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The Formation of Identity Narratives within Racialized Space

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An Honors Thesis

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for graduation with honors in Sociology from Hamline University

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Introduction

This study seeks to investigate how living in stigmatized¹ neighborhoods impacts residents' identities. It is clear that the places people live plays a role in shaping their lives, however, not enough attention has been given to the various factors that influence the process of identity formation beyond simply the physical environments people live in. This study asks how the messages people receive, both locally within their neighborhood, as well as from dominant discourses², contribute to their self-narratives. Additionally, this study will examine the interplay between external structures and internal decision-making to conceptualize identity as a fluid story that is created through an ongoing process of negotiation. The concept of negotiation is used in this study to disrupt the binary between structure and agency and describe the ways in which residents make sense of how their environment fits into their identities,

Within recent decades there has been an increased focus on the social construction of place. There has been extensive work done to explore the mechanisms by which inner-city neighborhoods and the contemporary disadvantages within them were created (Calmore 1995; Wilson 1998; Sharkey 2008). A newer body of work has moved beyond the material conditions within these neighborhoods to explore the ideological structures that are embedded in place

¹ It is important to note the power of the language used to characterize the neighborhoods under study. These areas are referred to in many ways, often interchangeably within the discourses that describe them; these terms include, inner-city neighborhoods, ghettos, low-income or disadvantaged neighborhoods, and communities of color. The words used to talk about these places are overwhelmingly negative, which reinforces the stigmatization of those communities. I recognize my own tendency to describe these areas in similar ways, even while writing about the positive aspects within these areas I have at times used language that negatively. Part of the difficulty in determining better ways to describe places comes from the need to call attention to the systematic processes that disadvantaged communities of color, this language shows evidence of the need for investment in these areas. However, it also perpetuates the idea that these areas are 'other' or marginal. With these debates in mind, and for a lack of a better term, I have chosen to refer to the neighborhoods in my study as disinvested neighborhoods or communities of color to highlight the role of public policy in creating the conditions within them. I also use the term stigmatized neighborhoods when referring to the ways they are portrayed in dominant discourses.

² Used synonymously with stigma and public perceptions. Each of these terms refer to neighborhood representations and assumptions.

(Rosen 2017; Sriskandarajah 2020). This research has shown that it is not just the circumstances within neighborhoods that shape the lives of residents, but the cultural representations of these places and the local norms and values within them. The messages residents receive at both the neighborhood level and the societal scale frame the ongoing negotiation of their identities. Both the identities of individuals and the places they live are narratives, they are a composite of stories that are framed by the ideological contexts within which they are formed.

The method of ethnography is especially well suited to this research because of its focus on storytelling. The process of qualitative interviewing is concerned with the meaning-making processes participants engage in (Heyl 2001). This methodology relies on the co-construction of knowledge between the interviewer and interviewees to help prevent the imposition of the researchers' own cultural beliefs on the responses they receive. Through open-ended interviewing, the respondents have the ability to shape the focus of the study according to what is most important to them. The emphasis on the voices and interests of the interviewees is important given the marginalization of these groups within dominant discourses.

The focus of this study is particularly relevant given the current moment in history and the events that characterize it, most notably, the murder of George Floyd. This event was a catalyst for releasing many of the underlying racial tensions not just within Minneapolis, but throughout the world. Contextualizing North Mpls as the location where this unrest originated highlights the importance of choosing this site for my research. It is necessary to examine the impacts of this event and the social unrest that followed on those who live on the Northside and the stigma of criminality that surrounds it.

This context has made the existing inequalities more explicit and led to a growing interest in the disadvantaged conditions and public perceptions that reinforce these disparities. Much of

the past research has focused primarily on the dominant discourses that stigmatize people of color and their neighborhoods as dangerous and disadvantaged. However, in order to disrupt the existing narratives, there needs to be an increased understanding of the individuals and their communities themselves. This study aspires to contribute to this knowledge by providing an interpretation of the stories participants shared with me.

Literature Review

This project draws on several core areas that have been clearly articulated in the literature. In order to understand how living in disadvantaged areas impacts people's identities, it is necessary to begin by discussing the history of segregation and the policies and practices that facilitated it. Nearly all of the research on disinvested neighborhoods traces the roots of the contemporary structural issues to this process. This literature provides the necessary background on the various conditions that exist in these areas such as high levels of crime and a lack of resources.

Another major body of work focuses on the *racialization of space*, the process through which racial meanings and assumptions become embedded in physical locations. Research shows that the division of space along racial lines has shaped public perceptions about the relative safety of some spaces compared to others, leading to a dominant discourse that frames communities of color and the residents within them as dangerous (Lipsitz 2011). This informs my investigation of neighborhood stigma and its impact on the identities of those it is imposed upon. The literature also shows how the local ideologies within neighborhoods shape the lives of residents by influencing their perceptions of themselves and their communities (Rosen 2017; Sriskandarajah 2020). The concept of *scales of representation* is a useful framework to

understand the relationship between neighborhood-level ideologies and dominant discourses and the effects of switching between them (Bauder 2001). Both scales of representation shape people's identities, however, the research presents the strategy of mental resilience as a way to combat the negative effects (Brooms 2015).

Segregation

There has been extensive research on the process through which places become imbued with racial meaning (Lipsitz 2011). Most trace the roots of racialization to policies and practices that created and have maintained neighborhood segregation. According to Sharkey (2008) this process included the investment in white suburban neighborhoods and the consolidation of Black populations within the inner city. The Federal Housing Administration used the racial composition of neighborhoods to determine access to home loans, effectively excluding nonwhite populations from these opportunities. Discriminatory policies such as this enforced residential segregation and limited black upward mobility (Sharkey 2008). Although many of these policies are no longer in place, they have had long-lasting effects that sustain the racial division of space. These findings are relevant to my study because they show the systematic exclusion of people of color from white spaces led them to be concentrated within isolated neighborhoods. This will inform nearly every aspect of this project.

Disinvested Neighborhoods

The contemporary conditions in disinvested neighborhoods are a direct result of the formalized policies and practices of segregation. The literature on these neighborhoods often relates to the work done by Wilson (1998) describing the urban underclass:

“...a heterogeneous grouping of families and individuals in the inner city that are outside the mainstream of the American occupational system and that consequently represent the very bottom of the economic hierarchy.”

According to Sharkey (2008), the neighborhoods in which the urban underclass reside are:

“...characterized by economic dislocation, the loss of core community institutions, deteriorating family structures, and rising violence.” (17)

The literature shows how the process of segregation created a range of negative conditions within communities of color. For example, Wilson (1998) explained that the social isolation of these neighborhoods from mainstream society led to high levels of crime within them. These findings are relevant to my study because they illuminate the structural nature of disadvantage.

Place and Identity

It is clear from previous literature that the places people live meaningfully structure their experiences. Residents in disinvested neighborhoods are directly impacted by the conditions and behaviors they are exposed to. The isolation within disadvantaged communities limits residents' access to resources and exposure to positive role models. Sriskandarajah (2020) found that the negative circumstances in disinvested neighborhoods, including poverty, crime, and the lack of resources, all informed the way residents see the world, interact with others, and negotiate belonging. According to Krivo and Peterson (1996), residents model the actions of others. Within disinvested neighborhoods, they are more commonly exposed to crime and have fewer positive role models. Additionally, there are fewer networks of neighbors and community institutions to discourage crime. According to Kirvo and Peterson:

“Future research should incorporate more direct measures of these intervening mechanisms. Local institutional supports (e.g., churches, schools, recreation centers) that connect residents to mainstream society, provide role models, and assist in crime control have been given limited attention in neighborhood crime studies.”

Krivo and Peterson (1996) note the need for a focus on intervening mechanisms in future research, suggesting that an increase in local supports could mitigate the negative effects of neighborhoods. My study hopes to fill this gap in the literature by exploring the role intentionality plays in exposing residents to positive role models and examples.

The Racialization of Space

In addition to creating negative conditions that shape residents' experiences, the concentration of people of color within areas with higher rates of crime and poverty have shaped and reinforced public perceptions of those neighborhoods (Calmore 1995). The process by which places become imbued with racial meaning is referred to by George Lipsitz (2011) as *racialized space*. He states that:

“People of different races do not inhabit different places by choice. Housing and lending discrimination, the design of school district boundaries, zoning regulations, policing strategies, the location of highways and transit systems, and a host of tax subsidies do disastrous work by making places synonymous with race.”

According to Lipsitz, the practices of segregation result in racialized spaces that privilege whites through access to opportunities while excluding communities of color. The links between place and race have not only led to unequal outcomes for communities of color, they have also shaped outsiders' perceptions surrounding disinvested neighborhoods, leading them to view the conditions within them as natural, rather than structural. Lipsitz explains that seemingly race-neutral sites contain and enforce racial meanings about who belongs where. He points to a distinct *White spatial imaginary* that is protected from racial others, isolating them in *Black spatial imaginary* in order to maintain the supposed safety of white spaces. According to Calmore, (1995) the desire by whites to maintain segregation through the exclusion of Black people from their neighborhoods is primarily because of the association of Blackness with crime. The discussion of spatial imaginaries is relevant because it provides background on the ways racial lines are drawn between spaces, marking some as unsafe and separating them from others.

Spatial Stigmatization

The racialization of place has not only led places to contain racial meanings but public perceptions about safety and crime as well. According to Sriskandarajah (2020), *spatial*

stigmatization is the tendency to degrade or vilify marginalized communities. These discourses frame communities of color as dangerous and impoverished. This perception exists because of both the stereotypes linking race and crime and the demarcation of space as safe or not along racial lines.

The stereotype that depicts people of color as dangerous or immoral provided the justification for segregation. This led to the creation of racialized spaces which in turn reinforced this perception through the concentration of disadvantage within communities of color. Research finds that neighborhoods come to be recognized by their racial demographics (Besbris 2015). An area's racial composition is the most significant factor in shaping the stigmas surrounding it (Quillian and Pager 2001). Past studies show that regardless of actual crime statistics, areas with high proportions of people of color are more likely to be perceived as dangerous (Chricos, Hogan and Gertz 2012; Pickett, Chricos, Golden and Gertz 2012). This suggests that the stereotypes of racial minorities extend to the neighborhoods they live in, creating a perception that both communities of color and the people who live within them are dangerous.

The *racialization of space* also contributes to these discourses. Research shows that dominant groups control how places are represented, both through the process of segregation and through institutions such as the media (Sriskandarajah 2020). Media directs people to think about racialized spaces and people as 'other,' cultivating what Sriskandarajah refers to as a *social imaginary*. Evans and Lee (2020) refer to neighborhood reputations as *socially constructed place identities*. These portrayals are produced and sustained by the state in order to maintain segregation and exclude certain groups from white spaces (McCann 1999). Sriskandarajah (2020) references Bourdieu's suggestion that the social is structured through spatial and social distancing. These observations argue that the exclusion of people of color directs people to think

of white spaces as safe and desirable and spaces with people of color as dangerous and impoverished. This will inform my study by showing the process through which neighborhood reputations are produced and maintained,

Embodied Stigma

There has been a lot of research on the nature of the stigmas surrounding communities of color, however as Sriskandarajah (2020) notes, there is a lack of literature focused on the experiences of residents who live there and the ways they negotiate dominant discourses. It is clear from the former body of research that neighborhood stigmas affect residents by shaping outsiders' views and behaviors towards them.

The public perceptions of neighborhoods lead outsiders to make assumptions about both the community and the individuals who live there. According to Besbris, (2015) residents in high crime, low income, or racially isolated neighborhoods embody the negative characteristics associated with their neighborhoods. Keene and Padilla (2010) reference Goffman, suggesting that residents are marked or tainted by stigma. People carry stigma with them, even when they leave the neighborhood. It follows them when they move (Keene and Padilla 2010). Multiple studies also discuss the work of Wacquant and the concept of territorial stigma, indicating that neighborhoods can have spoiled identities (Keene and Padilla 2010; Evans and Lee 2020). Research shows that residents of stigmatized neighborhoods experience negative consequences (Evans and Lee 2020). Dominant discourses represent communities of color and those who live in them as marginal, leading youth to youths 'acquire an identity of cultural pathology' which is imposed on all residents (Bauder 2001).

The discourses surrounding neighborhoods impact residents through the discrimination they face as a result of outsiders' perceptions (Evans and Lee 2020). The perception that

disinvested neighborhoods are dangerous causes distrust in residents, which can lead to tangible consequences such as job discrimination. They receive fewer responses to advertisements due to the assumptions outsiders make about their race or trustworthiness, (Besbris 2015) as well as fewer callbacks on job applications (Evans and Lee 2020). These findings suggest that the stigmatization of place may serve as a way for neighborhood segregation to reinforce inequalities (Besbris 2015). The literature shows that stigma impacts residents through the discriminatory ways people treat them as a result of the assumptions they make. However, it doesn't explain how this directly affects their identities.

Some of the most significant contributions to this explanation were made by Anuppiriya Sriskandarajah in two separate studies focused primarily on youth. These studies find that stigmas not only shape the identities of places, but of the people who live within them (Sriskandarajah 2020). The dominant discourse through which neighborhoods and residents are perceived informs the production of their identities (Sriskandarajah 2020). Youth's recognition of the marginalization of their spatial locations and identities oriented them to view themselves as 'othered' (Sriskandarajah 2019). This suggests that space shapes people's sense of belonging and exclusion which then impacts identity. Sriskandarajah finds that feeling excluded and over-surveilled in white areas requires youth to negotiate their identities. This leads residents to form deeper attachments with their communities rather than seek prospects outside the neighborhood.

These findings are significant to my study because they illustrate how residents in disinvested neighborhoods embody the stigma that is attached to these places, which in turn leads to a number of tangible consequences such as job discrimination as well as impacts to their identities. It also shows that the stigmatization of neighborhoods influences residents' sense of

exclusion and belonging. This investigation will inform my exploration of the relationship between mainstream society and communities of color.

Local Ideologies

The exclusion of communities of color has led residents to be isolated within neighborhoods with distinct norms and values. Local ideologies inform the way residents view themselves and the world around them. Research shows that ideological structures are represented through space (Bauder 2001). According to Wilson (1998):

“Cultural values grow out of specific circumstances and life chances and reflect one's position in the class structure.”

This suggests that the places where people live become markers of their social standing.

Sriskandarajah (2019) uses Bourdieu as a framework to explore how social fields inform *habitus*, meaning one's economic, social and cultural capital. Residents associate life possibilities with their surroundings which are internalized and acted on (Sriskandarajah 2020). Local ideologies are viewed as norms, which shape the identities of residents, particularly youth. Because communities of color are separated from mainstream culture, residents' identities are differently conditioned, impacting their values, choices, and life outcomes (Calmore 1995). Sriskandarajah (2020) found a relationship between social and spatial exclusion leading to limited access to the labor market and increased racial profiling.

Research shows that the neighborhood contexts residents live in shape their choices through the narratives they tell themselves (Rosen 2017). Additionally, the places people live shape the way they think about the choices they have, such as the decision to move, leading them to stay within their neighborhoods or to move to ones with similar conditions (Rosen 2017). This is relevant to my study because it shows how local ideologies shape residents' identities through the narratives they form about their neighborhoods and themselves. My study will expand on

these findings by exploring how residents negotiate their self-narratives within the frameworks of both local ideologies and dominant discourses.

Scales of Representation

Bauder (2001) uses the concept of *scales* to illustrate the different levels of ideologies between dominant society and disinvested neighborhoods. He suggests that the *spatial scale of representation* influences residents' identities. The exclusion from white spaces leads them to be isolated within the neighborhood level, however, it is possible to jump scales and adopt society-wide ideologies instead. Bauder explains that this is a way to escape the stigma associated with neighborhoods. However, Keene and Padilla (2011) have found that stigmas become attached to neighborhoods and follow residents even if they move. The discussion is meaningful to my study because it shows how neighborhood ideologies maintain the barrier between scales, leading people to stay within neighborhoods rather than jump scales and move out. The framework of scales provides a useful framework for my study because of the way it conceptualizes the local ideologies within communities in opposition to the dominant discourses outside of them. This will inform my investigation into the binary between scales and how switching between them affects the identities of residents.

Mental Resilience

The literature shows that living in disadvantaged communities negatively impacts residents in a variety of ways. On the neighborhood scale, the material conditions shape residents' choices and experiences. Additionally, the isolation within local ideologies influences residents' perception of themselves and the world around them. At the societal scale, the stigmatization of their neighborhoods also impacts the way others perceive and treat them. Each of these factors plays a role in structuring residents' lives. However, the literature suggests that

people have the ability to choose how they respond against these structures, but it takes mental resilience to do so (Brooms 2015; Rosen 2017).

Brooms (2015) looks at the challenges neighborhoods create for students, specifically Black males. He finds that neighborhoods can be risk factors for student success, impacting their behaviors, values, and aspirations. In order to overcome these barriers, students must develop strategies such as resilience to focus on future responsibilities. This suggests that although residents can be constrained by the circumstances in their neighborhoods, they have the ability to choose how they conceptualize and interact with their environments. The stigmas surrounding neighborhoods can also impact residents, but they are not entirely determinative (Sriskandarajah 2020; Rosen 2017). Individuals can respond against dominant discourses and create alternative narratives. Residents must negotiate the ways neighborhoods and dominant discourses fit into their identities (Sriskandarajah 2020).

The discussion of response and negotiation is significant to my study because it shows that while neighborhoods can negatively impact residents' identities, they can use mental resilience to overcome these effects. My study hopes to contribute to the literature by further investigating the relationship between structure and agency and how each factor into residents' self-narratives.

Methodology

Ethical Considerations

There are several challenges with conducting research on the sensitive issues of stigmatization, race, and identity. There are limitations with doing this work in general and even more so as an outsider to the communities and groups who I have studying. Because this topic

deals with issues surrounding race and criminalization there are some important ethical concerns to address. In an effort to familiarize myself with these issues, I looked at discussions on several ethnographies from which ethical concerns have arisen prior to the start of my research. These studies, such as *On the Run* by Alice Gofman and *Gang Leader for a Day* by Sudhir Venkatesh were found to be problematic in several ways. One of the issues that emerged from these studies was the concern of helicopter research. This refers to when researchers enter disinvested neighborhoods to collect research and then leave to disseminate it without returning or conferring any of the benefits of the research to the communities under study. Another concern was that of non-Black researchers entering predominantly African American communities to study and tell the stories of a group whom they are not a part. These were issues I paid close attention to throughout my project. Doing so required engaging in self-reflection on my position as a researcher. Because I am not a part of the communities I will be studying, I cannot hope to fully understand the experiences of those who I will be studying. I also recognize the power I have to choose what to include in my study and how to interpret it. It is my goal to better understand and articulate the perspectives of my participants, while still ensuring that they speak for themselves.

Research Sites³

Participants were chosen from several neighborhoods within North Minneapolis. The neighborhoods chosen were areas with either high levels of crime, low income, or high concentrations of racial minorities. Because it is not just conditions, but public perceptions that contribute to the processes explored in this study, neighborhoods were also selected based on their reputations. To determine the public perceptions of safe and unsafe neighborhoods I began by having conversations with peers and gathering feedback. I also relied on online resources to

³ See Appendix A for a map of Minneapolis

gauge the public perception of what the most dangerous neighborhoods were. I looked at discussion forums such as Quora or Reddit where others had asked about the ‘bad’ or ‘sketchy’ parts of the Twin Cities. The responses to this were most often to avoid North Minneapolis, similar to what I had heard in casual conversations with others. Some suggested that there were pockets of crime in Saint Paul as well but that the primary focus is on the Northside. While there is a bad reputation attached to North Minneapolis as a whole, the data shows that there are demographic differences between neighborhoods with respect to income levels, crime rates and racial composition. Based on these data, I selected the ten neighborhoods with the highest levels of crime. The focus was due to the strong associations between race and crime within public perceptions of neighborhoods (Chricos, Hogan and Gertz 2012; Quillian and Pager 2001).

Recruitment

After identifying a list of potential neighborhoods to study, I began working to recruit residents who lived in the areas to participate in my study. Because I am not from these areas and had no access to the residents who lived there, it was not feasible to approach residents directly, so I began by reaching out to neighborhood associations to get connected with the communities. This method draws on those employed in previous neighborhood ethnographies who used community organizations to recruit participants (Brunson and Weitzer 2009; Brunson and Miller 2006; Zaykowski 2019). These studies showed that neighborhood organizations provided access to communities as well as served to build rapport with community members allowing for the referral of additional participants.

In hopes to have a similar experience, I chose this strategy for recruitment. I began the process in the spring of 2021 during which the pandemic was in full swing. The challenges that already exist with recruiting participants in communities that I had no prior access to were

compounded by the need to minimize contact. With this in mind, I began by reaching out to organizations over email and then by phone after I received few responses. When I began calling neighborhood organizations, I was surprised by the number of times I reached only a voicemail explaining that due to COVID-19, the organization was temporarily closed. After several of the restrictions of the pandemic eased, I began visiting organizations in person. In doing so I encountered mixed reactions to my presence in the community and my plans for conducting research.

Many of the people I talked to expressed similar concerns to those that were brought up about the studies mentioned above. One woman I spoke with explained that the Northside has been over-studied and that I should raise the compensation for participants. She commented on my embodiment as well. I am a biracial woman (Indian and white) and my coloration makes it difficult to tell what my racial background is. After I had described my project, she asked me whether I was Black, to which I responded that I was not. She paused and nodded before reminding me of the need to approach this project carefully and be attentive to the ways I am different from the people I was hoping to talk to. She also commented on my physical appearance, telling me that I shouldn't go to the Northside dressed the way I was that day, wearing a dress with my hair in braids. This interaction made me more cognizant of the ways others perceived me. I also encountered hesitancy from community members and at times refusal to participate before even having the chance to explain my project. One person I reached out to responded by telling me that there are plenty of Black people on the Northside that I could talk to besides him and his family. Several of the people I talked to at community organizations were reluctant to talk to me at first, however after explaining my project and acknowledging their concerns, many were instrumental in connecting me to members of the community. They helped

refer me to the majority of the people I interviewed and in some cases participated in my study themselves.

Research Design and Analysis

The review of literature provides several answers to questions surrounding related topics, however, the existing research fails to fully describe the role of identity in issues of race, crime, and place. In order to bridge this gap in the literature, this study asks the question: *How does living in a criminally stigmatized place impact the racial identity of African American people residing there?* In order to answer this question, I chose to limit the sample population to Black residents over the age of eighteen, however, participants were only screened through the data they reported themselves. Because this project centered around issues of identity, I chose the method of qualitative interviews to allow for the aspect of storytelling to inform my analysis. After receiving IRB approval, I began contacting the people I was referring to through neighborhood associations. I introduced myself as a Hamline student and explained that I wanted to understand how living in their neighborhood impacted their perceptions and experiences. I chose to keep this description broad to avoid suggesting that their neighborhoods were stigmatized. Instead, I relied on their own reports of outsiders' perceptions. I also explained that they would be compensated with a \$20 Target gift card to thank them for their time. The funding for this project was provided by Hamline University. Once I confirmed their interest in participating in my study, I began scheduling interviews with participants. I suggested that we meet in person at a quiet location in their neighborhood or wherever was most convenient for them. This choice was made to ensure that interviews took place in a neutral setting that was familiar to participants. Some participants worked at a neighborhood organization and suggested we use that as a meeting place. Others requested that we meet in a public park. However, the

majority of interviews took place in or outside of people's homes. One of the participants in my study connected me with several people who lived in her apartment building. These interviews were conducted back-to-back on the same day within the lobby of the apartment complex.

Between the months of June and September 2021, I conducted a total of fifteen interviews. Prior to the start of each interview, I provided participants with an informed consent form which was read aloud to them and signed. This form communicated that their identities would be kept fully anonymous. Participants were given pseudonyms in the form of city names by which they will be referred in this report. This form also asked permission to record interviews. Interviews were recorded both on a video camera and on an app for voice memos. Following each interview, these recordings were uploaded and transcribed using the software Temi. Both recordings and transcripts were privately stored and will be deleted following the completion of this project.

I used a semi-structured interview instrument to help guide interviews and maintain consistency throughout them. This guide consisted of twenty questions designed to ask respondents about their perceptions of their neighborhoods and experiences within them. I also inquired about outsiders' perceptions of their neighborhood and what effect, if any, it had on them. After all the interviews were completed, I used the software NVIVO to carefully analyze and code transcripts to identify initial themes. The code words I used were designed to group and classify responses into the categories I used to make sense of the existing literature. Once these codes were identified and sorted, I used a visual map⁴ to draw connections between them. These connections eventually formed the basis of my findings.

Participant Demographics

Prior to each interview I requested that participants fill out a brief demographic survey although some chose not to provide certain information. These gaps were filled in through the

⁴ See Appendix B

information reported during interviews and through inference in some cases. The categories used to distinguish between participants are race, age, gender, education level and income.

Participants are also classified based on the neighborhoods they currently live in. The research sample included eight women and seven men. The majority of participants were Black although one identified as white, two as Latinx and two as multiracial. There was a wide range of ages represented, from twenty-one to over fifty, the most represented group. The levels of income reported in the demographic survey ranged from an annual income of less than 10,000 to more than 100,000. Participants were residents from a variety of neighborhoods in t

he Twin Cities, including Webber-Camden, Marcy Holmes, Folwell, Uptown, Phillips, McKinnley, and Brooklyn Center. These neighborhoods and their demographic data are listed below. The table shows that the neighborhood participants were from areas with either high proportions of people of color, high crime, low income or a combination of these factors. These demographics illustrate the differences between the neighborhoods under study and the state of MN.

Demographic Data

Name	Neighborhood	Age	Race	Gender	SES
Agra	Phillips	18-25	Black	Male	40k
Amalfi	Mckinley	Young	Black	Female	Mid
Cairo	North	26-33	Black	Male	76-100k
Calais	Brooklyn Center	21	Black	Male	Low
Cordoba	Webber Cambden	51+	Black	Female	Low
Denver	Webber Cambden	40-50	Multi-racialHispanic White	Male	26-50k
Ibiza	Webber Cambden	Young	Black	Female	Mid
Madrid	Webber Cambden	51+	Black	Male	Less than 10k
Milan	Webber Cambden	51+	Black	Female	Low
Monaco	Webber Cambden	51+	Black	Female	Low
Mykonos	Marcy Holmes	40-50	Multi-racialBlack	Male	100k+
Nairobi	Folwell	51+	Black	Female	Low
Odessa	Webber Cambden	51+	Black	Female	Low
Tokyo	Webber Cambden	18-25	Black Hispanic	Male	76-100k
Vienna	Phillips	51+	Black	Female	100k+

Findings

The findings of this study are split into two main sections. The first provides the necessary background on the processes through which communities of color were constructed and the material conditions within them. Nearly all of the issues discussed in this report can be traced back to structural racism and the discriminatory policies and practices of residential segregation. This is an important starting point for the analysis of respondents' experiences with circumstances in their neighborhoods, including the high levels of crime.

By developing a greater understanding of this background, it will be possible to better illustrate the ways residents' identities were shaped through exclusion from white spatial imaginaries and belonging to the communities in which they lived. In this section, I discuss the ways residents are impacted by the conditions and local ideologies within their neighborhoods, as well as the dominant discourses surrounding them. Following an examination of how each of these structural aspects frames residents' self-narratives, I suggest that individuals have agency over decision-making and the negotiation of their identities within these contexts.

The Physical Structuring of Space

Structural Racism

Issues of race and racism underlie this entire project. It is clear from past literature that racial stereotypes and discrimination played an instrumental role in shaping the lives of people of color by excluding them from certain spaces and segregating them into what are often referred to as 'inner-city neighborhoods' (Wilson 1998; Sharkey 2008; Lipsitz 2011). These are areas with high levels of disadvantage, crime, and high proportions of people of color. These neighborhoods did not come about naturally but were deliberately constructed. Residential segregation was

designed and implemented through policies and practices such as redlining, housing covenants, and homeownership loans. Not only did the government channel people into different areas, it heavily invested in white neighborhoods while excluding people of color from these opportunities (Sharkey 2008).

Participants' responses explain that racism plays a major role in structuring people's lives. It separates them on the basis of skin color, creates assumptions about them, and privileges the lives of some while disadvantaging others. It operates at multiple levels, impacting people's lives through systemic discrimination, as well as through their everyday interactions. Many of the people I talked to throughout this project had experiences with racism, although each in different ways. *Milan*, an older Black woman who has lived in Webber-Camden for thirteen years explained:

“Racism has always been prevalent in my life. I've never not seen it any other way. So some people claim they don't see it, but it's been here all my entire life.”

Participants discussed the historical roots of contemporary disparities. According to *Madrid*, a Black man who grew up in Minneapolis in the sixties and moved back to Webber-Camden after more than twenty years in prison:

“History...tells who gets oppressed ... this situation we're living in is by design... it's by design. I mean, when you take and you end slavery and you talking about, Hey, don't never let them have no more than one half, 1% of the nation's wealth.”

He added that there needs to be a redistribution of wealth throughout the country to create equal opportunities for people of color to succeed. *Mykonos*, an older Black man who lived in several other Minneapolis neighborhoods prior to moving to Marcy Holmes five years ago, told me about the barriers that exist for people of color:

“...you have to be twice as good to be viewed as, you know, as half, as, as competent, you know, as your colleagues. Um, and, and my dad would always tell me, he's like, he's like, you're in, you know, fourth, fifth grade, you're already reading at a college level. He's like, he's like, but they won't care about that if you're not turning in your work and you're not like answering questions

and you're not, you know, completely polite and completely. So there is a weird sort of subservience, I think that probably goes into that is maybe indoctrinated into you.”

Odessa, an older Black woman who moved from Chicago to Webber-Camden thirteen years ago added:

“I think about society and every time people of color, except for every time a person black color tries to achieve something in life that you had torn down, kicked down, beat down or killed simple as that.”

These findings illustrate the ways that racial inequalities are produced and maintained through policies and practices. The prevalence of racism shapes the lives of people of color through the discrimination they face as a result.

Segregation and Racialization of Space

The process of segregation discussed above led to the division of space along racial lines, creating two distinct spatial imaginaries each with separate discourses surrounding them. The exclusion of people of color from white spaces resulted in their isolation within disadvantaged communities, limiting their exposure to the people and perspectives outside their neighborhoods. Research shows that neighborhoods are not just physical locations, but symbolic ones that contain racial meanings about who belongs where (Lipsitz 2011). Previous studies describe mainstream society as a white spatial imaginary which is protected through the exclusion of racial minorities (McCann 1999; Calmore 1995). This imaginary is a homogenized public space designed to minimize encounters between whites and people of color (McCann 1999). Multiple participants in my study described experiences with exclusion from white spaces. For example, *Mykonos* described having to pay attention and avoid certain areas:

“...because it was a white working class neighborhood that did not want you there.”

They also mentioned the disinvestment in the areas in which they resided. *Ibiza*, a middle-aged Black woman who moved to Phillips from Chicago as a teenager described:

“I do think it's the system that, that built it that way, like ghettos was creating, um, the government created like redlining. They created the disparity, they created the disinvestment in our businesses. So a lot of it is just created.”

She made reference to isolation as well:

“...the segregation is, um, very stark, um, where I come from, it's like 99% black. It's like you kind of in a bubble, you know, you live in Inglewood. Um, then the only time you run into different races is if you go to the north side, um, whereas kind of like a melting pot on North side. Um, so just like coming from a bubble of like black people and then moving to a place where like your culture, like doesn't exist almost. It's like kind of disturbing sorta.”

Cairo, a young Black man who grew up in several neighborhoods in North Minneapolis, including Phillips and McKinnley, discussed the segregation between the area he lived in and the one where he attended school:

“My neighborhood that I lived in was predominant, I would say like 95% black. My school I went to, it was 95% white. So it was complete contrast. Uh, it was weird though for me, cause like I, well, before I go there, I, so talk about the economics. Like everybody was poor in my neighborhood. Everybody was rich at my school. Like I said, I was on scholarship, the other kids, most of the other black kids, not all of them, but most of them were on scholarship to some degree. Like I was on a full scholarship, but it varied, but most black kids were on some form of a scholarship or minorities, I should say, not just black kids. So yeah, it was like definitely a switch, but yeah, I would say it was pretty stereotypical. people of color in my community, low income, a lot of struggle, government dependency. Like a lot of people were like a lot of single parents stuff like just like broken families and stuff like that. And then at school it was pretty much the opposite.”

This response shows that the process of segregation has led to the creation of two separate spheres with an invisible barrier between them. Because of this, people on both sides have had little experience with each other. *Ibiza* mentioned that she was only around Black people growing up so she wasn't aware of racism. Others explained that the limited exposure they have had to each other is not always positive. *Madrid* explained that his uncle had told him:

“Usually when a white person has their first experience with a black person that they read, remember it's something bad, something bad happened, right? Not that the black person necessarily did something bad or whatever, but it was a bad experience. And then that's what they remember. That's what they know.”

Nairobi told me how her experiences with white people made her distrustful of them for most of her life until she met her daughter's caretaker, a white woman with whom she has had positive experiences with. She said:

“...I've never, uh, allowed one to take care of me or my kids or into my home. Like, so that's big, it's real big. And they kind of, they kinda let me heal. They kind of let me take that breath, you know? ...so I'm very, very grateful, grateful that she came and brought her mother. Yeah. Because it's a healing for both sides. Definitely. It really is. It's it's um, it's, it's definitely a big thing for me. It is that even though it's just the two, but for me, that is like a million.”

These findings support those of past studies which show that racial meanings are embedded within spaces. The exclusion of communities of color has created a divide between them and mainstream society, resulting in a lack of exposure and a sense of distrust between them.

Neighborhood Conditions

There are numerous structural issues within disinvested neighborhoods that create the conditions for high levels of crime and violence. These areas are characterized by a wide range of negative circumstances, most prominently a lack of resources, issues in education, and the silencing of community voices and interests. There has been extensive literature on inner-city neighborhoods and the structural disadvantages in place within them. According to Wilson (1998) inner-city neighborhoods are characterized by dislocation, a lack of positive role models, and limited access to opportunities. Additionally, there are fewer networks of neighbors and community institutions to discourage crime. There are also fewer organizations such as churches and schools that link individuals to social institutions. According to Krivo and Peterson (1996):

“Because of the isolation from mainstream society, residents have less access to jobs and less exposure to conventional role models.”

disinvested neighborhoods also create challenges in schools (Brooms 2015) and disproportionately channel people into jails (Krivo and Peterson 1996). Past studies have also shown that spatial exclusion leads to limited access to the job market (Sriskandarajah 2019).

Additionally, because the voices of these communities are marginalized, their interests and concerns are overlooked or ignored (Sriskandarajah 2020).

Participants described many of the barriers referenced in previous studies. *Ibiza* discussed the food disparity and the lack of job opportunities within the community, as well as parenting issues:

“I do think there is a food disparity. There is that education gap where, um, kids are failing out of school, they turn to gangs, they turn to drugs, they turn to fast money. Um, there is that element of teen pregnancy. Like there is jobs that are not close by, like, you know, where all the jobs. So it's like, it's hard. I can't, I have a car. I can go to Amazon 20 minutes away and to go to work. But shorty on the block, he ain't got no car, you know, he gotta go whatever's around here is just not paying enough anyways. So they would have to travel somewhere to get a livable wage. Um, then there's like the parenting aspect of, are you watching your kids? And they're all mom gotta go to work. You know, dad is not around, you know, these it's like a societal issue more than it. It is like case by case.”

She also emphasized the ways the educational system creates barriers for people of color:

“I think, uh, the system, like it's like, it's set up for like, I think black kids to fail. Um, they want to say, you know, black kids so hard. Um, They fight too much or they talk back too much or they, um, they can't pass this test, so they must be dumb. But, you know, uh, and I I'm strong believer that these standardized tests work against us.”

Multiple participants noted that their voices are not being heard and their interests are not being represented. As *Odessa* explained:

“...in certain areas all of a sudden infrastructure is down. they won't cut the grass, take out the trash. and unless you go to town hall meeting and voice your opinion nothing gonna happen bc of the color you are. they don't care bout you.”

Ibiza added that they have to fight to be noticed:

“I don't like the way we have to keep fighting for like to be noticed. Like I have to go into meetings and talk to mendi, or I have to talk to the city of Minneapolis about something that they have disregarded when they know we've been asking for these things for years.”

Agra gave a specific example of the conflicting interests of the community and the city:

“...right now there's a back and forth between the community members and the city based on this huge site, that's called roof Depot because the city wants to bring in a trucking facility and do shipping and cargo and train truck drivers. And the community want to build a sort of community space, a farm, another type of farm that hasn't hydroponics and aquaponics. And in addition to that affordable housing and different community gathering places.”

The issues described above are less prevalent in white neighborhoods due to the higher degree of investment in those spaces. As *Ibiza* put it,

“they definitely take care of white people's neighborhoods better, and they tend to have good jobs and, you know, better resources and things like that. So they don't have to resort to crime”

These findings suggest that the increased rates of crime in communities of color is a result of the negative conditions that exist due to the disinvestment in these areas.

Crime Rates

Nearly all participants in my study noted the presence of crime, although they differed in their conceptualizations and reactions to it. When I asked about the levels of crime in their neighborhoods, many acknowledged the presence and perception of crime in North Minneapolis. However, they argued that crime has been increasing everywhere lately, not just on the Northside. Participants identified two major contributors to the increased crime rates, the murder of George Floyd and the pandemic. They also discussed issues with policing and the need for alternative methods of crime reduction. Participants agreed that there are high levels of crime in Northside Minneapolis. However, as *Agra* noted, the Northside has high rates of crime compared to other parts of the state but it is relatively safe compared to other parts of the country:

“We're in this interesting state of crime in Minnesota over the last two years has increased significantly. And because MN is so small in Minneapolis, there's a lot of people that everyone knows that unfortunate things are happening. Or even in some cases like random acts of violence, but in the grand scheme of statistics, it's still not even top 50 crime spot. Like it's a relatively, extremely safe space, but just like in any city, there's one place that can be dangerous. You just have to be aware, but it's not that... You could be relatively Okay in almost any spot in Minneapolis, if you're understanding and sort of aware, mind your business.”

Participants described frequent crimes and how they affect residents. For example, *Ibiza* noted the daily presence of crime:

“I think it's a high level of crime. Uh, I can't remember off the bat if something like happened yesterday, there is usually something like every single day. Um, for a while there, there was a lot of just shootings happening all the time. Um, but I mean, you hear sirens all day, every day and you don't know what it's for. If it's a shooting or someone, a car crash, all of those things happen all the time.”

Vienna, a middle-aged Black woman who has lived in the Phillips community for the past twenty years, told me that the crime in the park has made it harder for her kids to use it:

“The challenge is the park, that is the closest that they just spent a million dollars to renovate is also the sign of a lot of shootings. And there was a homeless encampment there that was there to shoot out at noon in the middle of the day. Yeah, so it's things like that. We're like, yeah, we have a beautiful brand new park. I would not bring my kids there without me”

The high frequency of crimes has led to a normalization among residents. As **Denver**, a white male who has been living in Webber-Camden for about ten years described:

“Yeah, so there's murders and some of them are bad. There was a kid walking out of a convenience store that got shot in the head. And, um, he was a customer that i knew, um, a kid came into the market last week wearing a Bulletproof vest. Like it was no big deal. Like this is just normal life and nobody's said anything or looked at him or anything. It's just like, oh, that makes sense. Of course it does.”

Tokyo, a young Black man who moved to Webber-Camden several years ago from the Bronx area of New York explained that you just need to be cautious:

“It's crazy everywhere right now. Like, I feel the same, you know, like I don't, um, I always, I grew up always watching my surroundings no matter where I'm at. I'm always vigilant about where I'm at and what's going on. So that doesn't change.”

According to **Mykonos**, the levels of crime vary from block to block:

“...it can be problematic from, from block to block and it's just, you gotta do your research and, and, and, and find a place that, that makes sense.”

These responses suggest that although crime is prevalent everywhere, the structural deficits within communities of color lead people to turn to crime more frequently in these areas.

COVID-19

The strain of the pandemic exacerbated the negative conditions that were already present within communities of color, especially for children. Some studies have suggested that the circumstances of the pandemic led to a decline in community-based organizations, which contributed to an increase in crime (Glazer and Sharkey 2021). The responses from participants

support this finding. Participants suggested the pandemic led crime rates to rise primarily because it removed many of the support systems for children. *Agra* explained that the combination of having no money and having nothing to do pushed kids to turn to crime:

“...But in general, it's the younger kids. And I think that has to do more so with, so I'd say, I would say after the unrest, the reason it hits so hard is the timing you had everyone stuck in a house for months at that time two. If you're a teenager, especially in high school and you had a lot of stressors at home or say little siblings that you have to deal with, you took away one, their social bubble. They couldn't go to malls. They couldn't go to the movies. It couldn't go to school. And a lot of times when they go to school, that's the one time they can act their age. Once they're home, they're being a parent, they'd been an adult, they'd be in the provider. So you take away their literal social environment and social world three, if they're already like struggling in school, you took away their support and help to actually meet the teacher four, even though there's like the free wifi, it doesn't work well at home learning doesn't work well for majority of people. And then in addition to that, they're losing their jobs because jobs are shutting down and they're competing with mostly adults who have lost their jobs and have much more experience than them. So now what do you do if you're like 15, 14, 16, 20, 21, 22, it's just like you sort of turn to the streets and other ways to make money or start doing things with the group you are going to be out with...”

Amalfi described this issue similarly and noted the negative impacts of budget cuts:

“...we found out that, uh, a lot of youth jobs got cut from the budget or from whatever, from the certain programmings, which to me, I felt like it was the worst thing they could have did because you've got all these kids who have already been stuck in the house, you know, for a year. And then the opportunity they have to make money and put money, like real money in their pockets, safe money in their pocket, they cut it. You know what I mean? For whatever reason. And I felt like that was the worst thing that government and city and, and organizations could have did. And so a bunch of neighborhoods are actually trying to work together to figure out how do we pay people for time? How do we get kids involved in the neighborhood, um, to one, take pride in community, but give these kids something to do. Right? So like, I pay my kids out of there, out of my pocket because this gets them out of the house. It gets them active and it gets them helping people. And hopefully they see value in that, but not everybody can do that. Like I know that people can't be like, okay, I'm gonna give my kids 40 bucks to go help or go help for a couple of hours. People can't do that. But if organizations can do it in spite of all of the funding getting cut, I think there's value in that because they need something to do and they need money in their pocket. We can't ask these kids to like, I'm not going to ask my own kids to give me a whole day worth of time and not giving them nothing. Like I get, I volunteer a lot, but I'm an adult and I have a job. I have, I make jewelry. I make money. But yeah, you can't ask these kids, these kids are hungry. They don't have stuff”

These responses show that the structural disadvantages within communities of color were aggravated by the pandemic, especially for children. It reduced the avenues for making money

successfully and removed the activities that kept them busy. This led to a situation where kids were desperate for money and had nothing else to do, leading some to turn to crime.

George Floyd

Many participants described the relationship between race and crime, noting the racial disparities in sentencing policies as well as the over-policing of minority groups and neighborhoods. Much of this conversation took place in the context of George Floyd's murder and the unrest that followed. This unrest led to increased levels of crime, not just in communities of color but throughout Minneapolis as a whole.

Nairobi discussed past incidents of police brutality and the sentencing of Derek Chauvin:

“So really they have just like the did that boy pulled that boy over. We could not put them trees in our cars. Come on. Just racial profile right there. We didn't have a name for it. We just automatically knew went back on way to Rodney king. We watched them, beat him than death on the ground. But did they charge you? No. That's why Derek, whatever his name is. This is history.”

Odessa added:

“but there's two sides to the police. they not all bad but most are. That George Floyd thing was a fluke there's no way he gets 22 years but if it was a black man?”

Vienna described the increases in crime that followed the unrest:

“...So you know, last summer, there was a National Guard 20 troops rolling down the street. So yeah, it was it was nuts. It was like insane. It got so bad. That we it's so volatile, that we sent our kids to the suburbs with friend. And my husband and I were just like we're holding down the fort with the neighbors. Yeah. And I think that there's just even the protests that were uptown ... and then I think since the social unrest, things have been a little bit more dicey. Yeah. And then the pandemic too that changes.”

These responses show that the criminal justice system is structured to privilege white people and harm people of color both through police practices and sentencing policies.

Policing

The stereotypes linking race and crime have led to discriminatory practices in policing such as disparities in arrests and over-surveillance of communities of color (Mitchell and Caudy

2015). Due to these issues, there has been a push for community policing rather than formal institutions of control. For example, *Agra* discussed the lack of relationship between the police and the community and the creation of community programs for crime reduction:

“...lack of relations with actual community members and police officers. That's one of the things the, the (???) grant sort of tried to focus on and we were doing extremely well until then, but as time progressed, things got bad. What the social unrest and the killing of George Floyd, things just got increasingly worse and worse. And that's something we're trying to look at revisiting. What does that relationship look like again, but also understanding that it could be very stressful. The intention of the grant in general was to; One, increase collective efficacy as a little earth community. Two, build a better relationship, more positive and consistent relationship between formal structures of social control, that being in schools, courts, police. And sort of with that in mind, um, figuring out like the placing something like peacemaking a community-based I would say a community-based conflict resolution programming, understanding that's already based in native American context. Okay. With ‘circle’ before things escalated to officers. So I'm trying to deal with things internally, before bringing in external people.”

Cairo explained that he was more afraid of the police than he was of the crime in their neighborhoods:

“I think it was probably 50/50 for me, like times growing up and I felt unsafe between like just like regular civilians shooting at each other. And I'm just there or like police officer, like pulling us over or like stopping me as a kid, walking on the street for no reason. Like that's more terrifying cause I'm like, well, they're trying to kill each other and I'm here and that's scary. But like if I get away from that, I should be good police officer, like just targets you. Like, there's nothing you can do about that. They have all the control and the power. So like, those were like, honestly, if I think back to the scariest moments where I like felt fear for real, the top times are probably police involved, to be honest”

These responses show that the police are perceived as more of a threat than a source of safety.

Safety

Most participants explained needing to take precautions given the high levels of crime in their neighborhoods, although they differed in terms of their overall feelings of safety. *Vienna* explained feeling increasingly unsafe recently:

“I think this last year has been extremely challenging. And it is a deep consideration for us. Just kind of like, honestly, mental health, and it is deeply stressful, to kind of be on high alert all the time. And, again, I think about we have the luxury of moving. Everyone doesn't have that. So then then it's almost like you're, you're sacrificing your mental health, your physical well being, and all those things. One, because we can afford to do that again. For us right now. We're making the choice because we are committed, but you know, given everything that's happened, you know, for us, it's it might be this season is ending. Yeah. And we just want to live a quieter life.”

Others such as *Milan*, *Amalfi*, and *Tokyo* stated that they didn't feel afraid but were still cautious. They explained that people in the neighborhood need to be alert at all times, and take certain precautions like not walking alone at night. For example, when I asked Amalfi how she felt in the neighborhood she responded:

“Pretty safe. I mean, but I think when you grow up northside you don't take any unnecessary risks.”

Vienna echoed this idea:

“If safety is I feel like I can walk around by myself. certain times a day. Make Yes, like, right now, it's fairly light out. I'm probably fine to just walk around, you know, I wouldn't do that by myself at night. I wouldn't do by myself, you know, even 6am in the morning.”

Others felt comfortable in their neighborhoods. For some, this was because they were used to it and knew how to navigate high-crime neighborhoods. *Milan* explained:

“You learn how to carry yourself where people learn not to mess with you. And, and, and I don't think it's about looks. I think it's how you carry yourself. Yeah. And, and you have to have a tough demeanor and you can never have show fear. Yeah. Yeah. You have to convince yourself. You're not even afraid that if you got to go there. Yeah. Because people can smell fear and then you become a target.”

For others such as *Nairobi*, the feelings of safety came as a result of belonging to the neighborhood.

“Well, for us, a lot of people know of the twins. Cause we used to walk. So we were pretty safe or pretty safe.”

Tokyo mentioned this as well, suggesting the importance of community:

“It definitely wasn't the safest place to grow up. But, uh, I don't know. There's a huge like community element to it that people don't really like know unless you're from there. Like yeah, people do. Like, I think there's a lot of violence and there's a lot of crime, but if you know everyone and people know that you're not involved in that, no, for the most part you can stay pretty, pretty cool. keep your head above water.”

According to *Amalfi*, intentionality plays a big role in safety. She said:

“...but again, I think when, when you're intentional, it really plays a part. Um, cause people have said even being here, being here by myself, being here, um, we ran it as a gift shop for a little while and everyone's like, why aren't you worried being there alone? And I'm like, no. Cause I

talked to everybody. Yeah. Um, if I do see a youth, which a lot of people say that most of the violence is the youth. If I do see a youth hanging out or someone where I get a weird feeling, I talk to them and I say, how you doing? Do you need anything? Because I feel like when you communicate and you interact with people, they'll they'll think twice about if they were going to do something bad. Yeah. Cause there was a woman that was here that got robbed three times by the same kid, but she treated him like crap and she was very rude and very like disrespectful. And I think that kid thought it doesn't make it right. Yeah. But I think that kid was like I got one up on her. So yeah. How you treat people is definitely Yeah. Key.”

This shows that when you treat people with respect rather than assuming the worst, they are more likely to reciprocate and respond positively. Participants' perception about the level of safety was strongly influenced by their sense of belonging to a community and was fostered through increased interaction with the neighborhood and its residents. Those who were more involved in their community, those who interacted more with their neighbors had a higher degree of trust in the neighborhood and felt safer as a result. This suggests that despite the challenges in disinvested neighborhoods, the community can also provide a sense of safety depending on how residents choose to engage with it,

Perceived and Lived Space

The previous section on the physical structuring of space outlined the impacts of racism on the policies of segregation. This process excluded people of color from white spaces, isolating them in communities with high levels of disadvantage and crime, thus shaping their experiences and limiting their choices. In this section, I will describe how exclusion from white spaces fostered a sense of belonging to their communities. Residents negotiate their identities both within the context of their neighborhoods including the circumstances and ideologies within them, as well as through the public perceptions of those spaces and the people within them. Both small-scale ideologies and societal ones impact the way they view their communities and themselves.

Exclusion and Belonging

According to (Sriskandarajah 2019) an individual's sense of belonging is framed by inclusion or exclusion. Research shows that white spaces are marked by exclusion (Lipsitz 2011; Calmore 1995). Participants mentioned feeling over surveilled in white or affluent neighborhoods and feeling out of place. *Ibiza* explained:

“...I think you feel a little bit like, uh, you stick out like a sore thumb and you feel sometimes you feel watched sometimes you feel like, um, like the people around you don't trust you or do you know, they singling you out, you know? I also feel even like the way that I speak or the way that I dress or, you know, the way I wear my hair, you know, it's a problem, you know, it's like, uh, it's foreign to them. You know, you treat it like it's foreign, you treat it like it's unfamiliar, you uncomfortable around things. You don't understand, you know, stuff like that.”

Several respondents worked outside of their neighborhood in predominantly white places which made them question whether they belonged there. For example, *Tokyo* stated:

“Work? Okay. Yeah. I mean, it goes back to like seeing people who look like me, you know, like to me that makes me feel more at home rather than, and again, it's not their fault, but we just didn't grow up the same. We didn't have the same culture. We don't have the same culture. No, we don't look at life in the same light, which is not a bad thing, but I'd rather, I don't want to trade that for people who do have the same experiences. ...Like you go to like conferences or workshops or whatever. It's just like, you see people that don't look like you and then it's like, you know, you felt like, you don't belong there.”

“...it's a, it's a tough thing to navigate, but like me saying, I like, I don't belong is just because there aren't enough people who are like me, so when I get there, it's like, like, do I really belong here? Like how, why am I here? Just kind of situation. Like, I don't really want to speak, you know? And I just like, like that, you know, but in the bronx or even here. Like, it was like, I know I belong. Like, you know, person over there. That looks like me person over there looks like me. And you know, like at the end of the day, like we're trying to do the same thing. Right. Which is better our lives better, our families.”

Mykonos mentioned having to quit a job because of the atmosphere that he detected. The surveillance that residents encountered in white spatial imaginaries led them to form deeper attachments to their community.

Belonging informed participants choices to live in communities with people who looked like them and had similar experiences despite the barriers that exist there. As *Vienna* explained:

“My husband and I feel called to this community. You know, part of that's our faith. Part of that is being people of color with children of color.”

“You know, sometimes the choices we make are, you know, would you rather live in a community of color with that set of challenges, or live in a white sub suburb that has a different set of challenges? And so I think that for people of color, you're gonna get something no matter where you go, there's no comfort. So you kind of pick your poison.”

Mykonos explained wanting to live somewhere that reflected who he was:

“I mean, I like it. Like, I like seeing people who look like me, like I go to work and not to their fault, but little to, no one looks like me, so, and that's not their fault, but that's why I wanted to live somewhere that reflects who I am, because it's easy to lose yourself if you're not around that environment.”

Tokyo expressed feeling connected to the people in his community because of their shared experiences:

“Yeah. I mean, in the couple of years that I've lived here, I've lived here. Like, um, I dunno, I guess it's difficult for me because like I'm older now. And so growing up, like if you would have gone to high school here or whatever, you know a lot more people. Yeah. I don't, I don't know people from that standpoint, but I do feel connected from the, like the root of like the pain and the understanding of the circumstances.”

Agra explained that the circumstances in the neighborhood created a communal culture:

“I would say the culture, there's always a, and that's probably a positive thing is there's a more communal culture when people that are quote unquote struggling together.”

Additionally, participants agreed that along with feelings of belonging came a sense of safety.

As **Cairo** described, people from his predominantly white suburban school were scared to come to his neighborhood to hang out, but he said that as long as they were with him, they'd be safe:

“I have friends from my private school that were scared to come to my neighborhood just to hang out. And I was like, yo, it's not like that. Like as long as you're with me, you're good. Now somebody might press you if they don't know you. But like, you know, it's not like you walk outside and somebody like in your face with like a strap or something. Like, it's not like that at all.”

Ibiza explained her community provided protection, however, the challenges still pushed her to leave:

“Like I belonged to that church that I grew up in, you know, um, those families that cooked for me, um, those people, when I felt like danger, they protected me. Um, I, we lived me and my family lived in the drug Lord's house. Um, and so it was like, we go outside people dealing drugs,

but it's also like some safety built into that too. Um, there's like financial stability built into that too, Like, it was like all these layers of, you know, community built into like where I come from. Um, yeah. I feel like deeply connected to it”

“...would I return to it? no. it was very dangerous. Very, um, there's a lot of like disparity in those places. That would be hard to return to.”

This shows that although the neighborhoods participants were from could at times be dangerous, the sense of community that was built into them increased residents’ safety.

The Pressure to Belong

The desire to belong can lead to a rejection of large-scale norms and an acceptance of community ideologies. Participants in my study also noted that belonging to one group or area can mean exclusion from the other. Choosing to distance oneself from the neighborhood or going down different paths than others can lead to exclusion from their own community or community members. *Cairo* mentioned that when his friends began going down a path that included more criminal activity, a path that he didn't choose to follow, he experienced exclusion from the friend group.

“And we kind of grew apart a little bit because they started taking like a path more conducive with like a certain lifestyle, like more crime invested, like doing stuff of that nature. Nothing too crazy for the most part. But like, I don't know, like there was times where they'd be like.... ‘oh you can come with us’.”

He also described the experience of being part of two worlds⁵, his neighborhood which had a set of local norms, and his school which was aligned with the larger scale societal norms. He explained that because he belonged to each scale, he stood out in the other. This led him to feel the need to overcompensate to prove himself.

“...there was a lot of like growing pains with it because I think that was one of the reasons why I told you I got into some bad situations, Time or two. And I think it was because I was always like, felt like I had to prove myself that like, I wasn't like some suburban, like preppy kids. Cause just cause I went to a private school, like I'm still from here, uh, or from my neighborhood. So I try to do things to like fit in with some of my friends that I had known, like growing up with.”

⁵ Or *scales* using Bauder’s (2001) framework. This concept will be operationalized later.

This shows how the desire for belonging can shape people's choices, such as the decision to be loyal to their friends. *Agra* explained that most teens would do anything to keep their friends and belong, even if that leads to negative consequences:

“There's that there's also usually to a lot of people, the presence of gangs and yes, that does happen. And I will say that that's even associated with belonging and always has. But to teens, that can be just like, well, yeah, I hang out with that and yes, this happens, but now something pops down and these are my actual friends. If I'm not a gang or not, you kind of have to choose, I'll be loyal to my friends and possibly get labeled or do I do X, Y, and Z and leave and then lose that even though they may actually be friends or family members. but I was okay at 15, 16, 17 being like, I could be a loner for now for three months because things will naturally happen. And those friends looking for a place trying to tell majority of teens that they would do anything to keep those friends.”

Both *Cairo* and *Agra* were able to distance themselves from their friends but they explained that many people would instead choose to stick with their friends even if that meant going down a path less conducive to success.

Belonging can also impact people's lives through the way outsiders view and label residents. According to *Agra*, oftentimes belonging can mean being viewed as dangerous by outsiders. Groups of friends can be labeled as gangs, but kids would rather be loyal to their friends even if that means getting labeled than risk losing them.

“...because we're sort of in a culture where anyone with a group of friends and they like get a name and general like a little click. Yeah. And if you don't know, like if you don't know the terminology or this it's literally a gang to any outsider.”

As I will discuss later, the labels attached to people, teens in particular, can negatively affect their own self-perception, which in turn impacts their choices and life paths. These responses suggest that the exclusion from spaces outside of the neighborhood leads residents to form deeper attachments to their communities and those within them. This sense of belonging can positively impact residents by creating a communal culture and an enhanced level of trust and safety. At the same time, however, the pressure to belong can also negatively impact people's choices.

Community

It is clear from the existing literature that the places people live shape their identities (Bauder 2001; Sriskandarajah 2020). My findings suggest that the conditions, local ideologies, and the influences and interactions residents encounter within their neighborhoods all play a role in shaping their lives. Each of these factors has the potential to negatively impact residents' experiences, choices, and perspectives, however, there is equal potential for the community to mitigate these effects. The literature on disadvantaged neighborhoods focuses almost exclusively on the negative aspects, however, there is little attention given to the ways in which residents counteract these elements. My findings illustrate the role intentionality plays in creating a strong community that improves the structural circumstances.

Limiting Circumstances

The material conditions within disinvested neighborhoods can impact residents in a variety of ways. Research shows that people's environment influences their life outcomes (Gould and Brent 2020). A foundational study by Skrisandarajah (2020) showed that residents associate their life possessions with their surroundings, and that neighborhood conditions inform the way they see the world. The structural issues in disadvantaged areas shape residents' lives by constraining the opportunities available to them. *Vienna* explained this:

“I think that's what you probably see more here is the effects of poverty and, and the effects that it has on people. And, you know, going back to then your zip code determines your school outcomes and job opportunities, and things like that.”

As *Tokyo* put it, when you live in a disadvantaged neighborhood there are only two routes, it can either motivate you or take you over:

“... there's only, there's to keep it simple. There's two routes that can happen, right. It could either motivate you or take over you, you know? And so a lot of my friends, like, unfortunately, like they got caught up and the life took over them. Right. For me, like the way, like, I just used that to motivate me. Like I don't want to live in that situation.”

According to *Cairo*:

“...the only opportunity you see is like things that can really alter your life in a negative way just by taking that chance.”

He explained that people are forced to do things to survive or provide for their family and because they have no other options. *Mykonos* added that people are pushed to make decisions they probably wouldn't have if there were more resources, opportunities, or role models:

“Um, and again, like I said, when you have a society that is based in inequity, you are pushing a certain group of people who are at the bottom of that socioeconomic ladder to making decisions that they probably wouldn't make. If there were jobs and opportunities and, you know, equitable education and childcare and stuff, you know, after school programs, you know, mentors that could, I could go on and on.”

According to *Tokyo*, it's not always a clear cut choice, sometimes people have to do what they need to in order to survive:

“...before I used to think, like, you always have, I guess a clear cut choice. Like, what are you talking about? But now, like, as I've gotten older, it's like, it's not as clear cut as it's put out to be, you know? Cause sometimes it's you got to do it. Like it goes back to doing what you have to do to survive.”

Vienna also mentioned the school-to-prison pipeline and explained how these issues can lead people to turn to crime. *Milan* also commented on this:

“I blame the system in terms of lack of education goals. And, um, it, if people had goals and a focus, their energy somewhere else, other than crime and guns and, but they're not being educated. So that's a problem.”

Tokyo added that when you're exposed to primarily negative things it can be hard to pivot.

“I mean, it was tough, you know, like to be honest, like sometimes I look back and I'm like, I don't even know, like how I was able to get an education? So it's like, sometimes I look back and I'm like, God I have, no idea. Like how i made it out.”

Vienna noted that growing up in the neighborhood can expose kids to high levels of violence which can impact how they view the world.

“...it does kind of put a different lens on the world for kids. Yeah, that you don't, you lose that innocence.”

Although there are a lot of ways in which the neighborhood can negatively impact residents, it can positively influence them as well. Participants explained that the neighborhood made them tougher, more street savvy. Both *Vienna* and *Milan* explained that you learn to carry yourself where people don't mess with you. As *Amalfi* described,

“I think it makes you harder or tougher. Um, but I also think that you develop a certain sense of compassion for people. Um, cause you maybe understand some of the things they're going through because maybe you've been there yourself. Yes. Um, so I think there's a lot of like shared experiences, um, being in this community. Um, but yeah, I think it definitely makes you, it makes you more streetwise. Um, which I think helps you in the long run when you're an adult in this kinda world.”

These responses show the ways that the conditions in disinvested neighborhoods affect the lives of the people who live there.

Influences, Interactions, and Examples

Neighborhoods also influence people's lives through the behaviors they are exposed to within them. According to Krivo and Peterson (1996), residents model the actions of others. Within disinvested neighborhoods, residents are more commonly exposed to negative examples and have fewer positive role models. This impacts both their perceptions and behaviors. According to *Tokyo*, they start doing the things they see others doing unless they have people around to tell them otherwise. He explained that people are only presented with negative examples in the media.

“...and so usually because all you see other people look like you do, that's similar to when you do, you know, people who sell drugs or steal is because the people around them are doing that. And so when you look at the TV and the only thing, or you look at your life, and the only thing that you'll see people doing is a few things, right? Selling drugs, robbing, um, playing basketball or rapping, you know, and I'm sure there's some other things, but those are like the main four things that I can think of. And when you look at those four things, there's only four options. Everyone else has a pool of I want to be a doctor, lawyer, police firefighter, whatever, you know, and when you grow up a little, there's only four options. for you to look at, and sometimes those options are even eliminated as you're growing up based off of your environment.”

This limited exposure leads people to think those are their only options, whereas people in well-resourced neighborhoods are aware of many different types of lifestyles and believe they have more options as a result. Both *Agra* and *Vienna* described this as a self-fulfilling prophecy.

“In some ways, it can become a self-fulfilling prophecy, that kids growing up, in neighborhoods are challenged. And then sometimes kids fall into those behaviors.”

According to *Amalfi*, kids who grow up in challenged neighborhoods sometimes model the behaviors they see because it is all they know.

“...if all you see is, is gang banging and drugs and prostitution and living like really poor quality of life. You think that's all, you can amount to, you know.”

Agra stated that a lot of kids don't have the necessary support systems at home to succeed so they become susceptible to the negative influences around them. For that reason, *Amalfi* is intentional about making sure her kids see positive examples such as Black people owning businesses, rather than just the unfavorable influences they see in the neighborhood.

“So even though I've, I've been very intentional about making sure that they see positive influences, they see black men owning businesses, they see black women owning businesses and they, they do a lot of community work. Like they still get, you know, people smoking weed on the corner or across the street. And then you've got people, kids sneaking weed in the school. You got like, people think guns are cool. So there's still a bunch of outside influences that comes with the neighborhood.”

This suggests that people, especially kids, model the behaviors they see in others. When all they see are bad examples, they start to fall into this behavior. In order to prevent this, it is necessary to expose kids to positive role models as well. Although disinvested neighborhoods expose kids to a lot of negative behaviors, the community can also positively influence them through increased accountability. This is something that is not discussed in the past studies I have encountered. According to *Amalfi*, kids need positive role models and people holding them accountable which is something that the community can provide.

“...but with that it's they come up here and they volunteer. They shovel people's snow and mow lawns. They know the elders in the community. People, I go to church with school, with work, with whatever they know my kids so that as they grow up and they're on their own, if they're

making bad decisions, someone's going to call me up and say, Hey, I saw your son on the corner of Broadway. Not doing anything good. You know what I mean? Like I have worked hard to make sure that they have that kind of accountability in the community. And my son even said to me the other day he's I said, well, you be careful. And let me know if, if anything happens or don't get in any trouble. He's like, well, you know everybody. Yep. I do. I've got eyes everywhere. Um, so I think it's neighborhood definitely plays a part, but it can be good and it can be bad.”

Cairo explained that members of the community positively influenced him by keeping him out of trouble.

“No, but like, as I got older, like definitely during high school, like I just saw for the lesson that it was like, my OG's, basically the big homies would tell me like, you don't want to be doing this stuff. Like, especially guys that I knew that were like healthy, involved in like real crime and real activity, they always provided the most wisdom to me like, and that's why I have the perspective that I do. you got a chance to go to college for sports you're in a great school, stay on that path and they'd like keep me out of like certain situations.”

This suggests that even community members who were involved in crime themselves could be positive role models. A lot of the people I interviewed mentioned that they had positive role models, or that they tried to be those role models for others around them. Some participants had children and described their efforts to positively influence them by working to give them better perspectives and a better life. Parents mentioned protecting their kids, sometimes by sheltering them from the violence so they can have happy childhoods. Others like **Odessa** did this by moving away from violent neighborhoods so their kids wouldn't get caught up with drugs and gangs.

Participants in my study noted that children are particularly susceptible to modeling the behaviors they see around them and that this can impact their choices. They explained that in order to combat these effects, it is necessary to expose kids to positive role models and examples so they understand that they have more options than the ones presented to them in the neighborhood. Participants agreed that there were limited opportunities; however, they argued that intentionally engaging with the neighborhood and its residents creates a strong community that holds kids accountable and positively shapes their self-perception.

Community Ideologies

According to Skrisandarajah, (2020) community ideologies teach youth how to interpret their experiences, interactions, and identities. Youth view local ideologies as societal norms and use the messages they receive to articulate their own racial identities. The literature shows that local ideologies become internalized which then impacts people's decisions and values. For example, Bauder (2001) suggests that community-based ideologies teach youth how to interpret their experiences, identities, and relationships to other groups. Both *Cairo* and *Ibiza* explained that to fail is the norm in disinvested neighborhoods. According to *Cairo*, this gets in the way of people's goals.

“I don't think it's like specific choices. I think you're just in an environment where, you know, it's set up for you to fail for lack of a better term. So to not fail is actually like really, really, really tough. And to fail is like the norm, it's a standard. And then by fail, I mean like, you know, end up living a life of crime or going to jail or passing away, you know, like not necessarily actually failing, but just like not achieving what you may have wanted to at like four or five year old or six year olds, you know? But it's tough because there's not opportunity.”

Ibiza explained that when you try to succeed, people are waiting for you to fail:

“I think it definitely, um, yes, it's such like a mind fuck. When you think about it, like you, like, I didn't feel like I could be my full person. You know, you feel like you have to hold this part of yourself back to appease, like other people that are watching you, like either looking for you to fit. It's like they looking for you to fly or fail, you know? Um, and then when you fly something, they didn't expect it. You know, they was actually waiting for you to fall flat on your ass. So it's just like, its like really interested like to think back, you know, face, you know, what I was supposed to do or, you know, like, I don't know. It's like weird. Like you just, you feel like you just, you like somebody is waiting to like add a statistic to the back of your name, you know?”

Tokyo added that it's hard to be the first one to go against the norm:

“...it sounds crazy for someone like, from a disadvantaged community to say, Hey, I'm going to be a business owner. I'm going to open the shop. People even people in your own family are going to look at you crazy like how you're going to do that. Yeah. You know, and it's like, you don't have the people around you who know how to do that. So then as you're going up, what you need to do is find those people.”

The communal culture more strongly influences kids. *Ibiza* noted that the Black community doesn't allow kids to emote so instead they internalize their emotions which end up turning into anger or resentment:

“I think they internalize a lot of that. I think it, I think as a kid, you kind of specifically in the black community, you kind of taught like to show no emotion, um, to respect your elders, don't talk back to your teachers. You know, I think white kids have a different way. White parents have a different way of like teaching their kids things. Um, so the only thing left to do is kind of to internalize a lot of how you feel a lot of, you know, um, what you want to say is kinda left unsaid, and I think it kind of turns into anger or it turns into depression or it turns into like other forms of release maybe.”

These responses suggest that because the cultural mindset is not set up for people to succeed, it can be much harder for people to choose to do something different than what is expected of them. Intentional engagement is necessary to counteract the negative effects of the local ideologies within disadvantaged communities that shape residents' lives.

Trust and Intentionality

The negative conditions within these neighborhoods can lead to a broad level of distrust within the community. *Odessa* noted that trusting people can sometimes end up hurting you and that the neighborhood teaches people not to trust. *Vienna* noted that they trusted their neighbors, mostly because of how well they knew them.

“I would say I trust my neighbors. But again, we have 15 and 20 year relationships. And like, we actually have a homeowner's association board that we all serve on intermittently. So we get to know each other. We have meetings every year, we like to sit on lawn and talk about our challenges. So we have something shared in common that we have to talk about.”

Tokyo agreed that he trusts his neighbors but explained that there's a broad level of distrust due to the fact that people need to do what they have to do to survive.

“Um, I mean, I could speak to that from two different aspects. Right. One is like me, the people who I've interacted with, I feel like there is a level of trust, um, being, you know, my neighbors, but I also know like with different community, like I grew up in a similar community and then I also understand that there's some broader aspect of trust that there is some sort of distrust. Um, well everybody has to, you know, have a place to live, have something to eat. So when you don't have the resources to do that, you have to figure out how to do it on your own. And then that creates a level of distrust.”

According to *Denver*, the level of trust has declined further since the riots and unrest. Trust is closely linked to the quantity and quality of interactions with people. Many participants explained that the distrust is a result of a lack of understanding about others. *Agra* noted that people tend to stick to their bubbles because of a fear of the unknown. This can be especially true across racial and cultural lines.

“There's a lot of, There's a lot of activities, a lot of intersectionality, but also is there still a lot of fear and fear of the unknown? So, and I know specifically at little earth as, um, at times workers, we feel as if like there are walls around little earth, cause it's like the chance of a youth literally going somewhere like three blocks over. If it's not a specific reason, it's not with a group of kids to get support. They're not going to do it. Yeah. So that's always been very interesting and sort of that mentality of staying what you're used to and sort of being in and bubbles. And I think all of these Philips can be like that at times”

Amalfi argued that it was necessary to do the work of interacting with people, building relationships, and creating a sense of community, along with which comes a sense of trust and safety.

“If you're intentional, you, you build relationships with people.”

Amalfi made an intentional choice to live there and raise her kids there.

“I grew up here. I raised my kid. I choose to raise my kids here. And even when I buy a home, I'm choosing to raise them here. Um, but I think it's, it's intention. It's intentional. I've been very intentional on building a sense of community, um, for my kids and for, for myself. So yeah, if you don't, people don't want it, they ain't going to get it. And then they're going to come on the north side and get a bad experience. We have made a commitment to a commitment to living and being in what is traditionally termed as a marginalized community, we've made a choice to be here. And I think that's the luxury that I have. I have the luxury of saying, If I don't want to live there, I can move, most of my neighbors probably don't. Many of my neighbors don't have a choice.”

Vienna also made this decision.

“You know, I think for me, because we, it's intentional, we have made a commitment to a commitment to living and being in what is traditionally termed as a marginalized community, we've made a choice to be here. And I think that's the luxury that I have. I have the luxury of saying, If I don't want to live there, I can move, most of my neighbors probably don't. Many of my neighbors don't have a choice.”

Others were active in the community. These participants all had overwhelmingly positive views about their neighborhood. Nearly all participants agreed that the Northside is a strong community, despite its challenges. As *Madrid* explained, there is a lot of violence but people want to reduce it. *Mykonos* explained that he is involved in the community:

“Um, one of the ways in which I think I interact most, um, is by picking up trash in my community. And I feel like that's important, especially if it's important to do period. Um, it's important to do as a person of color because I need to show the community that doesn't largely look like me, that this isn't my trash, but I'm not above picking it up. Um, not that it's my job, but you know, we're trying to, these are all shared spaces, so we're trying to make these spaces, um, nicer places for everyone.”

Participants explained that community members not only protect and defend each other but the neighborhood's reputation as well. *Milan* described this:

“I feel safe because I know my neighborhood will protect me too. and I can tell if the community is upset, no one's sitting. Right. And so then we're on guard and actually we all protect each other to that level.”

Mykonos added:

“I like to dispel those things. Um, and again, maybe that's because I'm so unbelievably proud and fiercely protective of this neighborhood.”

Amalfi explained that, especially during the pandemic, people came together to help out:

“I feel like the past year has been really, really good with getting, um, with people coming together and offering help like this.”

Participants wanted to improve the neighborhood and push for changes. Many said that's what they loved most about the neighborhood, people with good hearts who want to make positive changes. Others said it made them want to fight harder for the people around them. Nearly all participants said that there are a lot of positives about the Northside that aren't accounted for.

Vienna explained that people only want to focus on the negatives:

“Going back to I feel like there's so many valuable things about this neighborhood in this space, and I wish others valued it as much as I. I'm, like, ask me about my wonderful neighbors. Yeah, ask me about, you know, the gardens that people are trying to plant. And, you know, a block over ask me about the community meetings that we're having. We're sort of remarkably civil in the

community as we're having these discussions about religion. I'm like that sort of like that. But you never get there. Because people can't get past the crime.”

Although the neighborhood conditions can lead to an overall feeling of distrust and make residents feel unsafe, through intentional engagement it is possible to create a strong community that reduces the negative effects of the neighborhood and positively benefits residents' lives. This suggests that community is not inherent, it is something that needs to be built and it takes intentionality to do so. Additionally, by creating alternative narratives about their neighborhoods residents have the ability to positively shape the local ideologies within them.

Dominant Discourses

In contrast to local ideologies which are circulated at the neighborhood level, dominant discourses are the societal representations or public perceptions that surround neighborhoods. These are also referred to as stigmas or reputations (Quillian and Pager 2001; Sriskandarajah 2020; Evans and Lee 2020). These assumptions influence how neighborhoods are framed and conceptualized.

The Stigmatization of Communities of Color

As discussed in the literature review, African Americans and their living spaces are stigmatized as impoverished and dangerous. Neighborhood stigmas are produced by dominant discourses that mark space as safe or not along racial lines (McCann 1999). The exclusion of people of color from white spaces shapes public perceptions of these areas relative to others (Evans and Lee 2020). These reputations are enforced by racial stereotypes that lead areas with high concentrations of people of color to be perceived as dangerous. The literature emphasises that the presence of racial groups triggers spatial stigma which leads to assumptions (Besbris 2015; Evans and Lee 2020) Further, research has shown that racial composition is the most significant predictor of whether an area is stigmatized as dangerous, regardless of actual crime

statistics (Chricos, Hogan and Gertz 2012; Quillian and Pager 2001; Pickett, Chricos, Golden and Gertz 2012).

The responses from my study participants support the finding that neighborhood reputations are shaped by their racial compositions. Many explained that their neighborhoods were viewed as dangerous and impoverished, leading to assumptions about the residents' trustworthiness or education level. Neighborhood reputations are relative to other places. According to *Agra*, the Northside is seen as dangerous compared to other parts of MN but it's relatively safe compared to neighborhoods in other states. Nearly all the participants noted that the Northside of Minneapolis has a bad reputation. This can lead people to avoid the area.

Vienna explained that people don't want to go to the Northside because they think it's a bad area inhabited by dangerous people:

“...maybe more that dangerous things happen here. But I think they're, you know, there is a perception that dangerous people also live here. Yeah. So like, it's where the drug dealers are.”

Agra explained that the inner city is racialized:

“And I would say in general, what it means to be quote unquote from the inner city can be synonymous with being black at times, which it's not, but to the mainstream it is.”

Amalfi and *Denver* both referenced the idea that the perception that Northside is a bad area is directly related to the racial composition. *Cairo* mentioned that some of his friends from school were scared to come over to hang out. *Vienna* said that people in her life outside the neighborhood look down on her choice to live there. Coming from a bad neighborhood can also be viewed as desirable by outsiders. *Cairo* explained that people he went to school with and jobs he applied for took an interest in where he was from:

“Like, I think a lot of white people, for lack of a better grouping, like they are just like, they, like, I know a lot of my white friends, even in college, like they just wanted to be my friends so they can know someone from north Minneapolis, if that makes sense.”

Although this might be seen as something positive, *Cairo* explained that the increased attention in his neighborhood only reinforced the discourses that marginalize communities of color.

Media Representations

The media has played a large role in creating and reinforcing neighborhood and racial stigmas by framing communities of color and their residents as undesirable (Sriskandarajah 2020). Many respondents explained that the increased media coverage of crimes on the Northside perpetuates the idea that it is a dangerous place. According to *Amalfi*:

“I feel like the news, the news only tells the bad stuff. So kids getting shot, uh, people getting robbed, car crashes. That's all that you pretty much here in the news about the north side. So when people say, I think there's just the perception of, I don't want go to the north side because it's dangerous. Well, yeah, it can be. Yeah. But for the people who live here every day, like I can go about my business and you just have to be, I think living here, you just that extra level of cautious.”

She added that the neighborhoods bad reputation comes from the media:

“...it's just ignorance media. We get, you know, we get a bad rep in the media as well. So that's part of the problem as well.”

Agra suggested that all people know is what they see in the news:

“A lot because, um, we could always look at TV and see when a crime was done by a black person. Cause they showed their pic immediately and white people, they still delay it.”

He added that the same thing happened with the protests; people would watch the news and make assumptions which would just further feed a narrative that they already believed in. So the stereotypes get reconfirmed:

“But yeah, like I think it's like a, it's a confirmation bias of just like, people always will use that as an excuse. and being like, see, I told you that area is terrible.”

These findings suggest that the representation of communities of color are not accurate to the lived experience of residents.

Perceptions Versus Reality

Nearly all of the respondents argued that the discourses surrounding their neighborhoods differed from reality. This supports past research that shows evidence of a disconnect between outsiders' perception of neighborhoods and the lived experiences of residents (Evans and Lee 2020). Participants explained that the perceptions about the neighborhood are incorrect due to the lack of understanding of the realities within stigmatized neighborhoods. **Cairo** explained:

“...the perception that I get from what I talked to people from outside of North Minneapolis, or like watching the news or whatever, it's like a lot different than the reality to me.”

According to **Tokyo**, this is because people haven't experienced what things are like within the communities they make assumptions about.

“that perception is in place because it's, they haven't experienced that life. Like it's like, like the way I look at it, if you're going to speak on someone else's life you gotta live it first and then you can speak on that.”

Amalfi explained that everyone thinks it's dangerous and it can be, but for the people that live there, they just go about their business. you just have to be extra cautious. People assume that everyone who lives there is involved in crime, but the majority of people in 'bad neighborhoods' are just trying to survive. **Vienna** mentioned that Phillips is seen as one of the worst neighborhoods in Minneapolis which saddens her because that's not what she sees. She said:

“I see people who go to work every day. I see people who raise their kids. I see people who have family values. And I see people who care about the crime and the beauty”

The people who live there have generally positive views of their neighborhoods. They see the potential and they are frustrated by the challenges and the negative perception their neighborhoods face. According to **Vienna**:

“I like my neighborhood. I do. I like my neighbors. I mean, I appreciate so many things about this neighborhood. And I get frustrated with the perception of the neighborhood. I get frustrated with the lack of resources. I get frustrated with perception. Going back to I feel like there's so many valuable things about this neighborhood in this space, and I wish others valued it as much as I”

Participants who worked outside of the neighborhood explained that people were surprised about where they lived. For example, *Vienna* stated

“I think with me, because of my executive-level roles, they're very confused. Very like, like, I don't get you in your role living where you are it's incompatible. And then I would say, if I am, if I were an immigrant or things like that, I feel like it gets very stereotypical.”

This suggests that the Northside is also stigmatized as low-income and unsuccessful. *Cairo* mentioned that people outside the neighborhood were impressed because he made it out:

“I have a whole conversation with somebody about whatever business, for the most part. And then at the end of it, I was like, oh, so tell me more about yourself, all from north Minneapolis. Then it's looked at in a good way. It's like, oh my gosh, you made it out of that. And you're able to, but that's, but one thing that I've learned about being from, or being a part of two different communities is that at the end of the day, stereotypes don't work. If people actually know you”

This response suggests that in order to improve the public perceptions of communities of color there needs to be a better understanding and representation of the realities within them.

The Effects of Stigma on Residents

Neighborhood stigma impacts residents through the ways they are treated as a result of public perceptions. Past studies have shown that negative stigmas are not only attached to physical spaces, but to the people who live within them (Sriskandarajah 2020). This influences the ways outsiders perceive and engage with residents, causing them to experience adverse consequences as a result. Studies show that neighborhood reputations are imposed on their residents, leading outsiders to make assumptions about their trustworthiness (Besbris 2015).

Participants described this as an indirect effect of stigma, in that the neighborhood's reputation shapes how people view and treat them. This leads to tangible consequences such as discrimination in the job market. According to *Ibiza*:

“they might assume that you come from poverty. They might assume that you are poor. You have like a lot of crime in your neighborhood, um, that you probably went to a bad high school. Probably not smart enough for this job. Um, you probably, um, uh, like he probably like to make crime. You've probably got some bad like background that we gotta check and stuff like that”

Denver added that employers might not want to hire residents of stigmatized neighborhoods because they think they wouldn't fit in. *Amalfi* explained that they might think they are dangerous or unprofessional. According to *Cairo*, employers may make certain assumptions based on an applicants name or zip code:

“I know that people get overlooked for, you know, their name, for example, you know, or just like ethnicity or like where they're from or how they're able to present themselves in an interview. And it's like, it doesn't actually a lot of those times it doesn't come down to the merit of like how you'd be able to do the job or like how qualified you are for whatever. It just is like, oh, we already are like, nah, we're going to go a different direction because your name kind of talk a certain way from this area. We kinda got, we know, we know you, but we don't know you, but we know you, they think that they know you. And that's where I think he coming, it's just like, oh, north Minneapolis. And that's why people like me, my, my homie's like were we, we rep north Minneapolis every day. You were able to find me on Instagram. Cause I'm posting north Minneapolis, all my. Like, cause it's like, I want to try to like bring back more positive narrative.”

“...if you're from an inner city community and like, you know, you act like you're from an inner city community, people are going to not want to like work with you. They're not going to want to even give you the time of day, because they're already going to have those same stereotypes that they brought into the door with.”

Despite the implications in terms of discriminatory hiring, *Cairo* explained that residents in disinvested neighborhoods don't care about outside perceptions:

“I don't think people in only, I don't want to even just like limit this to north Minneapolis. I don't think people in like low economic communities, inner city or in inner city communities really have a care in the world about what the outside people think it's more so. Just like, I mean, it's, it's real poverty. Like when are you going to get your next meal? Are you going to be able to pay rent at the end of the month? But you don't care what, something like suburban folk opinion is”

He explained that people in disinvested neighborhoods are focused more on the conditions within their neighborhoods than the stigmas surrounding them. However, participants suggested that outsiders' perceptions do impact residents through the ways they interact with them. For example, *Vienna* discussed how her neighborhood's reputation affects how safe people feel when they come to her house and whether or not her daughter's friends will be allowed to sleep over.

“I think it affects things like do people want to come to my house? Because they have perceptions of the neighborhood? Yeah. And you know, how will? How will they feel? Or like you will that you know, people are, you know, scared. Yeah. And you know, things like, you know, I've got my

daughter has a friend who lives in Edina. And it's like, will they want to come for a sleepover? Yeah. You know, we want to do you know, we want to hang a sheet on the house and do outdoor movie. Will they think that's okay. Yeah. And quite frankly, if she came over and we heard gunshots? What do we do. Yeah. I mean, it's those kinds of things.”

Amalfi said that it doesn't affect her but it may impact her sons.

“I don't think it impacts me. I worry about how it impacts my sons. Um, because they are young black boys in America already. They're like, they have a target. And then you say, oh, well, I'm from north Minneapolis. Well, does that make them a bigger target?”

Cairo argued that the stigma doesn't impact one's mindsets but it does affect them indirectly through the way it leads others to treat them.

“I think it, I think it doesn't affect their mindset, but I think it affects them indirectly. Like, so when you have somebody, when a situation arises and it's in a gray area, like there's no grace for black people, right? Like if you get caught up, like, let's say you commit a crime, like an average person, like I don't even know the statistics, but most people commit a crime in their life, whether they get caught or not several crimes. Right. So let's say you get caught for shoplifting a shirt at Macy's like, are you going to get a ticket? And like some community service, or are you going to go to jail for two years? Like, those are the types of effects that has on like, it's like institutionalized, like things that actually affect livelihoods. Now, if it's a man and he has kids now, his kids, fathers, isn't , isn't going to be there for a couple of years. Who knows what happened once you go to jail? You know what I'm saying? Like jail is made and designed to keep you in jail. So it's just a whole system of life. I think it does actually affect people in the community but like the mindset of people in the community isn't like, you know, like people are looking at us certain ways, so we need to- I think it kind of should be more like that. Like, Hey man, like it's hard. It's hard for people to see without having a certain perspective that like the way that we interact and the way that we approach life and the way that we act does actually affect the people who right now have the power in like changing that and like bringing that full center. And this is like a very, very nuanced conversation. But like, you know, there's so many different things that like do need to be changed in my opinion. But I think the attitude of like the outside does have, you know, does have an effect on like how people get treated in our community. Because most people, like I said, they are relying on the government to like survive at this point, right. When we vote on like raising minimum wage or just like livable wages, like people from the suburbs have a say in that, but it's like, it doesn't affect them in the same way that it affects people that actually like need those jobs and are supporting kids and stuff like that. So, yeah. It's like, it's a give and take. It's kind kinda, it's tough to say, but it definitely has an effect on the community.”

Both participants and past studies make it clear that the stigmatization of neighborhoods impacts residents through the discriminatory treatment they receive as a result of outsiders' perceptions of the people who live there. However, I received conflicting responses about the direct effects of stigma. As *Cairo* explained, this is a very nuanced conversation. Because of the complicated

discussion surrounding this question, it is difficult to determine whether and to what extent neighborhood stigma influences residents' identities. However, it is possible to speculate. Many participants explained that they didn't care about outsiders' perceptions of their neighborhood, however, others argued that it does impact people's mindset. Participants also noted the need to improve outsiders' perceptions to reduce the negative consequences residents face because of it. The responses from participants each fell somewhere between the two sides of this dichotomy, suggesting that the impact of stigma likely ranges in effects. According to *Ibiza*, there are also some people that it just doesn't affect as much. This shows that individual characteristics also account for the variation between participants.

The Internalization of Labels in Children

Previous research on neighborhood stigma and its role in shaping residents' identities focused primarily on children and the way they negotiate dominant discourses (Sriskandarajah 2020). The research shows that stigmas can be imposed on youth, labeling them with the negative characteristics attributed to their neighborhood (Keene and Padilla 2010). This suggests that residents, children in particular, need to negotiate their own identities in the context of the ways they are perceived and treated by others. The messages kids receive about who they are can shape their self-perception, which subsequently impacts their choices and the directions they go in life. Many of the people I talked to told me that others' perceptions don't affect them as much now because of their age, but this can be more difficult for children. According to *Agra*:

“And it happens often, but at this point I just laugh. Whereas like for teens, that can be probably a little more challenging because then they have to deal with one how they view themselves and how the world is viewing them. And I think for anyone that takes a lot of self-reflection.”

According to *Ibiza*, kids have so much information nowadays they internalize things they hear about themselves from.

“I do think kids today have like an extreme amount of access to information that they didn't have that I didn't have like growing up, um, like far too much access. And so I do think that when kids learn something about their self, they will act accordingly. Um, it's kind of, I do think it's sometimes it's hard to think above like what somebody puts on you.”

“...kids will do what you call them, you know, they will act accordingly. Yes, I do believe that. Um, I think there are like other things that could, that could happen that could deter him from that path. Um, like some intense, like some sitting down with him and helping him to see it have a different mindset. I do believe it can like change. Yeah. Um, and sometimes It takes like kind of a strong little person to think past those things,”

She added that kids who are struggling in school get labeled as bad kids rather than given the help they need.

“...the system tends to like penalize, like kids that are not getting A's and B's, they tend to hold them back. Um, they tend to put things on their record at a young age. Um, like I have a friend, her son has like, he's only like eight or nine years old and they already have like, um, a strike on his, his, uh, record that he's a bad kid and he's a troublemaker and he fights other children and all these things like the, so that's like another barrier, like you created for a child of color.”

Amalfi explained that once kids are labeled they start behaving even worse. According to *Tokyo* when a kid is told what they can or can't do it's powerful. *Agra* added that when others treat them as dangerous, sometimes they decide to act that way. *Cairo* explained that this goes back to wanting respect:

“On flip side I do the things I don't like about it is just like, you know, we kind of have this attitude of like we fit into the stereotype or we own the stereotype more. So just like, I know a lot of kids nowadays, I feel like I'm getting older, but, um, we just like, you know, they want to, their whole goal is to be that guy that people fear and like they wanna like, you know, just continue to terrorize other, other people and it's other community members. And I hate that. Like, I, I feel like if we use that energy towards like something positive, you know, nothing can stop us, but it's, it's very deep rooted. It. Doesn't just start on the surface with one kid, you know, like this is stuff that's been institutionalized for decades now. So it's not something you can just fix it to snap your fingers. But I do hate that. Like we kind of own that stereotype and like some people like liked it. Like they like to get the glory off of that, but it goes back to me saying like, everybody wants to be respected. Everybody wants to have a purpose that is technically a purpose, you know? And it's just not what I feel like the best purpose for it.”

The message Black kids in disinvested neighborhoods are given by society is that they don't matter. *Mykonos* explained:

“...that sucks to be able to be forced, you know, by society to make those choices, to provide for yourself or to provide for a family and be given the message, you know, that you don't matter and you don't, you know, this isn't for you
Indoctrinated subservience.”

The messages people receive from society become internalized. According to *Madrid*,

“people grow to accept, its human nature.”

Ibiza added that it is hard to think above what someone else puts on you.

“..kids will do what you call them, you know, they will act accordingly. Yes, I do believe that. Um, I think there are like other things that could, that could happen that could deter him from that path. Um, like some intense, like some sitting down with him and helping him to see it have a different mindset. I do believe it can like change. Yeah. Um, and sometimes It takes like kind of a strong little person to think past those things.”

Participants also highlighted the importance of exposing children to positive narratives about themselves to combat the negative things they hear from others. For example, *Ibiza* tries to change the perception others might have about her sons:

“...And I fight every single day to make sure that that's not how they, how they're seen. Yeah. And I usually say it a lot. Like go help that old, old, white lady with her bags across the street or hold the door. Because the more that people who don't look like, see these boys in a different light, maybe society in general, will start seeing them in a different light. But I always say the thing, I have a six year old and now I have teenagers, big teenagers. Right. They're only, they're young teenagers, but they're big kids. So when do they stop being cute? And when are they deemed a threat? Cause my six year old. Oh my God. He's the cutest thing, everybody everywhere. Oh, he's so cute. He's so awesome. Okay. But whens he gonna stop being cute. When, when are you going to start clutching your purse? When you see him walk by, when are you going to lock your car door as they walk past? Like we have to change that. But I mean, that, that takes work definitely.”

She does this not just so others will view them more positively but to build their mental resilience and impact their own self-perception:

“So I mean, but that's part of the reason why I think community is so important because when I see these young kids I speak life into them, so you have to speak life into these young kids because they aren't likely not hearing it. All they see on the news is that they're a threat. You know, cops are threatened by their presence.”

Amalfi described the importance of treating kids with trust and respect instead of as a threat:

“...a lot of people say that most of the violence is the youth. If I do see a youth hanging out or someone where I get a weird feeling, I talk to them and I say, ‘how you doing?’ Do you need anything? Because I feel like when you communicate and you interact with people, they'll... they'll think twice about if they were going to do something bad. Yeah. Cause there was a woman

that was here that got robbed three times by the same kid, but she treated him like crap and she was very rude and very ...like disrespectful. And I think that kid thought it doesn't make it right. Yeah. But I think that kid was like I got one up on her. So yeah. How you treat people is definitely key.”

Ibiza makes sure her kids hear positive things about themselves rather than the negative messages they receive from society:

“And to really be intentional about speaking life into them and saying you're better than this. Because even my kids aren't angels, they get into trouble, but I always tell them you're better than this. You can make better decisions and have better outcomes. Definitely not just you ain't shit and you not Going to be nothing.”

These responses suggest that the degree to which neighborhood stigma impacts residents' identities is predicated on the amount of exposure they've had to alternate narratives. This is an important finding because it shows that because children are still negotiating their identities, they are more susceptible to the messages they receive from others. It is important to combat the negative things kids hear about themselves by treating them with respect and positively shaping their self-perceptions.

Reactions to Stigma

Because children are not fully secure in their identities, they have less ability to react against stigmas. Because the participants in my study were all adults, outsiders' perceptions of them and their neighborhoods had little effect on their self-perceptions. Because of this, they were able to choose to interact with outsiders' perceptions in a variety of ways, some actively fighting to change them and others making a conscious choice to ignore them. Previous studies have shown that people cope with the negative perceptions surrounding their neighborhoods and themselves in different ways. Evans and Lee (2020) suggest that individuals cope by disassociating or resisting. My findings show that rather than disassociating, several participants made an intentional choice not to respond to stigmas. *Agra* explained that sometimes it can sometimes be easier to just accept outsiders' views rather than constantly try to correct them:

“Well, even accepting, let me be clear when I say accepting, accepting it as an outsider's view. So like, let's say a teacher be like, well, that's this. Like, I'm really not that, I'm not, but to the teachers, since you hang out with, and you know, this, you are. And just like, okay, whatever, like, it's literally easier to not argue with someone and just walk away from it and knowing who you are. I think externally when like an external locus of control, it can be very heavy and daunting to where you do have more likely the self fulfilling prophecy popping up because it's not always our job to teach people that are ignorant what's right. And once you, you can teach some, it starts with people you care about, but when you're always trying to correct and teach, people aren't always in a mind space to understand and receive it and learn. So it can be literally pointless. Yeah. So understanding that, and I have to say that within myself and some of the teens, it's just like, it's easier to just accept it and let people be wrong and just take note. than it is to call them out and tried to combat it each time. And then internally, I think there's still a lot of pride.”

Ibiza added:

“Yeah. I think I consider the Headspace that I'm in now is definitely a privilege and it's definitely like a place of growth. Like I think it's a place you have to get to, to reject things that don't serve you anymore.”

Many of the participants in this study explained that the stigma surrounding their neighborhood doesn't affect them as much because they knew who they were. According to **Madrid**:

“...once an individual knows who he or she is, um, there's very little room for infiltration to sway or manipulate the self perception.”

Ibiza supported this by saying:

“I think it don't really affect my identity. I think, uh, i'm past like letting something like that affect my identity. I do realize though that I need to help other people like not have this mindset.”

These responses suggest that the degree to which stigma impacts residents is also partially dependent on how secure they are in their identities. **Vienna** mentioned that sometimes she just avoids telling people where she's from because it's exhausting to always have to justify it:

“Like, specifically people who are for I'll even take people who are in the suburbs of Minneapolis. Once you get to pass the second ring suburbs. It's not even worth it. Yeah, like I will we will actively avoid telling them. and try to not say it. Yeah, we'll just say we live in South Minneapolis. And this is what we're not far from. Yeah, we're just technically true. Yeah. But I think that's a way to stave off like, we get exhausted. Yeah. Having to justify”

Others such as **Milan** just blow it off because people are ignorant:

“I'm trying to think over the years, I'd hear it from time to time. We just, I just blow it off. Cause I, I just look at it. You're really kind of ignorant to say, make those kinds of statements. You can say that about any neighborhood as far as I'm concerned”

Others actively try to dispute the stigmas surrounding their neighborhood in an effort to improve outsiders' perspectives. *Vienna* said that she corrects the perception that it is dangerous so that her guests will feel safe coming over. *Mykonos* does this out of pride in his neighborhood:

“I like to dispel those things. Um, and again, maybe that's because I'm so unbelievably proud and fiercely protective of this neighborhood.”

Cairo also positively promotes his community:

“Like if I'm having a conversation with someone, I actually make it a point to say that because like, I can articulate myself. I can, you know, those things that we were talking about, I think that more so has an effect on how people see you, but let's just say, you know, and this is why, like I wear my durag all the time now. Like I just like do different things. It's like, this is just like, it's not unprofessional.”

These responses suggest that residents can choose to respond against stigma in a variety of ways. The ability to respond against stigma is partially dependent on several factors discussed in this section, including residents' age and their exposure to alternative narratives. For some residents, neighborhood stigma impacted them only through the discrimination they received as a result. or others, children in particular, outsiders' perceptions meaningly shaped their identity formation. This suggests that the effects of stigma are not uniform across residents, however in many cases, it can lead to negative consequences.

Switching Scales

The findings that have been discussed thus far show evidence of the divide between local ideologies and dominant discourses. These levels are referred to by Bauder (2001) as spatial scales. He uses the book “The Production of Space” by Henri Lefebvre as a framework for the idea that ideological structures are represented through space, creating two distinct spatial representations: the small scale of the neighborhood, characterized by local ideologies, and the larger scale such as the city which produces dominant discourses (Sriskandarajah 2020).

According to Bauder (2001) the spatial scale of representation influences the production of marginalized identities.

Exposure to Multiple Scales

My findings suggest that there is an invisible boundary between these scales that keeps communities of color isolated from mainstream society. This limits residents' exposure to different types of life. According to *Tokyo*, some people aren't aware of large-scale norms, they're isolated in neighborhoods. All they know is what they see.

“...because a lot of the time, a lot of the issue is like people who let's say grow up in Webber Camden, or people who grew up in the Bronx or whatever, like that's all they know, you know? And so for them, like, this is the end all be all like this is life. And there's so much more out there, you know? And so when you get to experience that, then you're like, woah, now, that starts to change the decisions that you make in life.”

The awareness of large-scale norms beyond one's neighborhood can both positively or negatively impact residents. Greater awareness of different lifestyles, perspectives, and opportunities can allow people to move beyond what *Ibiza* called a block mentality, however, it can also show them the ways they are disadvantaged. Participants were exposed to large-scale norms and lifestyles in different ways. For *Ibiza* it was through church:

“...when I went to church, I saw like different kinds of black people than I did on the block. I would go to church and I would see black people that was like from Chicago Heights. So they were sort of south Harlem or, um, Richton park. And they had like four homes for their kids. And like, I would go and hang out with those families sometimes. And I'll be like, oh, like yall live with different kinds of lifestyle than what I'm used to in, in the city. Um, and so seeing those like different kinds of lifestyles kind of made me see there's something more to have. Um, and there is a lot more that my mom cannot provide for us. And I think that kind of put that like in my...in my mental...like there's more to achieve, but also my mom was introducing us to, we would go to the lake and Navy pier and we would go to the science museum, the planetarium, like we was the cyber museum. We would go see things outside of like where we stayed, like often.”

Her mother also helped expand her mentality:

“I definitely see how my mother raised us to see different things. I definitely see like how other kids, they weren't exposed to those types of things, like at all. And so they only have a block mentality. They only have like this five mile radius mentality where I have went to, you know, other places and seen, like bigger and better things. And it's like, in the back of my mind, like, this is not where I want to be. Like, no, I don't want to live the roaches.”

For *Cairo*, it was through his suburban school, a place that was a complete contrast from his neighborhood both racially and economically. He explained that when he started getting involved in different things, he realized that it wasn't where he wanted to be. Although this exposure can have positive effects on the decisions people make, it can also show people the ways they are disadvantaged compared to others and make them aware of the stigmas surrounding their neighborhood. *Ibiza* mentioned that she was isolated in her neighborhood growing up, she wasn't aware of the stigmatization of her neighborhood so it didn't affect her. According to *Agra*, once you see all the things that you don't have, you are aware of how others are privileged in ways that they aren't.

“I'm originally from new Orleans and being from there and then the south, the people down there was their happiest when they sorta were lower income and understood and poor is because like, and by people, I mean like the kids, like for myself, I didn't have that sense of like, this was really bad because everyone lived in a shotgun house and I knew that there were also projects and those projects are very different than where we're living. So I was okay and Content. And then again, I shared a room with four people but then again, everyone was sharing a room with four people. So it was cool. Whereas like when you move that to like Minnesota, there's a lot of, there's a lot of things.”

“...the open enrollment school system, it works, but you're also creating, you're creating areas where people can interact intermingle of different cultures, but you're also creating a lot of opportunities for people to judge an experience and sort of be outcasted. And you're creating a lot of opportunity of like doing the social media effect where it's like, I see that these kids are having this. And when I go back home, I don't have any of those things.

“And I'm thinking of the outsider perspective. They think in general, it's like, well, all these people have all these opportunities they're going to schools with my kids and blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. When really, when that happens is you're creating in some ways, like a mental period and showing them what they're not and showing them like, okay, these are all the ways they're privileged. These are all the ways they can do this. And that's not the same for me. Not saying that it's not achievable, but that's not the same. And it's, it takes a different level of mental stability to get it, understand it, recognize it, but also just continue and not let it affect you. because I'd seen more times than not. It affects people. And it's hard for me to really go in depth about it because I'm one of those people where it doesn't affect as much.”

These responses support the idea that there are two distinct scales of representation (Bauder 2001). My participants explained that there is a barrier between scales that limits the exposure of residents to outside perspectives in both positive and negative ways.

Code-Switching and Identity Conflict

Several respondents in my study mentioned belonging to two scales at once and having to negotiate two distinct sets of norms and values. They explained that when people belong to multiple scales, they have to learn to switch back and forth between them. *Cairo*'s responses show that it is not easy to be part of both spaces. He described having to code-switch and talk or act differently at school more than he did at home:

“Cause like I would like be viewed as like the black kid at school or like the hood kid. Right. And I would kind of like fit into that role cause everybody knew where I was from. And like I didn't try to hide that or anything. Um, but then when I'd go back home and they be like, oh, he's the white boy, like how he like, cause I could talk, I can articulate myself. Well, and this is growing up too not really necessarily in the latter years of high school. Cause I learned how to navigate growing up in that. But at first it was just funny to me cause like I would like overly compensate for like my black friends calling me the white boy when I would get to my school. But they, but when I would be at home, I wouldn't act that like, it was almost like a character, like, you know what I'm saying? I wouldn't act that way when I was at home because I didn't feel like I felt comfortable, but it would always bother me when people would be like, oh you talk white or whatever, just because I'm like, nah, bro. I just know how to, like, I can switch it up.”

“...Like I literally am like switching code switching. Like I have to go to school and act a certain way, go home and act a certain way. And like sometimes I would forget to switch in both environments and they would just be like, oh yeah, I can't like talk like that here. Like, you know, I would talk to my teachers a certain way and like get sent to the office or, you know, stuff like that. And I'll just be like really like, yeah, go home and like act how like some of my, my friends would act with their parents from my mom and that's not flying.”

According to *Cairo*, being split between two scales can result in identity conflict. This was something he needed to navigate growing up, and doing so required figuring out who he was.

“Um, it was, it was tough I guess. Well, not, maybe not tough, but it was definitely something I had to navigate. Luckily I had time to figure it out. Like I said, I started this when I was four years old. So I think the biggest thing for me was like, I had to figure out who I was and there was like that switched over like middle school. Let's just say like you went, it was a roller coaster ride. Like I was just trying to figure it all out. But I think after high school, like when I went to college, I think everybody kind of has that moment of like, okay, I've lived this life, but now I can really like start fresh and just be who I am. And that's when it really set in for me of just being like, okay, this is my identity, this is who I am, but I don't necessarily think I saw it as a struggle

growing up. I was just trying to figure it out. Like I knew that I valued both places. Um, but I didn't know how like big of a deal that were like how few people have that type of perspective, which has really benefited me now, like in my adult life or just in like business and like whatever I have going on. Like it's very, very helpful to be able to relate to any type of person.”

Other participants who were part of multiple scales described a different kind of identity conflict stemming from one's own feelings of pride in their neighborhood, and the bad reputation it has in mainstream society. According to *Ibiza*, when you belong to a neighborhood and are proud of it, yet are aware that others perceive the community negatively, it causes an inner conflict.

“Oh, it's definitely like, it's definitely like a conflict. Like it's a conflict with your person, you know? Um, it feels like betrayal to yourself a little bit. Um, it feels like the world rejects, um, your person, like it rejects who you, what you identify with. And so in a way, like even applying to that job, we feel like it's betrayal to yourself. Like, why would I accept something when you know, like they will deny you because you live in that place, you know? Like why would you even want to work there? You know? Um, I think I'm finally coming to a place where I'm like, do this match my values. Do they respect like who I really am? Like, you know, things like that. Like I'm starting to come to that place. I can make those decisions in my career. I reject somebody if they rejected me.”

She mentioned that she is finally at a place where she can choose to reject a job if that company's culture doesn't match her values or respect her, but that wasn't always the case. This shows how the difficulty of belonging to multiple scales can push people to choose between the two rather than trying to straddle both.

'Making It Out' Versus Investing Back In

Bauder (2001) suggests that it isn't just neighborhoods that affect identities, youth can switch scales and adopt identities based on ideologies from larger scales such as a city. He explains that jumping scales is a way for youths from stigmatized places to escape this stigma and the negative effects it causes. The idea of switching scales was referred to by participants as making it out of the neighborhood. Participants explained that the segregation of disinvested neighborhoods creates a barrier between the neighborhood and mainstream society. According to *Tokyo*, it feels like it's “...us versus them.” This suggests that there is a binary between these two spatial scales. This can seem to force people to choose between staying in the neighborhood or

making it out. According to Bauder (2001) switching scales can allow people from disinvested neighborhoods to escape the stigma attached to their communities and themselves. My findings suggest that switching scales is indeed possible, but it requires sacrificing part of one's identity and as such is not a viable option. Participants mentioned how the lack of resources within a neighborhood makes it seem necessary to leave in order to succeed. According to *Tokyo*:

“A lot of the times it's like, oh, you need to move out to see progress. Why don't we build that same progress where our people are.”

Agra explained that making it out requires sacrificing parts of one's identity and creating distance from the neighborhood.

“...you have to like sacrifice yourself if you get out, if you like leave the community you're from like, who are, you know, like you're a different person.”

Because of this, several participants explained that making it out is not really an option, instead, the focus should be on investing back in communities. According to *Cairo*:

“We need to build a community back up for us. The whole get out mentality is like, not really a thing.”

Participants identified this as a third option that can disrupt the binary between being stuck and making it out. As *Agra* described,

“I think that's a very common perspective. I don't necessarily abide by that perspective. I'm more so I've always wanted to stay close to the community and bring back whatever resources I could. Like I mentioned a nonprofit before. Um, so I think that's also another option, but I think there's like truth to that mindset, like okay.”

Amalfi seconded this:

“...if all you see is, is gang banging and drugs and prostitution and living like a really poor quality of life. You think that's all, you can amount to, you know, you will get those kids who are like, Nope, I'm going to make it out of the hood and they do it. Yeah. But why can't more of our kids do that? Why does it have to be every, every, every one out of 100 kids that make it out of the hood? Like, but then why do you even have to make it out? Why are you not making your hood better? So there's that piece of it too. It's like, we should just be trying to make our, make our neighborhoods better so that there is a sense that.”

Tokyo explained that it is difficult to make it out without fully distancing yourself from the neighborhood:

“...because I don't know anybody that's stayed in the hood became successful legally and stayed. You know what I mean? Like you have to branch out because in low income communities, like the resources are getting poured in like, like I said, most people are on government assistance or making money illegally. Like there's not like, like they're small, not, and not to say that, like there's not people that own their own businesses or making money legally. It's just not enough to like support outside anyone outside of their family, which is fine. Like if everyone was on that, that's a middle-class community like Richfield, you know what I mean? But like, it's, there's, there's not that many of like small business owners or like people who like, you know, have people that know how to invest in stock markets and stuff like that, who just can like make a livable wage for themselves and their family. So it's like those people that do elevate a little bit, well, you've got those people that are making money illegally and they see them as like a target because they're the only ones getting it in the neighborhood. So it kind of, it's like a catch 22. So I do understand that perspective of like, you got to get out to kind of like bring it back home a little bit, but I don't, I don't think you have to get out and just stay out. But I think you can, there's a fine line. You can walk, I'm trying to walk at least.”

These responses support the idea that there are two distinct scales of representation. Participants described the ways space is structured to keep people trapped within one scale or the other. They suggest that while people are often isolated within community ideologies, they can be exposed to large-scale norms. People can also belong to multiple scales at once, although this puts a strain on their identities by forcing them to switch back and forth between two distinct sets of values and behaviors. Finally, the responses show that escaping the neighborhood is seen as necessary for success, but that because people's neighborhoods are intertwined with their identities, this means sacrificing that part of one's self. Oftentimes when people think about improving the lives of those within disadvantaged communities, the proposed solution is to help them escape the negative conditions around them. My findings show that the focus should instead be on investing back in these areas to create possibilities for success within them.

The Relationship Between Structure and Agency

There are conflicting arguments about the degree to which living in disinvested neighborhoods shapes the lives and identities of residents. It is clear from the past literature that

the places people live play a role in structuring their identities (Calmore 1995; Bauder 2001; Sriskandarajah 2020). However, it is also true that people are in control of their own lives and have the agency to choose how they react to the environment around them. The responses from participants supported both sides of this debate, as well as the overlap between them. When I asked *Cairo* what role the neighborhood played in shaping his identity he immediately responded with:

“All of it. I think like that again, coming back to like centering myself, like that is who I am and the school experience, the suburban experience. I got just added to that. Like, but when I like, it was just by myself or with my closest friends, like that is how I act. That's what I, that's what I grew up on. That's what I know. Like that's my, how my family, you know what I'm saying? So like, it's just that, that is me. And then, you know, it, it, I guess it's all me, but like I find the community aspect or just like neighborhoods that I was raised in to be like how I like identified personally.”

Participants in my study explained that the neighborhoods they resided in impacted their identities by preventing them from achieving their goals. They agreed that everyone wants a better life. They want to succeed and to have a purpose, but sometimes life gets in the way and people are forced to make certain choices due to the circumstances. According to *Cairo*:

“...everybody wants to be successful everybody wants to have a purpose but if you don't have parents at school that, don't stay on you to go to school every day. Like my mom did then you're kicked out of school or whatever. You're just on the block all day. You need to find a way to make some money. You know, you're not going to college, like what's your option...”

However, participants suggested that the environment isn't entirely determinative. Despite the structural constraints that disinvested neighborhoods placed on residents, participants argued that individuals have agency in the ways they reacted to them. They explained that everyone has a choice and that you have to take responsibility for them. However, community conditions and ideologies can constrain residents' perception of their choices. *Madrid* explained that it's easier to blame others but individuals need to take responsibility for their decisions:

“...the reality is we all go through trials and tribulations. It's just, how does it affect us? How do we allow it to affect us? Because sooner or later, sooner or later, I used to tell the youngsters in

prison, man, sooner or later, you got to own to the fact that you put yourself here. You know, no matter what Joe Widey did, or Mr. Corporate America, did you made a choice to do what you did. You made a choice not to go to school. You made a choice not to get an education. You made a choice not to be respectful. You made choices. We all did. I said, look at me, you don't want to be like me. You got a 4, 3, 6 year sentence, man. Learn something, go out there and do something. And you would see them come back. You know, you see some of them come back, but there's some of them, they went out there and did something, you know, they took head. So it's about individualism. To me, we make choices. I've made some bad choices.”

Tokyo also supported this idea, explaining that it starts with the individual:

“Well, I think, I think there's a mixture of things, right. I think at first it starts with yourself. Right. Because you can have like all the mentors, all the support in the world, but if you don't make that decision, like nothing's going to happen. So I think it starts with you.”

Amalfi added that positive influences and interactions can help lead kids down a good path

ultimately up to them:

“...but obviously everyone has a choice. You could have the best upbringing. I could do an amazing job raising my kids. And one of them could still decide to go gang bang and be like, well, this is cooler.”

“Yeah. I think it is definitely if they have role models and they have positive things to do, it makes a huge difference, but it's still a choice on their end.”

She explained that although it is possible to support kids and foster a positive self-perception in them, they might still end up making bad choices. **Madrid** discussed the consequences of these choices and the idea of karma, explaining that the things you do come back to you. **Odessa** also referenced this:

“You have to learn in your life somewhere that you can't keep doing the wrong things. Expect good to come to you because it's not.”

Although participants stressed the individual's ability to make choices, the neighborhood and local ideologies can limit residents' awareness of their options. According to **Ibiza**:

“...I also feel like sometimes people don't see, they way out of a situation. Like they don't see that there is another way to do things. Like I told, I was telling somebody a while ago, like a lot of times black kids are not exposed to different kinds of jobs. And so they don't know that, okay, I could be a museum curator one day. If I would knew, I could be a museum curator when I was like 19 i would be a museum curator. Right. It's like, I love picking out art. It's my favorite thing to do. I love like going to seek new art and in the museum. Um, and now they like, you know, there's some fucked up with the museums, you know, stealing like cultures and whatever, but I

don't know whatever, but if I would've known, like that was an actual job to have and they made a lot of, like, they make a lot of money doing that.”

Cairo explained that a lot of the crime and negative stereotypes could get fixed if people felt like they had the option to do the things they want.

“I just think there needs to be more opportunity. I think people need to see like that, you know, opportunity is right around the corner. We just need to like give accessibility to it essentially. Like I don't think people really even know how to find routes to achieve the things that they want to. Um, and that's like the main, because I feel like a lot of the crime and like just the negative things and negative stereotypes, especially a lot of that can get fixed with just people feeling like they have a route to do the things that they want to do and not have to go down a certain road and that starts young. So it does have a role in education as well.”

These responses suggest that although residents' lives are structured by the circumstances in their neighborhoods, they have the ability to make decisions and need to take responsibility for them. However, the lack of access to opportunities can limit the residents' awareness of their options and constrain their available choices. This shows that there is a complicated relationship between structure and agency. My findings suggest that neither side of this relationship is fully determinative in shaping residents' identity, rather their identities are formed through an ongoing process of negotiation within the context of both structural constraints and individual agency.

Mental Resilience

It is important to consider the role of mental resilience in increasing individuals' agency over their life outcomes. Participants' responses suggest that mental resilience is the ability to overcome the limiting circumstances that neighborhoods impose. It is a necessary factor to be able to continue making good choices and working to succeed despite the increased challenges. These findings support previous research which demonstrates that although neighborhood discourses inform the production of identities, individuals have the ability to react against them (Sriskandarajah 2020). Brooms (2015) explains that neighborhoods can be risk factors, impacting residents' behaviors and that mental resilience is a strategy to overcome this.

Perspective

Participants noted an abundance of structural issues and barriers that prevent residents from succeeding, although many still argued that it's all about one's perspective and making the best out of the situation. When asked about the relationship between structure and agency multiple participants suggested that it's all about the way you look at it, including **Cairo** and **Calais**. The latter is a young Black man who moved with his family to Brooklyn Center after living in several other parts of the Twin Cities. They agreed that sometimes circumstances can get in the way of residents' goals but they insisted that it's all about how you look at it. Respondents emphasized the importance of mindset in affecting people's life outcomes. **Calais** stated that the lens through which you view the world matters, and that you can choose to have an optimistic outlook on life rather than a pessimistic one. He said that it is necessary to make the best out of the situation in order to gain control over one's life.

'Sink or Swim'

Agra referred to the relationship between structure and agency as *sink or swim*. He suggested that despite a strong current of challenges, it's up to individuals to decide whether to let the circumstances take them over and start to drown or to use mental resilience to fight past them. He explained that to sink means to fall into it or give up and let it take you over whereas to swim means fighting against the current:

“...and the analogy of drowning was just that people get complacent and stuck. So we have these individuals where you have 14, 15, 16, they have plans. it takes everyday choices to get to where you want to be for everyone. And so we have a lot of youth that from 16, 17, 18, 19 20 something happens, takes them off track a little bit something. They try to get back on track. Something else happens sets them off track, a little bit. They begin to drown in it. And it's like, if you don't, if you don't have the mental capacity to swim and deal with those things, you will be stuck in that place for years.”

He said that this is not an easy thing to do, it takes mental resilience and everyday choices, and as such, it's necessary to build up the mental resilience of youth:

“I would say this it's very important to the point where I think the most important thing we can do, like being a worker in east Phillips is to build the mental resiliency of the youth. That's how, that's how damaging it can be when everything around you can seem that it isn't enough or it can't be changed or sort of like swimming and fighting against a mountain of current. It is always easier to just fall into it. Like, okay, well I'm not going to do anything.”

Agra also suggested that some people are privileged enough to have safety nets. They have the ability to float and still be okay, whereas people in disinvested neighborhoods need to work twice as hard in order to succeed.

“It's just that some people have a safety net. Some people have life jackets, unfortunately there's privilege”

“...and what I also say to the more, the more practical way to look at it is okay, you grind and you work for something and you've got it cool. But what about the people that don't drive don't work? What happens to them? Because I know people in my community for myself, if I didn't work my ass off 120 times harder than most people, I would've been dead or in jail or living a life that nobody would have even cared about. You know what I'm saying? Besides my mom or something like that. But like I see kids that didn't apply themselves at my school that were class clowns did terrible and they still got six figure jobs and they're still doing just fine.”

Finally, he explained that it's easier to blame someone else because then they're in control and they have the power.

“It can be both. So (big pause) one good example is that outside conditions in general and Sigma is I'm thinking that the example and going through it in my head, it's easier to just blame something else. So like I kinda got upset at like a couple of my teens because they do the things like, oh, what is it? Cause I'm native. And it's just like, sometimes it is that. So now what, like once you got your answer, what are you going to do? Like, unfortunately the world is racist. You know that already, what are you going to do about it? So trying to use that approach of like, yes, sometimes it is because it is, so what, yes. It's like for me, like it's probably because you're black, it may not be, they can say it's, there are different. They can say that it has nothing to do with this and actually has to do X, Y, Z. And they'll be like, well, X, Y, and Z is that it's because of this. It doesn't matter at that point. What are you going to do about it? What's the next thing. So it's just like accepting it and then trying to combat it because someone's always going to view you a certain way. Someone's always going to label you. It's not new. You already know it exists. How can you deal with it and get used to it and continue to go forward? And I would say, that's the biggest thing. It can be both, but it's always easier to blame it on someone else, because then we give them the control. They have all the power and it's just like, no, you can choose to let it affect you. Yes. It can impact you. But we can also always find a way, but you have to have the mental capacity to understand it, call it out and then try something else.”

The idea of sink or swim is a useful metaphor to understand how the circumstances in disinvested neighborhoods hold people back and make it harder to succeed. These findings show

that mental resilience is a necessary factor to mitigate the negative effects of neighborhoods. This suggests that residents' ability to negotiate their identities within the structural constraints of the neighborhood is strengthened through the skill of mental resilience.

Narratives

Each of the elements previously discussed in the findings influences the narratives participants tell about themselves and their neighborhood. These stories are shaped both by local circumstances and ideologies, as well as by dominant discourses. Both sets of ideologies can negatively impact residents' identities, however, through narrative, they have the ability to interact with the messages they receive and disrupt these discourses. Participants mentioned working to create positive narratives for their children to improve their perceptions of themselves. They also told positive narratives about their neighborhoods to outsiders to improve and reduce the stigmas surrounding them.

Case Classifications

There were several interesting patterns among participants in terms of their neighborhood, race, gender, age, income, and educational level. This is important to note because the stratification of responses by demographic information illustrates the ways identities are shaped by factors other than conditions and ideologies.

The majority of participants lived in Webber-Camden, most of which, in a subsidized apartment building for people over the age of fifty. These participants *Milan, Madrid, Odessa, Ibiza, Tokyo, Denver,* and *Cordoba* shared a set of experiences within the community, although they differed in their perspectives. Several respondents from Webber-Camden did not live in this building and described slightly different experiences. Participants from different neighborhoods had slightly different responses due to where they lived, but they nearly all described similar

effects due to living in stigmatized neighborhoods. Only two participants, *Odessa* and *Mykonos*, suggested that their neighborhoods had good reputations. *Odessa*'s description of Webber-Camden differed from other residents in this area. *Mykonos* was the only participant from Marcy Holmes so there were no conflicts with his description of the neighborhood's reputation as positive.

Several participants mentioned that moving to Minnesota impacted their views. Some described moving from similarly situated neighborhoods such as *Ibiza* who moved from Chicago, and *Tokyo* who moved from New York. Having moved out of what they described as disadvantaged communities, they had unique relationships with neighborhood belonging. A few participants also mentioned working or going to school outside of their neighborhood (*Cairo*, *Mykonos*, *Tokyo*, *Vienna*). Those who spend time outside the neighborhood reported exposure to outsiders' perceptions of their communities which had both positive and negative effects on them.

The sample population was intended to be homogenous in terms of race, however, one participant referred me to a white man living in her building (*Denver*) and I chose to include him in the study. All other participants identified as Black, although the demographic survey showed that several were multiracial. The racial differences among participants were not clearly relevant to their responses, except for that when *Denver* described issues of racial stereotypes or discrimination where he was referring to others' experiences rather than his own.

Participants were nearly split in terms of gender, eight identified as female (*Milan*, *Odessa*, *Nairobi*, *Ibiza*, *Vienna*, *Amalfi*, *Cordoba*, *Monaco*) while seven identified as male. (*Madrid*, *Mykonos*, *Cairo*, *Agra*, *Tokyo*, *Denver*, *Calais*). Participants' gender most prominently impacted their relationship with crime and safety. For some, it made them more of a threat.

Several Black male respondents described being stereotyped as dangerous by others and made efforts to reduce this by being visible as positive members of society. For others, it provided a sense of safety. According to *Mykonos*,

“I also understand the privilege that I carry as a six foot, six and a half African-American man. Um, you know, I'm the size of an NFL lineman. So I, I kind of get to walk around and do whatever I want.”

Female respondents didn't explicitly state that they felt more unsafe due to their gender, but they mentioned avoiding walking alone at night more frequently than male respondents, suggesting that it played a role.

There was a wide range of ages represented in my sample. The majority of participants were over fifty whereas several were in their twenties. The rest fell somewhere in between. The differences in age reflected the degree to which the neighborhood shaped their identities.

According to *Odessa*, a Black woman from Webber Camden,

“It's a good life is good life. I think that at my age is good life because I'm 65 years old. But for teenagers that don't understand society, you don't understand why they can't get a job.”

Others also referenced the idea that young people, especially children, are affected more heavily by both neighborhood conditions and norms, as well as by the messages they receive from society. Several participants mentioned having children (*Vienna*, *Amalfi*) and discussed the ways that living in stigmatized neighborhoods impacted them.

Most participants did not report their income levels. Those living in the subsidized housing unit were classified as low income. Two participants, *Mykonos* and *Vienna*, reported an income over 100k a year. Many participants described a lack of financial resources, whereas others explained the ways their income privileged them such as through their ability to own homes or to move to a higher income neighborhood if they chose. Some participants including *Vienna* mentioned that their incomes were higher than the typical level of income within their

communities. Others explained that outsiders were surprised at their choice of neighborhood given their financial status.

Responses also varied in terms of participants' educational experience; several mentioned having gone to college while the rest did not mention their highest level of education. This only appeared to influence the language with which they discussed their neighborhood. Participants with higher levels of education referenced academic terminology to describe the concepts they invoked, whereas others used more general terms.

Participants mentioned additional factors that influenced their identities that are not listed above. This includes personal circumstances such as health issues or disabilities, as well as belief systems such as religion. *Ibiza* mentioned having a natural ability to learn that was passed down from her family and impacted her outcomes in life:

“Um, I think it has to do a lot with, my ability to learn and to do well in school and like, realize my potential, like early on, like my sister went to the same school as Michelle Obama. Um, my mom was, she was getting like A's and B's like her whole life college. I mean, high school grammar school and high school career. Um, she wanted to go to college, but she didn't. Um, my dad is very intelligent too.”

Calais described his relationship with God. This has led him to feel safe wherever he goes. His faith led him to be secure in his identity which reduced the extent to which stigma impacted him.

“I ain't gone lie. I feel safe everywhere I go. Cause I'm one of those guys that I believe gods with me and every step”

Other participants such as *Ibiza* discussed her connection to church and the ways it made her feel more connected to her neighborhood growing up.

“...my family was there, the church was there. Um, my whole, I don't know, my, my whole, like, grounding was taught there.”

These responses suggest that although neighborhoods conditions and ideologies shape residents' identities in similar ways, these effects are not uniform due to their individual differences.

Additionally, identities are not just shaped by belonging and exclusion from spatial scales, but by the groups they belong to through their race, gender, income level, or educational experience. This suggests that community is not just rooted in the places people live, it is something that exists as a result of a shared set of experiences and perceptions.

Discussion and Conclusion

Prior to a discussion of this study's contributions, it is first necessary to contextualize these findings. In doing so, it is important to begin with the history of racism and segregation in the US because of the explicit role these forces have played in constructing the neighborhoods under study. Without attention to the role of structural racism and discriminatory policies, the division of space along racial lines appears to be inherent, rather than constructed. Additionally, the emphasis on these processes accounts for the difficulty in improving the circumstances within neighborhoods and helps inform efforts to do so.

These findings must also be understood within the current moment in time and the context of recent events, specifically the murder of George Floyd and the protests that followed. Past studies have shown that recent exposure to events primes people to think of racial stereotypes when evaluating residents (Mobasseri 2019). This suggests that the social unrest within Minneapolis likely reinforced the stigmas of criminality surrounding this area. Because these interviews took place during the pandemic, it is also necessary to consider how this impacted the responses I received. Participants explained this event increased the negative effects of neighborhood conditions by removing structures of social support for children. This suggests that community plays an important role in mitigating the negative effects of neighborhoods, however, the interaction between members is a necessary component of this effort.

Discussion

This study sought to explore the question of how living in stigmatized neighborhoods impacts the identity of residents. What I found was that the identities of places, and of the people living within them, *are not static*. They are ongoing narratives that are part of a mutually constitutive relationship and can be framed or shaped by the ideologies surrounding them (McCann 1999; Sriskandarajah 2020). Neighborhoods are not just physical locations but symbolic places that produce cultural meanings. The identities of residents in inner-city neighborhoods are formed along a continuum between individual agency and multiple conflicting structures at different spatial scales. Individual narratives are influenced by the ideological and material structures around them, however, residents can choose how they make sense of these contexts and negotiate how they fit into their identities. This process of negotiation is what connects structure and agency. This study examined the effect of local ideologies and conditions, as well as the discourses produced by white spatial imaginaries, that stigmatize communities of color as dangerous and disadvantaged.

One of the major findings of this study is that by creating alternative narratives, residents have the power to disrupt the dominant discourses that marginalize their communities and themselves. Neighborhood stigma affects residents in more than one way; The assumptions outsiders make about communities of color shape their perception and treatment of residents, leading to negative consequences, such as job discrimination. Stigma also becomes imposed on residents, children in particular, and at times internalized which influences their self-perception.

This suggests that it is necessary to address and correct the stigma of disadvantage and criminality that surround these neighborhoods to reduce the negative impacts it has on residents. Because public perceptions of these areas are often uninformed and inaccurate, residents need to

have a role in shaping the narratives surrounding their neighborhoods so that they reflect their lived experiences. However, this needs to be a shared effort. Respondents explained that it can be exhausting to constantly combat outsiders' misperceptions, and it is not their job to do so. Future research should address the mechanisms for allowing residents to guide the depictions of their neighborhoods, without making it their responsibility to do so.

This study hopes to help correct public perspectives by presenting the views and experiences of community members. However, despite my best efforts to let participants speak for themselves, this report can only provide an interpretation of their responses. Because the discourses surrounding these neighborhoods are based on assumptions rather than actual awareness of the lived experiences of residents, it is necessary to create more avenues for interaction between residents and those who live outside of these neighborhoods. I will discuss potential mechanisms for this below.

Another primary contribution of this study relates to the rhetoric of 'making it out' of neighborhoods rather than investing back into them. Participants explained that the challenges in their neighborhoods made it seem necessary to switch scales and leave in order to overcome them and be successful. They argued that doing so requires sacrificing the part of their identity that is connected to their communities. Additionally, this reinforces the idea that these neighborhoods are something that needs to be escaped from, reinforcing systems of exclusion and isolation (Bauder 2001). These responses suggest that it is possible to switch scales and adopt societal ideologies instead, however this is not a viable option. My findings suggest that the focus needs to be on investing back into neighborhoods to create the necessary opportunities and resources within them. This need is often obscured by dominant discourses that suggest the problem is that people are trapped with the disadvantaged conditions of their neighborhoods and

propose a solution to helping them escape these circumstances. This discourse has meaningful implications on the focus of the policies intended to make positive changes.

My findings suggest that by building a sense of community, residents can change the narratives within their neighborhoods that frame ‘making it out’ as the only option for success. It is clear from past research that both the conditions and the local ideologies can constrain residents' choices and negatively affect their lives (Bauder 2001; Sriskandarajah 2020). However, within both the literature and dominant discourses, the positive impacts of the community are often overlooked. Krivo and Peterson (1996) make note of this, suggesting that there has been limited attention given to local supports. My findings help bridge this gap by showing that although disinvested neighborhoods are characterized by distrust and a lack of safety, through intentional engagement with the neighborhood and each other, residents create a strong sense of community that mitigates these negative effects. This suggests that by crafting positive narratives about their community, residents can change the local ideologies and improve the conditions within them.

Limitations

There are several limitations of this study that prevent the results from being generalized. The small sample size of fifteen limited the generalizability of this study. The limited range of perspectives that these findings were based on cannot be assumed to be widely held throughout the communities this study investigated. The perceptions of neighborhood conditions and ideologies likely differ greatly depending on the person and are affected by additional influences specific to the individual such as their gender or educational experience. Additionally, this study would have benefited from multiple interviews with participants over a longer period of time. This would have allowed me to develop stronger relationships with respondents and a greater

understanding of their experiences. This sample was also limited to adults and people of color and as such, it was not representative of the overall population within the neighborhoods. Additionally, this study only focused on residents of disinvested neighborhoods. If the sample was expanded it would allow for a more in-depth examination of outsiders' perceptions themselves, rather than just residents' experiences with them.

A second set of limitations has to do with the selection of the neighborhoods under study. These sites were chosen primarily on the basis of their reputation, however, there were no concrete methods used for measuring this stigma. Neighborhood reputations were considered as a compilation of individual perspectives without accounting for the variation among them. Additionally, this study focused on neighborhoods with either low income, high crime, or high proportions of people of color without considering the effects of these factors individually. Finally, because this study focused solely on North Minneapolis, these results can not be generalized throughout the United States. Ideally, this study would have examined a variety of stigmatized neighborhoods beyond just those in Minnesota.

Future Research

The framework used in this study conceptualized scales of representation as a binary between neighborhood level and society-wide ideologies. Future research should investigate if these scales overlap and in what contexts. Doing so will help identify mechanisms for the integration between communities of color and white spatial imaginaries. The recent focus on desegregation efforts in Minneapolis is through education. The city is currently engaged in a process of rezoning schools to reduce the current disparities in educational achievement. In the past, this process required sending children of color to predominantly white schools, however, the current plan involves doing the opposite. This strategy is intended to bring resources to North

Minneapolis and represents an increased awareness of the need to invest in this community.

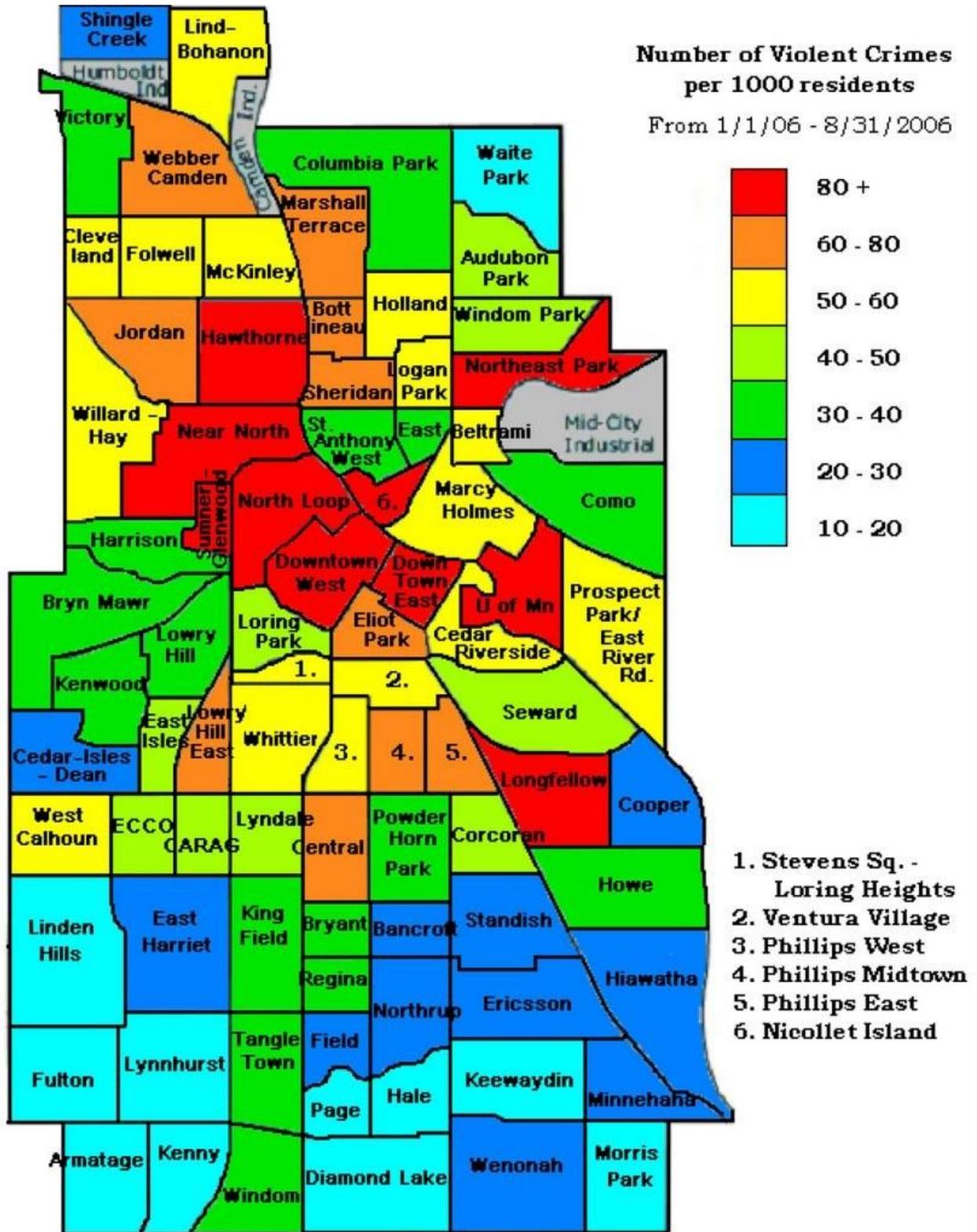
Policies and initiatives such as this are necessary to create meaningful changes in the ways space is structured and reverse the long-lasting impacts of racial segregation.

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Appendix A



Appendix B

