

# Diversity has no effect on community satisfaction rates. But income and education does.

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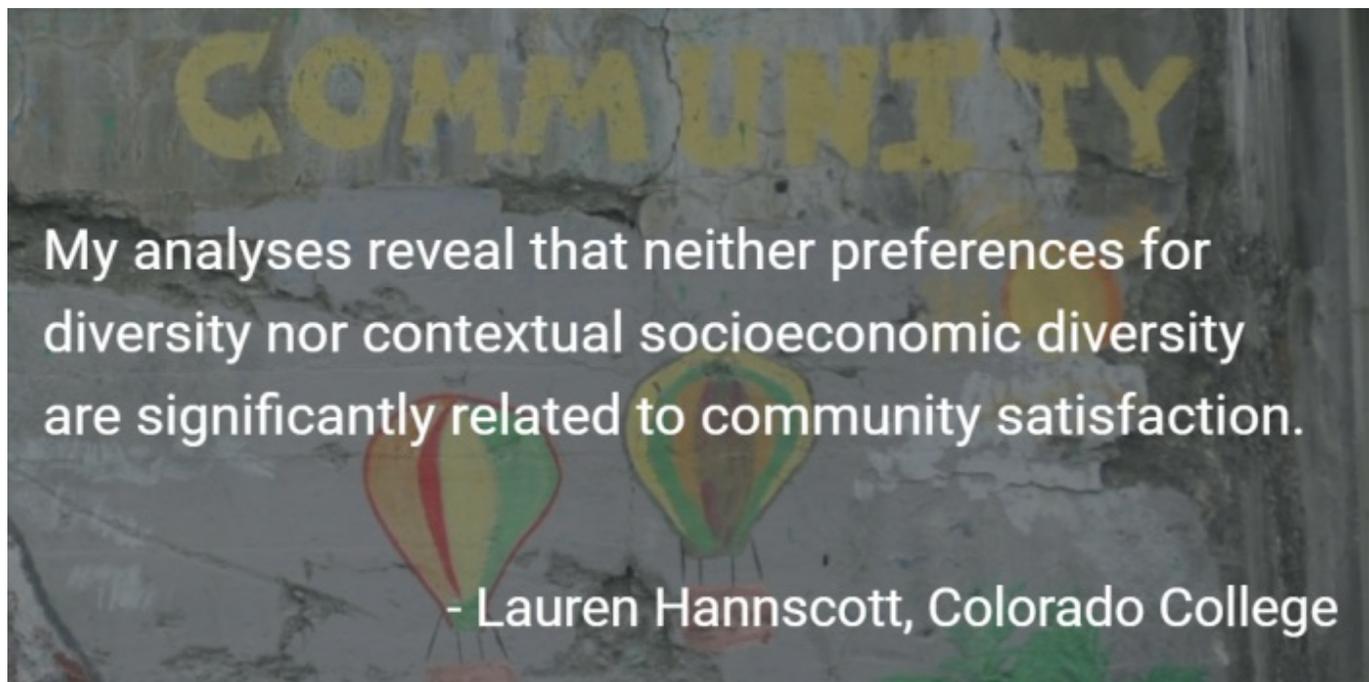
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*Most people live in communities. But what determines whether they like or love living in them? In new research, [Lauren Hannscott](#) examines the relationship between income, education, community diversity and community satisfaction. She finds that while more educated people are more likely to want to live in more diverse communities, they generally do not, and that such diversity also has no effect on levels of satisfaction. Income and education, on the other hand, are linked to higher levels of community satisfaction.*



'Love where you live' is a common refrain, and community satisfaction is important; it contributes to a person's quality of life and overall well-being. Satisfied residents are also critical for the strength and sustainability of a community. People who are happier with their communities are less likely to move and are more likely to shop and invest locally, increasing the stability of the area. Stable communities are better equipped to deal with economic change and to address social issues. In new research, I find that people's education and income levels are linked to how satisfied they are with their community. On the other hand how diverse a community is, as well as residents' preference for such diversity has no link with people's satisfaction levels.

Despite a wide range of living conditions around the world, people tend to be very satisfied with their neighborhoods and communities. There are many potential reasons for the surprisingly high levels of satisfaction. To the extent that people have control over where they live, they will attempt to identify a destination that fits their preferences. People may also become habituated or desensitized to sources of dissatisfaction in their communities. Finally, residents can take action to attempt to improve physical conditions, such as conducting home renovations, or organizing community members to actuate change.

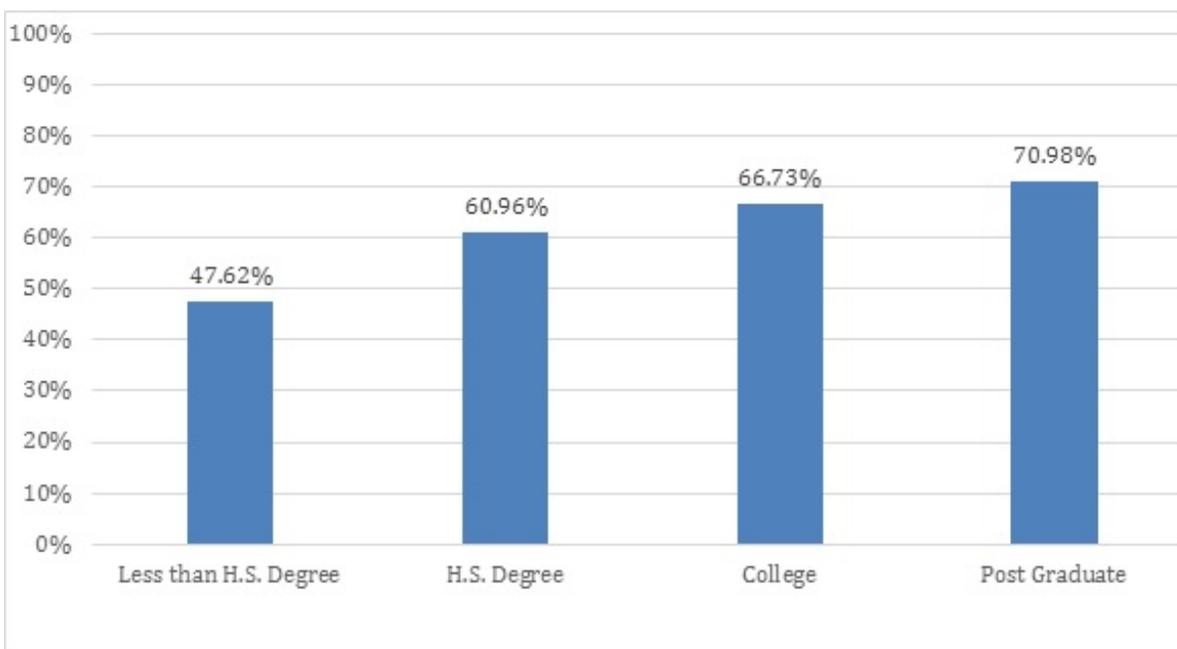


While people tend to report high levels of community satisfaction, there is still variation in their responses, leading researchers to question what factors might predict satisfaction. At the individual level, socioeconomic status is

assumed to be an indicator of community satisfaction because it is hypothesized that individuals with higher incomes and education have more residential choices and are better equipped to improve their surroundings. When satisfaction is equated with community quality, this makes sense. However, satisfaction is highly subjective and is influenced by people's expectations as well as by their assessments of situations. When satisfaction is thought of as more than material quality, the relationship between socioeconomic status and community satisfaction becomes less clear.

My study takes a first step toward unraveling some of these relationships by examining both individual and contextual socioeconomic status, including socioeconomic diversity, and by considering two antecedents of satisfaction: preferences and experiences. Utilizing the Pew Research Center's 2008 survey on Social and Demographic Trends, I find that higher socioeconomic status, in the form of education, is associated with having a preference for socioeconomic diversity. For example, as shown in Figure 1, holding all other individual variables at their mean, an individual with less than a high school education has a 47.62 percent chance of stating a preference for socioeconomic diversity, while an individual with post-graduate training has a 70.98 percent chance of stating a preference for socioeconomic diversity. In addition, US born respondents and those who report higher levels of political liberalism are more likely to state a preference for socioeconomic diversity.

**Figure 1 – Predicted Probability of Stating Preference for Diversity by Education Level**



Little attention has been devoted in past work to the role of contextual socioeconomic status, particularly socioeconomic diversity (communities which have a mix of incomes and education), in understanding why different communities have different levels of satisfaction. Mixed-income housing developments and neighborhoods are gaining popularity as scholars, planners, and policy-makers highlight the potential of socioeconomic diversity to yield social and economic benefits. However, these diverse communities have received mixed reviews and studies have done little to clarify the relationship between socioeconomic diversity and residents' satisfaction.

However, preferences do not always align with experiences. My analyses show that having a preference for diversity is not significantly related to living in a more socioeconomically diverse community. Still, socioeconomic status seems to influence experiences with diversity. When socioeconomic diversity is operationalized as educational or income diversity, having more education and income is positively associated with living in a diverse community. This could be because higher socioeconomic status provides more opportunity to live in different types of neighborhoods, including ones that are socioeconomically diverse. Lower-income individuals and those with little education may be trapped in lower-income, relatively homogeneous communities. Control variables such as

duration, racial/ethnic minority status, political liberalism, and religiosity are also strong predictors of socioeconomic diversity.

The influence of individual socioeconomic variables on community satisfaction is clear throughout my analyses. Individual education and income explain a non-trivial proportion of the variation in satisfaction and remain statistically significant after controlling for age, gender, race/ethnicity, religiosity, political ideology and contextual socioeconomic variables. This may be because people with higher income and more education live in physically nicer communities with more amenities, or because they feel like they have more control over their life and their surroundings. Among the contextual socioeconomic variables, percent unemployment is the strongest predictor of dissatisfaction. Such a finding hints that poverty and other social problems related to unemployment might be impediments to community satisfaction. However, since I was not able to include individual unemployment in my models, it is also possible that percent unemployment could be capturing an individual effect of personal unemployment on community satisfaction.

The lack of alignment between preferences for and experiences with socioeconomic diversity is interesting, and one might posit that it would have a negative effect on community satisfaction. However, my analyses reveal that neither preferences for diversity nor contextual socioeconomic diversity are significantly related to community satisfaction. Furthermore, when diversity variables are considered, respondents whose preferences and experiences with diversity align are no more likely to be satisfied with their communities. While the insignificance of this alignment is surprising, it is possible that another form of alignment between preferences and experiences with regard to some other contextual attribute, such as quality of schools or public transportation, could be more important for community satisfaction. Future research that considers residents' preferences or expectations for different community characteristics could shed some light on this issue.

*This article is based on the paper, '[Individual and contextual socioeconomic status and community satisfaction](#)', in *Urban Studies*.*

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*Note: This article gives the views of the author, and not the position of USAPP– American Politics and Policy, nor of the London School of Economics.*

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## About the author

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Lauren Hannscott is a Visiting Assistant Professor in the Department of Sociology at Colorado College. Her primary research interests include urban sociology, inequality, education, demography and quantitative methods. Specifically, she has written papers on socioeconomic and racial/ethnic diversity, residential segregation, individual and contextual socioeconomic status, community satisfaction, and access to education.



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