn conformists (M=4.5 hours). A summary of demographic characteristics may be found in Table 1.

In addition, lawn deviants are more likely to belong to some
Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Respondents (N=24)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Lawn Conformists</th>
<th>Lawn Deviants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n=6</td>
<td>n=18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age (years)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30 or younger</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31-40</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>50.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41-50</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>33.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51-60</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>61 or older</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>16.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Formal education (years)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school or less</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school graduate</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>16.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocational school</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some college</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College graduate or more</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>83.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Average annual household income</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than $25,000</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$25,000-$50,000</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>50.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$50,000-$75,000</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>33.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$75,000-$100,000</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>16.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$100,000 or more</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Environment when growing up</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>50.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>50.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Environmental/conservation group</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>33.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>66.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Children</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>66.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>33.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age of your children (years)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0-4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-9</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>33.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10-14</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>16.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15-17</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 or older</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>16.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ownership of house</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rent</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>16.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Own</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>83.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
environmental/conservation groups (77.8%) than the lawn conformists (33.3%). Lawn deviants are less likely to use a lawn care company to take care of their lawns (27.8%) than lawn conformists (66.7%). It is interesting that the data revealed no noticeable difference in whether lawn deviants and lawn conformists had a lawn in their residence when they grew up. Fourteen out of 18 (the other four did not respond to this question) of the lawn deviants did have a lawn at their residence when they grew up, as all six lawn conformists did. (Note: for all the female and male respondents, only two female lawn deviants did not have one at their residence when they grew up, indicating having a similar residence background between lawn deviants and lawn conformists).

The data also indicated that lawn deviants and lawn conformists have interesting attitudinal similarities and differences (See Table 2). For instance, four attitude items were asked about neighbors. Results show that both LD and LC respondents, on average, believe that their neighbors like their front yard landscaping (M=5.56 and M=5.17 for LD and LC respondents respectively). However, LD respondents are less in agreement than LC respondents that they have a close relationship with their neighbors (M=4.39 and M= 5.50 for LD and LC respondents respectively); and are less in agreement that having a well-maintained lawn improves their relationship with their neighbors (M=4.83 and M= 5.17 for LD and LC respondents respectively). Furthermore, LD respondents tend to disagree that their neighbors influence how they maintain their landscape, while LC respondents tend to agree (M=3.22 and M= 4.33 for LD and LC respondents respectively).
Table 2. Responses to Attitudinal Questions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attitude Item</th>
<th>Lawn Conformists</th>
<th>Lawn Deviants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Having a well-maintained lawn improves my relationship with my neighbors.</td>
<td>M=5.17, SD=2.07, N=6</td>
<td>M=4.83, SD=2.24, N=18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lawns enable people to have a healthy place for children to play.</td>
<td>M=6.17, SD=1.21, N=6</td>
<td>M=4.78, SD=1.99, N=18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My neighbors like my front yard.</td>
<td>M=5.17, SD=0.89, N=6</td>
<td>M=5.56, SD=1.84, N=18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lawn chemicals in this area do not effect water quality.</td>
<td>M=4.83, SD=1.17, N=6</td>
<td>M=3.06, SD=2.07, N=18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The use of lawn chemicals is needed to maintain a healthy lawn.</td>
<td>M=5.17, SD=1.64, N=6</td>
<td>M=2.72, SD=1.65, N=18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My neighbors influence how I maintain my landscape.</td>
<td>M=4.33, SD=2.14, N=6</td>
<td>M=3.22, SD=1.95, N=18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agricultural chemicals affect water quality in urban areas.</td>
<td>M=5.83, SD=1.38, N=6</td>
<td>M=5.72, SD=1.65, N=18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having a lawn can lead to adverse effects on the environment.</td>
<td>M=3.83, SD=2.07, N=6</td>
<td>M=4.89, SD=1.56, N=18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Would you say you have a close relationship with your neighbors?</td>
<td>M=5.50, SD=1.72, N=6</td>
<td>M=4.39, SD=2.01, N=18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Values ranged from 1=strongly disagree to 7=strongly agree

Interesting similarities and differences are also found on the five items concerning chemicals and the environment. Lawn deviants believe that lawn chemicals in their landscape area does affect water quality (M=3.06), while lawn conformists did not feel as strongly that lawn chemicals affects water quality (M=4.83). Also, lawn deviants are less likely (M=2.72) to agree that the use of lawn chemicals is needed to maintain a healthy lawn, while in sharp contrast, lawn conformists agree that chemicals are necessary (M=5.17). The majority for both lawn deviants (M=5.72) and lawn conformists (M=5.83) agree that agricultural chemicals affect water quality in urban areas. However, lawn deviants are more
likely to emphasize the adverse effects of having a lawn on the environment. The LD respondents agree that having a lawn can lead to adverse effects on the environment, while lawn conformists do not seem to agree (M=4.89 and M= 3.83 respectively). Lastly, LD respondents are less positive that lawns enable people to have a healthy place for children to play (M=4.78) than LC respondents (M=6.17). (See Appendix C for Graphs of Respondent Attitudes).

Looking at the time LD and LC respondents have lived at their current residence, the data revealed that, lawn deviants have lived in their current residence longer (M=16.2 years) than the lawn conformists (M=8.5 years).

A majority of both lawn deviants (62%) and lawn conformists (67%) indicate they spent less time on their current landscape than their previous landscape in their yard. Another interesting finding is that 50% of lawn deviants have had conflicts on their front yard landscape issues with their spouse, while no lawn conformists have ever had any conflicts over this issue with their spouse. Seventeen percent of lawn deviants admit that if their partners had it their way, they would probably have more lawn, while no lawn conformists would want more lawn if their partner had it their way. Lawn deviants are less likely (66.7%) to agree that lawn enables people to have a healthy place for children to play than lawn conformists (83.7%) do. No lawn conformists indicate "disagree" on this issue while 22.2% of lawn deviants disagree with it. Almost sixty-seven percent of lawn deviants are positive that their neighbors likes their front yard landscape, while 83.3% of lawn conformists believe their neighbor like their front yard landscape. An interesting finding is 27.8% of lawn
deviants indicate uncertainty on this issue while no lawn conformists show any uncertainty.

Lawn Conformity as the Norm

Lawn conformity is defined as the normative front yard practice, consisting of a 25% or more of the front yard landscape of a single-family-detached house which predominately exhibits a well-maintained lawn. In order to have a justification of classifying LC as such, an illustration of the normative concept of LC will be presented to establish this framework.

The normative concept of having a lawn as a major component of one's front yard landscaping was the sociological platform on which this study was based. With this assumption, one would expect to uncover similar themes that would lend to the understanding that having a well-maintained lawn is a normative practice. Empirically, this may seem evident by walking down many suburban neighborhoods. Such themes might be, but are not limited to the ones previously outlined. This framework is exhibited quite clearly from the following quotes of LC respondents.

The social pressures of having a good looking lawn in one's front yard landscape are woven so tightly into the American suburban psyche that it is one of the first things some new homeowners will contemplate. An example of this can be seen in a quote from a respondent as she remembers the concern over the condition of her lawn when she first moved into her residence.

*The lawn—it was really sparse. It was in really bad shape. So, that first summer my husband took the tiller to it and tilled it all under and re-seeded everything. It was bad you know. How the owners before us got more weeds than grass, well, —so we just killed it all and started over. It was mostly weeds, yeah it wasn’t good (Respondent #23).*
As the quote describes, the importance of having a good lawn is paramount in owning a house. Also, it is an example Scott and Lyman’s (1968) accounts theory because justification is being used in the way to explain how bad the lawn was, and that action was taken to correct its “bad” state. After this was said, the respondent stated that,

The lawn ethic is definitely from my dad, he told me, ‘you don’t have weeds, you keep it watered, because that’s important’. Your lawn needs to look nice. It’s a reflection of—you know—taking care of your house, taking care of the neighborhood and being a responsible person (Respondent #23).

The lawn is ultimately a presentation of one’s self (Goffman, 1950) through the front stage of the front yard landscape. Likewise, as expressed in the quote, maintaining the lawn is normative, and any possible negative environmental impacts are not perceived as such, because the yard looks great. Interestingly, another LC respondent actually described the process of buying his house and how the landscape was such an essential thing to consider. Another way of considering how essential the front yard landscape is, would be the idea of “curb appeal”. Curb appeal meaning, when the front yard landscape is viewed from the street it has eye catching qualities. This could be important if the owner ever considered selling his or her house. A realtor would use curb appeal as a selling point to attract possible buyers. An additional comment this respondent shared was,

The folks back here—straight behind us—straight to the south of us—obviously have a big vested interest in the way we keep our yard, because they have mutual friends. Before we moved in, they asked our mutual friends—how well do they keep up their yard? (Respondent #19).
He went on to say,

_The first thing we did here—within the first week after we moved here for the first time that I had ever done this—was get a lawn service_ (Respondent #19).

This reflects on the social pressure of maintaining the lawn, stemming from the fear of criticism from his new neighbors. Again Goffman’s (1959) front stage parameters come in to play here. This respondent went on to explain that,

_And I’ve always taken—even when I didn’t have a lawn service—took care of the lawn. I was kind of a cheater. When I saw all the other little signs go up in the yard of people who did have lawn service, I knew it was time for me to fertilize. So that’s how I did it. I just tagged along. And ah, I do the same thing here_ (Respondent #19).

Furthermore, the respondent was so concerned about criticism from his neighbors he said he “cheated” in order to sustain the normative social practice of his front yard landscape. Another LC respondent again emphasized this “presentation of self in everyday life” (Goffman, 1959) as he expresses,

_If you walked around out in this neighborhood, you’ll see these houses that cost three times what this house does and their yards look like hell, and it detracts from the whole house_ (Respondent #21).

To carry this concept further, another LC respondent comments on the importance of a well maintained yard by saying,

_Yeah, because you have something that’s actually going to catch a person’s eye. You know. You don’t want somebody driving by and just look at just another house. You have something there that will catch it—perspective—say you’re trying to sell your house—to catch their attention_ (Respondent #8).

Even more specifically,

_Edgings I know are extremely critical you know. If you ain’t got a very good edger or edgings, the yard doesn’t look good at all. But you need to have a good dark colored grass, deep green grass, something to accent the front yard_ (Respondent #8).
A further illustration of this normative concept of having a lawn is revealed by this respondent’s remark. He states,

> When I look out on this neighborhood—it has a uniformed, well-kept appearance to it. Gives me a sense of people appreciate—this sense—one sense of beauty (Respondent#19).

In addition to the actual care of one’s lawn it is important to maintain the normative appearance. When asked how respondents maintained their lawn if they have to control weeds and pests, respondents answered with the following comments,

> I’m not great with messing with chemicals. I was afraid it’s going to like fry part of my lawn and the price of it is much more. So, rather than me messing with it- I let a lawn company mess with it (Respondent #23).

> I used to use a lawn care service to start with and then, if you look around, the best lawns are usually the guys that do it themselves (Respondent#21)

Then when asked if he was concerned about using lawn chemicals, he remarked:

> Ah, chemicals. I do the full treatment. You know, you get the grub and the weed and feeds. I know I probably apply twice as heavy as the bag says- its an environmentalists nightmare from that standpoint. I guess that I like a nice plush grass. You know. I do my own lawn treatment. I don’t necessarily think you save any money, but I think you can probably do a better job than those lawn companies. And, ah, you know, I try to keep the grass trimmed and full and all those good things (Respondent #21).

This remark reflects on Mills’ (1972) “vocabulary of motive.” In this theory, instead of justification, as would thought to be seen in a LD respondent, a LC respondent would “boast” about the perfect condition of his or her lawn, which is displaying the normative front yard landscape. This boasting is demonstrating the intention to “promote a set of diverse actions with reference to the situation and its normative pattern of expectations” (Mills, 1972, p.395). Again, boasting about one’s
lawn is not to be confused with justifying one’s behavior, since having a nice looking healthy green lawn it is the norm. Motives are usually established vocabularies that connect certain results with a particular activity and perpetuate various societal norms (Mills, 1972). Also, “motives are associated with a norm with which both members of the situation are in agreement” (Mills, 1972, p. 397). In this instance, it is the lawn owner and the neighbors in agreement. Ultimately, this displays the idea that having a green lawn with the help of chemicals and the like, is rather typical in the suburban landscape stage, and is an accepted social norm. Another respondent explained,

Fertilizer. Ah, weed/feed kill. Something that’s not going to destroy the front yard actually, but make it—the other item—a lot of people don’t know—is using Dawn liquid soap through a sprayer and spray all over the yard. You know. Just spray the whole front lawn and makes grass clean. A lot of people go—why would you want to use Dawn to clean your grass for? It makes it cleaner and a lot deeper in green and it grows a lot nicer (Respondent #8)

Goffman’s (1959) idea of “mystification” can be seen here in the description of the Dawn liquid soap by showing how this gardener (performer) has his own “special” way of keeping the lawn green. This can also be an example of “tricks of the trade” or the “old family secret” of lawn and garden care. This respondent further explains his maintenance practices by saying,

Ah, I’d probably average out to about—oh—7-8 hours over a weekend. My wife, she does probably a good 3-4 hours just getting the weeds out. From there, I take care of the rest. You know, the mowing, the trimming, getting rid of any garbage that’s gotten into it (Respondent # 8).
This social norm of a lawn in the front landscape seems to be one of prestige. When asking respondents what the function of a lawn was, some interesting remarks were exhibited. A representative of this LC is seen in the following remarks,

*It doesn’t get used, yeah you know, just curb appeal* (Respondent #21).

*So far, it’s purely aesthetic. One time—and it may become more so—my daughter has just taken up soccer and it is a very large area as you notice, so I kick the ball around with her* (Respondent #19).

When LC respondents were asked what type of front yard landscape would they least like, here are how a few LC respondents replied,

*Probably one that the whole yard was like a garden: a flower garden. I don’t care for those. I like to see grass in a front yard* (Respondent #17).

*As far as the front landscaping, somebody who never cuts the grass, the grass is tall or there cars piled up into it—trash continuously in it or they got way too many trees I don’t mind trees, but I don’t like to have a lot of trees* (Respondent #8).

*I like the fact that all the neighbors keep up their yards and have a lot of green grass. I would be upset if someone let their yard go completely wild. That would upset me. You know, weeds and all, completely taken over by the creeping Charlie and dandelions and crab grass and not mowed very often—that would upset me* (Respondent #19).

Lastly, during the discussion on the size of a respondent’s yard and the time it took to mow it, one respondent stated,

*I have grown accustomed to the size and I definitely enjoy it after I’ve mowed it. I enjoy the wide expanse of green grass. And I don’t apologize for that at all* (Respondent #19).

The power of this notion of LC as a normative front yard ideology is expressed very clearly in this respondent’s remark,
Ah, the yard and so forth? Well, I think you know there’s a certain conception of what beauty is obviously and one is the notion of a well-manicured lawn with grass that is green and mowed and ah—shrubbery’s that have a sense of plan to them. So, whatever you people place on that vision of beauty, then I’m part of that. Obviously, it’s a fairly common conception. I mean, so I guess what it says about me is I’m well socialized. (Respondent #19).

As seen in the previous LC respondent quotes, the normative concept of having a lawn as a major component of one’s front yard landscaping is a strong ideology and practice. Similar themes included the idea of low maintenance, the use of chemicals to maintain a good color and consistency of a lawn, neighbors having influence upon one’s front yard, and the front yard landscape ultimately reflecting the owner. All of these themes lend to an understanding that having a well-maintained lawn as part of the front yard landscape is a normative practice.

These data should be interpreted with caution, however, because they come from small, convenience samples of respondents, rather than from probability samples of LD and LC populations. Participants in this research may not be representative of larger LD and LC populations. Attitudes and background characteristics found in this research may not be typical. Furthermore, it is very likely that many of the differences found between the LD and LC participants in this study are due to sampling error. In other words, observed differences between LD and LC participants in this study may very likely not reflect average differences between LD and LC populations.

Lawn Deviance and Hypotheses Testing

As indicated in the introduction of this study, lawn deviance was defined as a front yard landscape of a single-family-detached house, which consisted of 25% or
less lawn. This section investigates how well various sociological theories predict LD respondent’s viewpoints. Each hypothesis will be examined using words of LD respondents.

• A population of single family detached residences exists in the Midwest that does not display the normative practice of having a lawn in their front yard landscape.

This hypothesis was confirmed. At the onset of this study, it did not seem likely that a population of single family detached residences located in the Midwest would be found that did not exhibit the normative front yard landscaping practices of having a well maintained lawn. To the surprise of this investigator, not only was a population found (n=18), but as the study progressed the magnitude of the LD population seemed to be growing with each consecutive interview. Given the time frame in which data had to be collected, however, all the other LD respondents could not be interviewed for this study.

• LD respondents will give justifications for not having the conventional front yard.

From the following examples, it can be seen that this hypothesis was confirmed:

_Basically, an attempt to control pedestrian traffic on a very busy corner where events like rock concerts and football games go. The plantings and the landscape are basically designed to remove as much of the yard as possible from mowing. And my lawn maintenance is basically a freedom lawn and not an industrial lawn. By that I mean, to design the average American lawn is_
basically where that comes from and basically I don’t want any chemicals. I have allergies and fertilizers affect them. Actually I’ve got things like white clover and violets and stuff that actually look wonderful. in fact, if I can get more flowering things into the lawn it wouldn’t bother me at all. I don’t even find dandelions objectionable if you cut them off after they’ve flowered. I think also it’s designed in such a way to give the house its own space away from the street. Give us some privacy. So we look out and see plants and not traffic. I think probably that’s pretty much it in a nutshell. It’s very low maintenance (Respondent #7).

I wouldn’t want a little square stamp of green lawn. I need trees and plants. That’s what feeds my soul. So I couldn’t have a space that didn’t have green textures and beautiful flowers (Respondent #16).

In my front yard I feel creative. Oh, I’d say I’m out here almost every day doing something easily 4-5 hours a week, but it’s pleasure. It’s not what I consider work. To me, work is mowing the yard. I think there’s something therapeutic in transplanting and moving things, and in pulling weeds, getting in some sort of order in your mind and in your place. It’s good in and of itself. In fact, probably more people would be less uptight and more happy if they spent more time outdoors – not doing work, but gardening (Respondent #13).

Um, that’s pretty much it. I think – to me – it gives me great pleasure. To me, it’s a thing of beauty. It may not be to everybody, but it’s my version of beauty. Kind of chaotic and loud, and disorganized – or unorganized, I’d say. It’s just kind of a natural flow of things. I get a great deal of pleasure out of it, out of being outdoors, period. And it gives me a good reason to be out (Respondent #13).

As far as our front landscape, it’s more of like a hobby, I guess. So to go out and just work in it and enjoy working with the different plants and being in the out of doors. For people to enjoy. I think it’s to avoid mowing. Well, when we first moved in—like I said—it was just a little bit of grass and it was all creeping Charlie. I still have creeping Charlie problems but not the grass problem! So, it was like either redo and re-seed the entire front yard and try to have this pristine grass yard or go to perennials and I like plants. You know, I like different flowering plants and different green plants (Respondent #22).

I’ve always felt that grass is a waste unless you have kids—it’s really kind of worthless, except for setting off the garden. Also, I have a difficult time pulling things up once they’re growing. Yeah, I have a survival of the fittest garden to a certain extent. I let the phlox duke it out with everybody else and then I decide that I don’t want phlox in a certain area and I have to pull them before they blossom because once they blossom I’m a sucker (Respondent #11).
These quotes represent what Scott and Lyman (1972) call justifications. They seem to say that it may not necessarily be wrong to not have a lawn, just different, or maybe even better. As can be seen in these respondents’ remarks, they have expressed that mowing a lawn is actually work and taking care of plants instead is a hobby and is relaxing. As Scott and Lyman (1972) illustrated, “justifications are socially approved vocabularies that neutralize an act or its consequences when one or both are called into question.” This is evident in the practice of not having a normative front yard with a lawn. In these comments, LD respondents are using justifications frequently to describe their non-normative front yard. One LD respondent explained that the idea behind his landscape was to remove as much lawn as possible by using shrubs and trees. This was to him a freedom lawn. He meant a lawn, which ultimately freed him from chemicals and the labor of mowing a green carpet. More importantly, was the idea that a yard with trees and shrubs afforded him landscape privacy. Having a normative lawn would not lend to these desired attributes.

Other respondents mentioned that they did not want a “square stamp of lawn,” but instead needed trees and shrubs for their soul. Also, having plants instead of a lawn afforded them to be more creative. These comments clearly represent Scott and Lyman’s accounts theory, specifically that justifications are used when one accepts responsibility for the action in question, but denies the pejorative qualities. These LD respondents indicate that they are very satisfied with their alternative landscape ideology.
• LD respondents will have had associations with people who are also lawn deviants.

The quotes included here indicate that this hypothesis was confirmed:

In my background well, my front yard looks very much like my grandparents front yard. My desire to have that kind of yard is really pretty much driven by the fact that I grew up in a place where there was really no lawn at all. It was out in the country and my grandmother was a really avid rock hound. She collected rocks from all over, and I just have always had this strong feeling for rocks and my grandmother had lots of flowers planted in amongst the rocks. So, when my relatives come to this house, they always say—oh, my gosh—that’s just like grandma. You know. So, I know that’s where that came from (Respondent #9).

The thing in my background would be the fact that my mother is an interior designer and my father was a forester and we had a gorgeous garden in Winterset where I grew up. So, there’s always been gardening in our family. I’m sure the perennials and things—in fact, I had a great-grandfather that was the vice president of the Iowa Horticulture Society so our whole family’s been growing things. He was a Hosta expert. So, I mean, it’s been in the family and as a result I suppose I was brainwashed into gardens as opposed to going out fishing or doing something else (Respondent #7).

My dad filled our yard with huge evergreens. Every time he went out west—and you’re not supposed to do this—but he would dig up a little seedling, bring it back. So many trees, so there was very little grass. Which can maybe be where the very little grass comes from (Respondent #13).

I inherited the love of flowers from my mother who was into gardening, we had a huge garden behind our house and she always had it filled blooming flowers. Just kind of a neat family thing. As kids—we hated it, but she would get us out there weeding and talking, and well here I am talking to you about my front yard (Respondent #16).

Sutherland’s differential association theory (Sutherland and Cressey, 1974) suggests that a deviant may hold an alternative value system against a norm. Specifically, deviant behavior is not innate but is learned from a process of socialization that it is associated with intimate personal groups (Clinard and Meier, 1995). It raises the question of how lawn deviants learn their values and
techniques. The preceding show that deviant behavior was a normative behavior, and that the behavior grows out of personal relationships just as differential association theory predicts (Sutherland and Cressey, 1974). These intimate associations are displayed in the comments of the LD respondents’ quotes; and the quotes show that when they were younger they spent time with parents and grandparents who did not support the normal front yard lawn ethic.

Sutherland and Cressey (1974) also talk about how the prestige of the source of an association will determine the intensity. This is illustrated by LD respondents’ descriptions of enjoyable time spent as children helping grandparents or parents helping in the garden: planting and caring for flowers and shrubs, etc. Thus, LD may have been learned from figures such as grandparents who carry with them a certain amount of prestige, and can make a strong impression on a child. At the core of this logic, is the idea that these non-lawn practices have been carried with the LD respondents and they are now reproducing the same behavior as their parents and grandparents have done. The quotes essentially confirm that differential association points outs that LD behavior takes on a very positive perspective and reflects an emotional attachment to significant figures in one's life associated with beautiful living processes: plants.

- **LD respondents will present themselves as environmentalists.**

  As expressed in the listed remarks, this hypothesis was confirmed:

  *I have nothing against grass. I don't fertilize it. I don't herbicide it. I don't – I don't like the use of chemicals. I realize there's a place for them, but, I guess*
my concern is there's enough groundwater problems in Iowa anyhow. Why should I add (Respondent #13).

I do not use a lawn care company because I don't like the idea of spraying things. Again, it's a living thing. It's not good for grasses, how can it be good for other living things? I worry about the interconnection between things (Respondent #13).

I think that my biggest concern is with chemicals. If there's somebody who has a monoculture lawn and they're really careful about maintaining it that way, that would bother me more than anything else I guess. So in other words it doesn't make a difference if somebody has a real grass lawn next to us. I just don't want the chemicals associated with it around (Respondent #1).

I guess I've mulched to keep weeds down, but like when a branch falls off the tree, I let it lay. When the leaves fall in the fall, I leave those there too. Just so it is more like a wooded garden or natural habitat (Respondent #22).

As confirmed in these comments, LD respondents express that they have environmental tendencies. As one respondent remarked, they were not necessarily against grass, but the chemicals that are associated with its up keep. They seem to have a holistic view in that there is a realization that lawn chemicals do not always remain on the lawn, but find their way into the ground water. Many LD respondents revealed that chemicals harm living things and that everything is connected in life; representing this holistic view.

Furthermore, instead of chemicals, many of the lawn deviants simply pulled weeds and used mulches to control them. Another respondent explained that he simply let the leaves and branches that fell to the ground remain, instead of throwing them away. Predominantly every LD respondent spoke of his or her landscape as being a part of nature. They felt a connection to the earth by maintaining an alternative front yard landscaping style that did not include the traditional lawn.
LD respondents will indicate resistance to conspicuous consumption (by talking about frugality or conservation).

This hypothesis was confirmed, as the following comments suggest:

*It's a landscape that's a result of a dialogue between the owner and nature. It is not just nature being itself and it is not me saying what it should be. There are plants that are placed here with other plants that have come in, either brought in by birds or the wind. What we call volunteers. Essentially, I do not water it or poison it with fertilizer. If there's a drought and things die—they just die. It's a collective landscape. It's not purely native, but a lot of this stuff is native or natural or naturalized (Respondent # 14).*

One of the stupidest things I'd saw once was, where they're fertilizing and watering in an irrigation system and we had a bill that would have staggered the imagination for just mowing the lawns during the summer. Well, why? Why do it? Why bother to stimulate the grass to grow all season so you can mow it all the time (Respondent #7).

*I sit in it, I eat the berries and the herbs. Otherwise I smell it and I look at it. Actually, that's what it's for. So, I have lots of aromatic things. I have lilacs, lily of the valleys. Then when you walk by it and brush it—it wafts—wonderful! It's a pleasure for me and if other people find pleasure in it too, that's wonderful (Respondent # 11).*

*That's one thing that we have noticed, it's nice not being constantly surrounded by lawn mowers. Now we have it over here, but you know, we don't have it in all the directions out from the house. And it is nice not having that constant errrrrrrr (Respondent # 20).*

LD respondents talk about frugality and conservation ideals by emphasizing the absurd nature of fertilizing and watering a lawn to just spend money and time to mow it. One even mentioned that he does not miss the hum of lawn mowers. These comments refer back to Veblen's conspicuous consumption theory (1967) in the sense that Veblen's theory basically stated that people spend money to show their wealth in regard to fashion and fad. As is expressed by the LD respondents, they feel that they are in harmony with nature by not using chemicals and the like to care
for the traditional lawn. Even though, they do exhibit conspicuous consumption by the fact that they obviously have the time and money beyond the basic necessities of life to make a social landscape. Even so, as remarked by one of the LD respondents, his front yard landscape was a dialogue between himself and nature; he did not waste time and money of fertilizing and watering his yard. It simply existed, as a nature would intend.

- **LD and LC respondents’ front yard landscape is an extension of their social self.**

  This hypothesis was confirmed and is exhibited in the following quotes:

  *My front yard is like a welcome to my little plot. It’s like saying welcome to my family’s little piece of Iowa. Kind of like a welcome mat. I just love working in the soil. It says something about—you know—you and how you want to portray yourself to the community (Respondent #20).*

  *I select plants that are already in the neighborhood so there’s a willingness to be part of the community (Respondent #7).*

  *I like this neighborhood in that there’s nothing controlled about it. You can plant whatever you choose as long as it’s not a noxious weed. As you can see my plants, they do what they please and I do what I please. The neighbors are very precise, have very orderly yards — and that’s fine for them. I’m all for that. I love the freedom to do what I want to do, to plant what I want to plant. Look at the milkweeds that are growing, I think that’s great. Some people would think that is really obnoxious. I kinda like the Creeping Charlie it smells really good when you step on it. It smells a little bit like a wild pine, if you will (Respondent #13).*

  *I think since I’ve done this — I don’t know that I’ve been an influence, but you see more people using the front yard in a floral way rather than the grass way (Respondent #14).*

  *This is my conversation to the neighbors. This is grass and is mowed. So, I maintain this strip here for them (Respondent #14).*
These comments reflect on LD respondents' front yard landscapes with the associated practices to maintain the landscape's aesthetic and social characteristics. Goffman (1959) alludes to these characteristics in “The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life.” As previously explained, the center of Goffman's theory is that social interaction is analogous to life of the theater, or stage, and people's day to day interactions and actions are similar to theatrical performances. Most of these “social performances” take place within the front region or stage, i.e., the front yard landscape. Respondents are actors using props and are interested in appearance. This performance is exhibited in their comments. One respondent revealed that even though he did not buy into the traditional front lawn paradigm, he still planted and maintained a small strip of grass for his neighbors. Additionally, a front yard landscape was referred to as a welcome mat. The front landscape as a whole was symbolic of a willingness to be part of the community.

- **LD people will be ostracized by their neighbors.**

  This hypothesis was not confirmed by this study. The data revealed that both LC and LD respondents showed a tolerance for each other. Despite differing views, a common theme was one of compliance to an overall landscape social order. By this, it seems that by having pride in one's front yard landscaping overrode any negative confrontations.

  People seek a sense of order in their daily contacts and interactions (Goffman, 1991) in order to give daily life a sense of purpose and reality. Within this order, Goffman, (1959) was interested in the “tension” between the “I”, “me”, and “self”, and the associated social constraints. He states that, “crucial discrepancy
between our all-to-human selves and our socialized selves" (p.56) gets at the idea that there is a difference between what we do and what people expect of us. An extension of this may be found when a respondent suggested that his deviant front yard was having an influence on other neighbors, because he was noticing that they were incorporating more flowers into their landscape since he changed his.

For people to find a balance and "in order to maintain a stable self-image, people perform for their social audiences" (Ritzer, 1996, p. 353). They have to essentially make themselves happy, as well as appease those that surround them. This can be seen when a LD respondent explained that the social life on his or her block was such that everyone had the freedom to choose his or her front yard landscape style. It can be a lawn or flower garden. Thus, depicting that everyone on the block is a performer on the front yard landscape stage.

In addition, the backstage is where actors can shed their roles or prepare for the next performance (Goffman, 1959). Even though the backstage is not representative in the LD respondent's comments, it can be inferred that in order to have a front yard landscape, the backstage process is going on. This takes the form of planning what to plant or how to accomplish a task such as planting or mulching, etc., so that when the respondents are performing the act, it seems as though they have been well rehearsed in the sense that it is done without much strife.

Goffman refers to the physical scene as the "setting," the area in which the actors generally perform. The front stage also involves appearance, which portrays the performer's social status. Fronts become institutionalized. This leading to collective representations about what is to go on in a certain front. Again, the
remarks about the “welcome mat” and “selecting plants for the community” are examples of the importance of this social front. In order to maintain respondents’ social status within their neighborhood, their front yard landscaping becomes the front stage, and the meaning and presentation of this yard is very important. It is transformed into the frontstage representing them, as well as what is being presented to their neighbors.

Even though LD respondents are not expressing the relative uniformity of the American front yard with its trademark lawn, they are showing the same level of concern in their alternative front yard landscape as the LC respondents showed. When looking at the other hypotheses in this study, a holistic theme can be seen in relation to Goffman’s theory. To clarify this holistic theme and to display how the other theories which have been discussed fit into front yard landscape ideologies, a typology of LC and LD respondents will be presented, followed by a illustration of a lawn deviant respondent vis a vis a lawn conformity respondent. This should offer a interesting front yard ideological landscape dialogue.

Typology

To better understand the differences and similarities between LC and LD and how they fit into the various theories, respondent typologies were developed. The criteria to ascertain typologies were adopted from Roebuch and Frese (1976). They outline three sociological dimensions: achieved and ascribed characteristics; identities and perspectives; and behavior on the scene. Given this, the data indicated two main categories: Lawn conformity and Lawn deviance. The categories were then broken down into subcategories (see Figure 1) in order to represent the
Lawn Typology

"LC" (n=6)
- Idea of low maintenance.
- Use of chemicals.
- Anthropocentric view.
- Lawn must have good color and consistency.
- Neighbors have influence.
- Front yard landscape reflects the owner and house.
- Yard care is work.
- Lawns are essential to LS.

"LD" (n=18)
- Idea of low maintenance.
- Anti chemical use.
- Environmentally concerned.
- Feel a part of, not apart from nature.
- Independent; not concerned about neighbors.
- Creative: about self-expression.
- Refer to native and natural qualities of landscape.
- Enjoy working with plants.
- Lawns are negative
- Lawns mainly for kids to play on.

"Typical LD" (n=6)
- Expresses all of the LD themes

"LC Observers" (n=4)
- Expresses many of the LD themes, but have a small portion of lawn that is well maintained.

"Dandelion Lovers" (n=7)
- Expresses many of the LD themes, but have a small portion of lawn that is not well maintained.

"Front Yard Apathy" (n=1)
- Has total disregard for front yard landscape.

Figure 1. Lawn Typology
main respondent themes. It is important to note that each respondent can be
categorized into an individual theme. However, the general goal of this thesis was to
uncover and try to explain major themes of alternative front yard ideologies, and not
to explain each micro occurrence. The data revealed that Lawn Conformity was
associated with the following basic themes. The most common theme revealed the
idea that a front yard landscape with a lawn was essentially one of low maintenance.
LC respondents' front yard landscapes were just something to look at. They needed
the use of chemicals to be properly maintained, and weeds were the most important
thing to eliminate. It was also indicated that the front lawn must have good color and
consistency. Lawn Conformists indicated that neighbors had a strong influence or
were of concern in their maintenance practices, emphasizing that the front yard
landscape reflects the owner and their house.

On the other hand, Lawn Deviants consisted of respondents being
environmentally concerned and against the use of chemicals in their landscaping
practices. Predominately, LD respondents had no lawn. They seemed to be
independent in their thinking and actions and felt a part of nature, not apart from it.
Therefore, by not having a lawn they felt that they were living more harmoniously
with the earth. They were not concerned about neighbors' opinions and exhibited a
creativity in the approach and implementation of their front yard landscapes and
themselves. LD respondents referred to the native and natural qualities of their
landscapes and explained the enjoyment of working with plants. In addition, they
conveyed the notion that not having a lawn was a low maintenance landscape, and
for the most part, lawns are mainly for kids to play on. It is interesting to note that
many of the LD respondents had cats as pets; this was not exhibited in LC respondents. Continuing further with subcategories of LD shows that, "LC Observers" (n=4) expressed many of the LD themes, but have a small portion of lawn that is well maintained. Next, "Dandelion Lovers" (n=7) expressed many of the LD themes, but have a small portion of lawn that is not well maintained. Lastly, the subcategory, "Front Yard Apathy", (n=1) is categorized as having a total disregard for front yard landscaping.

**LC vs. LD: A Comparison of Neighbors**

It was fortunate for this investigator that a LC and LD landscape were right next to each other, affording a rich look into these polar landscaping styles and ideologies. I will refer to the LC landscape respondent as “Mrs. Greenlawn” due to the luxurious green carpet in her front yard, and the LD landscape respondents as “The Woodchips” since their entire front landscape is mulched with woodchips.

**The Woodchips.** As seen in Appendix A, the first question asked respondents to describe their front yard landscaping. The Woodchips replied,  

*Well, it's grassless- a bit nonconformist. I mean, everybody has a lawn here, and ours isn't.*

This statement reflects on how Clinard and Meier (1995) explained the definition of deviance. This notion of being different from the norm. The Woodchips continue by saying,  

*Everybody else does grass and now it's like—why do we have to?*
This quote touches upon the notion of an alternative value system against a norm as addresses in differential association theory by Sutherland and Cressey (1974). The Woodchips also engaged in justification, as described by Scott and Lyman (1968).

Well, there was grass here before and it was not in good shape. The only way to make it good grass would be to use herbicides and we don’t do that. We have a 5-year old and she was 1-year old when we moved in—so we don’t want to expose her to that. We don’t want her playing in contaminated grass.

They are accepting the responsibility of going against the normative practice of having a lawn along with the associated chemical use, and this further reveals a justification by stating that they are protecting their child. Furthermore, dramaturgy is involved when the Woodchips express,

I’ve got one more important thing about how I would describe the front yard, I think of it as a public garden because the sidewalk goes through it. People can walk through it. But that’s part of my intentions for the front yard is to make it sort of like a public garden where people can walk through it and enjoy the flowers and the plants.

The Woodchips are trying to find order within the nature and social aspects of their yard. A performance is going on between the Woodchips, their yard and the neighborhood. Although it may be subtle, Veblen’s conscious consumption theory is also represented here, because wealth is being expressed with the presentation, and offering of the flowered front yard. Scott and Lyman’s (1968) accounts theory is again illustrated with further justification when the respondents were asked the question about the environment and the Woodchips’ neighbors. The Woodchips respond by saying,

Well, we have a serious lawn chemical user just to the back of us and we have one right next door to us. We were kind of worried that we’re surrounded on two sides by chemicals. He’s a broadcaster. She’s a broadcaster yeah, but she hires a weed company and they come in and spray
her lawn. She’s just not as fanatical as our other neighbor, he’s so insane, he’d kill his own trees. We non-lawn people are proud of ours!

When discussing the function of their front yard, the Woodchips reveal aspects of what Goffman (1959) refers to as “front stage” when they comment,

I use it strictly for pleasure and I spend quite a bit of time just doing what I call wandering around in the front yard. Walking through the flowers and enjoying it. We have a lot of pedestrians that use the sidewalk on walks. A lot of people in this neighborhood walk and so I planted a lot of those flowers with the idea in mind that pedestrians would be coming through there and would be able to enjoy the garden as they’re walking. I’ve also encouraged pedestrians and neighbors to pick flowers if they want to.

They are actually performing an interactive show. Goffman (1959) explained that the audience is an essential part of a performance. Here we see that the Woodchips actually expect the audience, their neighbors, to participate in the performance by picking flowers. As put forth by Scott and Lyman (1968), the Woodchips are exhibiting the positive side of deviance by allowing people to pick flowers from their front yard landscape, almost offering their front yard as a community garden. They justify this with the intention of neutralizing a social incident in a positive way, with positive benefits. I think it is safe to say that when people pick flowers that they can keep, they are in a positive mood, unless of course they are allergic to the flowers.

The Woodchips further support Goffman’s (1959), as well as Sutherland and Cressey’s (1974) alternative value system against a norm when they describe the kind of front yard they would least like to have. They go on to say,

I could think of it in terms of being boring. I don’t want a boring front yard. I don’t want a monoculture front yard where there’s just a few kinds of plants. I don’t like the look of a house that has professional landscaping and that has no character. That just sort of a carbon copy of the neighbors next door, and then not let your kid walk on that grass because it’s poison—chemically treated lawn.
This quote illustrates Scott and Lyman’s (1972) idea of justifications. As indicated earlier in the hypothesis, respondents without lawns were unlikely to consider the lack of a lawn to be bad, wrong or inappropriate. They would see it as just different, or maybe even better. The Woodchips’ quote reflects the idea that, “justifications are accounts in which one accepts responsibility for the action in question, but denies the pejorative quality with it” (Scott and Lyman 1972 p. 406). In addition, this respondent supports Scott and Lyman’s (1972) notion that, “justifications are socially approved vocabularies that neutralize an act or its consequences when one or both are called into question” (p. 406). Furthermore, “to justify an act is to assert its positive value in the face of a claim to the contrary” (Scott and Lyman, 1972 p.411). These respondents’ comments seem to claim that having no lawn, and or an alternative to a lawn has positive benefits over having a lawn. Specifically, they mention the safety of their child and their concern for the environment. This justification is in contrast to the previous discussion of “boasting.” As applied to this study, it was described that LC respondents’ “justification” of their lawns, resembles Mills’ (1972) discussion of vocabulary of motive. It was posed that instead of using justification, a LC landscape respondent would “boast” about the perfect condition of his or her lawn, which is displaying the normative front yard landscape.

When asked if their neighbors owned their house what changes they would make to the front yard, the Woodchips revealed this boasting attitude as they remarked,
Yeah, they’d have a lawn. It might not be very good grass, but just something to have to mow and cut, just something to sort of to take up the space. We’re the only ones on this block right here that have no grass.

Another important theme that came out of my conversation with the Woodchips was their reason for having flowers and shrubs in their front yard rather than a lawn. They said the following,

*In my background, my front yard looks very much like my grandparent’s front yard. My desire is to have that kind of yard, one that is really pretty, much driven by the fact that I grew up in a place where there was really no lawn at all. It was out in the country and my grandmother was a really avid rock hound. She collected rocks from all over and I just have always had this strong feeling for rocks also, my grandmother had lots of flowers planted in amongst the rocks.*

This is precisely what Sutherland and Cressy (1974) suggest with differential association theory. Here we can clearly see the way that the Woodchips learned their deviant non-lawn behavior. As stated with differential association theory, deviant behavior is learned from intimate personal relationships. Furthermore, it is a way that one assimilates to the surrounding culture, in this case grandparents’ gardening practices. From the description that the Woodchips give, it is safe to theorize that the intensity and priority of this experience with a grandparent was significant enough to generate this lawn deviance behavior.

Lastly, a comment was made about their yard in relation to the other neighbors,

*Even though we don’t have grass—we do make an attempt to keep the yard well maintained so that the neighbors don’t take offense at our yard.*

Reflected here is an indication of “disturbances” (Goffman, 1959). Goffman discusses that there is an interaction between an actor and an audience, between
an owner of a single-family-detached-house, and the neighbors in this situation. A disturbance can occur when the homeowner does not keep his or her yard up to the "societal norms" of that area. Hence, a conflict between neighbors can result. The Woodchips describe that even though their front yard landscape is not a conventional one, they do not want to offend, or have a social conflict with their neighbors. In addition, the following statement about the Woodchips' LC next door neighbor reflects upon the idea of the setting, and social performances.

My impression when we first started doing things in the yard, was that she (next door LC neighbor) was sneering at what we were going on in the front yard. I noticed this year that she seems to be kind of paying attention to what's going on over here because she does have her little attempt with flowers and plants and I think she would like to have more. I don't think she knows anything about growing plants without the use of chemicals. So, I've noticed her standing in her yard watching me several times during this season and partly because I think when we first moved in here—we had a really crappy yard and she had a really nice yard. And so, she kind of had her nose up in the air. But I think lately she's noticed that our yard is very beautiful and that people stop and admire it and so she's like—kind of standing there watching me and what I'm doing and observing what I'm doing.

In addition, this also reveals the notion of "mystification." Goffman (1959) described mystification as a way for performers to distance themselves from the audience. We see here that the LC neighbor is seemingly trying to demystify the Woodchips' alternative front yard design that has attracted other neighbors' attentions in a very positive way.

Mrs. Greenlawn. The Woodchips' next door neighbor, Mrs. Greenlawn, fits into the a LC category. A closer look at her comments should aid in a more suitable understanding of this social front yard ideology. This was an interesting conversation with Mrs. Greenlawn because her landscaping ideal did not seem to
coincide with her landscaping realities. To clarify this, she talked a lot about her love of plants, yet the most dominant thing in her front yard landscape was a beautifully manicured lawn. She also mentioned that she is not too structured, yet her yard was very ordered and her neighbors' yard, the Woodchips, was not seen as appropriate. With this said, a more detailed look at her responses will help illustrate these observations.

When Mrs. Greenlawn was asked to describe her front yard landscape she responded by answering,

*Um, hit and miss. You know, I just like flowers and so I've just been putting in a lot of flowers and just a few bushes—kind of what I like, not a great plan, if I don't like it I rip it out. The lawn—it was really sparse. It was in really bad shape when we bought the house. So, that first summer my husband took the tiller to it and tilled it all under and re-seeded everything. It was bad. You know. How they get—more weeds than grass—so we just killed it all and started over.*

Here is a good example of Scott and Lyman's (1968) accounts theory. Unlike the justification we saw in LD, justification is being used in the way that Mrs. Greenlawn is explaining how bad the lawn was, and that action was taken to correct its "bad" state. Even though justification is essentially used in explaining deviance, I feel that a leap can be made here to see its meaning.

The next topic discussed was the kind of influences that generated her front yard design. An interesting thing started to develop. Instead of the more typical answers such as the environment or past experiences with family members, she answered with this,

*The only thing we really kind of thought of was, we wanted something to separate ourselves from the neighbors on the east side (the Woodchips). So we now have a lot of dogwood bushes along that side and their cars tended*
to take out our lawn on that side when they backed over the driveway. So, we put up more dogwoods the rest of the way to just kind of keep everything from getting run over.

She further explained,

Yeah, They mulched their entire yard, so we kind of like having the dogwoods up so we don’t have to see that all the time.

This is an example of the power of a norm, and shows how unacceptable attitudes can be when one differs from the existing paradigm (Clinard and Meier, 1995). Mrs. Greenlawn does not want to have anything to do with the Woodchips because to her, essentially not having a lawn and just having a yard that is mulched is unacceptable.

As with the other LC respondents, Mrs. Greenlawn sees the function of her front yard landscape as being very passive and almost one of distance the majority of the time. She comments,

It never gets used much at all. Um, I sit and study on it once in awhile, but otherwise it’s just—I always come home and see the pretty flowers, but it doesn’t get used much. I don’t have any kids or anything.

This attitude is definitely a polar opposite to the attitude we saw from the Woodchips and the other LD respondents. It is a very typical answer from LC respondents, however. As strong as the Woodchips’ sentiments were about Mrs. Greenlawn’s landscape practices, hers are just as strong and expressive. This can be seen when she was asked about the type of landscape she would not want to have next door. She replied,

Plain grass and nothing else. I would hate that. Plain grass and three yew trees that are cut square. You know. Real formal and boring. Ah, well two years ago it was next door to me. But now she’s planted more flowers.
When they first came in, it was just—they mulched everything. They had no grass and no nothing. That was the yard I didn’t like to see.

Another very interesting finding was when the question came up about what generated her ideas for her front yard, the reply was quite surprising. First she commented that,

As far as all the different types of flowers, probably that would be my grandparents. They had lived on a farm and my grandma had all different kinds of flowers. Yeah, my grandma—you know—out on the farm she had a lot more space and she always—you know—and actually several things I’ve gotten from her. She’ll come down and she’ll stop over with a bucket with some flowers in it.

This quote shows that differential association can also apply to certain aspects of LC. Although Mrs. Greenlawn shows all of the tendencies of LC, she also has incorporated an ideology of LD from her grandparents. This LD typology is not dominant in her thinking, however. This can be clearly shown from when she said,

My flowers are from my grandparents. The lawn ethic is definitely from my Dad. He told me, ‘you don’t have weeds, you keep it watered, because that’s important’. Your lawn needs to look nice. It’s a reflection of—you know—taking care of your house, taking care of—and being a responsible person.

Differential association asserts that the likelihood of deviance being transmitted depends upon variables such as frequency, duration, priority, and intensity of association. Given the fact that Mrs. Greenlawn’s father instilled these lawn ethics to her, we would expect LC to be more influential than the LD tendencies she learned from her grandparents. Also, Mills (1972) indicated that describing and giving reasons is what ultimately influences others. This is very exactly what her Dad was doing. He was “boasting” about how and why a good lawn ethic is so important. This sentiment is probably one of the most powerful themes that has generated and
perpetuated the American ideal of the front lawn. Thus, it can be seen why this green carpet has been woven into the American social urban landscape.

**General Observations**

Presented here are some general observations I encountered while interviewing LC and LD people that will further paint a picture of the dynamics behind the ideological constructs of these landscapes. My overall impressions when interviewing LC people were that they were a bit tense during our discussions and seemed to be anticipating the conclusion of the interview, whereas LD people were very relaxed and the interviews lasted longer with usually more depth. It is also important to mention here that when letters were sent out in the initial stage of contacting respondents, only LD people returned correspondence.

LC houses seemed to be very ordered and structured, not only on the outside, but on the inside as well. This is not to say that LD houses were messy and the like, but LD houses seem to have a more “lived in feel” with more artwork being displayed for example. There seems to be an overall organic or loose tendency with not only the people but also the LD houses. Another significant tendency was that a majority of LD people would take me on a tour of their front yards, back yards and/or neighborhood at the conclusion of the interview. This is in contrast to only one LC person who afforded me an extended tour. Furthermore, LD respondents were very interested in the topic of my study and would inquire at length about it. Many also stated how thrilled they were to discuss their landscaping with me, as well as share their landscaping and life philosophies. Lastly, it was interesting when LD and LC respondents took a picture of their front yard, the majority took it from the curb
looking at their landscape except for two LD respondents. This seems to indicate that their landscape is more of a public domain, rather than a private space.
DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Normative Lawn Attitudes and Environment Effects

The social phenomena of the American lawn influences culture, but also the environment. The environment is being affected from the increased use of chemicals in maintaining the lawn to achieve an idealistic green carpet. Chemicals have become such an essential part of maintaining a turf grass lawn that, it seems they are referred to as an essential component. Chemicals seem as essential as water. This is evident in both the commercial and residential setting. Chemicals used for turf range from fungicides, herbicides, pesticides and fertilizers. In addition to chemicals, yard waste (specifically, grass clippings) are having an impact on the environment by filling up the nation’s landfills. In addition, electricity and fossil fuels used to power lawn equipment such as mowers, blowers, and trimmers waste energy and also affect the environment in the form of noise and air pollution.

The American attitude toward fertilizers is reflected by “The Lawn Institute,” which claims that the average lawn was starving for nutrients and that homeowners, at the very least, should fertilize. This message must have hit home because by 1984 the U.S. applied around a million tons of chemical fertilizer (Jenkins, 1994). Jenkins also states, “in 1984 the U.S. applied more synthetic chemical fertilizer to lawns than India applied on all food crops” (p.142). Most American lawns receive 3 to 25 pounds of fertilizer per year (Bormann et al., 1993). Unfortunately, this fertilizer
does not stay within the grass. Runoff from over watering and soil compaction carries fertilizer to streams, wetlands, rivers and lakes.

The most essential nutrient for turf grass is nitrogen. Nitrogen is the most readily leached, followed by phosphorus and potassium, as well as many other micro-nutrients. This means that the nitrogen that is put on the lawn does not stay and “fertilize” as efficiently as we think. Most of it is either leached through the soil, or washed off of the lawn when watered or when it rains. Since there is so much fertilizer being applied, these chemicals are finding their way into nearby streams, lakes, ponds, oceans, and potable water supplies. Nitrogen is the most readily leached, but phosphorus and potassium are also leached. What results is nitrification and associated pollution of these waters. The result are excess algae blooms, which rob the water of oxygen and cause aquatic life to perish. There is also a threat to human health because drinking water with high levels of nitrogen is potentially carcinogenic.

There are other forms of fertilization that are more environmentally friendly and could be used instead of the more popular synthetic chemical fertilizers. These include organic based fertilizers from human and animal wastes. One very popular one is Millorganite, which is composted sludge sold by the city of Milwaukee. Others sources are blood and bone meal, liquefied seaweed, mushroom compost, and composted manure (Jenkins, 1994). One of the most obvious ways to fertilize is simply leave the grass clippings on the lawn after they have been cut.

Today, the mulching lawn mower is being advertised more and more to the American lawn owner/caretaker. This has no doubt been brought about by increased
pressure from levels of governments to reduce the input into landfills. Grass clippings are a rich source of fertilizer containing nitrogen. Removing grass clippings from lawns is the equivalent of removing corn stubble from fields and adding chemical fertilizers. The average American throws away many cubic yards of lawn clippings a year from their lawns (Bormann et al., 1993).

In a sense, it seems that Americans have waged war on anything that threatens their lawn. By walking through any retail gardening aisles one can see an arsenal of chemicals to help protect and increase the vigor of one’s lawn against a variety of pests and diseases.

Pesticides seem to be at the forefront of the arsenal, and are also the most controversial. This is because chemical companies that produce lawn aids have a powerful influence within our society, and when their products improve a person’s lawn, then their contribution is perceived as positive. Until Rachel Carson’s (1962) monumental book, *Silent Spring*, the environmental effects of all the chemicals we were using to control pests and to make things grow faster, bigger, and brighter were not considered. People believe that agriculture uses most of the chemicals and this is where efforts should be focused to improve the environment. In fact, homeowners use about twelve times more chemicals annually than is used in agriculture (OPTS, 1991). Agriculture is more regulated than homeowners are. In order to apply chemicals in an agricultural context one has to be licensed. Homeowners, on the other hand, do not need to have a license or any training. This is having serious impacts on the environment because homeowners often apply well over the recommended rate. If there were only a few homeowners with lawns this
would probably not be an issue, but with approximately thirty million acres as mentioned earlier, this is a very big environmental and social problem. In 1988 alone, sixty-seven million pounds of pesticides were sold for use on American lawns (Bormann et al., 1993). With this staggering amount and the lack of homeowners chemical and application knowledge, we need much more than education. We need an entirely new social paradigm regarding the importance of the American lawn.

In addition to chemical leaching as happens with nitrogen fertilizers, pesticides also have negative impacts. Many pesticides are not host specific and kill beneficial insects, and have residual effects long after the application has been sprayed and dried. A danger that is now being understood is what is called the pesticide treadmill. It was first discovered in agriculture applications but with the vast numbers of homeowner applications it can been applied to the urban paradigm as well. Pesticide treadmill means that, after prolonged use of a chemical, the targeted pests become resistant and even more chemical is needed for control. When that chemical no longer works, other chemicals, usually more toxic, are developed and used. Since the value of the lawn is so socially ingrained in most of the American population, the pesticide war escalates almost endlessly to save the green carpet, but at what cost?

Fossil fuels are used to manufacture and ship the chemicals used in lawn care. The use of fossil fuel is being linked to such environmental problems as: smog, acid rain, mega oil spills, destruction of the ozone layer, and global warming. The American lawn is contributing to these environmental hazards both directly and indirectly, with approximately 13 million lawn utility machines sold every year in the
U.S. Most of these machines use gasoline which emit carbon dioxide in addition to other by-products from burning fossil fuels. The average homeowner spends 40 hours a year behind a power lawn mower. Multiply this by 38 million homeowners each year, this translates to 580 million gallons of gasoline each year used by lawn mowers alone (Bormann et al., 1993).

Additional Thoughts

Today, there are very few push mowers sold, although this is the most ecologically sound method of mowing. Push mowers do not pollute the environment and they give the user a physical work out. Using a gasoline-powered lawn mower for one hour produces the same amount of pollution as running a new car for thirty hours. (Automobile Club of Southern California, 1996).

In addition to fossil fuel that is needed to maintain the American lawn, water is an essential component. Watching the news, it is hard to miss the latest discoveries that we are depleting our water resources faster than nature can replenish them. This can be seen from coast to coast. America's population is ever increasing and the sustainability of natural resources is beginning to come into question.

The lawn is like a dry sponge in the desert: it seems to just keep absorbing all the water you can put on it. In the years to come this will play more of an important role in communities around the country as populations continue to grow and water resources become less available. This was seen in Southern California during the last drought. City ordinances prohibited the watering of lawns, and many homeowners were forced to paint their lawns green to maintain their landscape dignity! In Santa Barbara, CA during the drought of the 1980's, the city asked voters
to decide whether they should build a desalination plant or have oil tankers bring icebergs from the poles to supply fresh water to the affluent communities. As absurd as this may sound, it was a very serious issue. The lawn to a certain extent played a role in this decision. Since so much water is used to water the lawns in Santa Barbara, there was a shortage for drinking water!

The use of all of these lawn chemicals and natural resources on the lawn shows an anthropocentric view, in that we feel that we can control nature. In relevance to the lawn, we are able to control its color and growth with fertilizers, height by power equipment, what insects live and die within the green carpet with pesticides. We control the simple existence of turf by how much we water it. The "dominate world view" (Buttel 1996) seems to resonate through the sociological undertones of the American fascination of the lawn. We believe that with technology we can fix things to our liking.

The Professional Lawn Care Association of America (PLCAA) and The Lawn Institute, the major promoters of lawns, state that a 50 by 50 foot lawn will produce enough oxygen for a family of four. However, this does not account for the oxygen used by soil microbes to break down the grass clippings, oxygen used in producing and shipping lawn chemicals, and the carbon dioxide that is produced from lawn maintenance equipment.

Validity of Lawn Deviance Concept

This thesis claims that lawn deviance is the opposite of lawn conformity. This may not be true, however. Another possible explanation would be one of social lawn evolution. What I mean by social lawn evolution is that, lawn deviance may simply
be a more evolved or later stage in lawn-related life cycle. As the data revealed, LD respondents were on average much older than lawn respondents. The reason why these LD respondents no longer had a lawn may be due in part to the fact that they had out grown the need for a lawn in their front yard landscape. Younger respondents have children, and their need for having a front yard lawn is much greater. Taking this a step further, it is conceivable to look at the lawn issue as a process of lawn evolution. When a typical landscape respondent is younger, the likelihood of having young children in the residence and needing a front lawn would be greater than that of an older respondent.

Likewise, as indicated by the data, the majority of respondents felt that having a lawn was mainly for kids to play on. Given this, it is understandable that younger respondents were typically lawn conformists, and older respondents were lawn deviants. An explanation for why older respondents fell into the LD category might be that they have evolved along this developmental continuum, from having a lawn in their front yard landscaping to not having one. Since they are older, this need for a lawn for kids to play on may now be replaced by the notion of environmental sentiments. Furthermore, the data revealed LD respondents regarded lawn care as work. This would suggest that being a “lawn deviant” would lend toward a less strenuous maintenance regime for their front yard landscape. Along these same lines, LD respondents owned their homes much longer which would explain the minimization or elimination of lawns over time. As far as looking at external factors which may contribute to lawn deviance, the shade from maturing trees may be a factor. Since LD respondents have lived longer at their residence, the surrounding
landscape would be nearer a mature state, thus there may not be adequate light for the upkeep of a lush green lawn. Essentially, the decline in lawn interest, or in the physical activity needed to maintain a lawn may help explain this social evolution from lawn conformity to lawn deviance.

In addition to this notion of developmental continuum of the lawn, another alternative to the deviance and conformity dichotomy presented in this thesis, would be to consider lawn variations as the need for one to express sentiments such as, distinctiveness, individuality and the like. Maybe a possible explanation would be, since the lawn is seen as a unifying theme, as envisioned by Olmsted, there is a need for self-expression. In other words, what this thesis calls lawn deviance might really be conformity to American society's norm of individuality, distinctiveness and originality. Home owners who can afford the time, the money, and the extra effort it takes to go beyond the boring mindless front yard lawn are responding to higher values of individuality and originality. From this perspective, lawn conformists would be deviants. They are the ones without the talent, means or sense of style that it takes to go beyond the ordinary.

**Ecological Dialogue Perspective**

Rather than interpreting respondents as either lawn conformists or lawn deviants, we might see them as engaging in different dialogues. In addition to the theories previously discussed, Bell's ecological dialogue (1998) suggests there is a "mutual dependence" within an environmental sociological context: a dialogue between the material and the ideal dimensions and their interactions with each other (see Figure 2). He comments, "what we believe depends on what we see and feel,
and what we see depends on what we believe. It is not a matter of either/or; rather, it is a matter of both, together” (p.4). This theory of ecological dialogue, that of material factors always depends on ideal factors, and vice versa, also helps to explain why LC respondents would believe that their lawn is a beautiful statement of not only their position in society, but their own piece of nature. This means that the chemicals, the mowing, etc., needed in maintaining this statement are normative, and any possible negative impact is not perceived as such. After all, their yard looks great! Their ideals of being a "good neighbor" depend on the material aspect of their front yard, and conversely. LD respondents also fit into the ecological dialogue. They would also choose to have their own kind of front yard landscaping style. However, their ideal is that of the environment, as well as aesthetics. Having a lawn goes against this ideal because of the associated costs of care. Their material
condition would be formed by not wanting to comply with the chemical and
monotonous tendencies of a lawn, and they would feel that they are portraying a
high statement of their positions in society by not using chemicals and such.
Fundamentally, their value is protecting the biological/natural world: the
environment. An individual’s material circumstance is mainly based on his or her
knowledge, beliefs and values.

One’s knowledge, beliefs, and values are based on one’s material
circumstances. Again, either within the context of LC or LD, both views and
practices refer to a “dialogue” which is a continual interchange of social life’s
material and ideal factors (Bell, 1998).

I’ve got one more important thing about how I would describe the front yard, I
think of it as a public garden because the sidewalk goes through it. People
can walk through it. But that’s part of my intentions for the front yard is to
make it sort of like a public garden where people can walk through it and
enjoy the flowers and the plants.

This quote shows a dialogue between the material flowers of their landscape, and
the intention that the flowers are being offered as a social gesture. The flowers
represent the material, and the public gesture to enjoy the flowers is the idea. In this
next statement, a reference to Bell’s ecological dialogue is again seen. It is the way
the respondent describes how his bad lawn was tilled up and killed, “the material,”
so that a new, better lawn could be established, “the ideal,” in order to be within the
socially accepted parameters of a normative lawn.

The lawn—it was really sparse. It was in really bad shape. So, that first
summer my husband took the tiller to it and tilled it all under and re-seeded
everything, it was bad. You know. How they get—more weeds than grass—
so we just killed it all and started over.
Furthermore, Bell's ecological dialogue (1998) suggests that a lawn is a beautiful statement of not only a person's position in society, but also of that person's own personal pride. Mrs. Greenlawn's expressed this viewpoint as coming from her father. For her, maintaining her lawn is normative. Any possible negative impact is not perceived as such, and because her yard looks great, it must be great!

*My flowers are from my grandparents. The lawn ethic is definitely from my dad. He told me, 'you don't have weeds, you keep it watered, because that's important'. Your lawn needs to look nice. It's a reflection of—you know—taking care of your house, taking care of—and being a responsible person.*

This respondent's ideal of being a "good neighbor" depends on the material aspect of her front yard. A dialogue exists between the material and the ideal dimensions, and each interact with each other.

**Conclusion**

The lawn has evolved both genetically by hybridizing the plant to be adapted to a variety of climates, as well as socially by becoming as common as the streets required by for America's ubiquitous automobile. This study employed various sociological theories such as, Goffman's dramaturgical, Scott and Lyman's accounts, and Sutherland's differential association theory, to help explain the concept of lawn conformity and lawn deviance. In addition to these sociological theories, Mills's vocabulary of motive, Veblen's conspicuous consumption, and Bell's ecological dialogue theories also aided in the understanding of some of the sociological factors that may help to explain why people would choose to go against the normative practice of having a lawn. These theories also help us understand the normative ideologies of having a well-maintained front yard lawn. Due to the
intricate themes of this type of study, incorporating these different theories helped
shed some light on America's commitment to the lawn.

The experience that was described in the prelude and the viewpoints that
were revealed in the study are not restricted to the Midwest but can be seen from
coast to coast in the United States. Taking a visit in just about any suburban
American neighborhood there is, more often than not, a unifying theme: a front yard
landscape with a green, usually well-maintained lawn incorporated into it. Why is
this lawn so woven into the social fabric of the country? What are the social factors
that contribute to these phenomena? More importantly, are there populations within
this normative behavior of producing and maintaining a green carpet in the front
landscape that have alternative landscapes, those which do not incorporate lawns?

At the surface this may be a very ordinary issue of people having or not
having a lawn in the front yard of their single family detached houses. However, if
you consider the population of the United States that are owners of single family
detached houses, this choice of lawn or no lawn has significant impact. The front
yard extends far beyond the aesthetic window that is seen throughout the country,
and is a serious social statement that has many negatives environmental as well as
societal ramifications. This study attempted to reveal some interesting and for the
most part hidden social impacts. Within our built environments these impacts
encompass beyond the natural/biological worlds with this presentation of self to
maintain the aesthetic green carpet.

Future sociological studies are needed not only to understand the social
impact of lawns, but also to understand how nature is perceived, experienced, and
treated within our built environments. In order to maintain the health, both physical and social, of the growing populations of modern society, our connection with nature must be looked at with our sociological imagination. The deviants of today are very likely to be tomorrow’s normative leaders. Perhaps that day will come sooner, rather than later. In addition to the biological and psychological, ultimately our built environments are effected by social interaction resulting in social change.
APPENDIX A. SURVEY INSTRUMENT

IOWA RESIDENTIAL LANDSCAPE SURVEY

By
Andy Kaufman
Graduate Student
Department of Sociology
Iowa State University
Ames, Iowa
1. In your own words, how would you describe your front yard landscaping?

2. How much of this front yard landscaping is your own design (and how much is inherited perhaps from a previous owner)?

3. How long have you lived at this residence? Years _______ Months _______

4. How long have you had your current landscape? Years _______ Months _______

5. What were you thinking? In other words, describe the decision-making that went into your front yard landscape design, were you thinking of the environment? Neighbors.......

6. What is the function of your front yard? (How do you use it when you are in it? What are you doing? Who uses it?)

7. If you had no budget or time constraints, what further changes, additions, modifications would you make to your front yard?
8. Describe the kind of front yard you would least like to have (what would it look like?).

9. Describe the kind of front yard you would least like to have next-door to you.

10. If your neighbors lived in your house, would the landscaping be any different? If so, how?

11. Describe the most beautiful front yard you have ever seen.

12. Is the landscaping in your backyard different than in the front yard? (If so, in what way? Why?)

13. How much time do you spend a week on yard work and who does it?

14. Is the time less than your previous yard landscape? □ Yes □ no
15. Have you and your partner ever had a conflict over landscaping? If so, describe the nature of the conflict. How was it resolved?

16. If your partner had his/her way, would your landscaping have more lawn?

17. Your description of your landscaping is very interesting, can tell me where you got your ideas for it? (Anything in your background?)

18. Many people think of their yard as an extension of themselves. If you agree, then what does your yard say about you?

19. How do you control weeds and pests in your yard?

20. Do you belong to any environmental/conservation groups? If so, what ones?
21. Have you ever used a lawn care company?  □ Yes  □ No

22. Why, or why not

23. When you were growing up, did you have a lawn at your residence?  M □ Yes  □ No  
   F □ Yes  □ No
Attitude Items
Please circle the number that best corresponds to your level of agreement with each of these statements.

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<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Undecided</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</table>

24. Having a well maintained lawn improves my relationship with my neighborhoods ............................................

25. Lawns enable people to have a healthy place for children to play ........

26. My neighbors like my front yard landscape ............................................

27. Lawn chemicals in this area do not effect water quality ........

28. My neighbors influence how I maintain my landscape ................................

29. The use of lawn chemicals are needed to maintain a healthy lawn ........

30. Agriculture chemicals affect water quality in urban areas ........................

31. Having a lawn can lead to adverse effects on the environment ........

32. Would you say you have a close relationship with your neighbors? .......

33. Please describe who lives in your household.

34. What is your age?  M  F

30 years or younger .......... 1 1
31 to 40 years .................. 2 2
41 to 50 years .................. 3 3
51 to 60 years .................. 4 4
61 years or older ............. 5 5

35. What type of environment did you grow up in?  M  F

Rural .......................... 1 1
Urban ............................ 2 2
36. What level of formal education do you have?

<table>
<thead>
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<th>F</th>
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<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>High school graduate</td>
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<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocational school</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some college</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College graduate or more</td>
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37. What is your average yearly household income before taxes in 1998?

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<thead>
<tr>
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<th>F</th>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$100,000 or more</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

38. Do you have children? □ Yes □ No

If yes, what are their ages?

□ 0 to 4 years □ 5 to 9 years □ 10 to 14 years □ 15 to 17 years □ 18 and older

39. Do you □ rent or □ own your house?

40. What is your occupation? (M) _________________________
    (F) _________________________

41. What magazines do you subscribe to?

42. Could you recommend anyone else I might talk to (someone with your same type landscaping, or someone with radically different landscaping)?

43. If I could take a photo that would epitomize your landscaping style, what would I take a photo of? Take the photo.
APPENDIX B. LAWN AND NON-LAWN FORM LETTER

LAWN LETTER

Date

Respondents Name and Address

Dear .................,

Hello, my name is Andy Kaufman. I am a sociology graduate student at Iowa State University. I am doing my Master's Thesis on residential landscapes in Iowa. Specifically, I am interested in front yard landscaping and lawns.

I am writing to you to ask whether you would be willing to talk to me about your front yard landscaping. My questions would take about 1 hour of your time. Our meeting would be at your convenience in your home. I would ask you questions such as, where your landscaping ideas come from, what your thoughts and feelings are regarding landscaping, etc.

This is strictly a research project; no sales or solicitations will be made. All information will be confidential and will only be used for my scholastic research. Your name will not be associated with any of the findings, so your comments will be anonymous. Your participation is strictly voluntary. You may discontinue the discussion at any time.

I would like to meet at your convenience in the next three weeks. I would be very appreciative if you could call me and let me know if you would be willing participate in my research. Your input will be very important to me.

Thank you very much for your time.

Sincerely,

Andy Kaufman
Graduate Student
Sociology Department
Home phone: (515) 233-3351
e-mail: ajk@iastate.edu
Dear ........,

Hello, my name is Andy Kaufman. I am a sociology graduate student at Iowa State University. I am doing my Master’s Thesis on alternative landscapes in Iowa. Specifically, I am trying to locate residential landscapes that have little lawn or none at all.

I am writing to you to ask whether this description (little or no lawn in your front yard) characterizes your landscaping, and whether you would be willing to talk to me about your front yard landscaping. My questions would take about 1 hour of your time. Our meeting would be at your convenience in your home and I would ask you questions such as, where your landscaping ideas come from, what your thoughts and feelings are regarding landscaping, etc.

This is strictly a research project; no sales or solicitations will be made. All information will be confidential and will only be used for my scholastic research. Your name will not be associated with any of the findings, so your comments will be anonymous. Your participation is strictly voluntary. You may discontinue the discussion at any time.

I would e to meet at your convenience in the next three weeks. I would be very appreciative if you could I me and let me know if you would willing participate in my research. Since there are not many landscapes that fit my description, your input will be very important to me.

Thank you very much for your time.

Sincerely,

Andy Kaufman
Graduate Student
Sociology Department
Home phone: (515) 233-3351
e-mail: ajk@iastate.edu
APPENDIX C. GRAPHS OF RESPONDENT ATTITUDES

Having A Well Maintained lawn Improves My Relationship With My Neighbors

![Bar graph showing respondents' attitudes towards having a well-maintained lawn]

Lawns Enable People To Have A Healthy Place For Children To Play

![Bar graph showing respondents' attitudes towards lawns enabling a healthy place for children to play]
My Neighbors Like My Front Yard

Lawn Chemicals In This Area Do Not Effect Water Quality
The Use Of Lawn Chemicals Are Needed To Maintain A Healthy Lawn

My Neighbors Influence How I Maintain My Landscape
Agriculture Chemicals affect Water Quality In Urban Areas

Having A Lawn Can Lead To Adverse Effects On The Environment
Would You Say You Have A Close Relationship With Your Neighbors

What Type Of Environment Did You Grow Up In
REFERENCES CITED


