

“Symptoms of the Other Thing”:
Responses to Vacant Housing on Three Suburban Blocks

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Abstract:

Research has been inconclusive on how social context affects the way disorderly spaces and behavior are understood. Neighborhood level factors influence the perceived severity of disorder reported on surveys, but they do so inconsistently. Ethnographic work has highlighted the moral divisions that residents see within their immediate surroundings, but has not generated concepts that can be generalized across varying contexts. This study takes a comparative approach, investigating residents’ reactions to increases in vacant housing on three blocks that varied in median income, racial composition, and other contextual variables of interest to scholars of disorder. Drawing upon 69 semi-structured interviews and qualitative fieldwork undertaken in 2010 and 2011, I identify two types of interpretive frames shaped residents’ perceptions of disorder across dramatically different social settings: *territories of concern* and *disorderly collectivities*.

In Wilson and Kelling's (1982) consequential formulation of the broken windows theory, an abandoned house, when permitted to decay, changes the way residents think about their community, engendering fear and mistrust. "A stable neighborhood of families who care for their homes...can change, in a few years or even a few months, to an inhospitable and frightening jungle," the authors write. "This is as true in nice neighborhoods as in rundown ones."

In recent decades, an extensive body of empirical research has undermined this claim. Whether signs of disorder such as litter, graffiti, public drunkenness, and deteriorating vacant buildings are "seen" at all depends on the context in which they occur (Sampson and Raudenbush 2004). When controlling for objective disorder, the perceived severity of disorder depends upon the racial composition of the surrounding neighborhood (Sampson and Raudenbush 2004), poverty rates (Sampson and Raudenbush 2004; Wickes, Hipp, Zahnow et al. 2013), residential stability, social cohesion and reciprocity (Hipp 2010a; Wickes et al. 2013; Sampson and Raudenbush 2004; Taylor 1996). Physical design and, inconsistently, population density have also been linked to perceptions of disorder (Perkins, Meeks, and Taylor 1992; Taylor, Gottfredson, and Brower 1984; Wickes et al. 2013), factors that may point toward the frequency of residents' exposure to disorderly spaces and behavior (Wallace 2011).

Although this research shows neighborhood context to affect how disorder is perceived, its substantive results have been uneven and inconclusive. Hipp (2010a; 2010b) argues that disorder varies widely *within* neighborhoods, and suggests that impressions of disorderly spaces and behavior are formed at a more local scale – residential blocks, "household clusters" or "micro-neighborhoods." Indeed, recent ethnographic work (e.g. Kefalas 2003; Murphy 2012; Pattillo 2007; St. Jean 2008) has revealed the "subjects" of disorder (Murphy 2012) to be local and specific. When residents become concerned about disorder, they focus on particular features of their immediate environment – loud music, visible litter or vacant housing – and imbue them with moral meaning, often assigning culpability to a specific out-group with ostensibly conflicting values (Baumgartner 1988; Kefalas 2003; Murphy 2012; Rieder 1985).

Neighborhood-level conditions may guide this block-level process, but it remains unclear how. Missing from the disorder literature is a comparative analysis that identifies patterns in reactions to disorder across blocks that differ in demography, density, homeownership and other

conditions of interest to scholars of disorder. If reactions to disorder are neither universal, as broken windows theory implies, nor entirely particular to place, then an important challenge facing disorder research is understanding how residents “see” signs of disorder and understand them as a problem under varying local conditions. As Sampson (2009) observes, “the link between context... and perception is variable and necessary to explain.” Generally, how do signs of disorder become more or less *visible* and more or less *important* to residents?

In this paper, I seek to answer this question, reporting the results of an in-depth, comparative analysis of three suburban blocks in northeastern New Jersey that shared an increase in vacant housing between 2007 and 2009, but that varied in median income, racial and ethnic composition, and population density, as well as in factors, such as social cohesion, civic engagement and existing social disorder, that only became evident during the course of the study. In adopting a comparative approach, I take council from Small (2004; 2009) who argues that qualitative case studies gain generalizability through attentiveness to the manner in which existing conditions shape observed outcomes. The objective of comparison in this case is not to isolate and adjudicate contextual variables (e.g. socioeconomic status) as determinants of perceived disorder, as multiple overlapping and interacting conditions are expected to bear upon this outcome in every case (Ragin 2004). Rather, I seek through “universalizing comparison” (Tilly 1984) to develop a general account of how disorder becomes salient and meaningful to residents on blocks that differ dramatically along a number of variables.

In focusing on vacant homes in the context of the recent foreclosure crisis, this study addresses a form of disorder widely believed by researchers and policy makers to be socially consequential. Previous analysts have linked vacancies with a wide range of negative spillover effects for communities, drawing links between foreclosure rates, the deterioration of housing stock, and levels of social order and informal social control (Immergluck and Smith 2006; Katz, Wallace, and Hedberg 2011; Ley and Cybriwsky 1974; Parker, Luther, and Murphy 2007; Skogan 1992). In line with this research, federal responses to the crisis regarded vacant housing as a threat to overall neighborhood stability, and focused not simply on foreclosure prevention, but on the rehabilitation or demolition of vacant homes (Joice 2011).

To be clear, not all foreclosures lead to visible deterioration. Lending institutions often rent foreclosed homes, partly to prevent physical decline. Furthermore, even *vacant* foreclosed homes do not necessarily become disorderly spaces, as lenders (or, more accurately, their local proxies) may maintain them while awaiting sale. Nevertheless, at the height of the crisis, even the mere threat of foreclosure often led to abandonment or eviction and a period of vacancy that could last for months or years, depending upon the strength of local housing markets (Immergluck 2010; Immergluck and Smith 2006).

By analyzing reactions to this form of disorder on three very different suburban blocks, this paper identifies two types of interpretive “frames” (Benford and Snow 2000; Small 2004) that shape perceptions of disorder. Firstly, I find that – across three dramatically different residential settings – attentiveness to disorder was directed toward *territories of concern*, spaces made more salient by neighbors and institutions actively involved in either producing or curtailing disorder. Secondly, I find that, regardless of block-level conditions, residents linked disorder with “us/them” conceptions of collective identity and culpability. Interpretations of vacant housing hinged upon the construction of a subset of residents whose interests were negatively affected by disorder and the corresponding assignment of blame for disorder to an out-group – a *disorderly collectivity*. Taken together, these findings help elucidate the cognitive and social processes that frame block-level reactions to disorder. The study has implications for future research as well as policies intended to mitigate the negative social consequences of vacant housing and other forms of physical decline.

DISORDER IN CONTEXT

In recent decades, a growing body of research has highlighted the role of neighborhood conditions in shaping the way residents see and interpret disorderly spaces. Several studies have found that, when controlling for individual level variables and objective levels of disorder, perceived disorder increases with neighborhood poverty rates (Sampson and Raudenbush 2004; Wickes et al. 2013), a result that suggests a link between perceptions of disorder and the socioeconomic cleavages in a community. When turning to racial composition, however, research has produced inconsistent results. Sampson and Raudenbush (2004) find that perceived disorder

increases with a neighborhood's black or Latino population share, but other studies have found no effect for racial composition (Franzini, Caughy, Nettles et al. 2008; Hipp 2010a). Moreover, with the exception of Latinos, Hipp (2010b) finds no significant differences between the severity of disorder perceived by racially isolated residents and those living among neighbors of the same race or ethnicity.

Population density and urban design features that may encourage informal monitoring and guardianship [see Newman (1973) on “defensible space” and Jacobs (1961: 35) on “eyes on the street”] have also been linked to perceptions of disorder (Perkins et al. 1992; Wickes et al. 2013), although, again, evidence has been inconsistent (see Sampson and Raudenbush 2004). And, though homeownership predicts participation in neighborhood improvement groups (Rossi and Weber 1996; Swaroop and Morenoff 2006), which may imply greater scrutiny to signs of disorder among homeowners (Lindblad, Manturuk, and Quercia 2013), research is inconclusive on the effect of homeowner status on perceived disorder (Franzini et al. 2008; Hipp 2010b; Sampson and Raudenbush 2004).

Finally, levels of reciprocity, social cohesion and social capital appear to be associated with perceptions of disorder, but researchers have measured these variables differently and have reported conflicting results. Social cohesion decreases fear of crime (Taylor 1984) and perceived disorder (Hipp 2010a), as does generalized reciprocity (Sampson and Raudenbush 2004), but the opposite effect is found for individuals personally involved in formal and informal activities on behalf of neighbors (Wallace 2011).

The inconsistency in these results may point to the role of contextual variables that are difficult to measure through survey or census data, particularly when the neighborhood is the scale at which these indicators are measured. More important than the demographic composition of a neighborhood may be the nature of social interaction between defined groups of residents and the meanings attached to these interactions. In a rare survey-based study that includes a measure of this kind of social contact, Wallace (2011) finds support for a “routine activities” model, whereby residents perceive heightened levels of disorder if their daily round takes them into contact with a specific neighborhood subgroup (teenagers).

Ethnographic investigations of reactions to disorder in heterogeneous communities support Wallace's focus on interaction across lines of social difference, suggesting that perceptions of disorder are formed in the course of everyday social activity, and are tied to the drawing of moral boundaries between local in-groups and out-groups. In an analysis of a Pittsburgh suburb, Murphy (2012) argues that littering is "socially constructed," as visible signs of physical disorder provide a basis for attributions of class-based differences in public conduct. Similarly, in Pattillo's (2007: 289) research on a gentrifying Chicago neighborhood, loud music and "loitering" provide categories by which class differences may be asserted and linked with public housing, even while overt classism is disavowed. In Anderson's (2000) work, orderliness and disorderliness are symptomatic of the internal divisions within a Philadelphia neighborhood, as "decent" families regard littered lawns and unsupervised children as evidence of deeper moral failings, including a propensity for violence or criminality.

Ethnographers analyzing relatively homogeneous residential neighborhoods have made parallel discoveries. Physical and social orderliness may serve as visible referents for moral virtue and respectability, an association that may produce intense scrutiny of physical conditions for signs of neglect or vandalism (Kefalas 2003, Rieder 1985). In these cases, orderliness becomes a basis for in-group identification and pride in a community, as disorder is attributed to outsiders in neighboring areas. According to several suburban ethnographies, the organization of interaction in suburban communities may heighten awareness of disorder and help to establish orderliness as a moral expectation (Baumgartner 1988; Kefalas 2003). The sequestering of social life in private, enclosed spaces such as the home and the automobile makes public disorder more salient (Baumgartner 1988), while single-family housing permits a "freedom of association" (10) that limits unwanted social contact, further intensifying the expectation of physical and social orderliness (also see Perin 1977).

The results of these qualitative case studies may help to explain the mixed findings of quantitative research, suggesting that disorder becomes salient and meaningful when tied to collective identity and the construction of us/them social distinctions. Orderliness and disorderliness, this research suggests, are categories that residents draw upon in constructing group identities and imbuing them with moral import, a process that may reinforce lines of race,

class, or homeownership in any given case, but that does not monotonically follow from the demographic or socioeconomic composition of a neighborhood. In other words, disorder may serve as a “Rorschach test,” (Murphy 2012) revealing the way residents divide up physical space and attach moral value to insiders and outsiders. Murphy describes how litter acts in this capacity:

When the geography of litter accumulation maps onto spaces where low-income and black people live and visibly utilize space, this pattern contributes to the representation of places and people surrounded by litter as stigmatized.

Viewing disorder as a factor in the “stigmatization” of “places and people” resonates with the finding that perceptions of minority residents and perceptions of disorder in a neighborhood are related (Sampson and Raudenbush 2004; Wickes et al. 2013), but it also may shed light on inconsistencies in this research. Racial and socioeconomic categories are not equally stigmatized in all contexts, an insight that Franzini et. al. (2008) underscore, and in cohesive communities, where social ties cross boundaries of social difference, the social stigma attached to disorder may decrease (Wickes et. Al. 2013; Hipp 2010a).

Finally, ethnographic work points to the role of formal association and civic engagement in affecting the interpretation of disorder. The presence of a local organization that actively suppresses disorder can add legitimacy to the collective identity of “community insiders” (Murphy 2012) and politicize the moral threat posed by disorderly outsiders. By organizing social interaction around a shared concern for order, a campaign of civic engagement may change the way residents think about the spaces they inhabit. Small (2004) finds perceptions of physical space in a Boston housing project to be contingent upon cognitive “neighborhood frames” that resulted from a previous period of collective mobilization. Prior civic participation and generational cohort were thus crucial factors in explaining individuals’ moral and aesthetic valuation of local space.

Taken as a whole, this research suggests that litter, public drinking, overgrown lawns and other forms of physical and social disorder become salient and meaningful when residents draw moral distinctions between local in-groups and out-groups, identifying social constituencies with orderly or disorderly spaces within the community. These distinctions may fall along lines of class, race, age or tenure in a given neighborhood, but perceptions of disorder do not appear to be

an automatic outgrowth of heterogeneity within or between neighborhoods, thus it remains unclear when and how residents pay attention to a given form of disorder.

RESEARCH SETTING AND METHODOLOGY

The desire to locate responses to vacant housing in neighborhood context and the theory that preexisting contextual conditions affect responses to disorder suggested a comparative, qualitative research design focusing on communities that differed along several key variables. I selected as research sites two adjacent towns, “Cliffside” and “Glenwood,” in Essex County, New Jersey, an economically and racially diverse county in northeastern New Jersey that experienced a dramatic increase in foreclosures in 2007 through 2009. (Following ethical research requirements and ethnographic convention, all places and peoples were assigned pseudonyms.)

In 2008 and 2009, a wave of foreclosures swept through this landscape, emanating from the economically vulnerable heart of Glenwood and penetrating the most affluent reaches of Upper Cliffside. I chose three blocks in these two towns for study, each in a different neighborhood. Following Grannis (1998), a “block” was defined as *both sides of one street* for one block-length (i.e., a “face-block”). In each study community, a second, contiguous face-block was added several months into the study, resulting in three research areas consisting of two contiguous face-blocks on the same street. All three street-sections, thus defined, had experienced an increase in foreclosures in the previous two years, according to foreclosure filing information provided by Realtytrac.com, and, based on first-hand observation, contained at least three vacant houses at the time of the study. Beyond sharing a recent increase in vacancies, the blocks were selected to capture variety in socioeconomic status, racial composition, population density and rates of homeownership, factors that have been linked, albeit inconsistently, to differential perceptions of disorder in previous research. Initially, I chose two blocks for resident interviews – “Foster Street,” a working class block in Glenwood’s “Valley” area and “Highview Terrace,” an affluent block in Upper Cliffside. Partly in response to early findings from these interviews, I added a third block (“Woodrun Avenue” in Cliffside’s “South End”) that fell between these blocks on all of the variables of interest. Descriptive statistics for the census tracts surrounding the three blocks are presented in Table 1.

Attempts were made to interview at least one member of every household on each of these two-block sections. Research took place over a 15-month period beginning in early March 2010. Data consisted of transcripts, notes, and recordings from 69 interviews, attendance of public meetings, archival research, and unsystematic participant observation. These attempts, which required approximately 36 visits to the neighborhoods under study, resulted in 52 interviews with residents of the three streets in question, as well as an extensive amount of unstructured interaction with residents, who occasionally invited me into their homes or to neighborhood events. The length of interviews varied greatly, from 15 minutes to, in some cases, between two and three hours, with an estimated average duration of 40 minutes. I transcribed all interviews by hand using a combination of journalistic shorthand and verbatim transcription. (Where statements by informants are enclosed in quotation marks, they represent excerpts from segments transcribed word-for-word.) Field notes on site visits were recorded immediately following each visit.

In addition to these resident interviews, I conducted eight interviews with six city planners and code enforcement officers of the three communities under study, four interviews with directors of local non-profit organizations dealing with housing, and seven interviews with realtors who conduct business in the communities in question. Finally, I reviewed an extensive body of newspaper and blog articles relating to housing or real estate in one or more of the communities, police blotters and crime reports published in town newspapers, and with property records for approximately 95 homes, obtained through Realtytrac.com. Observed characteristics of the three areas of study are presented in Table 2.

FINDINGS

Foster Street: Symptoms of the Other Thing

Foster Street is a two-block stretch of predominantly detached, one and two-family residences with a rail overpass at one end and a large parochial school at the other. Due to its proximity to a railroad station and a cluster of small convenience stores and self-service laundries along nearby Ireland Road, the street frequently has pedestrian traffic. Although predominantly black, the area contains a high degree of ethnic diversity and economic heterogeneity, with a high poverty rate (19.5%) as well as a sizable, stable population of working-class families. In an interview,

Glenwood City Planner Cynthia Michaels described this neighborhood as “sort of transitional in various directions. It could be kind of up and coming or it could be sort of down and sliding.”

At the time of the study, six of the thirty-seven houses on Foster Street’s two blocks were vacant, including a mixed-use building with a crumbling brick facade that formerly housed a storefront bar and, immediately next to it, a newer single-family house (which I will refer to as “the yellow house”) that for the entire duration of the study had two large sheets of plywood haphazardly hung across the front door, with one sheet hanging ajar, leaving enough space for entry. Of the six vacant houses, property records indicated that three had been subject to foreclosure actions in the two years preceding the study.

Interviews with residents and crime coverage in the local newspaper suggested that an increase in vacant housing roughly coincided with several isolated incidents of violent crime. In 2009, two shootings and a stabbing occurred on the block, including a drive-by shooting in which a block resident was hit eight times, miraculously surviving. More common and less severe forms of criminal deviance, however, predated the recent increase in vacant housing. Halfway down the two-block stretch were two houses in front of which marijuana was openly sold and smoked in plain daylight, a situation that long-term residents traced to the moment, roughly five years earlier, when two young men moved in with several female family members who were renting one of the houses in question, and began selling drugs on the block. Residents widely considered both the shooting and the block-level marijuana trade to be gang-related. According to many residents of the block, other forms of disorder – littering, loud parties, and public disputes between young people – were commonplace.

Early in every interview, residents were asked what, if anything, they disliked about the neighborhood. Only one of twenty informants on the block independently brought up the vacant houses in response to this question – a young woman who was interviewed while sitting on her porch, next to a free-swinging tangle of exposed wires dangling from the side of a vacant house. Far more common than concerns over vacant housing were concerns about nonviolent crime and disorderly conduct occurring in the block’s public spaces and observable private spaces such as front porches and driveways. A soft-spoken 26 year-old man with cornrow braids showed me three bullet holes in the stucco wall of his apartment building – material reminders of one of the

shootings from the year before. But most residents lived in tidy, single-family homes that had not been hit by gunfire in recent years, and said they felt safe while moving around and socializing in the neighborhood, as they frequently could be observed doing well into the night on warm summer evenings. Instead, they pointed to forms of nonviolent social disorder when discussing problems with the neighborhood. Sixteen of twenty informants raised issues related to the block's small but active marijuana trade, noise, and littering, all of which residents directly and explicitly linked to a group of young men inhabiting a house on the block, or as a young woman described them, "the bad guys up on Foster."

Others voiced their annoyance with a larger group of teenagers affiliated with the drug dealers who often walked up and down the block from Ireland Road late at night, shouting and causing trouble. My field notes indicate that teenagers were hanging out in front of the marijuana dealers' residence on sixteen of eighteen visits to the block during warm spring and summer months of 2010 and 2011. Perhaps because an identifiable group of disorderly young people were so readily visible and audible in the block's public spaces, this social presence dominated the moral landscape of the block, leading residents to associate quality of life on the block with a cast of identifiable good and bad residents who bore a largely incidental relationship to residential space.

A factor that appeared to help explain residents' preoccupation with the block's drug business and disorderly teenagers was the tight circumscription of the geographical area relevant to their everyday lives. Seven residents mentioned that they seldom left their properties except when commuting to work or shopping. Others defined their territory more explicitly. A 32 year-old woman with ornate neck tattoos and short hair, when asked whether a nearby vacant house bothered her, said, "I just don't go around there. I stay around here." The vacant house in question was two doors down. Similarly, a second woman, a longtime resident in her 40s who has raised two children in the neighborhood, remarked when asked about the vacant housing, "It doesn't make the neighborhood look good, but as far as me personally, I haven't been directly affected by it. I don't really go over there." The two vacant structures, the yellow house and the abandoned bar, were two and three doors away, respectively.

Given that these residents, by their own accounts, routinely walked to the train station and the businesses at the end of the block, a course that would take them past the vacant houses in question, their comments about not going over “there” cannot be taken literally. Indeed, residents’ descriptions of their spatially confined routines were belied by first-hand observation: even those who claimed to spend little time outside of their homes could often be seen walking the length of the block from a parking space, as most houses lacked driveways. Instead, the spatial delimiters “here” and “there” identified loosely defined territories for which block residents felt accountability and concern.

In residents’ suggestions concerning how to improve life on the block, it became clear that existing social disorder heightened and directed residents’ attentiveness to specific areas. If Wilson and Kelling (1982) suggest that perceptions of residential space affect how people think about their neighbors, in the case of Foster, residents’ perceptions of their neighbors appeared to shape their awareness of space. Importantly, the forms of disorder that most preoccupied informants (trespassing, littering, destruction of private property) tended to be confined to the private outdoor spaces of their own homes. Filomena, the middle-aged owner of a well-kept green house at one end of Foster, bitterly described repeated instances of theft and vandalism, including the recent smashing of two large globe lights that flanked her garden steps, and said that her end of the block needed security cameras. When I asked whether that would discourage the drug trade down the block, she replied: “Well, it wouldn’t be *here*, would it?”

At the opposite end of Foster, Eugene, a homeowner and self-described “family man” who was contemplating a run for city council at the time of the study, took an active role in monitoring and responding to the block’s social disorder, coordinating his actions with a neighbor named Henry, who, while sharing a beer in his kitchen, showed me the window he used to monitor his corner of the block. Occasionally, the drug dealers from down the block came up and conducted business in front of Eugene’s house. When this happened, according to Eugene (an account corroborated by several other residents on his end of the block), he typically intervened, telling them, in his words, “Don’t do that here.” These comments serve to shed light on the residents’ comments regarding vacant housing, suggesting a tightly circumscribed space in which disorder (physical or social) became more salient and more consequential.

The forms of disorder that residents were most concerned about were implicated in their definitions of spaces on the block. In the awareness of Foster's residents, the group of disorderly teenagers constituted an unavoidable and conspicuous presence in part because, unlike vacant houses, they were mobile. The majority of resident complaints (24 out of 37) concerning the teenagers in interview transcripts mentioned actions performed directly in *front* of the informants' house or *on* their private property (for example, sitting on their front steps, drinking in their driveway, or littering on their front lawn.) Repeated disorderly behavior in these areas led many residents to simultaneously categorize the block's teenagers as the predominant threat to the moral order of the block, while defining these spaces – the areas of their most frequent transgressions – as “territories of concern,” spatial focal points for anxiety and vigilance. By comparison, the vacant houses appeared as silent and immobile physical neighbors, and were thus easily ignored.

In several interviews, residents explicitly addressed the hypothetical contrast between houses with and without people in affecting wellbeing on the block. Patricia, a longtime resident in her 40s remarked, “[t]he vacant homes are bad. But right, well, if it comes to empty houses versus [the street address of a house where a local drug dealer lives], then I guess I wish *more* houses were empty.” On a separate occasion, another resident, a woman in her thirties with two children who had moved in three years earlier, made a parallel remark:

DeAnne: They're younger and they're disrespectful. They make noise, they fight in the street. There are certain houses on the block that you just wish would vanish.”

Me: “Do you mean like the vacant houses?”

DeAnne: (Laughs) “It's the houses with people in them that's the problem.”

With visible, constant reminders of the illegal activity on the block, residents tended not to see vacant housing as a serious facilitator of local disorder. In this context, the meaning of Patricia and DeAnne's comments about certain occupied homes “vanishing” is clear: *people*, not *places*, were to blame for Foster's problems.

When residents were asked to explain the origins of the block's problems, they gave voice to a model of neighborhood change in which both social disorder and physical disorder

figured as symptoms of deeper moral failings on the part of neighbors. Henry and Eugene separately made parallel remarks that were illustrative of this perspective:

Henry: [Y]ou know what it is? You have to get good people in here... Part of the problem is that people don't care about who they rent to. Maybe if they cared more we could get some better people in here and clean things up.

Eugene: Some of the occupied houses look worse than the empty ones. You have owners of homes renting out to Section 8 renters who are not responsible for what goes on in their own homes... People are not taking ownership of the community, they're not taking control of their own homes and their front yards and their own street.

In these comments, Henry and Eugene, both homeowners, blame the blocks' disorder on renters. Importantly, however, Foster's homeowners never explicitly raised the influence of orderliness on property values and focused instead on the "use values" of clean, quiet residential space – concerns also voiced by renters on the block. When prompted, residents applied this logic even to the visible decay of vacant houses on the block, half of which had become vacant due to foreclosure or abandonment during the two years before the start of the study. Thea's daughter, for example, described how the community could be improved:

Asha: "People need to raise their kids right. If they don't learn morals and respect then it makes things worse for everyone..."

Mike: "What about if somebody moves into this yellow house over here and fixes it up?"

Asha: [Gesturing toward house] "This – this is just a symptom of the other thing."

Even though the vacant house was a direct consequence of a foreclosure action undertaken 17 months earlier, for Thea's daughter, as for many of the residents with whom I interacted, physical and social disorder were lumped together and attributed to the moral failings of a subset of residents – "the other thing." On Foster, perceptions of physical disorder were conditioned and constrained by residents' preoccupations with a group of disorderly residents and the local spaces in which their disorderly behavior took place. To the extent that visibly deteriorating, recently vacated homes could not be logically attributed to this group, they were not worthy of concern.

Highview Terrace, Cliffside: "That's Not What Happens Here."

The second street chosen for fieldwork had similar foreclosure and vacancy rates, but was drastically different in socioeconomic composition and spatial configuration. Highview Terrace,

in Cliffside's affluent "estate section," wends its way along the side of a high, steep ridge running along the northwestern border of the town, where the Manhattan skyline is visible between towering oak trees that punctuate expansive lawns. At the time of the study, three homes lay vacant, two due to foreclosure, on the stretch of Highview between Quaker Road and Arlington Terrace. According to City Planner Dorothy Drake, 43% of the foreclosure actions in 2009 affected the wealthier side of town, north of Bloomfield Avenue: "It's going on everywhere. We have a lot of people here who work on Wall Street who have lost their jobs and pretty soon they find that they can't make their home payments."

One of the foreclosed homes on the block was a sweeping stone mansion on the uphill side of Highview Terrace, described in real estate advertisements as one of the most elegant houses in Upper Cliffside. Only the front of this home was visible from the road, and even this minimal view required looking sharply uphill across the vast front lawn from the sidewalk on the uphill side of Highview Terrace. A second vacant house was a well-maintained Victorian banked by manicured shrubs, which had been for sale for several months at the start of the study. The third house was the only property of the three that showed outward signs of deterioration – a stately white colonial home on the downhill side of Overlook Road with badly peeling paint and a front lawn filled with knee-high weeds.

If the lack of public concern over the vacant houses on Foster Street was surprising, even more surprising was an apparent lack of any awareness at all of the three vacant houses on Highview Terrace among block residents. Never once did any resident mention one of these three homes in broader conversation about physical or social conditions on the block without being prompted to consider the state of housing. When they did mention the homes, their comments were vague and conjectural, lacking in factual accuracy when checked against property records, municipal data, and local news media accounts. Interviews and fieldwork eventually suggested this vagueness and lack of awareness to be a result of two factors: the organization of social interaction on the block (or lack of it) and the work of a corps of non-resident private sector actors – realtors and contractors – who collaborated to keep vacant properties from deteriorating.

Compared to Foster Street in Glenwood, Highview Terrace constitutes a very different interactional environment. Highview has only one poorly maintained sidewalk running along the

uphill side. On the opposite side, the parking lane of the road is bordered by a narrow alley of grass broken only by the driveways of the mansions on this side. In thirteen visits to this part of the block during warm weather I only observed people using the sidewalk on three occasions, while either walking dogs or jogging.

The difference in the intensity of use of public space on Foster and Highview corresponded with patterns in the broader social organization of the two blocks. A standard closed-ended question in my interviews was the number of neighbors with whom residents regularly spoke for more than five minutes. On Foster, the modal answer was 3 or 4. On Highview, it was 1 or 2. This difference, in turn, appeared to be related to the spatial layout of the two communities. These factors were highlighted in an interview with a recent e´migre´ from New York City who, after nine months living on Highview, had developed a telling perspective on the relationship between physical space and social interaction on the block:

Roger: "Well, it's really this block. We're on a main road, the lots are bigger. There's not much interaction with neighbors. I think other places in Cliffside there might be a lot of interaction – you hear about close knit places where everyone knows each other. But that's not what happens here. I know that guy (pointing next door), mainly because he's constantly doing work on his house and I see him outside a lot. Actually, now I'm thinking about it and I really only know that guy because of Halloween. I say hi to him, you know, but I don't know anybody else around here."

Later in the interview, when I asked Roger how many neighbors he spoke with regularly for more than five minutes, he sheepishly held up one index finger, nodding with his head in the direction of the neighbor he had previously mentioned. It is tempting to attribute this lack of social contacts to his newcomer status. But other interviews with longer-term residents corroborated Roger's account, resonating with the "moral minimalism" described by Baumgartner (1988) in her ethnography of a middle-class suburb. Informants admitted to knowing little about their neighbors beyond what was readily visible from their properties, which, due to the infrequent use of the sidewalks, meant focusing on arrivals and departures.

In an environment where incidental social interaction with neighbors is uncommon, even minor signs of change in ownership may produce speculation (occasionally wildly inaccurate) concerning the identity and behavior of inhabitants. Dennis, a 57-year old, heavy-set retiree with

a full head of gray curly hair, described a massive brick mansion around the corner on Highview several doors down from a house that had been foreclosed upon the previous year:

There's a vacant house up here that nobody knows what's up with it. The landscaping has kind of a half-finished look... I heard it was owned by [a prominent actor] who, you know, is in jail in Pennsylvania for tax evasion. But, I mean, a Hollywood celebrity not paying his taxes... that's obviously not going to be typical. So only in extenuating or extreme circumstances are you going to see any real deterioration up here.

In fact, the house he described was *not* vacant but occupied. Furthermore, the owner and occupant of the house was *not* the Hollywood actor Dennis mentioned, but rather, an attorney at a prominent law firm headquartered in New York City, for whom the house was a primary residence. The lawyer had been conducting long-term, major renovations on his house and property, accounting for the unfinished look.

Dennis' comments served to distance the neighborhood from the economic hardship affecting much of the nation and to attribute what he perceived as the most salient physically deteriorating house to an exotic outsider – a celebrity criminal, in other words, someone “that’s obviously not going to be typical.” I went on to ask Dennis whether he had ever seen the actor in question in the neighborhood.

(Smiling) No. People speculate about the occasional place that looks a little bit off. I mean, it's behind us here and up on the hill. I might see a car start coming out of the driveway every now and then. But you're not going to see much when the front lawn is the size of a football field. And it's not like I'm camped out in my backyard with binoculars.

Although property records indicated that foreclosures, short sales, and vacant homes could be found on many of the more affluent blocks in Cliffside, the residents of Highview seemed to retain a sense that their community was insulated from the economic downturn. In fact, lending institutions, realtors, and other private sector actors were doing considerable work to maintain this sense of insulation. Realtors and contractors active in the estate section of Cliffside described a range of services they routinely contributed on behalf of absentee sellers (whether homeowners or banks) to ensure that a house exhibited signs of being inhabited up until the time of sale. Jay, a realtor active in all three of the communities in the study summarized the types of services he provided in Upper Cliffside:

I would pick up the mail, you would do your typical timers in the lamps in the home to make sure the lights go on and off – you know, normal things you would do as if you went on vacation for like a week.

Insulated by the market, residents of Highview found that the surrounding social and physical landscape largely met their expectations, as the physical condition of houses was preserved in spite of higher-than-usual rates of turnover and vacancy on the block. In contrast to Foster, where the all-too-obvious social life on the block appeared to eclipse the physical condition of housing as an object of concern, on Highview, minimal interpersonal information and connection combined with intense scrutiny to relatively minor flaws in the built environment. In neither case did the actually vacant houses in themselves constitute “disorder” for residents.

Woodrun Terrace: “We’ve Fought a Lot of Battles Down Here.”

Prompted by the findings in the first two, very different blocks studied, I added a third block to the study that, in economic as well as geographic terms, lies in between Foster Street and Highview Terrace. The neighborhood known as the “South End” begins in West Glenwood, where a rough triangle of land with a racially and socioeconomically diverse population crosses the border into Cliffside, extending to Harper Avenue in the north and Maple Street in the west, the informal divides that demarcate entry into Cliffside’s more affluent neighborhoods. Janet Cy, City Planner of West Glenwood, described the area as simultaneously “suburban” in appearance and “urban” in socioeconomic diversity: “People keep their homes so beautiful. They take a lot of pride in their houses and they don’t like to see deterioration... it’s where urban meets suburban.” Woodrun Avenue, in the heart of this economically mixed neighborhood, is lined with medium-sized homes, ranging from modest one-family houses built of brick or stucco and set close to the street to larger, multi-family Victorian homes with wraparound porches.

At the time of the study, five of the thirty-nine houses on the two blocks were vacant. Two of these houses appeared in good condition, presenting no signs of vacancy to a casual observer. Three others (referred to by residents as “the white house”, “the gray house”, and “the Milton home,”) showed clear signs of deterioration, including discolored, chipping exterior paint, plywood-covered windows, and a front yard that often went untended, remaining strewn with litter and tall dandelions for weeks on end during the period of study. Police records and residents’ comments showed two of these properties to have attracted social disorder. Squatters

inhabited the white house for several months in 2008 and 2009. The Milton home was frequented by teenagers who drank alcohol on the property and were suspected to have caused a mattress fire in the interior of the house that the town fire department had to extinguish.

In stark contrast to my findings on Foster Street and Highview Terrace, interviews with Woodrun residents quickly revealed widespread concern over the vacant houses on the block. Glen, a tall man in his mid-40s with an intense gaze and a shock of curly graying hair, was the second resident I met on the block. He was busy renovating a large house next to the Milton Home and professed his love for Woodrun early in an interview, at which point I asked him about the downsides. He stared at me as if the answer should have been obvious, “Uhh... how about living next to a vacant house that we don’t know what is going to happen to it?” This response showed itself to be representative in the following months of fieldwork. Out of 20 semi-structured interviews, 16 residents raised the issue of the vacant homes without being prompted while discussing the negative aspects of life on the block. In interviews, casual conversations and meetings of the block civic association, vacant homes were variously referred to as “miserable messes,” “pieces of crap,” “dumps” “eyesores,” and “ticking time bombs.”

The focal point for residents’ concerns were the physical and aesthetic condition of the properties, which contrasted with a set of ideal expectations or aspirations for local housing. Beth, a woman in her late 30s who had recently purchased and moved into the house to the left of the gray house, made illustrative comments:

Mike: “Does the owner come by to take care of the property?”

Beth: “No he doesn’t. It’s basically like a slumlordish guy – sort of like a super but he’s not doing anything. He comes by from time to time. Takes out the trash and stuff. But you can see the grass for yourself. And the back is all overgrown. We have a fence in back thank god so we don’t have to look at it. I don’t even want to know what’s back there.”

Mike: “So is the main issue in your mind how the house looks?”

Beth: “Yes, how it looks. We just bought this nice home – it’ll be a nice, big house once it’s fixed up. Of course we want somebody to take care of the place next door.”

Woodrun residents were quick to identify the role of external economic and political forces in the visible decay of local homes. “A tragedy of the market slump,” is how Alice, an opinionated

resident in her late sixties and a former city councilwoman, described the vacant mansion across the street. “This is an excellent area,” she quickly added. “There is nothing wrong with it. There is *nothing* wrong with it. I have great neighbors and I can only speak highly of them.” Claire, a working mother with a cherubic face and a playful four-year old daughter, had been tracking “short sales” by her neighbors and observed with sadness, “Sure, a few houses are empty, and a few look worse for wear. But this is not just here. This is not just us. This is everywhere right now.”

Remarkably, in only *one* of the 20 formal interviews conducted on the block did any resident attribute disorder to a local homeowner or renter, and this exception only served to reinforce the dominant narrative, which pitted well-intentioned neighbors against harmful external actors and political and economic forces. John, a tall, sturdily built man in his 40s, with a shaved head and a no-nonsense manner, described the gray house, which, after foreclosure and vacancy, was being rented out:

There are a couple of neighbors who don't keep their places up. That's annoying. Like this place two doors down. It's a flophouse for college kids. I was a college kid once, so I put it on the landlord. The kids in there are just living where they can afford. The landlord is not a member of this block. The problem is... his lawn and that house is very much part of this block. It's an eyesore. He doesn't take care of it. I've complained a bunch of times about that place. Complained to my neighbors. Complained to the guy [who owns it]. Complained to the city.

From John's comments, it was evident that a moral distinction between insiders and outsiders was integral to his assessment of blame for the physical condition of the gray house. This distinction drew the boundary-line of respectability, accountability, and solidarity around the block, rather than within it, as was the case on Foster. The landlord's outsider status helped to explain his indifference to the house and negated any claim to the empathy that John reserves for the insiders in the formulation: the house's “college kid” renters. Interestingly, John assigns the house – an inanimate object – insider status as well, suggesting that the people and the places of Woodrun are all “part of the block,” bound together by ties of mutual interdependence, empathy, and accountability.

Although the discrepancy between attitudes toward vacant housing on Woodrun and the other two blocks was initially puzzling, a factor came to light that eventually helped explain the

differences between the communities. Unlike Highview Terrace, which had long enjoyed affluence and robust real estate markets, Woodrun and its environs had been repeatedly proposed as a site for development plans requiring relatively inexpensive and available real estate. As a result, the block had a long history of conflict and mobilization that derived from Woodrun's status as a place of economic heterogeneity and vulnerability in an otherwise affluent town. These apparent threats to physical and social order had resulted in the creation of a civic association that remained active, protecting residents' interests and playing an instrumental role in the social structure of the block.

Bill, a soft-spoken 86 year-old resident and one of the first African-American residents of the block, recounted the mobilizing events behind the association's creation in the period immediately following World War II. During this time, the block was going through a period of demographic transition, as black residents were integrating the neighborhood, which had previously housed a mix of blue-collar and middle-class whites. After the state presented a plan to reroute a state road (currently on Quincy Boulevard) down Woodrun Avenue instead, homeowners on the block organized to fight the proposal. According to Bill, after the organization's founding, a series of similar fights followed:

They were going to bring the eastbound side [of Quincy Boulevard] all the way down here, right through people's backyards. Which was ridiculous, because if they left it up there and just expanded the road they only had to move two houses. Then they were going to put a garbage truck turnaround here, right in front of my family's house. So we fought that too. Ever since then there have been many things we've had to fight. They wanted to put a pool hall in where the hardware store is, and we fought that. They wanted to take the location of the Jehovah's Witness place up there and turn that into a lot for rental cars. Another time they wanted to turn it into an armory. So we've fought a lot of battles down here. And we've been pretty successful with most of them.

Notable in Bill's summary is the ambiguous pronoun, "they," which alternately refers to developers, private business owners, and municipal planners. For his rhetorical purposes (and more importantly, the objectives of the civic association), the discursive grouping of these actors signifies their shared status as outsiders to the block who would negatively change physical or social conditions on the block.

Throughout the block's recent history, the civic institution offered not just a political tool, but an institutional platform organizing informal ties between racially and economically diverse community members, resulting in a tightly knit social structure corroborated by the social network size indicator presented in Table 2. According to Mia, a longtime resident in her 50s, the civic association encouraged sociability and trust, as monthly meetings brought together residents of a block where "[y]ou don't necessarily see your neighbors regularly on the street." In recent years, the association had lobbied the town to levy code violations on owners of deteriorating vacant houses, and had staked out a position in the negotiations surrounding the Milton home's sale and redevelopment, operating in the space between the community, private corporations, and the municipality in order to pursue residents' shared interests. These actions represented the only civic engagement found in the three blocks that was explicitly oriented to physical disorder. Importantly, this engagement was not only manifested in the civic association, but explained *by* it, as the association politicized vacant homes and focused residents on decaying vacant homes as yet another worrying threat to the local landscape that could be countered through collective action.

DISCUSSION

The preceding analysis finds several of the conditions that figure prominently in neighborhood-level research *not* to be helpful in explaining block-level reactions to vacant housing. Poverty rates and, more generally, socioeconomic fault lines on the blocks did not explain the level of concern over vacant homes – if this were the case, the residents of Foster Street should have reacted most strongly. Racial stigmatization also played no apparent role on three blocks that varied widely in their racial and ethnic mix. Differences in homeownership, across and within the blocks, appeared to be similarly insignificant: renters and homeowners alike emphasized social disorder on Foster and vacant housing on Woodrun, emphasizing the use value rather than the exchange value of local space.

Instead, reactions to disorder on the three blocks were explained by direct encounters between residents and their physical and social surroundings that fueled a process of collective

identity formation and moral classification: disorder was crucial to the differentiation of respectable, well-behaved residents from marijuana dealers and misbehaving teenagers on Foster, block residents from developers, absentee landlords, and municipal agencies in the case of Woodrun, and an affluent, insulated community from vaguely defined malfeasance in the case of Highview. As in Murphy's (2012) research, reactions to vacant housing proved to be a "Rorschach test" revealing the meaningful categories by which residents divided up their social and physical environment, assigning morality to their surroundings.

If demographic variables such as income, race and tenure did not consistently inform these ingroup/outgroup dynamics, other factors highlighted in previous research did emerge as important, as the level of social cohesiveness among block residents influenced the way they drew boundaries between orderly insiders and disorderly out-groups. The primary question driving this study, however, is not *which* conditions matter in explaining how disorder is perceived, but *how* disorder becomes salient and meaningful across varying block-level contexts. Following Small (2004), I suggest that residents understand their surroundings in light of interpretive "frames" that direct and constrain attentiveness to physical and social conditions, explaining different responses to disorder. The relationship between neighborhood conditions, frames, and reactions to disorder are schematized in Table 3.

Territories of Concern

If previous studies (Hipp 2010a; 2010b) have recognized the importance of sub-neighborhood "social environments," this study suggests that reactions to disorder are formed at an even more immediate spatial scale – invisibly bounded, sub-neighborhood spaces that I have termed "territories of concern." Unlike Newman's (1973) "defensible spaces," which have been found to shape perceptions of disorder (Perkins et al. 1992), territories of concern are *socially* rather than architecturally determined. The behavior of residents and institutions directed residents' attention toward specific spaces in and around the block, politicizing them, surrounding them with an aura of contentiousness and concern, and thus rendering them more salient than others. The importance of these territories to the way disorder was understood emerged in all three communities, while the territories themselves took starkly different forms on each block.

On Highview Terrace, an anemic street life and isolation from other properties on the street partly explained a lack of awareness of vacant housing. But private sector institutions such as banks and contractors acted quickly in many cases to maintain and repair foreclosed homes, preventing signs of disrepair that might have drawn attention. Finally, residents' admitted lack of personal knowledge concerning their neighbors worked in concert with these factors, facilitating a sense of economic and social insulation from disorder.

On Foster Street, too, vacant housing was seen as irrelevant to quality of life on the block, as residents "stay[ed] around here," limiting their concern to their immediate surroundings even while moving freely throughout the block. Important in encouraging these tightly circumscribed territories of concern were group of misbehaving teenagers who introduced disorder *into* these areas, tossing litter on small front lawns and patios, playing loud music late at night, and breaking or stealing unsecured property. Thus, social disorder influenced and constrained perceptions of physical disorder; the preoccupation of residents with protecting their own private and proximate public spaces was a consequence of the threat posed by a subset of local actors to the existing social order.

Finally, on Woodrun, the local civic association effectively *expanded* the territory of concern to include the entire block. The association offered a durable institutional platform for the organization of periodic social interaction among the inhabitants of that territory, providing frequent rituals, collective memory, and reminders of shared accountability and interest.

In each case, local actors and institutions played an important role in defining the boundaries of the space for which a resident felt accountability and concern. They acted in this capacity by making specific neighborhood spaces more noticeable and more important. This was true of the teenagers on Foster with regard to front lawns and porches, and the virtually invisible realtors and contractors in the case of Highview's vacant homes. Only in Woodrun did a local institution act to maintain a territory of concern expansive enough to include the vacant houses "down the block," legitimizing the civic engagement I found in that community in response to vacant housing.

Orderly and Disorderly Collectivities

Prior research suggests that residents moralize signs of disorder, attributing it to out-groups with ostensibly conflicting values (Kefalas 2003; Murphy 2012; Rieder 1985). The case of vacant housing provided valuable insight into this process. Even when disorder is a consequence of a nationwide crisis, residents invoked locally relevant social boundaries in assigning culpability and formulating a response. If residents' awareness of disorder was shaped by territories of concern, disorder was given social meaning through a process of social demarcation, whereby order was associated with a (largely implicit) in-group, while disorder was associated with a troublesome out-group – a disorderly collectivity.

On Highview, attributions of blame for a condition (vacant housing) widely regarded as a non-issue might seem irrelevant. On the contrary, residents' dismissals of vacant housing spoke to their denial of disorder as a feature of their social environment. Dennis's comments were telling, as he attributed an exceptional example of disorderly housing to the financial malfeasance of a famous and exotic outsider, something "that is not going to be typical."

On Foster, culpability for the block's physical as well as social disorder was assigned to a highly visible group of block residents – even when the causes of physical disorder itself were entirely unrelated to the activities of this group. With the block thus internally split between good and bad residents, the most frequently raised solutions for disorderly vacant housing, along with litter, crime, and other social and physical forms of disorder, were surveillance (e.g. cameras) or social exclusion, rather than organization and mobilization across lines of difference.

Finally, Woodrun offered the only case in which the framing of vacant housing was consonant with broad civic engagement. Residents viewed the physical decay and the ambiguous future of vacant housing as analogous to other external threats that the block had faced in the past, imposed by external developers and an indifferent municipality. A persistent delineation between insiders and outsiders was evinced in residents' discourse regarding past and present problems, suggesting a level of solidarity internal to the block.

CONCLUSION

This comparison has implications for research and public policy addressing disorder in general and vacant housing in particular. Where prior research has linked vacant housing to

serious forms of social disorder, this study problematizes a central mechanism hypothesized to constitute this link. The sheer presence of vacant homes did not determine the way residents think about their communities. This was so on all three blocks in this study, even on Foster Street, an area that would appear, on paper, to fit the scholarly profile of economic and social vulnerability to social disorganization. The block-level specificity in reactions to vacant housing offers modest support for fine-grained, context-sensitive approaches to neighborhood revitalization rather than those based upon “broken windows” assumptions being distributed widely across municipalities and counties. The variation found supports decentralized policies, like New Jersey’s Abandoned Property Rehabilitation Act, that strengthen the hand of local institutional actors, such as municipalities and community development corporations (CDCs), to respond to the physical and social consequences of vacant housing on a house-by-house, block-by-block basis.

In theoretical terms, this study of three suburban blocks builds upon recent qualitative work showing perceptions of disorder to be formed as part of day-to-day processes of social identification and differentiation (Kefalas 2003; Murphy 2012; St.Jean 2008). In this sense, the qualitative findings presented here support quantitative approaches that situate perceived disorder within an immediate spatial scale, such as the household cluster or the “micro-neighborhood” (Hipp 2010a; Hipp 2010b), and those modeling perceived disorder as an outcome of complexly interacting local conditions (Wickes 2013). Perceived disorder should not be treated as an unproblematic, homogeneous independent or dependent variable.

However, while the conditions that affect collective understandings of disorder appear in this study as local and particular, the narratives used to raise disorder to the level of public concern are not. My findings suggest that residents direct their attention and concern for local social and physical conditions like vacant houses toward spaces made salient and meaningful by the social actors with whom they share territory. For this reason, types of disorder that “have a history” on a block, triggering the collective identity of orderly insiders who have mobilized in the past around similar issues, are more likely to generate concern. In making sense of their physical and social environment, residents use interpretive frames rooted in block-level social and spatial context.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for Blocks Included in Study^a

	Foster Street	Woodrun Avenue	Highview Terrace
Median Household Income (\$)	38,686	74,573	165,586
Poverty Rate (% Households)	19.5	4.4	0.0
Population Density (people per square mile)	19,479	6,929	4,009
Block Group Vacancy Rate	8.4	7.1	5.5
2000 Tract Vacancy Rate ^b	6.3	5.8	2.7
2010 Tract Vacancy Rate ^b	10.1	9.9	3.5
Owner-Occupancy Rate	43.3	50.1	91.3
% Black (non-Hispanic)	85.9	55.8	14.2
% White (non-Hispanic)	4.3	40.4	77.8
% Asian (non-Hispanic)	1.0	0.0	0.0
% Hispanic	8.7	3.0	8.0

a: Unless otherwise noted, demographic and economic data drawn from American Community Survey block group estimates (2006-2009), downloaded from www.socialexplorer.com. In cases where the block included in the study straddled a border between two or more block groups, the average of the block groups is represented.

b: Decennial census estimates for surrounding census tract(s).

Table 2. Observed Informant and Housing Characteristics

	Foster Street	Woodrun Avenue	Highview Terrace
<i>N</i>	20	20	12
Household Response Rate	54.1	55.6	42.9
% Homeowners	40.0	66.7	100.0
% Black (non-Hispanic) ^a	75.0	60.0	0.0
% White (non-Hispanic) ^a	5.0	35.0	91.7
% Asian (non-Hispanic) ^a	5.0	0.0	0.0
% Hispanic ^a	15.0	5.0	8.3
Observed Vacancy Rate	16.2	12.9	10.7
Modal Response: Network Size ^b	3-4	7-10	1-2
Average Duration in House (Years)	7.2	10.1	5.2
Average Duration in Neighborhood (Years)	11.3	14.7	6.3
Modal Response: Neighborhood Downside ^c	Social Disorder	Vacant Housing	Traffic Speed
Modal Response: Community Downside ^c	Poor Public Services	High Taxes	High Taxes

a: Racial and ethnic characteristics of informants imputed by the author. b: Interview question asked informants how many neighbors they regularly spoke with for five minutes or more. c: Interview question asked informants if there were any “negative characteristics” or “downsides” to living on their block and their community, respectively. If multiple factors were named, I asked a follow-up question asking which factor was most significant.

Table 3. Neighborhood Conditions and Resident Responses to Vacant Housing: Three Suburban Blocks

Block	Social and Spatial Conditions	Interpretive Frames	Responses to Disorder
Foster Street	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High density • Active street life • High levels of social disorder 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Territory of concern</i>: Porches, stoops, sidewalk in front of homes: sites of social disorder. • <i>Disorderly collectivity</i>: Block drug-dealers and affiliated teenagers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Informal control focused on littering, loitering, vandalism. • Minimal concern over vacant housing.
Woodrun Avenue	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Medium density • Active civic association • High social cohesion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Territory of concern</i>: Entire block: built environment • <i>Disorderly collectivity</i>: Developers, municipality 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Widespread concern over vacant housing • Mobilization through civic association
Highview Terrace	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low density • No street life • Low social cohesion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Territory of concern</i>: Private property: home and lawn. • <i>Disorderly collectivity</i>: “Celebrity criminals”, undefined outsiders. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inaccurate or vague speculation concerning status of local housing • Sensitivity to minor signs of physical deterioration



Figure 1: Valley District, Glenwood



Figure 2: Estate Section, Cliffside



Figure 3: South End, Cliffside

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