

**Staying Put in Depopulated Neighborhoods:
Evidence from a Mixed Methods Study**

by

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
(Sociology)
in the University of Michigan
2017

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I have been incredibly fortunate to have had the support and help of so many people throughout my life. I know that this dissertation would not be possible without the numerous educators, mentors, colleagues, and loved ones who have encouraged and supported me along the way. It would especially not be possible without the help of my exceptional mentors. Renee Anspach, Sarah Burgard, Alex Murphy, and Kristin Seefeldt have provided generous support, guidance, and encouragement throughout my time at Michigan. Renee continuously offered deep theoretical insight into my work and pushed me to engage more fully with my data. Her unwavering support, faith in my work, and willingness to re-read numerous drafts of a single paper are more than I could have asked of a mentor. From the first day that I began working with Sarah, I learned the hard work that goes into rigorous sociological research. I hope one day to have a fraction of Sarah's dogged approach to scientific inquiry. Her intellectual creativity and seemingly endless stores of mental and physical energy have been unremitting sources of inspiration and motivation to me over the years. Alex provided extensive feedback on my work and thoughtful suggestions about how to engage with current sociological debates. Her wealth of knowledge about urban sociology pushed me to dig deeper and read more. Kristin's dedication to economic justice and her knowledge of social policy have helped me to think carefully about the policy implications of my work. I have learned so much from

these mentors, and I am truly grateful to have had such incredible scholars and people guide my academic progress.

This research was made possible through the generous financial support that I received at the University of Michigan. During my graduate work, I received funding from the National Institute on Aging training grant at the Population Studies Center (T32 AG000221) and grants from the Department of Sociology, the Rackham Graduate School, and the Population Studies Center Alumni Student Support Fund, which all contributed to this work. I am grateful for the use of the services and facilities provided to trainees at the Population Studies Center (funded by NICHD Center Grant R24 HD041028). Thank you especially to the men and women of Detroit who shared their personal experiences and stories about life in Detroit.

I have grown as a sociologist and scholar because of my colleagues and cohort-mates at the University of Michigan. These bright, insightful, and hard-working people have been an invaluable source of knowledge and encouragement for me over the years. There are too many of you to name here, but please know that you have touched my life in so many ways, and that without you, this process would have been immeasurably more difficult.

Finally, I certainly would not be at this stage of my graduate school career without the love and unwavering support of my family. From a young age, my parents, Judy and Steve Seelye, imparted a love of books and learning, and I am incredibly grateful to them for all of the opportunities and encouragement they provided throughout my life. My furry companions, Lucy, Emma, and Zoe, were by my side during graduate school and always offered boundless love and much-needed wags, kisses, and cuddles.

Rebeka, your constant love, humor, patience, and kindness have brought so much joy and happiness to my life. Thank you for your support, friendship, and partnership over the last seven years. I am so lucky to have had you with me on this journey, and I look forward to the journey that lies ahead.

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ABSTRACT

Sociologists have long considered how urban population change affects the social life of communities. From nineteenth-century theorists to contemporary neighborhood effects researchers, scholars have explored the causes and consequences of population change and have revisited the question of how changing population dynamics influence the lives of residents. While reflections about rapid urban population growth emerged in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, in recent years, urban depopulation has become an increasing concern of researchers and policymakers. Shrinking U.S. cities like Detroit, Flint, and Cleveland have gained academic, political, and journalistic attention for their fiscal and infrastructural challenges, raising awareness about the various hardships that shrinking cities face. Recent evidence suggests that the number of shrinking cities and rural locations throughout the United States will continue to grow, prompting researchers to consider how depopulation affects the lives of residents who remain.

A long history of community-level studies has explored how living in certain types of places affects the lives of residents. Thirty years ago, William Julius Wilson posited that residing in neighborhoods of concentrated poverty shapes the social processes within neighborhoods and affects the lives of individuals who live in them. Since Wilson presented his hypothesis 30 years ago, researchers have examined what impact, if any, neighborhoods have on residents, and more specifically whether living in a high-poverty neighborhood has an independent impact on residents' long-term well-

being over and above individual-level factors. In these studies of neighborhood effects, researchers have examined a number of neighborhood-level predictors, including concentrated poverty, neighborhood racial and ethnic composition, density, vacancy, the built environment, and crime. However, to date, little attention has been devoted to how neighborhood depopulation affects the lives of residents. In this dissertation, I seek to fill this gap by examining neighborhood depopulation at both a local and national level.

In the following chapters, I examine the social dynamics of depopulated communities and consider how living in such places shapes the residential mobility decisions, social practices, safety strategies, and physical well-being of residents. I draw on qualitative interviews with residents from two depopulated neighborhoods in Detroit to examine why current residents have remained in their depopulated neighborhoods, how they negotiate relationships with their neighbors, and how they manage threats to their safety. I find that residents present multilayered narratives for remaining in their neighborhoods, which include social ties, a desire “to be stable”, and sentiments about their neighborhoods. I also find that neighboring practices of residents vary by residents’ opportunities to socialize with one another and by their perceptions of risk associated with their immediate residential environments. In addition to qualitative interviews, I use national survey data from the Panel Study of Income Dynamics to examine the relationship between exposure to depopulated neighborhoods and health outcomes. In line with previous research, I find that residence in high-poverty neighborhoods is associated with obesity and worse self-rated health. I also find that neighborhood poverty is a stronger predictor of health outcomes than neighborhood depopulation. Building on literature from urban sociology, the chapters of this dissertation present a complex

portrait of neighborhood depopulation that is often inextricably linked with the struggles endemic to high-poverty neighborhoods.

CHAPTER I

Introduction

Social theorists have long considered how urban population change shapes social life. Beginning in the 19th century, as people began relocating to cities to find work in industrial centers, some scholars lamented the breakdown of traditional communities, where, they believed, unity, cooperation, and cohesion were routine features of daily life (Simmel [1903] 1971; Tönnies [1887] 2002; Wirth 1938). Concerned about the loss of social bonds, these writers speculated that city residents would become emotionally indifferent and disconnected from familial and communal ties. However, not all theorists were equally alarmed. Some, like Wirth (1938), recognized that cities could alter social life in both positive and negative ways and could offer benefits to residents that smaller and tighter-knit communities could not. According to these observers, opportunities for individual freedom and creativity, a greater tolerance for different ways of thought, and a complex division of labor that provided occupational diversity and social solidarity were all thought to be possible in cities (Durkheim [1893] 1997; Wirth 1938).

Contemporary social scientists have continued to consider how community context and population change affect the lives of residents. As cities evolve and urban landscapes transform – with some cities facing surges in their populations and expansions of their metropolitan boundaries and others undergoing a process of depopulation and shrinkage – questions about the impact of urbanism, population change, and density on individual residents and the larger community are as relevant today as they were two

centuries ago. While scholars have largely moved beyond debates about whether urbanization represents a bane or benefit to civilization, a new form of urban change – urban depopulation – has captured the popular imagination, conjuring fears about the future of modern-day cities.

Since the 17th century, cities throughout the United States largely grew unabated (Beauregard 2003). However, after World War II, prodded by a combination of factors, including suburbanization, deindustrialization, racial antipathy, the rise of the service economy, federal and state policies, and regional changes in investments, signs of urban depopulation took hold (Beauregard 2009; Farley, Danziger, and Holzer 2000; Kain 1968; Sugrue 1997). While Rust Belt cities have been hardest hit, cities across the country, from Utica, New York to St. Louis, Missouri, have been losing residents (Beauregard 2009; Weaver, Bagchi-Sen, Knight, and Frazier 2017), and if current patterns continue, places like Pensacola, Florida and Gulfport, Mississippi will soon be among a growing list of “shrinking” cities (Weaver et al. 2017). Given these expanding patterns of depopulation and the attention paid to certain well-known shrinking cities, such as Detroit, there has been growing interest in the possible effects of depopulation on residents who remain in their communities. Cities with large-scale depopulation face multiple challenges: residential abandonment and vacancy, concentrated poverty, underemployment, crime, and a crumbling infrastructure. With a diminished tax base, shrinking cities have difficulty providing residents with high-quality schools, adequate police protection, and reliable emergency and utility services (Dewar and Thomas 2013).

While depopulation at the city-level brings multiple hardships to the residents who remain, researchers have yet to investigate whether depopulation at a smaller unit of

analysis, such as neighborhoods, also contributes to worse outcomes for residents. This dissertation is an effort to fill the gap in our knowledge about those who stay behind in places that have lost residents. Specifically, the goal of this research is to understand various aspects of neighborhood depopulation, including how residents understand their own residential stability in their changing neighborhoods, how they interact with neighbors in places with high levels of depopulation and residential vacancy, and whether exposure to neighborhood depopulation adversely affects residents' health. Relying on qualitative interviews with residents from two neighborhoods in Detroit with long-term depopulation, I describe the explanations that residents give for staying put and consider whether their narratives of staying are linked to involuntary factors or if staying put represents a voluntary choice. Using qualitative interviews, I also investigate how residents of depopulated places interact and socialize with their neighbors. Finally, using national survey data from the Panel Study of Income Dynamics, I consider whether there is an association between multi-year exposure to depopulated neighborhoods and worse health outcomes, such as obesity and poor self-rated health.

Background and Significance

In the 1920s, Chicago School researchers argued that areas with a high degree of residential mobility had a greater potential for a host of adverse social outcomes, including, but not limited to, demoralization, promiscuity, juvenile delinquency, poverty, crime, infant abandonment, and divorce (Burgess [1925] 1967; Park [1925] 1967). Shaw and McKay ([1942] 1969) later developed these ideas more fully, advancing the theory of social disorganization. According to the theory, the breakdown of social control and the failure of communities to solve shared problems and realize common goals led to the

growth of deviant and criminal behavior. More specifically, researchers identified high levels of neighborhood residential mobility, economic segregation, and ethnic heterogeneity – the structural and cultural factors that were believed to give rise to conflicting moral values – as responsible for increased crime, juvenile delinquency, and hospital admissions (Faris and Dunham 1939; Henry and Short [1954] 1977; Shaw and McKay [1942] 1969).

While contemporary sociologists have largely departed from the classical conception of social disorganization theory, many have continued to consider how neighborhood residential stability shapes social life (Browning, Feinberg, Dietz 2004; Morenoff, Sampson and Raudenbush 2001; Sampson, Raudenbush, and Earls 1997). In Sampson and colleagues' (1997) study of collective efficacy, defined as social cohesion and trust, combined with a willingness to intervene on behalf of the common good, residential stability is identified as one predictor among several that leads to greater collective efficacy and in turn lower rates of neighborhood crime. According to researchers, even when neighbors have strong ties with one another, the combination of concentrated poverty, racial segregation, and residential mobility produce weakened social controls that prevent the development of collective efficacy (Sampson et al 1997).

Some scholars have questioned the utility of these variables – concentrated poverty, racial segregation, and residential mobility – in models of social participation, social cohesion, and crime (Browning et al 2004; Hipp, Tita, and Greenbaum 2009; Small 2004). For example, in their recent study of neighborhood residential mobility and crime, Hipp and colleagues (2009) found that instead of neighborhood residential instability driving local crime, as social disorganization theory would predict, crime, in fact, induced

residential mobility. Similarly, Small (2004) observed that high socioeconomic status, racial homogeneity, and residential stability do not always bring about a high degree of social organization in neighborhoods; rather, in the neighborhood that Small studied, residents were engaged in local social participation despite high residential mobility and poverty. Small attributed community participation not to changes in structural characteristics, but instead to the way in which cultural frames about the neighborhood differentially affected residents' beliefs about the neighborhood and their willingness to participate in it. In other words, residents' participation in local organizations was dependent on their perceptions of their neighborhood – as a beautiful place to live or a deprived “ghetto” – rather than on residential stability, racial homogeneity, and concentrated disadvantage.

In the studies reported above, neighborhood residential stability is conceptualized as a process of residential churning that focuses on the amount of residential turnover in a particular neighborhood, often measured as the percentage of the population that had resided in the neighborhood for less than five years. This measure of neighborhood residential stability is meant to capture the opportunity for social participation and the development of social cohesion and social control within a neighborhood. Neighborhoods with a high degree of residential instability, then, are expected to have low levels of social participation, cohesion, and control. However, theories are unclear as to whether other forms of neighborhood population change generate similar patterns. For example, do neighborhoods with high levels of population loss, but low levels of neighborhood residential stability display similar social dynamics as those with high residential mobility or do they respond differently because of a lack of residential replacement?

Sociological theories have yet to consider if and how social processes respond to neighborhood population loss and whether these processes are different from those in neighborhoods with high levels of residential turnover. It is possible that depopulated neighborhoods are places where the residents who remain look out for one another and turn to each other for companionship and safety, rather than withdrawing to their homes and avoiding their neighbors. However, to date, little is known about the social dynamics of depopulated neighborhoods and the consequences of living in them.

Investigating depopulation can provide sociologists with additional insight into the roles of neighborhood dynamics. Understanding how people view their homes, neighborhoods, and cities will inform researchers about life in severely depopulated neighborhoods, like those in Detroit.¹ Incorporating the narratives of stayers will also advance current work on depopulated places by capturing residents' own stories, experiences, and perceptions. Understanding why residents of shrinking cities stay and the meanings they attach to their homes, neighborhoods, and cities can help social scientists, practitioners, and policymakers develop a more complete understanding of these changing places.

This dissertation seeks to explore more fully these broad and relatively unexplored questions about depopulated neighborhoods. Using qualitative interviews with residents and panel survey data, I examine various facets of neighborhood depopulation and consider two questions: why do low-income residents stay put in disadvantaged neighborhoods, and what are the consequences of staying put? In

¹ It is important to note here that not all neighborhoods in Detroit are depopulated. While Detroit has received its reputation as a shrinking city due to its overall outmigration of residents from the city, many neighborhoods in Detroit have maintained relatively stable levels of residential population change and some have experienced recent population growth. The notoriety of geographically large shrinking cities obscures the variation of neighborhoods within it.

addressing the first question, Chapter 2 uses in-depth interviews with residents of two depopulated neighborhoods in Detroit to explore residents' narratives of staying put. This chapter adds an important dimension to discussions of residential stability by considering stability from the perspective of those who have remained in their neighborhoods. I present various dimensions of residential stability, such as voluntary stability (the affirmative choice to stay put) and involuntary immobility (wanting to move, but being unable to do so), and I consider how the neighborhood context contributes to residents' decisions to move or stay. I find that perceptions of the neighborhood are integrated into residents' mobility decisions.

Chapter 3 also uses qualitative interviews with Detroit residents, but rather than focusing on residential stability, it examines the neighboring practices of residents in two depopulated neighborhoods. While Chapter 2 finds that perceptions of the neighborhood inform decisions to stay or move, Chapter 3 finds that the micro-residential context – the combination of housing type, the built environment, and the population density and residential vacancy surrounding one's home – is more salient to residents' neighboring practices than the larger neighborhood context. This finding, in relation to the previous chapter, suggests that the larger neighborhood context may be less relevant for certain outcomes, like neighboring practices, which tend to occur between residents living on a shared block face or in close proximity of one another, but may be central to other outcomes, like residential mobility and stability.

Chapter 4 uses survey data from the Panel Study of Income Dynamics, a longitudinal study of American families, to examine the association between neighborhood depopulation and health. I ask whether residence in depopulated

neighborhoods is associated with obesity and worse self-rated health compared to residence in neighborhoods with little population change. I find that neighborhood depopulation is largely not related to poorer health outcomes during a period of exposure of six years or more, but that poverty, consistent with the literature, is linked with greater obesity among women and marginally related to worse self-rated health among men and women. This chapter, in tandem with Chapter 3, suggests that neighborhood depopulation may be less relevant in explaining particular outcomes or may co-occur with other neighborhood-level factors, like poverty, which have a more discernable role in health-related consequences.

CHAPTER II

Living in Depopulated Neighborhoods:

Narratives of Staying in Place

Introduction

The scholarly and popular discourse are dominated by the rarely questioned assumption that any “rational” resident would, if given sufficient resources to do so, leave a disadvantaged neighborhood for a place with better schools and less crime and blight. In this dominant narrative, those who remain would leave if they could and are forced to stay because they are unable to escape. Yet, this narrative may fail to conform to the reasons many low-income people remain in high-poverty neighborhoods. In the landmark “Moving to Opportunity” experiment, a majority of people recruited – 62 percent – did not use the housing vouchers they were offered to move out of high-poverty neighborhoods (Briggs, Popkin, & Goering 2010). The fact that residents declined the opportunity to “move to opportunity” suggests that more may be at work in the decision to stay in a disadvantaged neighborhood than just abject poverty or lack of alternatives. At the very least, it suggests that the issue of why people stay in disadvantaged neighborhoods be treated as an open, empirical question.

To understand how residents negotiate decisions about staying put, this chapter focuses on the residential narratives of low-income individuals living in two high-poverty neighborhoods with long-term depopulation. Using interviews with residents, the chapter

seeks to explore whether – and how – the neighborhood context factors into participants’ residential narratives. To this end, I examine three research questions. How do low-income residents make decisions about why to stay in their places of residence? What factors are most salient to their decisions to remain in their neighborhoods? How do the changing characteristics of the neighborhood influence their decisions to stay?

To address these questions, I draw on 33 qualitative interviews with Detroit residents. I find that the neighborhood context gives rise to a unique set of reasons that residents want to either stay put or move out of their neighborhoods. Participants who lived in a neighborhood with recent residential and commercial growth had strong, positive sentiments about their neighborhood, which were the primary – and often only – motivation they had for wanting to remain in place. In contrast, participants who lived in a persistently depopulated neighborhood constructed multilayered explanations for staying put, which included the importance of social ties, a desire “to be stable”, and the rationale that their current location was as good as or better than any other neighborhood where they could live. As these narratives reveal, many participants experienced *voluntary stability*, affirmatively choosing to stay put and expressing a desire to remain in their neighborhoods. Embedded in some of these narratives of voluntary stability was a persistent threat of *involuntary mobility*, or being forced to move from a place where they wished to stay, usually as a result of eviction or landlords who had failed to pay property taxes. Although the majority of respondents spoke of their residential stability in voluntary terms, which were sometimes intertwined with fears of a forced move, some participants experienced *involuntary immobility*, whereby they described a preference to move, but identified barriers in their ability to do so.

Residential stability narratives such as these offer researchers insight into the residential mobility process of low-income individuals living in neighborhoods with long-term depopulation. As these interviews reveal, many low-income residents carefully assessed their housing options and made decisions about whether to stay and where to move. While some were involuntarily stuck in place, many wanted to remain in their neighborhoods and chose to stay. By incorporating these residential stability narratives into the broader research on residential mobility, social scientists can consider not only how low-income people make decisions about why to stay but also what factors contribute to remaining in place. Focusing on residential mobility without developing a clearer understanding of why people stay put means that researchers and policy makers know less about what keeps some low-income people in the same neighborhood over time, including whether staying put reflects a preference to remain in the same location or whether it is the result of external forces that limit mobility options.

Background

Low-income individuals experience greater residential mobility than more advantaged families (Astane & McLanahan 1994; Cutts et al 2011; Schacter 2004), and those who move most frequently are usually the most disadvantaged. They experience more unemployment, lower educational attainment, poorer mental health, a greater likelihood of domestic violence, and less access to affordable housing (Phinney 2013). When they move, many poor families move from one high-poverty neighborhood to another and struggle to escape poor neighborhoods (Sampson and Sharkey 2008; South and Crowder 1998). Low-income African-American families are especially vulnerable to remaining in high-poverty neighborhoods. Approximately 75 percent of all African-

American children who grew up in neighborhoods of concentrated poverty in the 1970s and 1980s remained poor and living in the same types of neighborhoods as adults (Sharkey 2013).

Scholarship has offered many explanations about why people move and has considered how individuals and families make decisions about when and where to move. In the seminal publication, *Why Families Move*, Rossi (1956) reported that families moved because of their shifting needs at various points during the life course. At the time of publication, this finding was novel. Prior to the book's publication, scholars focused almost exclusively on the negative consequences of residential mobility, but after publication, researchers and policymakers began to understand residential mobility as closely connected to social mobility. Rather than inherently flawed, movers were understood to be resourceful and motivated (Blau and Duncan 1967; Kopf 1977).

Residential mobility researchers soon began to investigate moving in the context of an individual's age, stage in the family life cycle, housing tenure, duration of residence, and environmental stress (Michelson 1977; Rossi 1955; Speare 1970; Speare, Goldstein, and Frey 1975; Wolpert 1966). Rational choice models emerged, which focused on "place utility", and reported that people moved – or stayed – after weighing the costs and benefits of relocation (Wolpert 1965). Since this early research, scholars have considered other determinants of moving (or staying), including residential satisfaction, whereby individuals and families move when they become dissatisfied with their homes or neighborhoods (Landale and Guest 1985; Speare 1974).

Researchers have also considered why low-income individuals, in particular, move and how they make decisions about moving (Bartlett 1997; Crowley 2003; DeLuca

Wood, and Rosenblatt 2011; Desmond 2016; Edin et al 2012; Rosen 2017; Schafft 2006; Wood 2014). Many low-income individuals experience unplanned and forced moves (Bartlett 1997; Crowley 2003; Desmond 2016; Schafft 2006), which necessarily interferes with the housing selection process (DeLuca, Wood, and Rosenblatt 2011). When low-income families are able to weigh the available housing options in preparation for a move, evidence suggests that they prioritize housing characteristics (the size and amenities of a dwelling) over neighborhood characteristics (Wood 2014). Acknowledging that they spent considerably more time inside their homes than out in their neighborhoods, families assigned much greater weight to a dwelling's features than to the risks associated with living in a particular neighborhood (ibid).

While most researchers have examined the causes and correlates of low-income residential mobility, some have explored the predictors of residential stability. In a recent study on the residential mobility of low-income families, researchers found that living in a disadvantaged neighborhood (as opposed to a “disordered” one) and homeownership were both related to greater residential stability (Kull, Coley, and Lynch 2016). Homeownership has long been linked to greater residential stability, as the studies above indicated, but the somewhat unexpected finding that low-income individuals experience fewer moves when they live in a neighborhood with more poverty and higher unemployment rates, suggests that factors related to the neighborhood context may be tied to staying put.

Staying Put in Disadvantaged Neighborhoods

Inequality researchers have considered a variety of systemic, structural, and individual-level factors that have served to keep low-income people in the same

neighborhoods over time. Many low-income families have remained in high-poverty neighborhoods because they have been systematically excluded from entering other neighborhoods due to racial steering and exclusionary laws that restricted their access (Farley, Danziger, and Holzer 2000; Lacy 2007; Massey and Denton 1993; Sugrue 1996). Other poor families have experienced economic barriers that have limited their ability to move altogether (Kothari 2003). These “involuntary immobile” families may wish to leave higher-risk neighborhoods, but because moving requires resources, they may be forced to stay (Black, Arnell, Adger et al 2013; Cummings 1998; Findlay 2011; Logan, Issar, Xu 2016). During times of natural disasters, these dynamics play out in the public eye as less advantaged people are disproportionately housed in danger zones and have fewer resources with which to escape (Logan et al 2016).²

In addition to these structural forces that keep low-income people in place, researchers have also considered how local social ties influence decisions among the poor to either move or stay (Boyd et al. 2010; Guest and Lee 1983). For example, Guest and Lee (1983) found that some residents remained in their communities long-term in an effort to preserve their social ties with their neighbors, and that when they moved, they selected housing only short distances away in order to maintain relationships with people in their communities. Although social ties have not factored as prominently in research

² Low-income individuals are not only disadvantaged by their lack of opportunity to move to certain neighborhoods, but they also face involuntary moves from places they may wish to stay, through evictions, problems with landlords, and poor housing quality (Bartlett 1997; Boyd et al. 2010; Crowley 2003; DeLuca, Wood, Rosenblatt 2011; Desmond 2016; Phinney 2013; Schafft 2006). Some scholars have argued that because low-income individuals are often forced to make involuntary and unplanned moves, their ability to make choices about when and where to move is constrained. DeLuca and colleagues (2011) recently argued, “most moves and neighborhood locations among poor minority families aren’t the result of making choices at all. In fact, the involuntary nature of residential mobility in poor communities is a direct cause (and eventual effect) of sustained segregation for these families” (2).

on residential mobility as have structural or neoclassical models³, there is some evidence that they play a role in low-income individuals' residential mobility decisions or preferences. Social support networks and close relationships with friends and family members may encourage some to stay put (Stack 1974), and relationships with neighbors may provide assurances of safety for residents who decide to remain in their higher-crime neighborhoods (Rosen 2017).

Local social ties – and the resources they provide – may also help to explain the return of some low-income individuals to their old neighborhoods. This pattern is perhaps best documented in housing mobility studies (Boyd, Edin, Clampet-Lundquist, and Duncan 2010; Briggs, Comey, and Weisman 2010), but also applies to Hurricane Katrina evacuees, who returned to the social networks of their old neighborhoods following displacement and relocation (Asad 2015). In the case of Moving to Opportunity, a housing mobility experiment sponsored by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development in which families were offered a housing voucher to move into a low-poverty neighborhood, many participants (62 percent) either did not accept the housing vouchers offered to them or returned to high-poverty neighborhoods soon after relocation. While multiple factors contributed to these outcomes (Edin et al 2012), some participants returned to high-poverty neighborhoods to be closer to loved ones and their other social supports (Briggs, Comey, and Weisman 2010). Researchers examining the Gautreaux Two residential mobility study similarly found that some participants moved back to their high-poverty neighborhoods one year after leaving them because they

³ Neoclassical models consider residential mobility to be an individual-level choice made by rational actors interested in maximizing benefits. However, as Kull (2014) points out, neoclassical models “may be less applicable for low-income families who face greater constraints on housing choices and preferences than more advantaged families, and whose mobility-related decisions may be influenced more by proximal and distal factors than by family traits” (p. 4).

wanted to be closer to friends and family members who provided companionship or childcare or because they needed to take care of sick family members (Boyd, Edin, Clampet-Lundquist, and Duncan 2010). Often, those who remained in their placement neighborhoods were more socially integrated into their new communities or had friends and family members already living nearby.⁴

Despite the extensive scholarship on residential mobility, current research still provides us with limited information about the extent to which stayers opt to stay put or are stuck in place. In a recent study on residential mobility and poverty, Phinney (2013) wrote, “It is unclear whether the absence of mobility reflects contentment with existing housing circumstances or constraints on the ability to improve existing housing and neighborhood circumstances by moving” (p. 781). By examining the residential narratives of stayers, I consider not only how low-income people make decisions about staying, but also the factors that residents identify as integral to their stability, including whether staying is a voluntary choice or the result of involuntary forces.

Methods

Between April 2013 and September 2013, I interviewed 33 current residents living in one of two depopulated neighborhoods in Detroit, Michigan: Northwood and River Park.⁵ Because I was interested in learning whether and how residents’ mobility decisions differed given their residence in neighborhoods with different types of population change trajectories, I selected Northwood and River Park based on their

⁴ Some participants of both housing mobility programs were relieved to live further from their original neighborhoods. In addition to living in safer neighborhoods away from gang violence and drug activity, some participants valued the distance from social entanglements, including needy and demanding family members and friends (Boyd et al 2010; Briggs et al 2010).

⁵ Per agreement with the university’s Internal Review Board, the names of both neighborhoods have been changed.

similarities with respect to long-term depopulation, median household income, and the neighborhood poverty rate, but differences in terms of their shorter-term population loss. In terms of the similarities between the two neighborhoods, both Northwood and River Park experienced considerable long-term depopulation. Long-term depopulation was measured over a 40-year period using U.S. census data from 1970 and 2010. According to Weaver and colleagues (2017), depopulated neighborhoods experience a loss of 25 percent of their population over this 40-year period. By this metric, Northwood and River Park are *very* depopulated neighborhoods. Between 1970 and 2010, Northwood's population declined by 76 percent, and River Park's population declined by 49 percent. Both neighborhoods also had a high percentage of families living below the poverty line (55 percent in Northwood; 47 percent in River Park), and both had low median household incomes (\$15,363 in Northwood; \$13,562 in River Park).⁶ In contrast to their similar levels of long-term depopulation, Northwood and River Park differed in their shorter-term declines in population. According to U.S. decennial census data, between 2000 and 2010, Northwood experienced a loss in population of 47 percent, whereas River Park's population declined by only 4 percent. This difference in shorter-term depopulation compared to the extreme long-term depopulation that both neighborhoods experienced provides an opportunity to assess how residents respond to measures based on different durations of neighborhood change and whether their residential mobility decisions vary given these differences.

Because this study was aimed at understanding why low-income residents stayed put, participation in the study was open to any resident of Northwood or River Park who had resided in their neighborhood for at least one year and was 18 years of age or older. I

⁶ Data obtained from the 2014 American Community Survey, 5-year estimates.

used a variety of methods to recruit study participants, including distributing flyers door-to-door, posting flyers in public locations throughout the neighborhood, and providing information about the study to local residents whom I met on the street or at neighborhood functions. Most participants indicated that they learned about the study through neighborhood flyers, but in four cases (one in Northwood and three in River Park), participants contacted me after hearing about the study from one of their neighbors who had participated.

I conducted interviews using a semi-structured interview format with open-ended questions, which maximizes reliability across interviews while also giving participants flexibility in their responses and encouraging them to formulate answers in their own words. Using this format, I asked participants to reflect on their current residential conditions, including whether they wished to move or to stay put, whether they expected any type of move within the next two to three years, and how they arrived at their residential mobility decisions. In interviews, I asked participants to reflect on their residential histories and to describe the circumstances surrounding each of their ten prior residential moves. I also asked participants to describe their experiences with and perceptions of their housing, neighborhoods, and city as a way to develop a more complete account of their residential circumstances. I collected information on participants' sociodemographic characteristics, sources of income, housing tenure and subsidy status, and residential histories. Each interview lasted between one and a half and three hours. Participants selected the interview setting, which included a local community center, nearby restaurants, and a gazebo at a local park. On three occasions, interviews took place in participants' homes.

Following each interview, I recorded notes of my encounters with participants, including their affect and appearance during the interview, the interview setting, our interview rapport, and any additional observations about the participant or interview in general. I used a handheld audio recorder to record each interview and compiled verbatim transcripts of all interviews. I drew on the suite of functions in NVivo 10 to code each of my transcripts and used both open and focused coding in NVivo to identify themes throughout the interviews. I also coded each interview “by hand” as a secondary check on my results.

I analyzed interviews by examining the narratives that residents shared about their residential mobility histories, experiences living in their neighborhoods, and future residential mobility expectations. A narrative approach to studying residential mobility and stability is useful as respondents interpret their lives through a causally connected sequence of events that share a beginning, middle, and end (Small, Harding, Lamont 2010; Somers and Gibson 1994). In the context of residential mobility, respondents tell stories about where they lived in the past, why they moved, how they experienced their current home and communities, and what they expected in a future, hypothetical residential location if they were to move. Participants in this study shared stories about their neighborhoods, neighbors, and personal histories that encapsulated their intentions to stay – or to move. Sociologists have used narratives to study social movements (Ewick and Silbey 2003; Polletta 2014), health care (Sandelowski 1991), social mobility (Young 2004), and residential mobility (Rosen 2017). Rosen (2017) recently employed a narrative approach to understand why residents stayed in or moved between high-poverty neighborhoods. She argued that residents moved after experiencing a “narrative rupture”

in the stories they told about their neighborhoods that shifted from initial feelings of safety to subsequent experiences of danger. As my interviews reveal, many participants' narratives of staying put were, like Rosen's, embedded in stories of neighbors, who, participants believed, were sources of protection. However, in contrast to those of residents in Rosen's study, the narratives of residents in my study did not always rupture and culminate in decisions to move. The narratives presented here also show participants who made sense of staying put by considering factors other than safety, such as proximity to family and friends, a desire "to be stable", and access to neighborhood amenities. I argue that residents' decisions to stay put are multilayered and that perceptions of danger are sometimes secondary to other factors unrelated to safety that serve to keep people in place, including proximity to family and friends, neighborhood-based sentiments, and feelings of personal stability.

As a middle-class, white woman with multiple years of higher education, I was aware of the multiple ways in which my sociodemographic characteristics differed from those of participants, who were predominantly African American men and women living in high-poverty neighborhoods in Detroit. I used a variety of techniques to build rapport with participants, which started from our initial contact either in person or over the phone. Prior to the start of our interviews, I began by talking about conventional topics such as the weather, current TV shows, movies, local sports events, holidays, or weekend activities. I then began with a short description of the project and a brief introduction about myself. I disclosed at the start of interviews that I was originally from Kentucky and that I was interested in learning about the changes occurring in Detroit and residents' perceptions of their city and communities. Many participants were intrigued that I was

from Kentucky and shared stories of spending time in Kentucky or traveling through the state to visit family members further south. Some said that they wished to move back to the South to be closer to family or to pursue work opportunities. As someone not originally from Detroit, I explained to participants that they were the experts of their city and neighborhoods and asked that they share their knowledge and experiences with me. During interviews, some participants said that they were glad that someone wanted to hear their thoughts about Detroit and their neighborhoods.

Given Detroit's long history of racial turmoil and the racist policies and practices of many white politicians, business owners, real estate companies, and ordinary people, I was concerned that African-American participants would be distrustful and guarded in talking with a white woman about their neighborhoods and city and that they would avoid the topic of race or racial tension altogether. While I cannot be certain of participants' overall level of trust, I was surprised and grateful by how open participants were in discussing issues of race. During the course of interviews, many participants readily spoke of the history of racial turmoil in Detroit, whites who had fled the city and whites who were now returning, and personal examples of racism that they had experienced throughout their lives. When discussing these topics, some participants would say, "I don't mean any offense." I would assure them that I had taken no offense and would explain how much I valued their sharing such difficult topics and experiences with me.

Data

Of the 33 participants I interviewed, 17 lived in Northwood and 16 lived in River Park. The ages of participants ranged from 18 years to 73 years, with an average age of 47.8 years. Over half of the participants were female (57 percent) and most were African

American (91 percent). Most participants had lived in their neighborhoods for several years, with an average tenure of 7.5 years. With the exception of three participants who had inherited their houses from parents or grandparents, all others were renters and nearly all received some form of housing subsidy, either Section 8 or residence in one of the public housing facilities in the city.

The sociodemographic characteristics of participants were similar for both Northwood and River Park neighborhoods. Participants from both neighborhoods were approximately the same age, though Northwood residents were, on average, slightly younger (46 years compared to 49 years in River Park). A majority of participants from both neighborhoods were female (59 percent in Northwood and 56 percent in River Park), and the majority were African American (82 percent in Northwood and 100 percent in River Park). In both River Park and Northwood, nearly all participants were renters. There was one homeowner in Northwood and two in River Park.

As mentioned earlier, while both neighborhoods experienced considerable population decline during the most recent 40-year decennial census period (76 percent in Northwood; 49 percent in River Park), between 2000 and 2010 Northwood's population continued to decline at a high level (47 percent), but River Park's depopulation began to stabilize (declining by only 4 percent). While population decline slowed in both neighborhoods, the decline was more rapid in River Park. These distinct population trajectories signal some of the differences between River Park and Northwood and highlight the uneven development of the two neighborhoods. For example, on the far north side of Detroit near the city limits, Northwood had few businesses and only one restaurant, a McDonald's, which was located on one of the busy streets bordering the

neighborhood. Many of the other businesses and some of the local churches in the neighborhood were long gone, wooden planks covering the doors and windows. One of the neighborhood schools sat empty on one block, with windows knocked out and old curtains still hanging on the walls. Some streets in the center of Northwood stretched for blocks where only one of two houses remained. Between these occupied homes were vacant houses, houses destroyed by fire, and overgrown lots with rubble and piles of trash – disposed beds, couches, and plastic bags of garbage. Sewer holes along the streets were missing covers and had been left exposed. Despite this decline, some signs of development and care existed: a freshly tilled community garden with hand-painted signs; a colorful “art house” for community residents; and two blocks of new two-story, single-family houses. While many Northwood residents considered the new houses as a positive sign of growth, some disapproved, deeming them as nothing more than prefabricated units that would quickly deteriorate like the rest of the neighborhood. During the spring and summer months of data collection, I seldom saw people outside. The streets, backyards, and porches were nearly always empty, regardless of the time of day.

In contrast to Northwood, River Park exhibited many signs of growth. People walked along the streets, sat on front porches, and worked in their yards. New luxury condominiums, restaurants, and businesses recently began to appear in River Park. At the time of this writing, the neighborhood included a vegan restaurant, a new coffee shop and bakery, and a tea house, and will soon have an organic food market. Across the street from River Park, is a renovated extension of the Detroit River Walk, with a gazebo and walkway. In 2016, the city announced that River Park would be the first of three

neighborhoods targeted for development from a \$5 million neighborhood grant. The new 12-unit complex will include eight townhouses, four apartments, and 1,200 square feet of retail space, with three of the 12 units expected to provide affordable housing to lower-income residents.

Findings

Staying Put in River Park

Staying for the neighborhood. In River Park, nearly every participant described a desire to remain in their neighborhood. Of the 16 participants interviewed in River Park, only two expressed an interest in moving, both because of their dissatisfaction with their apartment building – its poor maintenance and vermin infestations. The two participants who were making plans to move described their neighborhood as the only thing they liked about where they were living, and other participants who considered moving in the future said that they wanted to remain in the neighborhood permanently, and would simply move to another apartment or house in the neighborhood. Vi,⁷ a 56-year old resident who had lived in River Park for two years and was on a waiting list to move to another low-income apartment building explained:

I love living here, you know, it's so pretty. I can look out my window, and I can see the [downtown] buildings, and I can see [the park] and the bridge. I can see who come across the bridge and everything. I can see half of the [4th of July] fireworks from my window...I like down here 'cause you can go over there and sit and walk....It's so many things happening in this neighborhood. I see the motorcycles, and they be having their little thing. It's so much going on, and that's good. I even like sitting here looking out here at those flowers behind us....My neighborhood is beautiful, you know.

⁷ The names of all study participants have been changed. At the beginning of each interview, I asked participants if they would like to select their pseudonym for the project. The names throughout this dissertation reflect those that participants chose.

Vi, like many other participants living in River Park, moved to the neighborhood because her apartment was the first to accept her housing application. Before moving to River Park, Vi was homeless for two years, moving from shelter to shelter and dealing with untreated mental health problems. It took her two years to receive Social Security Disability, and once she did, she was able to move into permanent housing.

Nearly every participant moved to River Park in a similar manner: receiving word from an apartment building in River Park only after submitting housing applications throughout the city. No one described a careful process of neighborhood selection that involved assessing various neighborhoods in and around the city. However, once they arrived in River Park, few wanted to leave. Many spoke of their surprise in the discovery of how nice their neighborhood was with its amenities, police presence, ethnic diversity, and “beauty.” Nearby grocery stores, restaurants, and parks, and the close proximity to downtown with its medical facilities and entertainment offerings were features of their neighborhood that kept participants wanting to remain in place. Older residents, in particular, described how the ease of accessing food, clothing, and other items enabled them to “be independent” and how their close proximity to the Riverwalk promoted physical activity.

As described elsewhere, low-income residents are more likely than their higher-income counterparts to experience sudden, unplanned moves (DeLuca, Wood, Rosenblatt 2011; Kull, Coley, and Lynch 2016). Unplanned mobility, whether from evictions, conflict with landlords, or deteriorating housing conditions, gives individuals little time to assess their neighborhood and housing options, often propelling them to accept the first option that becomes available. Participants living in River Park were no different. Some

moved to their current apartments to get out of a bad housing situation, and others, like Mimi, arrived to River Park after experiencing a long episode of homelessness. Mimi, a woman in her mid 30s, had been homeless for over five years before landing an apartment in River Park the year prior. She explained that before moving to River Park, she had submitted applications throughout the city. Moving between shelters, rented rooms, and abandoned houses, Mimi was never in one place for long, living in different neighborhoods across the city. She placed housing applications wherever she could, and was finally able to find a landlord who would rent to her: “They were the only people to actually take a good look at my application and give me a chance.”

Mimi repeatedly described how much she liked her current neighborhood, mentioning the appearance of the neighborhood and describing how she felt safe to go for a walk. “I feel very fucking comfortable,” Mimi asserted. Before moving to her current apartment, Mimi had been staying in Highland Park, a neighborhood a few miles to the north with a reputation for violent crime and low levels of safety. While she was living there, Mimi believed that she was safe. She explained that her boyfriend lived in the neighborhood, and because people knew him, they would watch out for her. Then, one day when Mimi was coming out of a store, a man shot her. She was pregnant at the time, and subsequently miscarried the baby. At the conclusion of her story, Mimi looked out the window, tears rolling down her face, and with a faltering voice said, “So when you ask me something about how do I like it over here...this scenery...it’s very refreshing. It’s very refreshing. It’s beautiful... It look beautiful. The little hoodlums, they not even that bad.”

None of the participants living in River Park mentioned moving there because of features of the neighborhood. Most were like Mimi: they needed a place to stay, and had first heard back from an apartment building in River Park. A few of the older participants moved to the neighborhood to be closer to friends or family members who were already living there, but most submitted applications widely, and moved in after their application was accepted in one of the River Park apartments where they had applied. Many older residents were living in one of the two high-rise public housing buildings for seniors in the neighborhood. Some had submitted applications after seeing the buildings as they passed by in a car or bus, and several senior participants had secured housing during periods of homelessness. River Park Apartment residents usually moved into their apartments soon after placing their applications, sometimes as quickly as a couple of weeks.

Regardless of their paths to River Park, nearly every participant who lived there wanted to stay. Like Mimi, the characteristics of their neighborhood were central to their preferences to stay, and for older people, the safety and beauty of the neighborhood were augmented by its accessibility. For the senior participants of River Park who did not have a car (none did), the accessibility of amenities in their neighborhood was important. Dee explained, “[In River Park], you can, you know, be independent, and any kind of independency, you can do things yourself.” Barry, a 58-year old man living in one of the senior high-rises for the past five years explained that some of his friends who lived further away were trying to talk him into moving into their senior building, but Barry liked being close to downtown. He explained:

I like the area, because if I was to get sick and an emergency arise, I'm close to the medical center. Then, I have the supermarket, Eastern Market. I just like...I like the area 'cause I have everything, everything that I need, except for going and buying clothes, you know, and I have to, I go out to the mall for that. But other than that, I have everything I need right here, and a lot of it's in walking distance, you know.

The variety of neighborhood amenities, from stores to the local riverwalk, served as locations for residents to gather with friends and socialize with neighbors. Several senior participants described their routine of walking the three blocks down to McDonalds several days a week to drink coffee and talk with friends. Others, like Eunice, who had lived in the neighborhood for four years, would meet with other residents in her building and walk across the street to spend the afternoon fishing. She explained, "There's a lot of people in the building go fishing, so we all go over there together and just sit out there. See, I don't drink, but they be sitting out there having a little party." While participants typically emphasized the physical features of their neighborhood – stores, restaurants, the river, and park – rather than the social aspects in their explanations for staying, the physical and social elements likely reinforced one another to strengthen residents' attachment to their neighborhoods and desire to stay put. As we will see in Northwood, despite having few places to socialize, residents spoke of the bonds that they developed with their neighbors, which served to keep many in a neighborhood that others had left. Social ties may have contributed to River Park residents' desire to stay in place, but their primary focus was on the physical features of the neighborhood along with their proximity to stores, restaurants, and downtown.

Staying Put in Northwood

A multilayered narrative of staying put. Unlike residents in River Park, those living in Northwood did not express preferences to stay in their neighborhoods because of its characteristics. Rather, every Northwood participant described the neighborhood in harsh terms, calling it “the ghetto,” “a jungle,” “a dump,” and a “dope-infested, goddamn neighborhood.” Many described concerns that they had about their personal safety. Lisa, a ten-year resident of Northwood who planned to remain in her neighborhood, said “you don’t ever feel safe,” and Will, a 52-year old resident who grew up in the neighborhood explained, “I don’t feel safe two steps away from my door. I don’t feel safe. I watch everybody and everything, even the squirrels. I watch them too. They got some tricks too.”

Concerns with safety were a primary reason Northwood residents wanted to leave their neighborhood. In Northwood, many more participants wished to move than in River Park (35 percent in Northwood compared to 12 percent in River Park); still, despite their concerns with crime and safety, a majority of participants wanted to stay. This group of stayers presented a multilayered narrative of their residential stability that involved a combination of factors, including social ties with friends, family, and neighbors that provided sources of protection; the assessment that other neighborhoods were no better than their current one; and a desire “to be stable.”

Social ties. While River Park participants mentioned their social ties with neighbors only tangentially, such ties were integral to the explanations that Northwood participants provided for wanting to stay put. Some had close friendships with their neighbors, and others had family members who lived nearby. Sheila, a 49-year old

woman who had lived in Northwood for nine years, wanted to stay in her apartment building to be close to her son and grandchildren. Because her son and grandchildren both lived on another floor in her building, Sheila was able to see them every day. Her son often stopped by several times a day to check on her, and during the warmer months, she would frequently take her grandchildren outside to play on the lawn. Recently, Sheila's husband began to put pressure on her to move to Georgia so that they could be closer to his mother and aunt, who were both sick and in need of care. Sheila said that she was sure they would eventually move to Georgia, but for now, she was hoping they would be able stay where they were.

Sheila was unique among Northwood participants in that her family members lived in the neighborhood. Most other Northwood participants who spoke of wanting to be close to family lived a few miles away from them. This was the case for Anthony, whose parents lived two neighborhoods away. Although not in the same neighborhood, the distance was close enough for Anthony to want to remain in Northwood. Despite many complaints that he had with various aspects of his housing, Anthony, a 49-year old resident of Northwood Apartments, had lived there for six years and had no intention of moving. "Either they gonna tear this building down or take me out in a body bag," he said. Living close to his parents and to the neighborhood where he grew up was important to him. If he left his apartment, it was to visit his parents and his childhood neighborhood; otherwise, he stayed inside. He avoided the younger residents in the building, who he said caused a lot of problems, and he did not spend time outside in the neighborhood. During the interview, when asked to describe his neighborhood, Anthony began talking about the neighborhood where he grew up, not about Northwood. When

pressed, Anthony explained that although he lived there, Northwood was not his neighborhood, and he elaborated by saying, “there is no way I could do anything around here, ‘cause it’s just too much...it’s too far gone.”

Proximity to family was important for many Northwood residents, but for others, living near friends and neighbors was the primary reason they wanted to stay. Several Northwood residents had “best friends” in the neighborhood that they did not want to leave. Tammy, a 50-year old resident who had lived in Northwood for 12 years, explained, “My friends are in the neighborhood, so why go and try to make a bunch of new friends, and they gonna be a bunch of jerks, when you can be in your neighborhood and hang out with your other, older friends?” Several Northwood residents shared accounts similar to Tammy’s about living near friends. Northwood participants described spending the afternoon or evening talking and hanging out at a friends’ house or apartment. Residents told me about annual parties they hosted for their friends who lived nearby, and some residents of Northwood Apartments talked about gathering in a neighbor’s apartment to watch a movie or a sports game.

Comparing Northwood to other neighborhoods. While living near family and friends was important for some Northwood participants, others focused more generally on their good relationships with neighbors, something that they either did not have in their previous neighborhoods and/or were not certain would exist in another neighborhood. Part of Lisa’s narrative of staying in Northwood was the relationship she had with her neighbors. Lisa, a woman in her mid-forties who had lived in Northwood for the past 9 years, said, “Everybody knows us and respects us, so I’m not leaving.” In her previous neighborhood a few miles away, Lisa did not have a good relationship with her

neighbors. Not only were drugs, prostitution, and violence a bigger problem in her last neighborhood, but her neighbors had also begun poisoning her animals. Lisa had lived in the neighborhood for 6 years, but knew that she had to move. In Northwood, Lisa explained, she got along very well with her neighbors and they all looked out for each other.

For others, like Roy, staying put was less about comparing his current neighborhood to his previous one, but an assessment of what his life may be like in another, hypothetical neighborhood. Roy had lived in Northwood for the past 10 years, but at the time of the interview was at risk of losing his home because his landlord had not been paying property taxes on the house that Roy rented. Roy was hopeful that the judge would grant him the right to remain in the house, but if he were forced to move, he planned to look for housing within the neighborhood. He did not want to leave Northwood for an unfamiliar neighborhood where he did not know his neighbors or the dynamics of the neighborhood. He explained:

I choose to live around here, you know, because people know me around here, and I'm more relaxed than movin' somewhere where you don't know where you at and you don't know the people there. So, it's just like you just comin' in to start all over again. You meet new people and you seein' different faces. You don't know these people. But, see, all the faces I see around here, and everybody knows me because I do lawn service around this area here, you know. So, I mean, then you stand a better chance of, "Oh, I know him. Oh, he gonna cut some grass." You know, and I can feel relaxed about that. But you go somewhere where no one know you, you gotta start all over again. I mean, meetin' new faces and everything, and you don't know what type of person that lives here. You just now moved into the area. You don't even know what kind of area you're in.

In Northwood, where safety was a concern, knowing and having a good relationship with one's neighbors reassured many residents. Participants like Roy, who

considered the possibility of moving to another neighborhood in the city, were concerned that they would be at greater risk because their new neighbors would not know them. Several Northwood residents explained that when they left their homes by foot, they remained within the confines of their own neighborhood and did not venture into any of the adjacent neighborhoods. Residents explained that because they were a familiar face in their own neighborhood, they were less concerned about their safety, but because they were unknown in other neighborhoods, they had to be vigilant – being an unfamiliar face in a neighborhood was a potential risk. Vera, a resident of Northwood for the last four years, said that she did not cross her neighborhood boundary because people might “Knock ya in your head, rob ya, everything.” When asked why she would be in danger across the street, she explained, “It’s just a new face comin’ across.” Christy, an eight-year resident of Northwood, shared a similar sentiment. She explained:

I’m scared to go anywhere other than this. The only reason why...’cause I know everybody here, but, I’m scared to even cross [the road] and go in that neighborhood, because I don’t know anybody, and, I tell you, it’s foreign territory. It’s like a different country, I’m tellin’ you...it’s completely different. I mean, you don’t know everybody over there, you know? And they don’t know you. They could put a gun to your head, you know?

Simply knowing people in the neighborhood was reason enough for many residents to want to stay put. Michael moved back to Northwood the previous year with his fiancé. He had grown up in Northwood, moved away in his 20s, and now at 31, was back with his own family. His fiancé had also grown up in the neighborhood. Michael laughed that they were together now with an infant son of their own. When they were children, he explained, they never had any romantic feelings for one another. Michael liked being back in his old neighborhood, where he knew everyone. “I know everybody

[here]. I feel comfortable, so I wouldn't want it no other way. I wouldn't wanna move to a neighborhood where I gotta go purchase a gun or somethin' to protect my family. I know everybody, so if I don't see 'em, [my neighbors] gonna see [the dangerous people]." Michael trusted that people in his neighborhood were watching out for each other and keeping an eye on anyone who might be in the neighborhood to cause problems. Moving to another neighborhood did not carry these same assurances.

Residents in Northwood who planned to remain in their neighborhood often incorporated such appraisals in their mobility decisions, comparing their current neighborhood to potential destinations, and concluding that they were safer in Northwood. Participants who wanted to stay put typically considered other potential neighborhood destinations as having as much crime as Northwood, saying things like, "it's the same everywhere." In her description of Northwood, Tammy said, "This area's like, what do you call it? The drug area. But if you gonna say drug area, you might say the whole area of Detroit." For many participants, this included the suburbs of Detroit as well. Anthony, while reflecting on moving to another neighborhood, explained, "You can't run from [crime]. There's no way you can run from it, 'cause it's everywhere. You can go out to the suburbs; oh, it's at the suburbs. You can go downtown; it's downtown. No, it's everywhere. You can't run from it." Lula, a 73-year old resident of Northwood Apartments, explained that she felt safer in Northwood, where she had lived for the last 15 years, than in the suburbs, where her son lived. Her son once suggested that Lula move to his house to live with his family, but she declined, providing the following narrative of life in her son's neighborhood:

The suburbs they kill you out there quicker they would here. You safer really around in the neighborhood. You know everybody. You know ‘em, and you know what kind of crooks steal. You can’t go out your door here in Michigan! Out [in the suburbs], you come out your door, get in your car, and you subject to get killed. Like, I went out to my son’s house. He live way out there in one of them neighborhoods. I told him, “Hell no, I ain’t gon’ stay out here. People ain’t gon’ come up in here and kill me, thinking I got somethin’. You the one with the money.”

Lula reiterated the conviction shared by Northwood residents that knowing the people in the neighborhood, including the ones to watch out for, was important for safety *and* a reason enough to stay.

Stability. As described in the above passages, Northwood residents elaborated on several components that kept them in their neighborhood: close proximity to family and friends, good relationships with neighbors, feeling safe by knowing the neighborhood and the people, and an assessment that other neighborhoods were just as, if not more, dangerous than their own. Many residents addressed these factors concurrently in their narratives. Apart from considerations about the neighborhood or the people associated with it, some residents simply wanted to stay because they sought stability. I interviewed three participants with children, and none wanted to move their children to another neighborhood. Mary, a Northwood parent of two teenagers, had lived in the neighborhood for 10 years, but she remained concerned about her children’s safety. She sometimes considered moving to a safer neighborhood, but ultimately did not want to move her children to another school. Both of Mary’s children attended special needs classes at their school, and because they liked their school and were doing well there, she did not want to uproot them.

Similarly, Michael planned to stay in Northwood for several more years. His son was an infant, so he was not yet worried about his son's safety in the neighborhood. He explained that he wanted to stay where he was at least until his son became a teenager, at which time, he would likely move to get away from the local drug dealers who may try to recruit his son for work. "I know a lot of guys who done had kids grow up in my neighborhood, and then when they get up in age – 14, 15 – the guys in my neighborhood put it in their head, 'come sell drugs for me,' and all that, and if somebody do that to my son, I don't know what I'll do. I might do somethin' to them to be put on the news." Here, Michael draws on his knowledge of neighborhood gangs, drugs, and adolescence to fashion a narrative that allows him to time his move so that his son will stay out of trouble.

Northwood participants without children also wanted to stay put for their own stability. Although Christy's best friend lived a few blocks away, she eventually wanted to move out of Northwood and was looking forward to the time when she could move to a nicer neighborhood. She described it as "the ghetto," and said that she had been beaten up many times over the years. When Christy first came to Northwood eight years ago, she was homeless. Before moving to Northwood, she was living in a house that she had owned in one of the more affluent suburbs of Detroit, but after her mother and husband both died of cancer in the same year, she began using drugs, stopped paying taxes on her house, and was forced to sell. She moved to Northwood to be closer to her drug suppliers, moved into one of the vacant houses in the neighborhood, and started working as a prostitute to support her drug habit. Christy said that in the last eight years, she had lived in 12 different houses in Northwood, most of which were vacant: "My ex-boyfriend, he'd

fix it up, put the illegal electricity on, carpet the walls in the winter.” Over the last several years, Christy had been trying to get back on track. She said that she had stopped working as a prostitute five years earlier, had a full-time job as a caretaker, and was now living “legally” in a house in the neighborhood, paying rent and paying for utilities. Christy said that she often thought about moving, but she explained that she wanted to get things in order first. She needed to get a new ID and then apply for Social Security before she could move. During the interview, Christy repeated that she was residentially stable. “I’m stable here,” she said, and elaborated, “I feel much better about myself. For years, I’ve been illegally living, and I’m legally now doing everything in the right way like I used to again, and you know, trying to straighten up.”

Like Christy, Roy also spoke about wanting to remain residentially stable. However, unlike Christy, Roy had lived in the same house that he rented with his partner for the last eight years, and did not want to leave Northwood. In part, Roy wanted to remain in Northwood because he felt safe knowing his neighborhood and neighbors, and was not certain that he would have a similar experience in a different place. But, in addition to safety, Roy expressed a desire for stability. He explained that he had not thought about moving to another neighborhood because, “I wanna be somewhere where I can be stable and live, you know? Fifty-three, you can’t keep running here and running there. I’m tryin’ to be stable somewhere.” This type of residential stability was important for many Northwood residents, whether for their own well-being or for their children’s. Moving home is disruptive, so for these participants, residential stability was important for overall stability in their lives.

Involuntary Immobility

Not everyone in Northwood or River Park wanted to stay put. Participants from both neighborhoods – two in River Park and five in Northwood – were involuntarily immobile: they wanted to move, but were unable to do so. Lack of funds and long waiting lists at other apartment buildings were the most common reasons participants were unable to move. In each neighborhood, however, residents' reasons for wanting to move differed. In Northwood, every participant who wanted to move cited concerns with their neighborhood: drugs, violence, abandonment, and lack of accessible stores. In River Park, though, the two participants who wanted to move liked their neighborhood, but disliked their apartment building. They complained about the building's poor maintenance and rodent infestations. The narratives of these participants illustrate a form of residential stability that is distinct from the narratives of voluntary stability described earlier. These residents wished to leave, but could not.

Mr. C, a resident of Northwood Apartments for the last five years, was very unhappy with both his apartment building and the surrounding neighborhood. Just months before our interview, Mr. C was nearly shot while riding his bicycle through the neighborhood. He complained that the area was "drug infested" with shootings happening regularly and that people in his building and the surrounding neighborhood were not friendly: "you tell people good morning, they look at you like they got problem issues." Mr. C wanted to move somewhere that was safer and had friendlier people. He had wanted to move the following month, but he explained, trailing off, "the money ain't here yet, so I guess as soon as I get the money..."

Other residents, like Michelle, were on long waiting lists in apartment buildings outside of the city. They each expected to wait between one and three more years before they would be able to move. Michelle, a Northwood Apartment resident for five years, wanted to leave her neighborhood for a nicer place. In Northwood, she rarely left her home; if she needed something from the nearby gas station, she sent her husband. Michelle explained that she was the type of person who liked being out in the neighborhood, but in Northwood, it was too dangerous and there were no nice shops nearby. Michelle wanted to live in Ferndale, a more prosperous neighborhood to the north of the Detroit city boundary. Her name had been on a waiting list for an apartment there for the last two and a half years, and she expected to wait for another year before she would be able to move. She was willing to wait, she explained, because:

Where I'm moving to, I can walk everywhere. I can walk around the corner to the market, to the restaurant, to the nail shop, to the tattoo place, the Dollar Store, the beauty shop; there's a bank. It's four markets just right next to each other. It's a liquor store. Everything is right there, and then Ferndale is just friendlier to me.... And they have, during the summer months, they have the Gay Pride thing for gay, lesbian, transgender, and then they have the puppet show. They have the cat show, so it's like a little parade where they actually block off Woodward for a day or two, and you're able to bring your pets, and they can participate in the cutest pet of the day, and then you could try different foods for your animals, stuff that's natural.

Michelle did not want to move because of her apartment building, but rather because of the neighborhood. Indeed, each of the Northwood residents who wanted to move wanted to do so because of concerns with their neighborhood. Vera, a four-year resident of Northwood, explained that she liked that all of the residents in Northwood knew one another, "but that's not the point," she said, "the point is the cleanness.... [My street] is the worst street I ever saw. It's a lot of houses torn down, some of 'em is burnt

up, and stuff like that. Don't nobody come outside, really. When I walk out my door, and I have a nice house, I got trash just sittin' across the street in an abandoned house. It's just terrible. It really is." Despite having a nice house and a good relationship with her neighbors, Vera could no longer tolerate living in her blighted neighborhood.

In River Park, however, the two residents who wanted to move liked their neighborhood. Dee and Vi, both of whom had lived in River Park Apartments for about three years, liked living near the local stores and restaurants, and they liked being close to the Riverwalk park, but they were both very dissatisfied with their housing and wanted to move out. Both women described problems with cockroaches, mice, and recurring bed bug infestations, and they complained that maintenance was negligent in addressing their problems. For six weeks, the maintenance workers in Dee's apartment building had left a hole in her bathroom floor in disrepair. Every week for six weeks, Dee wrote a letter to the maintenance office reminding them of the damaged hole and complaining that bugs were coming into her apartment through it. It was not until Dee called the central office downtown that someone fixed it. "They came out that same day, but for six weeks, that hole was in there. Now, see, that's ridiculous." Like Michelle, Dee was on a long waiting list at another apartment building. She hoped that they would call her name within the next year, but until the time came when she would be able to move, she would deal with the bed bugs, mice, and negligent maintenance.

The Threat of Involuntary Mobility

Just as some residents from both neighborhoods experienced involuntary immobility, some were threatened with involuntary mobility, or being forced to move out of homes and neighborhoods where they wished to remain. Three residents from

Northwood and four in River Park described their concern that they would have to leave their homes and move elsewhere. The reasons for being forced to move included evictions, landlords not paying property taxes, concerns about loss of home to gentrification, poor and unsanitary housing conditions, and a family member who wished to sell the property. In every case except for one, participants did not know where they would go. Only one participant had housing lined up: Lori would move in with her son's family if she had to.

The threat of a forced move was imminent for some. Two Northwood participants had received notices that they would soon have to vacate their houses because their landlords had not been paying the property taxes, and another participant anticipated receiving an eviction notice any day. Lamont, a resident of Northwood Apartments for the last five years, was already nearly a week behind on his rent and had been late several months in a row. He did not expect the property manager to let him fall behind for another month. If he were evicted, Lamont was not sure where he would go. His mother had died five years earlier, and he never knew his father; he had no friends and an aunt whom he did not want to contact. He hoped that management would give him a few extra days to try to find money, but if they did not, he would try to find an empty bed in a homeless shelter.

In River Park, eviction was also a concern for some, but so too was gentrification. The two River Park participants who lived in houses in the neighborhood both feared being pushed out of their homes. Jay had inherited his house from his parents when they died. His house was located close to some of the recent revitalization projects in the neighborhood. He said:

We're starting to get new faces coming in, you know, from other places. A lot of them just from the suburbs starting to move back down this way. The middle class people, the poor people can't afford it, so they bring the other people back in that got the money, you know, that can afford it. They moving in, but they pushing everybody else out.... They don't want the black folks down here, I'll put it to you like that, you know, so they trying to push them out.

David also complained about newcomers to the neighborhood, but David, who is African American, described his new neighbors as “snotty” and “uppity” African Americans, and said, “If I walk up, ‘how ya doin’, don’t look at me like that. I mean, it’s kinda like...it’s almost like they don’t want to shake your hand.”

Both Jay and David were concerned that they would be forced to move. David lived with his aunt, who owned the house where he lived and grew up. Although she had not told him that she was planning to sell, David saw some of the changes that she was making to the house and knew that someone had already offered her \$80,000 to buy it. He expected to learn any day that his aunt was selling the house. Jay also said that some of his neighbors had already moved out after accepting offers on their homes. However, Jay had no intention of selling. He wanted his house to stay in his family and for his children to inherit it when he died, but he was concerned that the city would take the house from him, forcing him to move.

Conclusion

Research on residential mobility tends to focus on the prevalence, patterns, causes, and consequences of moving from one location to the next. However, neglecting to understand why people stay results in incomplete models of residential mobility. The results from this study reveal important information about why low-income residents remain in their neighborhoods, how the neighborhood context is woven into their

residential narratives, and why many residents choose to remain in neighborhoods of extreme depopulation. Findings also illustrate a reality that many low-income individuals face with respect to their housing: constraints in their access to mobility, either through lack of funds, lack of affordable and safe neighborhood alternatives, and/or long waiting lists in desirable locations.

By interviewing residents from two high-poverty neighborhoods that were undergoing different forms of population change (one in the midst of revitalization and growth and the other in the process of continual decline), I find that residents from these two neighborhoods gave very different accounts of staying in place. In River Park, participants prioritized the characteristics of their neighborhood, emphasizing its beauty, location, and local amenities, but in Northwood, where residents were uniformly critical of the physical characteristics of their neighborhood, participants presented a multilayered narrative of staying that included social relationships, safety strategies, and the need for “stability.” This contrast between participants from River Park and Northwood reveals how the neighborhood context – revitalization versus decline – differentially factored into residents’ decisions to stay.

While these residential narratives offer insight into the factors involved that keep people in place, there are some limitations worth mentioning. First, I rely exclusively on the residential narratives of individuals who had remained in their neighborhood. Although I made several attempts to recruit former residents, I was only able to locate seven individuals – all from Northwood – who had previously lived in the neighborhood. Their reasons for leaving Northwood were the same as those provided by current Northwood residents who wanted to leave – dissatisfaction with the neighborhood.

However, because I was unable to locate former River Park residents, I could not complete a full analysis of residential mobility and stability for both neighborhoods.

Second, the neighborhoods that I examined are at one of two ends of the neighborhood change spectrum – one in the process of population growth and revitalization and the other in the process of persistent population decline. The narratives of participants from these two neighborhoods may be very different from those of high-poverty neighborhoods with less labile population change. Furthermore, because both neighborhoods are in Detroit, the larger city context adds an additional layer to residents' mobility narratives that may not exist in other places that have not undergone long-term depopulation. Those who have chosen to stay in Northwood and River Park may not be representative of residents in other neighborhoods and cities across the country. Finally, because Northwood is a very depopulated neighborhood, it is possible that the people who remained behind did so precisely because of their relationships with friends, family, and neighbors living nearby. In other words, their social ties may be the primary reason why they chose to stay when others left.

Despite these limitations, these narratives of remaining in place offer a glimpse into the reasons why low-income residents remain in their neighborhoods, and they provide us with an opportunity to discern how the neighborhood context is woven into their residential narratives. The narratives in this study present a reality that many low-income individuals face with respect to their housing: constraints in their access to mobility, either through lack of funds, lack of affordable and safe neighborhood alternatives, and/or long waiting lists in desirable locations. They also reveal important aspects about why many residents *want* to stay in their neighborhoods, including a desire

for personal stability, relationships with friends, family, and neighbors, and valued characteristics of the neighborhood.

The findings from this study have multiple implications for research on low-income residential mobility and housing policy. While unplanned, involuntary mobility is a reality for some low-income residents (DeLuca, Wood, Rosenblatt 2011), many nevertheless remain in their same residence for multiple years, assessing their housing options on a continual basis and making measured decisions about whether to stay or to move. Lower-income residents with greater housing stability, like many in this study, evaluated their available housing and neighborhood options against other known or hypothetical ones. Although a small number of respondents were “involuntarily immobile,” many were “voluntarily stable,” weighing their options and affirmatively choosing to stay.

Some Northwood participants in the study stayed because they were unaware of other viable options and could not conceive of moving to any better neighborhood in or around the city, believing that any place where they could move would be of equal or lesser quality. Individuals with fewer resources or incomplete information, therefore, were often unable to act on their preference to move or simply did not know of other options. As Landale and Guest (1985) wrote, “Mobility requires both information and resources, and individuals operate in the context of both personal and institutional constraints” (p. 202). Information about housing programs or other social services is not equally distributed across the population. Some low-income individuals are well positioned within social networks and learn of openings in affordable housing as they become available, while others are less connected and have less access to information.

Participants in this study who were the least aware of low-income housing options in other neighborhoods were those living in the most depopulated sections of Northwood with the fewest immediate neighbors. Living in the heart of a very depopulated neighborhood, surrounded by other depopulated neighborhoods on the fringes of the city, may serve to further constrict residents' access to housing information and keep them in place. Future research on low-income residential mobility and stability would benefit from a closer examination of residents access to housing information throughout the city. If involuntarily immobile residents have less access to housing information, it is necessary for social service programs to increase their outreach efforts in order to reach these more isolated individuals.

This study has several implications for place-based housing policies that direct resources to the very neighborhoods in which people live. The two neighborhoods that I examined in this study are at opposite ends of the neighborhood change spectrum – one experiencing growth and revitalization and the other undergoing continued population decline. Interviews with residents from neighborhoods with different trajectories of change offer researchers an opportunity to assess whether and how certain elements of the neighborhood contribute to decisions to stay put. Residents living in a revitalizing neighborhood were much more satisfied with their neighborhoods, often wanting to stay solely because of its characteristics. This, of course, did not mean that residents of the residentially and commercially declining neighborhood wanted to move. To the contrary, most participants in the study, regardless of where they lived, wanted to stay put. Even in the most disadvantaged neighborhood, where residents were concerned about their safety and dissatisfied with their neighborhood's characteristics, participants elected to stay.

They chose to tolerate their unsafe neighborhood to be closer to friends and family or simply to be “stable.” Directing more resources to the neighborhoods themselves would allow all residents to be fortunate enough to live in safe places, where they could feel at ease to leave their homes and walk along neighborhood streets. At the same time, many cities like Detroit have limited funds available to improve the quality of all neighborhoods that need it. For this reason, increasing residents’ access to information about housing options throughout the metropolitan area is necessary to allow individuals who want to move the opportunity to do so.

CHAPTER III

Neighboring Practices in Two Depopulated Neighborhoods

Introduction

Two images have dominated the sociology of poor urban neighborhoods. One is of a desolate, abandoned landscape without businesses or organizations, where the few residents who remain are sequestered in their homes and withdrawn from their neighbors. The other image is of a poor, but active neighborhood that is vibrant and teeming with life, where people sit on front porches, socialize with one another, and congregate in public spaces. These contrasting images suggest distinct styles of neighboring: in the abandoned neighborhood, people are withdrawn and actively avoid one another, while in the populated neighborhood, with its businesses and residents, people come together and form social ties.

I call this depiction into question and argue that neighborhoods, even depopulated ones, are more varied and complex than these caricatures suggest. Depopulated neighborhoods, like the ones presented here, may contain both islands of residential density as well as pockets of extreme vacancy and abandonment. By investigating the neighboring practices of residents living in two Detroit neighborhoods, I find that it is not the depopulation and vacancy of the neighborhood as a whole that matter for neighbor ties, but rather the immediate micro-residential context – a combination of housing type, the built environment, and the population density and residential vacancy surrounding

one's home. In this chapter, I consider how neighboring practices vary for individuals given the characteristics of their residential environments. Instead of determining whether residents in high-poverty neighborhoods have relationships with one another, the goal is to understand the circumstances under which neighboring practices occur. I argue that researchers should carefully examine residents' perceptions of risk along with the characteristics of their micro-residential contexts to assess how neighboring practices differ, since these factors may better explain patterns of neighboring than characteristics measured at larger geographic scales. By studying the neighboring practices of residents living in each residential setting, researchers can identify the conditions when neighbor ties emerge.

To accomplish the goals of this study, I use field notes and 28 in-depth interviews with residents from two high-poverty, depopulated neighborhoods living in either single-family houses or high-rise public housing buildings. I find that neighboring practices vary given a combination of residential characteristics and perceptions of local threats. The structural characteristics of one's immediate environment, such as dwelling type and proximal density, impact the frequency of interactions through which chance encounters occur, and perceptions of risk factor into residents' decisions about when and how to neighbor.

Neighborhood-based Social Ties

Social ties have long been the subject of sociological investigations and have spurred numerous debates. While some researchers have argued that social ties among the poor are sources of support and assistance (Gans 1962; Edin and Lein 1997; Henly, Danziger, and Offer 2005; Liebow 1967; Nelson 2000; Newman 1999; Stack 1974;

Uehara 1990), others have maintained that the level of reciprocal support has been overstated and that such relationships are tenuous, burdensome, laden with distrust, or simply “disposable” (Desmond 2012; Offer 2012; Patterson 1998; Rainwater 1970; Ross, Mirowsky, and Pribesh 2001; Smith 2007; Wellman 1999).

In her seminal work, Stack (1974) found that social ties were an essential resource for some low-income residents who turned to others for needed services and support. Following the publication of *All Our Kin*, several subsequent studies bolstered Stack's findings by reporting that social ties among low-income families were important for economic survival (Edin and Lein 1997; Henly, Danziger, and Offer 2005; Nelson 2000; Newman 1999; Uehara 1990). Concurrently, a number of studies questioned the strength and durability of social ties among the urban poor (Desmond 2012; Patterson 1998; Smith 2007). Most recently, for example, Desmond (2012) argued that social ties between the poor are best understood as "disposable" - neither weak nor strong, but rather forged and accessed when needed and discarded when they cease to be valuable or when the relationship becomes overly strained. According to Desmond, disposable ties are necessary for urban survival, and their very existence suggests that high-poverty individuals are not social isolates as some have suggested.

However, the social ties that Desmond examined were not the neighbor ties that Stack and others have observed, but rather reflected relationships between individuals who were in similarly precarious housing situations. Desmond's observations were limited to people who had experienced or were in the midst of a housing crisis that resulted in moves out of their neighborhoods. While examining the social ties of individuals living in unstable housing conditions provides insight into a certain type of

social tie, it is less helpful in understanding the ties of neighborhood residents. Studies of neighborhood engagement have consistently reported that an individual's length of residence in her neighborhood is a strong predictor of neighboring (Campbell and Lee 1992; Flaherty and Brown 2010; Kasarda and Janowitz 1974; Sampson 1988; Swaroop and Morenoff 2006). Hence, focusing on the relationships between longer-term residents provides an assessment of the type of social ties that emerge in high-poverty neighborhoods.

The Influence of Structural-Residential Characteristics on Neighboring Practices

Researchers have proposed a number of explanations for why residents engage with or avoid their neighbors. Among the most prominent of these explanations is the Chicago School's ecological model and social disorganization theory, which emphasized the role of broad neighborhood characteristics such as concentrated poverty, residential instability, and ethnic heterogeneity in contributing to weak friendship networks, low levels of community participation, and unsupervised youth (Shaw and McKay 1942 [1969]). Kasarda and Janowitz's (1974) extension of social disorganization theory – their “systemic” model of community life – has received a great deal of empirical support with respect to the positive effects of individual-level residential stability on neighbor ties and community participation (Campbell and Lee 1992; Flaherty and Brown 2010; Kasarda and Janowitz 1974; Sampson 1988; Swaroop and Morenoff 2006). However, results have been mixed when considering the relationship between social disorganization theory's originally hypothesized neighborhood characteristics and the social interactions between residents. Studies have found that neighborhood engagement and neighbor ties developed in places not predicted by the theory – that is, in poor, ethnically heterogeneous, and/or

residentially unstable neighborhoods (Browning, Feinberg, and Dietz 2004; Sampson, Morenoff, and Earls 1999; Small 2004; Swaroop and Morenoff 2006; van Eijk 2012; Warner and Rountree 1997) – and several studies have highlighted the paradox of social organization by describing networks of social support and interaction among residents in high-crime neighborhoods that should qualify as “socially disorganized” (Browning, Feinberg, and Dietz 2004; Pattillo 1998; Venkatesh 2000).

Most studies that examined the effects of contextual factors on social behavior focused on neighborhood-level characteristics; fewer have considered whether and how neighboring practices differ for people living in different types of housing in the same neighborhood (but see Kouvo and Haverinen 2017). While researchers have used single-family houses, townhouses, high-rise public housing, and multistory apartment buildings as research settings (Anderson 1999; Harding 2010; Gans 1962; MacLeod 1995; Murphy forthcoming; Rainwater 1970; Sanchez-Jankowski 2008; Small 2004; Stack 1974; Venkatesh 2000), they have less frequently examined how certain forms of housing within a given neighborhood contribute to differences in neighboring. I seek to fill this gap by providing a multi-site comparison of housing in two depopulated neighborhoods to explore how variation in neighboring practices emerges by residential context within the larger neighborhood.

Neighboring Practices as Response to Local Threats

Threats that residents perceive within their residential contexts can also contribute to differences in neighbor ties. Studies have found that parents of young children in high-poverty neighborhoods restrict their children’s relationships with other youth in the neighborhood in order to limit outside influences that they perceive as harmful or

counter-productive (Furstenberg 1993; Merry 1981; Steinberg et al. 1995). In an investigation into the strategies that residents use to cope with neighborhood dangers, Merry (1981) observed that “respectable” parents worked diligently – if not always successfully – to keep their children away from “street” youth by keeping them at home. Other parents set different boundaries given their personal circumstances and perceptions of risk. For example, Roy (2004) observed that African-American fathers in Chicago’s South Side responded to neighborhood crime and gang activity by imposing a three-block radius around their own and their children’s outdoor activity. The designated three-block boundary gave fathers the peace of mind that their familiarity with other residents and family members in the area would enhance their children’s safety.

Researchers have also examined the social dynamics for older adults in disadvantaged neighborhoods, and found that senior citizens living in neighborhoods they perceived as unsafe experienced greater social withdrawal (Cummings 1998; Klinenberg 2002; Krause 1993). In his investigation of the 1995 Chicago heat wave, Klinenberg (2002) observed that senior citizens living in commercially and residentially abandoned high-crime neighborhoods resorted to physical and social withdrawal when they feared for their safety, and he argued that older adults’ literal and social isolation contributed to deaths during the summer’s record high temperatures. The extent to which social isolation led to heat wave deaths has been the subject of debate (Browning et al. 2006; Duneier 2006). For example, Browning and colleagues found no evidence of a relationship between social isolation and Chicago’s 1995 *heat wave* deaths, but they reported that during normal times of no crisis social isolation in Chicago was in fact related to higher mortality (Browning et al. 2006). It is possible, then, that during normal

times, older adults' fear of victimization contributed to reductions in their social and physical activities within the neighborhood, but that with the emergence of a new threat (in this case, a heat wave) older residents adopted different safety strategies that included uncharacteristic engagement and interaction with their neighbors (Browning et al. 2006).

While concerns about neighborhood safety and fear of crime may encourage some residents to withdraw from neighbors, adolescents appear to rely on their relationships with other youth as an important means of protection (Harding 2010; Irwin 2004; Jones 2010). Adolescent boys living in neighborhoods with many threats build strong bonds with their peers, which can improve their physical safety when disputes with youth from other neighborhoods arise (Harding 2010). Adolescent girls gain similar benefits in their friendships with other girls. Like boys, girls protect one another by fighting for each other when threatened. Girls who are socially withdrawn or who lack friendships are more vulnerable to risks because they have no friends to support or fight for them (Jones 2010).

The fear of impending danger has the potential to bring people together as well as isolate them. Taken together, these studies point the way to the central focus of this chapter: how neighboring practices are shaped by local contexts and perceptions of risk.

Data and Methods

I collected data for this study between March and September 2013. During this time, I completed 28 in-depth interviews, engaged in participant observation, and conducted informal interviews with residents, apartment building employees, shop owners, and community center staff. Using census tract-level rates of long-term depopulation as a starting point, I identified two depopulated neighborhoods in Detroit, Michigan: "Northwood" and "River Park." Depopulated neighborhoods were defined as

census tracts that experienced a population decrease of 25 percent or more between 1970 and 2010 (see also Weaver et al. 2017).

Participation in the in-depth interviews was open to any adult age 18 and over who had resided in their neighborhood for at least one year. I used a variety of methods to recruit participants. Because I was interested in the extent to which different types of housing shaped residents' neighboring practices, following DeLuca and colleagues (2011), I used a housing-type heterogeneity model of sampling in both neighborhoods to increase the variation in dwelling type of my participants. Using this sampling approach, I recruited heavily at a variety of housing locations, including high-rise apartment buildings and detached, single-family houses. In addition, I used a street-sampling strategy, which included sharing information about the study with neighborhood residents that I met on the street or in local public areas (DeLuca, Wood, Rosenblatt 2011). I also distributed flyers door-to-door and posted flyers in public locations throughout the neighborhoods. The in-depth interviews reported in this study took place in settings chosen by participants, including participants' homes, a private conference room at a local community center, nearby restaurants, and on four occasions, a secluded section of the local park.

I used a semi-structured interview format in all in-depth interviews, and asked participants about their relationships with friends, family members, and neighbors, their participation in their neighborhoods, and their perceptions and sentiments about their current dwelling as well as about their neighborhoods and Detroit at large. I collected information on participants' sociodemographic characteristics, including level of education, employment status, housing subsidy status, welfare receipt, and length of

residence. Finally, I asked participants about their residential histories and residential intentions and to explain why they had stayed in their neighborhoods and whether and why they wanted to continue living there.

I employed three methods for coding interviews. Using the software package NVivo 10, I conducted both open and focused coding of the transcribed interviews. I used NVivo's suite of functions to identify the categories and themes that emerged from the data within each neighborhood and housing type of respondents. After coding all transcripts and analyzing the data with NVivo, I recoded all of my transcripts "by hand" in an effort to corroborate my results. I found similar themes that emerged from both approaches.

I conducted in-depth interviews with 17 Northwood residents and 11 River Park residents who were living in high-rise public housing buildings (15) or detached, single-family houses (13). With the exception of three interviewees who had inherited their houses from parents or grandparents, all others were renters. Respondents who were living in the high-rise apartment buildings received rental assistance through the Detroit Housing Commission's Low-Income Public Housing program, and all others received assistance through Section 8 or rented through the private market. The race of respondents was consistent with the racial composition of the neighborhoods: in Northwood, approximately 80 percent of respondents were African American and 20 percent were white, and in River Park, all respondents were African American. About 60 percent of all respondents were women, and the average age of respondents was 50, though I interviewed participants from across the life course, age 24 to 73. Just over 40 percent of participants lived alone, and all others lived with a partner, parent, grown

child, or school-aged children. The average length of residence was 8 years: 9 years for Northwood respondents and 7 years for River Park respondents.

Research Settings

River Park

Situated along the southeast side of the city, River Park, as the name suggests, is located on the Detroit River. It is a high-poverty, depopulated neighborhood. Between 1970 and 2010, the population of River Park declined by 49 percent, and in 2014, the median household income in River Park was \$13,562, with nearly 50 percent of families living below the poverty level (Table 3.1). The neighborhood has a variety of housing types – a mixture of single-family houses, high-rise apartment buildings, and multi-unit apartment buildings. On the south side of the neighborhood, two high-rise apartment buildings overlook the neighborhood. In the shadow of these buildings, within the neighborhood’s core, houses flank the side streets, and vacant lots and boarded houses are interspersed with occupied homes. To deter break-ins and vandalism, some of the boarded houses have large signs posted on the front doors that display a giant eyeball and a written notice that the house is “being watched.”

Revitalization projects and signs of wealth – both old and new – appear in certain sections of the neighborhood. The southeast corner of the neighborhood is home to large, historic mansions, and a few streets away, newly built, upscale townhomes line the street. A couple of blocks to the south, the recently completed Detroit RiverWalk is an attraction for some residents. On a summer day, a visitor will find people fishing along the bank of the river or sitting at tables under the new pavilion.

[TABLE 3.1 ABOUT HERE]

Northwood

Northwood, like River Park, is a high-poverty, depopulated neighborhood. With over 50 percent of families living below the poverty level and a median household income of \$15,363 (Table 3.1), the degree of disadvantage in Northwood is similar to that of River Park. Northwood also has a variety of housing types throughout the neighborhood: high-rise public housing, multi-unit apartment buildings, and detached, single-family houses. Some of the single-family houses are newly constructed units managed by a non-profit housing organization that rents to low-income families. While some residents regard these new houses as signs of neighborhood improvement, others complain that the houses are poorly built, prefabricated units that will quickly deteriorate.

Compared to River Park, Northwood has higher recent vacancy (43 percent compared to 27 percent) and greater long-term population decline (76 percent compared to 49 percent). With empty lots, vacant and boarded properties, and houses destroyed by fire, the streets in the center of Northwood reflect the neighborhood's persistent depopulation. On some streets in Northwood, only one or two houses remain, and overgrown, empty lots, or makeshift dumping grounds fill the space between them. Northwood residents frequently described their neighborhood in terms of its vacancy. "Ghost town," "abandoned," and "too far gone" were the more common descriptions used. Some residents referred to their neighborhood as a "jungle" because of the pheasants, turkeys, and deer that roamed the streets and empty fields. Many also complained of the refuse left outside or dumped in abandoned properties. Vera, a 46-year old woman who had lived in the neighborhood for four years, said that her street was "the worstest street I ever saw. A lot of, just houses torn down and some of 'em is burnt up,

and stuff like that. It's just...it's just...I mean...I got trash just sittin' across the street in an abandoned house down the street. It's just terrible. It really is."

Despite depopulation and signs of physical decline, Northwood does have pockets of renewal and community-based organizations. In addition to recent housing construction, a community garden grows in the heart of the neighborhood, and across the street, a small house with a large banner reading "art house" serves as a community center for youth and other residents. During the course of data collection, a vacant school with shattered windows and rubble surrounding the building had been razed and all signs of debris removed. On the outskirts of the neighborhood, construction was underway for a large grocery store and strip mall. One resident compared the neighborhood changes in Northwood to the passing hours of the day: "It's almost getting daylight around here, almost, almost... This is July. I'd say about March it stayed midnight over here."

Findings

To structure the results of my interviews, I present two residential contexts in which neighboring practices emerged: high-rise apartment buildings and detached, single-family houses. I organize the findings by these contexts rather than by neighborhood, because living in a particular residential context carried with it different opportunities to socialize and different perceptions of local threat that shaped residents' neighboring practices. Although both Northwood and River Park are depopulated neighborhoods, some residents lived in detached houses with few, if any, immediate neighbors, while others lived in densely populated high-rise apartment buildings with many surrounding neighbors. In each housing type, opportunities to socialize and perceptions of risk differed. The results presented here reflect the heterogeneity of

neighboring practices *within* depopulated neighborhoods that are shaped by features of the immediate environment and residents' risk perceptions.

High-Rise Apartment Buildings

Opportunities to socialize. Both Northwood and River Park neighborhoods feature high-rise apartment buildings managed by the Detroit Housing Commission. With approximately 200 units in each building, Northwood and River Park Apartments are structurally similar: Northwood Apartments sits 12 stories above ground, and the two River Park Apartment towers are each 13 stories high. All buildings have a rectangular layout, with a long corridor in the middle of each floor and apartment units on either side. The Northwood Apartments and one of the River Park Apartment towers have balconies in every unit, a courtyard with grills and benches for residents, and a television room on the first floor. Residents use ID cards to enter their building, and guests sign in at the front desk and wait for their hosts in the lobby. Security guards, who work both day and night shifts, stand at the entrance and monitor the activities and flow of people.

The apartment buildings in both neighborhoods have a high proportion of older residents. In River Park Apartments, all lessees must be over the age of 50. This was also the case in Northwood until policy changes in 2008 permitted the building to accept adults of all ages. With the increase of younger renters, by 2013 the age structure in Northwood had changed such that only about 40 percent of tenants were 50 years of age or older. Although the increase of younger people was a complaint for some older residents, experiences of neighboring were consistent for respondents of all ages.

In high-density, high-rise apartment buildings, residents living in close proximity of one another shared frequent and impromptu social interactions with their neighbors.

With a centrally-located entrance and exit on the first floor, activity outside of one's apartment typically led to opportunities for social encounters. Taking the elevator or exiting and entering through the main entrance prompted brief exchanges and sometimes long conversations. It was common to see residents of each building gather in the television room or sit outside or in the lobby. These areas offered residents an opportunity to socialize with their neighbors or simply to take a break from their apartments. During the day, the buildings bustled with activity: cars filled the parking lots and the front entrance drive, security guards talked to residents and greeted visitors, and older residents, like Lula, sat in the courtyard or under trees on the lawn. Lula, a long-time Northwood Apartment resident, pointed to a tree in front of the building, and said, "See that little tree? They call that Lula's tree." Lula sat under the tree nearly every day when the weather was nice. Sometimes she sat alone, but often other residents joined her to talk and socialize.

Both buildings organized a number of events for residents. Holiday parties, resident appreciation parties, trips to Walmart, resident council elections and meetings, computer classes, and visits from politicians and healthcare educators all provided a variety of opportunities for residents to meet and socialize with visitors and each another. Because of the opportunities for social engagement, many residents quickly became acquainted with their neighbors and some developed close friendships. Residents met in neighbors' apartments to play card games, watch movies, or watch sports events. In the summer, some residents of River Park Apartments met at the RiverWalk across the street to fish with their friends and acquaintances from the building. Some residents also hosted get-togethers or parties for their friends in the building. Michelle, a floor captain and five-

year resident of Northwood Apartments, hosted several parties throughout the year, including an annual Super Bowl party, which was one of her biggest parties of the year.

Living in close proximity with many other residents facilitated frequent and regular contact. Residents who were running low on a food item, who had difficulty opening a jar, or who needed help moving furniture, could walk across the hall or go a few doors down to ask a neighbor for help. Older residents living alone received periodic check-ins from their neighbors or floor captains if they had not been seen after a couple of days. One River Park resident explained that she walked the halls of the apartment building with other residents for exercise and opportunities to socialize with people in the building. All of these opportunities to meet with other residents were commonplace in the high-rise apartment buildings.

“Don’t get too close too soon.” With numerous opportunities for social engagement, residents from both neighborhoods described the importance of taking time to develop relationships with neighbors rather than becoming acquainted too quickly. While some residents of single-family houses in depopulated areas also articulated this belief, high-rise apartment building residents cited it most frequently. In these buildings, residents agreed that it was best to “speak and keep going” and to develop nothing more than a casual relationship with others, to say “hi” and “goodbye” but little more. “Associates” – not “friends” – were the recommended depth of acquaintance in the building.

According to several participants, selecting associates should be done carefully and with great consideration. Goldie, a 50-year old woman who had lived in River Park Apartments for the past 5 years, explained, “Pick your associates out, and don’t have too

many of them. Pick maybe two or three, and don't be too fast on picking them out either. Take your time." Alice, another resident of River Park Apartments, echoed this advice: "Don't get too close too soon. Get familiar with it, you know, just like in the neighborhood, when you move in a neighborhood. You got to be careful everywhere you go. Just don't jump right in." Mr. Campbell, a five-year resident of Northwood Apartments, explained that when he first moved into the building, he made the mistake of giving his cell phone number to another resident. When he began receiving calls during the day and late at night, he explained that he realized he needed to be much more selective about giving his telephone number to neighbors. He shook his head and sighed, "they can be a headache."⁸

Admonitions of "don't get too close too soon" were often preceded by a lengthy account of a dispute or problem with a neighbor. Many residents reported arguments with neighbors, the spread of gossip, and sometimes physical altercations with neighbors. Jackie, a woman in her fifties who had moved to River Park Apartments three years earlier, described being the target of gossip in the building. Shortly after she had moved into the building, Jackie learned that some of the women were telling other residents that she "ran a crack house." After learning of these rumors, Jackie explained that she never wanted to leave her apartment and that she rarely ventured out, choosing instead to stay inside her apartment and avoid running the risk of seeing neighbors who may have believed the gossip. Eventually, when Jackie decided that she could no longer stay

⁸ To be sure, some residents of single-family houses in the depopulated neighborhoods reported problems with annoying neighbors. However, this problem was a much more intense and frequently reported preoccupation for high-rise dwellers.

confined to her apartment, she went to the communal television room where many of her neighbors were sitting, and confronted the woman whom she believed to be the source of the rumors. The woman denied the allegations, but Jackie said that after this encounter, her relationships with people in the building changed: she was no longer the target of gossip, *and* she was much more careful about how and with whom she socialized.

Beliefs about maintaining social distance from neighbors also stemmed from concerns about the spread of bed bugs, which were especially problematic in the apartment buildings where many study participants had experienced infestations firsthand. Jackie was so embarrassed by the bite marks on her arms that she wore long sleeve shirts every day during the summer so that no one could see evidence of bed bugs, which would be fodder for additional gossip. Many participants spoke of preventative strategies for mitigating their risk of developing a bed bug infestation: maintaining physical distance with other residents, not using furniture, particularly cloth-covered furniture, in common areas of the building, and not inviting other residents into their homes. Michelle, the floor captain and five year resident of Northwood, warned that residents should not invite neighbors into their homes in the event that their guests carried bed bugs: “It’s alright to speak and keep moving, but don’t have people in your home because you don’t know if they have bugs or not and bugs do travel.”

Concerns about developing relationships with untrustworthy people also prompted some residents to maintain social distance with their neighbors. Lula, a 73-year old woman who spent the last 13 years in Northwood Apartments, explained that she became friends with a young woman from the building whom she later invited into her apartment. During the visit, Lula went to the bathroom, and when she returned, she

noticed that the cash she had left in a cup on her shelf was gone. Rather than question her guest about the missing money, Lula said that she pretended not to notice, but learned that the woman was someone she could not trust and resolved afterwards that she would not invite neighbors into her apartment.

When neighboring practices and beliefs do not align. Although many residents expressed their belief about the importance of maintaining social distance with neighbors, consistent with others' findings (Murphy forthcoming; van Eijk 2012), their narratives about neighboring and their actual experiences of neighboring did not always coincide. In the high-rise apartment buildings, participants cautioned against developing friendships with neighbors, but almost every River Park and Northwood Apartments participant reported having at least one or two, and often three or four, close friends in the building.

Participants described meeting with their friends several times a week and, in some cases, every day. They watched movies or sports together, met for coffee, socialized in the TV room, sat outside to talk, and, for those living in River Park Apartments, fished together along the river. Many high-rise residents, some of whom were retired or disabled and unable to work, spent their time in and around their apartment building. Living in a high-density residential environment with others who had similar daily schedules sometimes made it difficult to avoid establishing relationships. Some residents referred to their friends in the building as family members, and others, like Jackie, as "a dysfunctional family." Michelle, the resident who cautioned against becoming too familiar with neighbors, explained:

I love my building. I love my neighbors. My neighbors are very nice to me. They kinda like family because, you know, when you are socializing with your family, you have those that you really, really love, that's your favorite. And then you got those that you just speak when you see them. And then the other ones where you like, "No, I'm never going over their house," and so that's how I feel about this building. It's like family.

In this context, having many neighbors within close proximity represents a double-edged sword: neighbors provide a source of companionship to residents, but at the same time, they are a threat to health or reputation. Residents, like Michelle, divide the social worlds of their residential context by those they trust enough to become friends with, those they have casual conversations with, and those they avoid altogether.

Single-family Houses in Depopulated Areas

Opportunities to Socialize. In River Park and Northwood, impromptu encounters with neighbors were less frequent for residents living in the single-family houses. Some residents had few, if any, immediate neighbors and thus little opportunity for unplanned interactions. The surrounding built environment and physical layout of the neighborhood provided few opportunities for them to cross paths. Others rarely saw their neighbors because, like residents in other neighborhoods across the country, they were at work or tending to families. Finally, some Northwood residents did not see their neighbors because their concerns about personal safety limited the amount of time they spent outside their homes.

As Klinenberg (2002) and others have reported, staying inside to avoid problems in the neighborhood was a strategy Northwood residents often used. Michael, a 31-year old father of three who grew up in Northwood, explained, "When you stay at home, you live a long time in Detroit. When you go outside and stay outside and wanna be in them

streets, stuff happens.” Unless Michael visited the grocery store or went out to look for work, he rarely left the house. After recently being laid off from his job as a hi-lo operator, Michael’s fiancé began to worry about his safety and the potential pressure to engage in illegal activity that she feared some people in the neighborhood would put on him. Michael explained that he assured her everyone in the neighborhood understood that he was a "family man" who did not get involved in activities of the street.

Many Northwood residents, like Michael, chose to stay inside their homes. Karen, a woman in her mid-forties who had lived in a house in Northwood for the last three years with her boyfriend, explained, “I’m mainly a house person. I be in the house all the time, unless my daughter come and get me and I go over there with my grandbabies. I may go over there and stay a coupla nights with my grandkids, and I come back home. But other than that, that’s it. That’s it.” And Will, a man in his early fifties who grew up in his house as a boy, also stayed inside and told his grandmother when she was still alive that she should not leave the house either. Although Will had a good relationship with his neighbors who lived in the five remaining houses on his block, he explained that he had to be very careful each time he left his house because other people were "always watching you," looking for an opportunity to harm or steal from those still in the neighborhood.

In River Park, although residents expressed fewer fears about their physical safety, they were nevertheless concerned about the prevalence of drugs, break-ins, gunshots, and abandoned houses, which, they worried, would appeal to arsonists and other criminals. David, a life-long resident of River Park, described the collateral damage to his house when his next door neighbor’s house was set on fire, and Jay, another life-

long resident of River Park, alerted his neighbor when he saw burglars entering his her home. Despite these instances of crime, neither Jay nor David limited the amount of time they spent outside of their houses. Unlike Northwood residents, their interactions with neighbors were infrequent for other reasons. Jay's busy lifestyle meant that he rarely saw his neighbors: "I'm always on the go, so the only time they get to see me is when I'm coming and going." While David occasionally saw some of the older seniors who were still in the neighborhood, his long-time neighborhood friends had moved out and were replaced by wealthier newcomers. David, who is African American, referred to his new African-American neighbors as "snotty" and "uppity", and explained, "I mean, hey, you still, you a black, so if I walk up 'how ya doin'?', don't look at me like that. I mean, it's kinda like, it's almost like they don't want to shake your hand."

Although impromptu interactions between neighbors were less frequent for those living in Northwood and River Park's single-family houses compared to the residents of high-rise buildings, social participation did occur. Residents described chatting with their neighbors while doing yard work, walking to the store, or attending a community function. Sometimes they called one another to make plans to go to the store, bus stop, or local community center together, and some residents spoke of helping their older neighbors by walking with them to the store or shoveling their driveways and sidewalks after a snowfall. Karen's neighbor, Ms. Jenkins, was confined to her bed and sometimes called Karen to request help: "I go take care of her sometimes. When she calls me, I go down there and wash her up, do her hair, and make her bed, clean her room." Will also helped some of his older neighbors, but he was firm that he only helped older people, not

the younger residents in the neighborhood. “I don’t fool with them younger ones,” Will said.

Block parties were unusual for those living in Northwood and River Park’s single-family houses, but both neighborhoods had at least one large neighborhood party a year. In Northwood, residents would host a party every June in remembrance of a youth who was killed in the neighborhood, and in River Park, the local church hosted a large party for the neighborhood. Apart from these annual events, social gatherings in the single-family houses in these depopulated neighborhoods were typically small and limited to a few surrounding houses. Unlike the high-rise buildings where everyone knew of the social events and received an invitation or saw event notices posted in common areas, residents in the single-family houses would sometimes make informal plans to get together with their immediate neighbors, like Christy’s boyfriend who frequently met with neighbors to socialize and drink.

“It’s who you know.” Residents from both neighborhoods shared concerns about theft, drugs, arson, and personal safety, but Northwood residents living in the neighborhood’s single-family houses reported far greater concern with violent crime. Many shared personal experiences of rape, burglary, homes set on fire, being shot, or being beaten up. Residents who were not personally targeted, either had witnessed such occurrences or had close friends, family members, or neighbors who had actually experienced them. Lisa, a 45-year old woman who had lived with her husband in Northwood for 10 years, said, “You don’t ever feel safe.” Lisa explained that although no one had directly threatened her, she lived in a house near a busy street that was the closest place to reach in case of an emergency. On many nights, women who had been severely

beaten with broken arms and noses came to her house and knocked on her door asking for help. Lisa said that most people in her neighborhood did not answer their doors, but she would assist women who pleaded for help by calling the police or the fire department on the corner.

Many residents described scenes of violence that they had witnessed. Karen, a 47-year old woman who had lived in Northwood for the last three years, tearfully recounted a devastating house fire that occurred one night next to her house while she and her boyfriend, who was disabled and in a wheelchair, were sitting inside:

The house next to us, last summer, somebody set it on fire, and I went to get up to go get a glass of water, and I seen a lot of - some lights, you know, on the side of the house, and my boyfriend say, "Did you leave...?" [My boyfriend] thought I left something in the microwave. I said, 'No, I haven't even been in the microwave.' Come to find out, the house [next door] on fire, and it blew the outside windows out. We had...I had...[my boyfriend] can't walk, so I had to...you know, he can only make it a little bit to get him outta there, and for us to get outta there to make it, and, um, the fire station right there, they got there real quick, though. But it blew our windows out, and the fire itself came through the dining room window. It was so scary, trying to get [my boyfriend] out of [our house]. And there was a dog over there. Whoever put that dog on the porch, she was danglin' and strangled to death. It was burnt. It was so sad... And, just to see her...I was trying to get to her...if I could have got to her, to save her, but the fire, it was too...too...it was too much. I couldn't...I couldn't save her. I tried, but the fire was just...it was beamin', and she was just danglin'. I'm like, "Oh my God."

In such places, it may seem likely that residents would avoid one another and withdraw completely from their neighborhood as a way to avoid potential threats. However, for these residents, maintaining relationships with their neighbors rather than withdrawing from them was necessary for safety and security. Residents shared examples of their neighbors watching out for them or intervening when an unfamiliar face was seen

causing trouble. Lori, a 54-year old woman who moved to Northwood 10 years ago following a spell of homelessness, described how on the morning of our interview, a man broke into her house while she was sitting in her living room. As the intruder was putting on gloves and walking up the steps to the second floor, she stopped him and told him that he needed to leave. Moments later, one of her neighbors, who had seen the man enter her house, appeared at Lori's front door. Her neighbor asked the intruder what he was doing in her house; the man said that he was "looking for weed," and promptly left. Although nothing more transpired, Lori said that she was grateful her neighbor came to her house to check on her and intervene in the situation.

Other respondents described using the "buddy system" with their neighbors when walking to the corner store or bus stop or, for one respondent, when scared and at home alone at night. Vera, a 46-year old woman who had lived alone in Northwood for the past four years, talked about feeling unsafe inside of her home and being most afraid at night: "Now, at night, that's when the scary part comes in. You know, I have a bedroom set that I barely sleep in. It costed me almost \$3000. I may have slept in it four or five times. 'Cause I go downstairs and make a pallet, so I can hear. 'Cause I got three doors – front, side, and back." Sometimes Vera took medication to help her sleep, but on nights when she was most afraid, she asked a neighbor to stay the night at her house. During the day when Vera needed to leave her home to go to the corner store or to the local food pantry, she called another neighbor to accompany her.

In addition to neighbors providing specific forms of assistance and protection, simply knowing one's neighbors and being known to others in the area was an important form of protection. For Michael, knowing his neighbors meant that he did not have to

purchase a gun to protect his family. Michael was concerned that if he moved to another neighborhood, one in which he did not know his neighbors, he would be forced to buy a gun to keep his family safe, but in Northwood, where everyone knew one another, Michael believed his family was safe.

The importance of knowing one's neighbors and being known in the neighborhood also shaped decisions about entering other neighborhoods. Christy, a Northwood resident for over eight years, explained that she was afraid to walk into other neighborhoods. She felt safe in Northwood because everyone knew her, but in other neighborhoods, where she was an unfamiliar face, she was more vulnerable: "I mean, you don't know everybody over there, you know? And they don't know you. They could put a gun to your head, you know?" For this reason, Christy avoided walking into other neighborhoods. If she needed to visit another neighborhood for something, she did so by car and not on foot.

Knowing one's neighbors – and the protection those relationships provided – also informed residential mobility decisions for some Northwood residents. Roy, a Northwood resident for over 10 years, had no intention of moving. Knowing his neighbors was the primary reason he gave for wanting to stay in his neighborhood. Although he had had money and cell phones stolen and had witnessed several brutal attacks in the neighborhood, Roy did not want to move anywhere else. He recognized that his neighborhood was not safe, but he felt more at ease there than in other places because he knew his neighbors:

I choose to live around here, you know, because people know me around here, and I'm more relaxed than movin' somewhere where you don't know where you at and you don't know the people there. So, it's just like you just comin' in to start all over again. You meet new people and you seein' different faces. You don't know these people. But, see, all the faces I see around here, and everybody knows me because I do lawn service around this area here, you know. So, I mean, then you stand a better chance of, "Oh, I know him. Oh, he goin' to cut some grass." You know, and I can feel relaxed about that. But you go somewhere where no one know you, you gotta start all over again. I mean, meetin' new faces and everything, and you don't know what type of person that lives here. You just now moved into the area. You don't even know what kind of area you're in.

For Roy, it was better to stay in an unsafe neighborhood where he knew his neighbors than to move to another potentially dangerous neighborhood where he knew no one. Many other residents living in Northwood and River Park's single-family houses expressed similar beliefs about why they wanted to remain in their neighborhoods. In a city that most participants described as "all the same," staying in their neighborhoods near people they knew was a necessary reassurance of safety.

CONCLUSION

Social scientists have long been interested in understanding whether and how population density affects the lives of residents (Jacobs 1961; Milgram 1970; Wirth 1938). Some studies have examined the social organization and social interaction of residents in depopulated urban neighborhoods (Gans 1962; Hartigan 1999; Klinenberg 2002; Nelson 2000), and others have considered the role of physical propinquity and the built environment in neighbor interactions (Brown and Cropper 2001; Festinger, Back, and Schachter 1950; Gans 1961; Kim and Clarke 2015; Leyden 2003). In this study, I set out to investigate the conditions that precipitated neighbor interactions between residents of depopulated neighborhoods by considering both the characteristics of the residential

context and perceptions of risk associated with that context. By sampling from different housing types in two depopulated neighborhoods, I found that variation emerged by the micro-residential contexts in which participants lived. In each residential context, residents' opportunities for social engagement with neighbors and their perceptions of risk varied. In high-rise public housing, with high residential density, regular and organized social events, multiple common areas, and a physical layout conducive to chance encounters, residents had many opportunities to meet their neighbors. By contrast, in places with vacant houses, few neighbors nearby, and less formal social organization, residents had fewer opportunities for impromptu interactions with one another. These findings suggest that neighboring practices depend at least in part on the housing type and built environment of residents.

In addition to structural characteristics, residents' perceptions of risks and dangers in their immediate environment also contributed to their neighboring practices, motivating some people to seek out neighbors and motivating others to distance themselves. Residents with many opportunities to socialize, like those living in high-rise buildings, often perceived their relationships with neighbors to be sources of potential problems, and as a result, emphasized the importance of maintaining social distance. To minimize their concerns, such as befriending an untrustworthy person, being the target of gossip, or acquiring bed bugs, residents developed schemas for interacting with their neighbors that were based on maintaining social distance and forming relationships slowly over time. By living in a high-density apartment building with high residential turnover, residents were more easily able to replace or substitute relationships with neighbors, making any one relationship less crucial.

In the most depopulated and vacant sections of the neighborhood, where violent crime was a problem, residents of single-family houses had greater dependency on the few neighbors who remained in their neighborhood. Establishing and maintaining positive relationships with their neighbors were important because knowing their neighbors enhanced their perceptions of safety. Without those relationships, residents believed that neighbors may overlook the sight of a burglar entering someone's house, may not walk with them to the corner store or bus stop down the street, or may refuse a request to keep them company if they were alone and frightened. Although they spent less time outside and were less physically active in their neighborhoods than those living in places with fewer perceived risks to their physical safety, residents maintained and nurtured their relationships with neighbors.

Studying the social dynamics of micro-residential contexts is important because differences in neighboring practices appear to emerge on smaller social and geographic scales. Neighboring often occurs between residents who live within close proximity of one another, making smaller units of analysis important for understanding neighboring practices (Rosenblatt and DeLuca 2012). Scholars have long called for greater attention to how social processes operate at different geographic scales (Sampson, Morenoff, and Gannon-Rowley 2002), arguing that different geographic and social scales shape social dynamics in different ways (Sharkey and Faber 2014). For example, smaller geographic areas may be especially important to consider for children whose activities are more spatially limited (Sampson, Morenoff, and Gannon-Rowley 2002). Studies should continue to incorporate micro-residential contexts into analyses to consider when and how they shape social processes and individual outcomes beyond neighboring practices.

This study took a long-term view of depopulation by using a 40-year measure of neighborhood population decline. The City of Detroit has a long history of depopulation. Since 1950, over one million people have moved out of Detroit, and in neighborhoods like Northwood and River Park, continual depopulation has been a long-term reality. The social dynamics in cities and neighborhoods with long-term depopulation may be different from places with more recent population decline. Using a long-term measure of depopulation also obscures recent changes that occur in neighborhoods, such as revitalization efforts and population growth, as has been the case in some sections of Northwood and River Park. Future studies should investigate how different durations of neighborhood depopulation differentially affect individual outcomes and social dynamics.

Despite these limitations, this study provides a number of insights about the social life of depopulated places. Depopulated neighborhoods do not uniformly consist of large swaths of residential abandonment and vacancy that are so often the hallmarks of the popular conception of depopulation. While depopulated neighborhoods may include vacant houses, empty lots, and streets with only one or two houses, they may also have areas with high-density populations, like those found in both Northwood and River Park. With such variation, it is important to consider how the social dynamics within micro-residential contexts differ and how the characteristics of a place and residents' perceptions of that place jointly contribute to their neighboring practices. Focusing on these elements within the immediate residential environment reveals unexpected social behaviors, such as those in Northwood where, contrary to the classic image of life in

depopulated neighborhoods, residents maintain and nurture relationships with one another.

Table 3.1 Descriptive statistics of Northwood and River Park

	Northwood	River Park
Location	Northeast side of Detroit	East of city center
Total Population in 2010*	1,343	3,117
Population Density (per sq. mile)	1,953	10,153
Population Change, 1970-2010	-76%	-49%
Total Residential Vacancy[§]	43%	27%
Race		
Black/African American	77%	91%
White	20%	7%
Two or More Races	3%	2%
Age		
Under 18	22%	16%
18-34	23%	16%
35-64	41%	46%
65+	14%	22%
HH with Children	21%	15%
Median HH Income[§]	\$15,363	\$13,562
Families Below Poverty Line[§]	55%	47%
Housing Status[§]		
Owner Occupied	29%	18%
Renter Occupied	71%	82%

* Unless otherwise noted, all data are from the 2010 U.S. census.

[§] American Community Survey, 5-year estimates 2010-2014

CHAPTER IV

Neighborhood Depopulation and Its Association with Adult Obesity and Self-Rated Health

Introduction

Social theorists have long debated whether population change affects communal bonds and individual outcomes. While 19th and early 20th century researchers were concerned about urbanization, rapid population growth, and residential turnover, researchers of the last 60 years have considered the impact of urban decline on residents. Recent work on urban decline has considered how various measures of decline, like neighborhood residential vacancy and residential and commercial abandonment, influence individual health outcomes. In these studies, researchers have found that vacancy and abandonment contribute to worse health outcomes, including premature mortality (Cohen et al 2003), adverse birth outcomes (Zuberi et al 2015), and mortality during the 1995 Chicago heat wave (Browning et al 2006; Klinenberg 2002).

Depopulation is another measure associated with decline (Dewar and Thomas 2013; Weaver et al 2017), but despite the significance of the neighborhood context as a determinant of health (Diez Roux and Mair 2010), to date, researchers have yet to unpack whether residence in a depopulated neighborhood independently impacts health outcomes, like body mass index or self-rated health. Neighborhood depopulation is often equated with abject poverty and commercial and residential abandonment. Indeed,

neighborhoods that experience depopulation, or long-term and persistent declines in population, exhibit greater concentrations of disadvantage relative to other, non-depopulated neighborhoods (Weaver, Bagchi-Sen, Knight, and Frazier 2017). However, despite the evidence that depopulated neighborhoods, when compared to non-depopulated neighborhoods, consist of greater disadvantage, many neighborhoods that have experienced long-term declines in population do *not* have high concentrations of disadvantage (ibid). According to Weaver and colleagues (2017), approximately 74.3 percent of depopulated neighborhoods were *not* neighborhoods of concentrated disadvantage. This evidence conflicts with the conventional perception of neighborhood depopulation, and provides an opportunity to consider whether neighborhood depopulation independently affects residents' health over and above neighborhood poverty.

Even if depopulated neighborhoods have low levels of concentrated disadvantage, the very loss of residents from a particular area may spur the departure of local businesses and organizations (Nyden et al 1998; Walker et al 2010). With fewer businesses and services available, access to healthy and affordable foods and reliable health care may be greatly diminished, particularly in racially segregated, black neighborhoods where organizations have disappeared (Small and McDermott 2006). This process can make it more difficult for residents who have remained in depopulated areas to obtain nutritious, affordable food and access health-related resources (Alwitt and Donley 1997; Anderson 2017), which may, in turn, lead to poorer health and greater obesity (Budzynska et al 2013).

The goal of this chapter is to advance research on neighborhood depopulation by investigating the association between health outcomes, including obesity and poor or fair self-rated health. Because little is currently known about the possible effects of depopulation on the lives of residents, it is important to consider how other forms of neighborhood population change may be related to health. Comparing depopulation's effects on health to other forms of population change, like population growth and stability, can provide useful information about whether depopulation operates differently from other forms of population change. To this end, I answer four research questions. What are the predictors of three different types of neighborhood population change: growth, stability, and depopulation? Is residence in depopulated neighborhoods associated with more obesity than residence in neighborhoods with little change in population? Is residence in a depopulated neighborhood associated with worse self-rated health? Do these results differ by gender?

Background

Nearly three decades' worth of research on neighborhood effects has generally corroborated Wilson's (1987) hypothesis that living in neighborhoods of concentrated poverty has an independent impact on long-term well-being over and above individual factors (Jencks and Mayer 1990; Hango 2006; Harding 2003; Crowder and South 2011; Wodtke et al 2011; Chetty and Hendren 2015). In the last twenty years, thousands of studies have examined whether and how living in certain neighborhood contexts affect health. Although the effect is attenuated after adjusting for individual-level characteristics, studies have largely found a significant relationship between neighborhood disadvantage and health outcomes, like body mass index, self-reported

health, and depression (for reviews, see Arcaya et al. 2016; Black and Macinko 2008; Kim 2008; Mair et al 2008; Yen et al. 2009).

In addition to these studies, numerous studies have emerged from the “Moving to Opportunity” (MTO) study, a randomized social experiment sponsored by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development in the 1990s, to test the long-term consequences of relocating low-income families with children from high-poverty to low-poverty neighborhoods. Although studies have tended to show that participation in the program had little to no effect on education or income (Katz, Kling, and Liebman 2001; Kling, Liebman, and Katz 2007; Sanbonmatsu, Ludwig, Katz et al 2011; Ludwig, Duncan, Gennetian et al 2013; but see Chetty, Hendren, and Katz 2015), many studies found that adults experienced greater subjective well-being and improvements in their physical and mental health (Katz et al 2001; Kling et al 2007; Clampet-Lundquist and Massey 2008; Ludwig, Duncan, Gennetian et al 2012; Ludwig et al 2013).

As concentrated poverty is associated with worse health outcomes for residents, it is possible that other neighborhood-level factors could adversely affect health. The persistent decline in neighborhood depopulation likely coexists with declines in a variety of health-related organizations and businesses, including the loss of healthcare centers, fitness facilities and supermarkets that provide affordable and healthy foods, which could be hardest hit in racial and ethnic minority neighborhoods (Alwitt and Donley 1997; Anderson 2017; Small and McDermott 2006). Reductions in these services may make it more difficult for residents to eat nutrition-rich foods and obtain needed healthcare, which could lead to poorer health and obesity (Budzynska et al 2013; but see Gilster and Meier 2016 and Subramanian, Kubzansky, Berkman, et al 2006). Despite a possible link

between depopulation and health and given the considerable research on neighborhood effects, few researchers have considered whether neighborhood depopulation actually impacts health outcomes, either directly or indirectly.

Recent research on residential vacancy and health has provided some indication that neighborhood depopulation may be linked to worse health outcomes. Although residential vacancy, or unoccupied housing, and depopulation are two separate constructs of neighborhood decline, vacancy is often a consequence of long-term, persistent depopulation (Weaver et al 2017). When examining the relationship between residential vacancy and health, researchers have found that vacancy rates are associated with greater emotional distress (Snedker and Herting 2016), worse birth outcomes (Giurgescu, Zenk, Dancy et al 2012; Messer, Kaufman, Dole, et al 2006; Zuberi et al. 2015), and premature mortality (Cohen et al. 2003). Among other facets of the built environment that are linked to depopulation, such as mixed land use, neighborhood housing damage, physical disorder, uneven sidewalks, and poor public transportation, researchers have found associations with worse birth outcomes (Miranda, Messer, and Kroeger 2012), mobility disability (Clarke, Ailshire, and Lantz 2009; Beard, Blaney, Cerda et al 2009), obesity (Rundle, Diez Roux, Free et al. 2007; Chang, Hillier, and Mehta 2009), poorer self-rated health (Ross and Mirowsky 2001), and worse psychosocial health (Messer, Maxson, and Miranda 2012).

On the other hand, some studies have reported the somewhat unexpected finding that high-density neighborhoods are positively related to BMI (McDonald, Oakes, and Forsyth 2012) and, in the City of Detroit, negatively related to walking behavior (Wineman, Marans, Schulz et al 2014). These findings suggest that depopulation – areas

that are typically low-density – *may in fact not have adverse effects on health*. However, to this author’s knowledge, no studies have yet investigated whether there is any relationship between depopulation and health outcomes. This analysis provides a first effort to assess the association between neighborhood depopulation and obesity and self-rated health.

Data and Methods

Data

Data for this study come from the Panel Study of Income Dynamics (PSID) and the Longitudinal Tract Database (LTDB). The PSID is a longitudinal study of approximately 4,800 U.S. families who were initially interviewed in 1968. The PSID collected detailed demographic, economic, and housing information for each family annually from 1968 to 1997, and biennially for all years thereafter. Because of its panel structure and its comprehensive set of residential mobility, socioeconomic, and health-related variables, the PSID is an ideal dataset to use for this study. I merged PSID data at the census-tract level with data from the 2000-2010 U.S. Census and the 2006-2010 American Community Survey obtained from the LTDB, which normalized census tracts to 2010 boundaries (Logan, Xu, and Stults 2014).

To examine whether long-term residence in a depopulated neighborhood is associated with obesity and worse self-rated health, I used six waves of biennial PSID data from 2001 to 2011. I constructed an analytic sample that consisted of 4,245 individuals (1,047 females and 3,198 males) who had lived in the same residence for at least one 6-year period between 2001 and 2011, referred to as “residential spells.” The greater number of male heads of household is related to the original sampling strategy of

the PSID, which assigned the male householder as “head” when both a male and female adults were present in the household. Female heads were typically in households without a male present, but sometimes had become heads when the male head became incapacitated or if the male householder did not want his personal information recorded in the study. The sample was further restricted to current heads of household who were 25 years of age or older and had complete data on all variables at the start and end of the residential spell. Of the total current heads who had remained in their residence for six or more years (n=4,650), 405 cases were dropped due to missing data. There were 177 missing values for self-rated health and BMI at the beginning or end of the residential spell and 26 missing values for education (n=12) and income (n=14). Respondents who reported being underweight were also removed from the analytic sample (n=108), as this category represented a group of individuals with very poor health. An additional 10 heads were dropped from the sample because they were living in a U.S. territory or a foreign country at the time of follow-up, and 84 heads were removed from the sample because they were under 25 years of age.

Measures

Health measures. Body mass index at the beginning and end of the residential spell was calculated using respondents’ self-reported weight and height. Following the international classifications of weight used by the World Health Organization and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, a BMI below 18.5 was considered “underweight”, 18.5-24.9 was considered “normal”, 25-29.9 was considered “overweight”, and 30.0 or more was considered “obese”. As mentioned above, respondents who reported being underweight were dropped from the sample. A

dichotomous variable for obesity was then created, with “obese” respondents coded as 1 and “normal” and “overweight” respondents coded as 0. Self-reported health was assessed in each wave of the PSID beginning in 1984. Respondents were asked, “Would you say your health in general is excellent, very good, good, fair, or poor?” Respondents rated their health according to one of these five categories. Following other studies of self-rated health (Bjornstrom, Ralston, and Kuhl 2013; Kravitz-Wirtz 2016; Poortinga, Dunstan, and Fone 2008), I used a two-category variable of self-rated health in which “excellent”, “very good”, and “good” were coded as 0 and “poor” and “fair” were coded as 1.

Neighborhood population change. Measures of neighborhood depopulation are based on tract-level population data from the LTDB, which includes national census tract data for the 1970-2010 U.S. Census and 2006-2010 American Community Survey. I calculated the rate of population change between the 2000 and 2010 censuses for each census tract in the United States. I divided the population change rates into tertiles based on the national distribution for all tracts between the 2000 and 2010. The top third of all census tracts nationwide underwent a population growth of 7.78% or more (coded 1 for “growth”); the middle third underwent a change of -2.03% to 7.78% (coded 2 for “stability”); and the bottom third experienced a decline of -2.03% or more (coded 3 for “decline”). Using these cutpoints, I then assigned tertile values of population change for each census tract where PSID respondents resided during their residential spell.

Neighborhood poverty. I used a continuous measure of neighborhood poverty based on the tract-level poverty rate as reported in the LTDB from the 2000 U.S. Census.

Other measures. I used several additional measures in analyses, including the current head's age in years at the start of the residential spell, race (non-Hispanic black compared to all other races), education as reported at the start of the residential spell (less than high school, high school graduate, and some college or more), the natural log of family income as reported at the start of the residential spell, and homeownership at the start of the spell (rents property versus owns home or has a mortgage). All analyses presented here are stratified by gender, as previous studies have found important sex differences in the neighborhood effects on health outcomes, like obesity (Chang, Hillier, and Mehta 2009).

Methods

I present descriptive statistics of the characteristics separately for female and male heads residing in each type of population change neighborhood (growing, stable, and declining). I conduct tests of difference with multinomial logistic regression models that predicts neighborhood population change type for each individual predictor. I then estimate multivariable models predicting obesity and poor or fair health, with neighborhood population change as the primary predictor variable. Logistic regression models for obesity and poor or fair health were estimated separately for men and women. I adjusted first for the neighborhood poverty rate (Model 2), as prior research has found that concentrated disadvantage is associated with neighborhood depopulation (Weaver et al 2017). I then adjusted for the respondent's age, race, education, the natural log of family income, and homeownership (Model 3), and finally I adjusted for obesity or poor or fair health as reported at the start of the residential spell (Model 4). In all analyses, I used survey weights from the last year of respondents' residential spell to adjust for the

PSID sample design and survey non-response. The analyses account for the complex sample survey design and use survey estimation procedures with Stata/MP 14.2.

Results

Table 4.1 presents the sample characteristics for female and male current heads of household, respectively, who lived in growing, stable, or declining neighborhoods for six or more years between 2001 and 2011. The percentages or means and standard deviations are reported separately for each neighborhood type. Table 4.1 also presents the results of tests of difference from multinomial regression models predicting neighborhood population change for each predictor. In each model, neighborhood stability is used as the reference category, which allows us to examine each predictor for whether neighborhood population growth or depopulation are appreciably different from neighborhood stability.

[TABLE 4.1 ABOUT HERE]

In both samples, roughly one-third of the household heads resided in each of the three neighborhood types. There is a slightly higher weighted percentage (38 percent) of men and women who live in “stable” neighborhoods. This is because the population change categories were based on tertiles from the national distribution of all census tracts in the U.S. For both men and women, neighborhoods experiencing depopulation were generally more disadvantaged. They were significantly more likely to have higher average rates of poverty (18.96 percent for women and 14.29 percent for men); they had a larger share of respondents with less than a high school degree (20.44 percent for women; 15.91 percent for men); and they had lower average family incomes, which, among men, were significantly different from stably populated neighborhoods. Men,

though not women, also had marginally significantly less homeownership in the depopulated neighborhoods compared to the stably populated neighborhoods.

The female sample was older on average than the male sample. The average age of women from each neighborhood type was approximately 56 with no significant differences between the neighborhood types, while the average age of men was closer to 49. Men living in neighborhoods experiencing growth were significantly more likely to be younger (47 years) than men living in stable neighborhoods (49 years). Women and men living in depopulated neighborhoods were more likely to be black than those in stable neighborhoods. Within depopulated neighborhoods, about 27 percent of female respondents and 11 percent of male respondents were black, compared to about 15 percent of women and 5 percent of men living in stably populated neighborhoods.

Among female respondents, about 27 percent of those living in depopulated neighborhoods reported being obese at the start of the residential spell. Compared to growing and stably populated neighborhoods (35 percent and 28 percent, respectively), depopulated neighborhoods had the smallest share of women who were obese. By the end of the residential spell, neighborhoods with a growing population continued to have the largest percentage of obese female respondents. In neighborhoods where the population was increasing, about 37 percent of respondents were obese, compared to stably populated neighborhoods, where 34 percent were obese, and depopulated neighborhoods, where about 35 percent were obese by the end of the residential spell. None of these differences were statistically significant for women.

While there were no differences in obesity between residents of each neighborhood population change type at either the start or end of the spell, there was an

increase in the percentage of women who transitioned from “not obese” to “obese” between the beginning and end of the residential spell. While the increase in the percentages of women who became obese during the residential spell may appear at first to be large for each neighborhood population change type, the total number of women who became obese in each neighborhood type is actually small. Furthermore, among women who became obese during the residential spell, the median BMI at the start of the spell was 28.7 and the median BMI at the end of the spell was 31.6. While this represents an increase of approximately 2 BMI points, it also indicates that many women who became obese over the 6- to 10-year period were nearing obesity even at the start of the residential spell.

Similar to female respondents, neighborhoods with a growing population had the largest share of obese men at both the start and end of the residential spell. Compared to stably populated neighborhoods in which about 21 percent were obese at the start of the spell and 25 percent were obese at the end of the spell, growing neighborhoods had significantly more obese men at both the start of the spell (26 percent) and the end of the spell (30 percent). Declining neighborhoods also had more obese men than stably populated neighborhoods, but differences were only statistically significant at the end of the spell, in which 29 percent of male respondents were obese. As it was for women, larger percentages of men were obese at the end of the spell compared to at the beginning of the spell.

The distribution of men and women reporting poor or fair self-rated health within each changing neighborhood type was slightly different from patterns of obesity. Among women, those living in depopulated neighborhoods reported better self-rated health at the

start and end of the spell (16 percent and 25 percent, respectively) than those in stably populated neighborhoods (21 percent and 30 percent). Women living in neighborhoods with a growing population also reported better self-rated health. At the start of the residential spell, 15 percent of women in growing neighborhoods reported poor or fair health, and at the end of the residential spell, 28 percent reported poor or fair health.

Compared to women, male respondents living in neighborhoods with declining populations reported the poorest health. At the beginning of their residential spell, about 13 percent of men living in depopulated neighborhoods reported poor or fair health, which represented a greater share than those in stably populated neighborhoods (11 percent) and growing neighborhoods (about 10 percent). By the end of the residential spell, more men reported worse self-rated health in each neighborhood type, but men living in depopulated neighborhoods reported poorer health (20 percent) than those in stably populated (17 percent) or growing neighborhoods (15 percent).

Turning now to the results of the logistic regression models that predict obesity (Tables 4.2 and 4.3) and poor or fair health (Tables 4.4 and 4.5), neighborhood poverty was the most consistent neighborhood-level predictor for health outcomes. Neighborhood poverty – not neighborhood population change – was associated with poorer self-rated health for both men and women and was associated with obesity for women. Only in obesity models for men was neighborhood population change significantly associated with health, and only until obesity at the start of the residential spell was included as a control (Model 4), at which point the relationship disappeared.

[TABLE 4.2 ABOUT HERE]

Table 4.2 presents log odds ratios, standard errors, and odds ratios from logistic regression models predicting obesity for female respondents. Among female heads of household who lived in the same place of residence for six or more years, neighborhood population change was not related to obesity in any of the models, including in Model 1, when neighborhood population change was the sole predictor. In Models 2 through 4, neighborhood poverty is a significant predictor of obesity for women. This relationship holds after adjusting for individual respondents' age, race, educational attainment, family income, home ownership, and obesity at the start of the residential spell, though the magnitude of the association with neighborhood poverty declines by about 13 percent from 0.031 (OR=1.032) to 0.027 (OR=1.027). This implies that after adjusting for all covariates (Model 4), a one-unit increase in the neighborhood poverty rate corresponds to roughly a 3 percent increase in the odds of obesity among women.

[TABLE 4.3 ABOUT HERE]

Table 4.3 shows that neighborhood population change is marginally associated with obesity for males. Neighborhood population decline was associated with obesity in Model 2, but after adjusting for individual-level controls, was only marginally significant in Model 3. Once obesity at the beginning of the residential spell was included in the model, neither population decline nor population growth was related to obesity.

[TABLES 4.4 AND 4.5 ABOUT HERE]

The relationship between neighborhood population change and poor or fair self-rated health for men and women is presented in Tables 4.4 and 4.5. The results for men and women are similar. Neither population growth nor decline is significantly different from population stability in their relationship to poor or fair health for women (Table 4.4)

or men (Table 4.5). Neighborhood poverty is associated with poor or fair health for both men and women, but the relationship declines in magnitude after adjusting for all individual-level controls. In Model 4 for both men and women, neighborhood poverty is only marginally significantly related to self-rated health.

Discussion

In this study, I examined the relationship between neighborhood population change and health outcomes. An extensive body of literature has examined the effects of neighborhood poverty on a range of health outcomes, including self-rated health and BMI. However, to date, few studies have examined the relationship between neighborhood population change and health, with fewer still considering depopulation. Although there is evidence that neighborhood depopulation is widespread in cities throughout the United States (Weaver et al 2017) and despite policy-relevant concerns about depopulation, few researchers have examined its possible effects. After stratifying by gender and considering two different health outcomes, this study found that neighborhood poverty was a more consistent predictor of poorer health and obesity than neighborhood depopulation. Depopulation was significant only in models predicting obesity among men, and only before adjusting for individual-level controls.

The results from this study suggest that neighborhood-level poverty is more strongly related to health than is depopulation. Furthermore, in models where neighborhood population change was positively associated with obesity (models of male respondents), neighborhood population *growth* was more strongly related to obesity than was neighborhood depopulation. However, these relationships disappeared entirely when obesity at the start of the residential spell was included in models. For the exception of

male obesity, all other models in this analysis indicated a positive relationship between neighborhood poverty and worse health six or more years later. Although marginally significant for poor or fair health among men and women after adjusting for all individual-level controls, neighborhood poverty was significantly related to obesity in models for women. The stronger effect of neighborhood poverty found in these analyses suggests that living in a poor neighborhood may matter more for health than living in a neighborhood experiencing depopulation.

However, these findings should be interpreted with caution, as there are several important limitations. The results presented here rely on data from individuals who remained in their places of residence for six or more years. By removing those who experienced a more recent move, the sample necessarily includes fewer younger individuals, people with lower incomes, and renters, all of whom remain in their places of residence for shorter periods of time. Furthermore, because depopulated neighborhoods are, by definition, neighborhoods that residents are leaving, sample respondents living in depopulated neighborhoods for six years or more are a select group. While using multi-year residential spells allowed me to capture consistent exposure to a given neighborhood type, it also served to limit the sample to older, wealthier individuals. Future analyses should include all person-years of data and follow sample participants over shorter and longer periods. The PSID collected information on current heads' height and weight once in 1986 and beginning again in 1999. It also began collecting information on heads' self-reported health beginning in 1984. An important next step in analyses will be to include baseline measures for health starting in the mid-1980s. A longer follow-up period will capture greater potential change in health over the life course than the 6- to 10-year

period that was used here and will avoid conflating adults who were only recently exposed to certain types of changing neighborhoods with those who were exposed for longer periods of time.

Critiques of neighborhood effects emphasize that most conventional statistical methods fail to account for the selection of individuals and families into certain types of neighborhoods (Sampson, Morenoff, Gannon-Rowley 2002; Sampson 2008; Sharkey and Elwert 2011). Without accounting for selection into neighborhoods and the amount of time that individuals spend in certain types of neighborhoods, results may understate the effects of cumulative neighborhood exposure (Kunz, Page, and Solon 2003; South and Crowder 2010; Wodtke, Harding, and Elwert 2011). Recent neighborhood effects research has used marginal structural models with inverse probability of treatment and censoring weights to account for long durations of exposure to neighborhoods and potential time-varying confounders (Kravitz-Wirtz 2016a; Kravitz-Wirtz 2016b; Wodtke, Harding, and Elwert 2011). By using conventional regression methods with a shorter period of exposure and not accounting for time-varying confounders, the results of this study are limited. In addition to the next steps outlined above, future analyses will use marginal structural models with IPT weights to overcome the analytic limitations of this study.

Despite these limitations, this analysis provides an important first step to developing a deeper understanding of neighborhood depopulation. While much attention has been directed toward shrinking cities, particularly within large urban centers like Detroit, Flint, and Cleveland, little is known about the extent to which neighborhood depopulation, net of other factors, impacts the lives of residents. A first look at this

relationship suggests that exposure to poor neighborhoods is a much stronger predictor of worse health than depopulation. Because depopulated neighborhoods often have high levels of poverty, it is difficult to separate the effects of neighborhood population loss from poverty and make determinations about whether population loss impacts health over and above neighborhood poverty. It is also possible that the unit of analysis that matters most in depopulation's effects is at the city-level rather than the neighborhood-level. Since cities that lose large portions of their population also lose businesses, jobs, and a tax base, living in a city with dramatic and long-term depopulation may have a more profound impact on residents than does living in a depopulated neighborhood within a thriving city.

Table 4.1 Sample characteristics for female and male household heads by neighborhood population change

	Females (n = 1,047)			Males (n = 3,198)		
	Growth	Stability	Decline	Growth	Stability	Decline
Neighborhood Poverty, mean	12.71 (9.99)	13.77 (9.16)	18.96 (13.20)	9.82 (8.21)	11.63 (9.09)	14.29 (10.94)
Age, mean	55.84 (15.22)	55.86 (15.68)	56.22 (15.55)	47.04 (13.35)	49.34 (13.86)	49.31 (14.08)
Black	17.31	15.22	26.98	6.41	4.57	10.56
Education, percent						
Less than High School	20.12	17.84	20.44	12.01	14.73	15.91
High School Graduate	40.81	35.00	36.60	26.96	29.43	30.71
Some College or More	39.07	47.16	42.96	61.03	55.84	53.38
Family Income in \$1000s, mean	41.25 (49.94)	39.23 (29.87)	36.78 (44.56)	97.33 (12.72)	88.48 (99.48)	75.18 (68.57)
Owns home, percent	80.71	70.98	72.18	93.23	86.50	83.09
Obese	*			***		†
Start of spell, percent	34.86	28.12	27.22	26.27	20.79	24.31
End of spell, percent	37.49	34.10	35.50	29.99	24.66	29.00
Poor or Fair Health				*		*
Start of spell, percent	15.27	21.72	16.34	9.83	11.35	12.82
End of spell, percent	28.18	30.07	25.40	15.13	17.39	20.23
Weighted %	29.77	38.51	31.72	33.13	38.07	28.8
N	300	348	399	1,070	1,138	990

Note: Figures are weighted using weights from the last year of the residential spell; column total Ns are unweighted. Sample characteristics for adults over the age of 25 who remained in their place of residence for six or more years between 2001 and 2011. Standard deviations are in parentheses. The p values are derived from multinomial logistic regression. Neighborhood stability is the reference category in each model.
† p < .1; * p < .05; ** p < .01; *** p < .001.

Table 4.2 Log odds ratios, odds ratios, and standard errors from logistic regression models predicting obesity for females

	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3			Model 4		
	LOR	SE	OR	LOR	SE	OR	LOR	SE	OR	LOR	SE	OR
NH population change ^a												
Growth	.148	.199	1.159	.183	.188	1.201	.153	.198	1.166	-.098	.252	.906
Decline	.062	.184	1.064	-.109	.204	.897	-.118	.211	.889	.045	.262	1.046
NH poverty				.031	.009	1.032	.022	.009	1.023	*	.027	1.027
Controls												
Age							-.021	.007	0.979	**	-.026	.010
Black							.418	.198	1.519	**	.051	.279
Less than high school ^b							.135	.246	1.144		-.102	.329
Some college or more							-.023	.184	.978		-.177	.254
Family income							-.034	.117	.967		.131	.141
Owens home							.107	.238	1.113		.011	.339
Obesity, start of spell											3.638	.273
												38.034

Note. N = 1,047 for all models. Models are estimated using weights from the last year of the residential spell. Analyses are based on adults over the age of 25 who remained in their place of residence for at least six years between 2001 and 2011. NH = neighborhood. ^aReference group is stability. ^bReference group is high school degree or equivalent.

† $p < .1$; * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

Table 4.3 Log odds ratios, odds ratios, and standard errors from logistic regression models predicting obesity for males

	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3			Model 4		
	LOR	SE	OR	LOR	SE	OR	LOR	SE	OR	LOR	SE	OR
NH population change ^a												
Growth	.269	.101	1.309 *	.282	.103	1.325 **	.252	.103	1.287 *	.100	.136	1.106
Decline	.222	.097	1.248 *	.203	.098	1.225 *	.186	.010	1.205 †	.169	.138	1.185
NH poverty				.007	.005	1.007	-.001	.006	.999	.005	.007	1.005
Controls												
Age							-.019	.003	.981 ***	-.030	.005	.970 ***
Black							.254	.143	1.289 †	-.375	.221	.687 †
Less than high school ^b							-.257	.163	.774	-.247	.214	.781
Some college or more							-.190	.110	.827	-.217	.152	.805
Family income							-.136	.050	.873 **	.011	.071	1.011
Owens home							-.089	.169	.914	-.073	.221	.929
Obesity, start of spell										3.556	.140	35.035 ***

Note. N = 3,198 for all models. Models are estimated using weights from the last year of the residential spell. Analyses are based on adults over the age of 25 who remained in their place of residence for at least six years between 2001 and 2011. NH = neighborhood. * Reference group is stability. † Reference group is high school degree or equivalent.

† $p < .1$; * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

Table 4.4 Log odds ratios, odds ratios, and standard errors from logistic regression models predicting poor or fair health for females

	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3			Model 4		
	LOR	SE	OR	LOR	SE	OR	LOR	SE	OR	LOR	SE	OR
NH population change ^a												
Growth	-.091	.215	.913	-.065	.227	.937	-.144	.223	.866	.098	.277	1.103
Decline	-.233	.219	.792	-.401	.244	.670	-.402	.263	.669	-.227	.261	.797
NH poverty				.028	.007	1.029	***	.019	.011	1.019	†	1.022
†												
Controls												
Age							.021	.009	1.021	*	.015	1.015
Black							-.299	.319	.742		.481	.618
Less than high school ^b							.501	.248	1.650	†	.236	1.267
Some college or more							-.228	.291	.796		-.093	.911
Family income							-.551	.122	.576	***	-.370	.690
Owens home							-.048	.265	.953		.109	1.116
Poor or fair health, start of spell										2.494	.234	12.113

Note. N = 1,047 for all models. Models are estimated using weights from the last year of the residential spell. Analyses are based on adults over the age of 25 who remained in their place of residence for at least six years between 2001 and 2011. NH = neighborhood. ^a Reference group is stability. ^b Reference group is high school degree or equivalent.

† $p < .1$; * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

Table 4.5 Log odds ratios, odds ratios, and standard errors from logistic regression models predicting poor or fair health for males

	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3			Model 4			
	LOR	SE	OR	LOR	SE	OR	LOR	SE	OR	LOR	SE	OR	
NH population change ^a													
Growth	-.166	.153	.847	-.108	.151	.897	.050	.179	1.051	.020	.198	1.021	
Decline	.186	.141	1.205	.098	.134	1.103	.030	.157	1.030	.058	.162	1.060	
NH poverty				.030	.005	1.031	***	.016	.007	1.016	*	1.014 †	
Controls													
Age							.047	.005	1.048	***	.039	.005	1.040 ***
Black							.524	.192	1.689	**	.324	.251	1.383
Less than high school ^b							.509	.182	1.664	**	.311	.209	1.365
Some college or more							-.432	.154	.649	**	-.425	.162	.654 *
Family income							-.308	.093	.735	**	-.215	.101	.807 *
Owens home							-.416	.176	.659	*	-.324	.172	.723 †
Poor or fair health, start of spell													***
											2.344	.183	10.425

Note. N = 3,198 for all models. Models are estimated using weights from the last year of the residential spell. Analyses are based on adults over the age of 25 who remained in their place of residence for at least six years between 2001 and 2011. NH = neighborhood. ^a Reference group is stability. ^b Reference group is high school degree or equivalent. † $p < .1$; * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

CHAPTER V

Conclusion

When social theorists first began to consider how population change impacts the lives of individuals, urbanization and the rapid growth of cities was well underway. Today, some social scientists have begun to examine a different form of population change – the persistent loss of population that is occurring in some once-thriving cities. Decades of depopulation and its correlates have left some urban centers with an onslaught of problems, from bankruptcy to lead-laced drinking water (Desan 2014; Dewar and Thomas 2013; Morckel 2017; Neill 2015; Sugrue 1996). As such, scholars and policymakers have begun to consider the various ways that urban depopulation affects the individuals who remain.

While much attention has been directed at shrinking *cities* (Beauregard 2009; Dewar and Thomas 2013; Weaver et al 2017), less is known about depopulated *neighborhoods*, including whether neighborhood depopulation contributes to worse social or health outcomes. While some researchers have examined patterns of depopulation at both the city and neighborhood levels and have considered how urban depopulation affects cities (Dewar and Thomas 2013; Weaver et al 2017), this dissertation provides a first look at the social dynamics and health outcomes for residents of depopulated neighborhoods, offering insights about neighborhood depopulation.

In chapters 2 and 3, I present the experiences, perceptions, and stories that residents living in two depopulated neighborhoods in Detroit shared during qualitative interviews. Because each neighborhood was located in different sections of the city and had undergone different trajectories of change, I was able to explore how residents perceived the changes that had happened in their neighborhoods and whether those changes were related to differences in neighboring practices and decisions about residential mobility. Although both neighborhoods qualified as “depopulated” according to Weaver and colleagues (2017) – i.e. a population loss of 25 percent over a 40-year period – River Park was in the process of economic and residential growth while Northwood, despite some nascent signs of vitality, had continued to lose businesses and residents. Residents’ perceptions of and sentiments about their neighborhoods reflected these demographic and commercial differences. Those living in River Park described how they valued the amenities, beauty, and convenience of their neighborhood, and many spoke fondly of living in a neighborhood with racial and ethnic diversity. Although some complained about the vacant housing that remained in their neighborhood and the crime and dangers they associated with it, most described feeling safe in River Park, particularly in comparison with other neighborhoods in the city. In contrast to River Park participants, Northwood residents were less fortunate, living in a neighborhood they perceived as more violent and farther away from stores and other amenities. While participants from both neighborhoods had similar levels of income, Northwood residents expressed considerable concerns about safety, some experiencing violence firsthand.

Chapter 2 illustrates how these perceptions of the neighborhood were enveloped in participants’ residential mobility decisions. Residents of River Park, describing their

neighborhood as a beautiful place to live with stores, restaurants, and other amenities, generally did not want to move. In providing their accounts of wanting to stay put, they often compared their neighborhood to other neighborhoods in Detroit, explaining that River Park was safer than other neighborhoods in the city and that everything they needed was located only a short distance away. Northwood, however, was located on the outskirts of the city, and at the time of data collection, had few stores and restaurants nearby. Many residents, without transportation of their own, described the arduous process of buying groceries or other household supplies. These inconveniences, coupled with the strong negative perception that many Northwood residents had about their neighborhood, prompted some to want to move. However, the majority, including those who complained about the safety, appearance, and inconvenience of their neighborhood, wanted to stay. They articulated multilayered narratives of staying put that focused on both individual and social factors, such as the importance of social ties, a desire “to be stable”, and the belief that their current neighborhoods were as good as or better than other neighborhoods where they could move.

Much of the sociological literature on high-poverty neighborhoods suggests that residents in a neighborhood like Northwood would retreat to their homes and avoid their neighbors, while those in River Park would be more involved in their neighborhood and more trusting of one another. However, Chapter 3 presents a slightly different account of neighboring in these two places. It shows that the immediate micro-residential context – a combination of housing type, the built environment, and the population density and residential vacancy surrounding one’s home – matter much more for neighboring than the larger neighborhood context. Participants living in densely populated places, such as

high-rise apartment buildings, were concerned about interpersonal entanglements and described the importance of taking steps to limit involvement with their neighbors. In contrast, participants living in the most depopulated areas, where concerns about crime and safety were the highest, emphasized the importance of establishing and maintaining good relationships with one another, as these relationships could serve as a type of protection in a place otherwise devoid of formal security systems. These findings, though slightly different from the expectations described in some of the criminological literature, are consistent with accounts from urban sociology emphasizing neighboring that occurs on the “blockface” or between those living within close proximity of one another (Gan 1965; Grannis 2009; Murphy forthcoming; Rosenblatt and DeLuca 2012).

The qualitative interviews presented in this dissertation suggest a tale of two neighborhoods. Both neighborhoods experienced long-term patterns of depopulation, but with recent revitalization underway in one (River Park) and few changes occurring in the other (Northwood), residents in the two neighborhoods experienced appreciably different circumstances. River Park residents described feeling safe in their neighborhood and being more active in their community. They talked about taking children to the local park, fishing along the Riverwalk, going on walks around the neighborhood, and meeting with friends at nearby restaurants. In contrast, in Northwood, the local park bore a large sign that read, “Get your kids and lock your doors. Crackheads.” People in Northwood were concerned about their safety and the safety of their children, and they opted to stay indoors and limited the amount of time they spent outside. They did not go on recreational walks in the neighborhood or take children to the local park.

Chapter 4 takes a different methodological approach from the two preceding chapters and examines neighborhood depopulation using U.S. census and national survey data from the Panel Study of Income Dynamics. In this chapter, I was interested in investigating whether residence in a depopulated neighborhood was associated with changes in body mass index and self-rated health. While I found some evidence of an association, neighborhood-level poverty appeared to have the strongest relationship to health. Because neighborhood depopulation and poverty are strongly correlated, it is difficult to isolate the effects of depopulation from poverty. In separate analyses not shown in the chapter, I created different categories of neighborhood depopulation and poverty in an effort to identify neighborhoods with low rates of neighborhood poverty and high rates of depopulation. Results were consistent with those shown in the chapter – that neighborhood depopulation was not associated with changes in health – but results were also revealing in that very few census tracts in the United States were composed of low poverty and high depopulation. Nearly all census tracts with high rates of depopulation also had high rates of poverty (very much like places such as Northwood and River Park), and almost every depopulated tract with low poverty was located in a metropolitan area that had undergone large declines in overall population, such as Cleveland and Detroit. While there are certainly neighborhoods in shrinking cities that have maintained their levels of population over time, and while there are some depopulated neighborhoods that have low levels of neighborhood poverty, most neighborhoods that have lost large portions of their populations are also those that have high poverty. Neighborhood depopulation and neighborhood poverty, therefore, are frequently entwined. While neighborhood depopulation alone may not be related to

changes in health, neighborhood poverty is related to health, as this study and many others have found.

While these three chapters provide useful information about residents who live in depopulated neighborhoods, the sample populations between Chapters 2 and 3 are quite different from the analytic sample in Chapter 4. The sample of respondents interviewed for the earlier two chapters was comprised nearly entirely of renters, while the sample analyzed in Chapter 4 consisted almost entirely of homeowners. Among qualitative interviewees, only three (out of 33 participants, or 9 percent) were homeowners, and according to the 2014 American Community Survey, both Northwood and River Park – two neighborhoods with long-term depopulation – had a greater share of renters than homeowners. In Northwood, 71 percent of units were renter-occupied, and in River Park, 82 percent were renter-occupied (Table 3.1). In contrast, the analytic sample used in Chapter 4 had a strikingly high percentage of homeowners: 72 percent of women and 83 percent of men residing in depopulated neighborhoods were homeowners (Table 4.1). While the qualitative sample is not necessarily representative of residents living in depopulated neighborhoods across the U.S., it is also likely that the analytic sample from Chapter 4 is not representative of depopulated neighborhoods. The results from Chapter 4, therefore, should be considered in light of these issues and should be interpreted as a sample that consists primarily of homeowners.

Because lower-income individuals are less likely to be homeowners (Haurin, Herbert, and Rosenthal 2007; Di and Liu 2007) and more likely to experience various types of housing instability as well as negative health outcomes associated with housing instability (Burgard, Seefeldt, Zelner 2012), it is important to consider how living in a

depopulated neighborhood impacts all residents, not just homeowners. While low-income homeowners are certainly disadvantaged with respect to housing (Dwyer 2007; Pollack and Lynch 2009), a large body of literature on low-income residents has described the multiple hardships that low-income renters face, including evictions, unaffordable rental housing, substandard housing quality, and unresponsive or duplicitous landlords (Collinson 2011; Desmond 2016; DeLuca, Garboden, and Rosenblatt 2013). Future work on neighborhood depopulation should aim to create a more nationally representative sample of residents exposed to depopulated neighborhoods and should investigate whether and how outcomes for residents of these neighborhoods differ given their renter or homeownership status.

Still, taken together, the evidence presented in this dissertation suggests that depopulation is often inextricably linked to poverty. Social scientists, policymakers, and city planners together must continue to identify productive and beneficial strategies to reduce concentrated poverty and its damaging effects. These include investing in the neighborhoods themselves *and* providing residents who want to leave their neighborhoods the opportunity to do so through resources, support services, and financial assistance. Furthermore, interventions must occur within multiple scales of government. Policymakers must intervene not only at the community level, but also at the level of the city government, and in shrinking cities like Detroit, Flint, Cleveland, and Milwaukee, at the level of the state government. Local organizational and community efforts to improve high-poverty neighborhoods are not enough. These neighborhoods and the residents who live in them require the attention, resources, and backing of every level of government.

Without wholesale investment from multiple partners and multiple scales of government, residents in high-poverty neighborhoods will continue to struggle.

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