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Neighborhood Satisfaction: A Study of a Low-Income Urban Community

Patricia Ciorici[1] and Prentiss Dantzler[2]

Abstract

This article discusses the findings from a study on neighborhood satisfaction conducted within the North Camden neighborhood context. Using data from the 2011 North Camden Resident Satisfaction Survey, the study examined the subjective measures of neighborhood-level characteristics to identify the determinants of neighborhood satisfaction. A binary logistic regression analysis revealed that the quality of social networks, neighborhood physical conditions, neighborhood safety, and quality of public services are positively associated with neighborhood satisfaction. Surprisingly, the analysis showed that the extent of social networks and access to transportation have an inverse relationship with the satisfaction of residents with their neighborhood. The article discusses these findings and the way in which the results can inform practitioners about policies and programs that need to be developed and implemented to improve neighborhood satisfaction and, ultimately, individual and community well-being.

Keywords

neighborhood satisfaction, community development, neighborhood disorder, social ties, Camden, New Jersey

[1]Independent Researcher, Chisinau, Moldova
[2]Colorado College, Colorado Springs, CO, USA

Corresponding Author:
Patricia Ciorici, 80 Kogalniceanu, APT 40, Chisinau MD-2012, Moldova.
Email: patricia.ciorici@gmail.com

Introduction

The topic of neighborhood satisfaction has caught the attention of numerous researchers in a range of disciplines including sociology, psychology, geography, and planning (Hur, Nasar, and Chun 2010; Lu 1999). The interest in the topic is unsurprising given that a better understanding of factors that influence the satisfaction of residents with their neighborhoods can hold important implications for practice. The practical importance of the topic stems from two considerations. First, neighborhood satisfaction determines an individual's overall quality of life (Lu 1999; Sirgy and Cornwell 2001, 2002). Quality of life and neighborhood satisfaction are distinct but interrelated concepts. Quality of life measures aim to assess the overall well-being of individuals. Neighborhood satisfaction, in turn, is a narrower concept that aims to capture the extent to which physical and social characteristics of neighborhoods meet the expectations of their residents. As noted by Lu (1999), theories of neighborhood satisfaction share a common notion that one's level of neighborhood satisfaction is based on the congruity of one's actual and desired situation. The two concepts are clearly interrelated. People spend a considerable part of their daily lives in their homes and communities, and the extent to which these places meet the physical and social needs of individuals determines their overall sense of well-being. Second, previous research has shown that neighborhood satisfaction influences the intention of individuals to move as well as their actual mobility behavior (Heaton et al. 1979; Lu 1998, 1999; Oh 2003). Hence, the effects of neighborhood satisfaction extend beyond the individual level and have implications for community vitality. In these conditions, understanding which neighborhood and housing characteristics determine the level of neighborhood satisfaction among residents can help practitioners effectively promote individual and community well-being by developing and implementing programs focused on improving those aspects that residents associate with better living environments.

Understanding which factors are related to neighborhood satisfaction is important for private and public actors alike. Both sets of actors face financial constraints and have to invest their limited resources in development and redevelopment efforts that best meet residential needs. As Galster and Hesser (1981) noted, the financial viability of private-sector actors, including housing developers, depends on their ability to assess correctly the desirability of individual units or entire communities. At the same time, urban planners and elected officials, as actors of the public sector, are "pressured to use increasingly scarce financial resources so as to maximize the well-being of their housing client population, whether it be through public construction or selective rehabilitation programs" (Galster and Hesser 1981, p. 736). Because

resource constraints are pronounced and investments are scarce in poor urban communities, knowledge about factors that shape neighborhood satisfaction could be especially useful in directing revitalization and development efforts in such areas. The topic of neighborhood satisfaction became even more important following the recent economic recession (Batson and Monnat 2015). Many communities struggled with the negative effects of the recession, including home foreclosures and unemployment, which may have negatively influenced the overall quality of life among residents (Batson and Monnat 2015). Studies on neighborhood satisfaction can inform initiatives aimed at stabilizing such communities.

Past research has shown that factors of a physical and social nature contribute to an individual's level of neighborhood satisfaction. Scholars, such as Skogan (1990), Ross and Mirowsky (1999), and Woldoff (2002), have studied aspects of physical disorder in the form of abandoned properties and vacant lots and found that they are strong predictors of satisfaction with place. Others, like B. A. Lee, Campbell, and Miller (1991) and Parkes, Kearns, and Atkinson (2002), have found social ties within one's neighborhood affecting an individual's level of neighborhood satisfaction. Scholarship in areas of social cohesion and residential mobility argues that residential satisfaction mediates the relationship between social bonds in a locale and the mobility intentions of the general population (Oh 2003). However, what is there to be said for individuals who live in poor urban communities? Are residents in such communities satisfied about where they live? Also, what determines the level of satisfaction among residents who do not leave or cannot leave these communities? As private actors, policy makers, and community development practitioners converge to address issues of poor communities, it is important to understand the nuanced nature of the relationship between neighborhood satisfaction, on one hand, and physical decay, social bonds, and other neighborhood characteristics, on the other.

Few previous studies examined neighborhood satisfaction in the context of poor urban communities (see Amérigo and Aragonés 1990; Basolo and Strong 2002; Bruin and Cook 1997; Fried and Gleicher 1961; Li and Wu 2013; Loo 1986). In one of the earlier studies on neighborhood satisfaction, Fried and Gleicher (1961) found that residents of an urban slum were surprisingly very satisfied with their living environment. The authors argued that the strong social bonds experienced by the participants in the study explained their high level of neighborhood satisfaction. Fried and Gleicher's finding is in line with the broader research on neighborhood satisfaction. As Hannscott (2016, p. 1729) noted, "despite a wide range of living conditions around the world, past studies have shown that across the board people tend to be very satisfied with their neighborhoods and communities." However, Hannscott

also argued that, although people are generally very satisfied with their communities, variations exist in their responses. Studying such variations remains important for practical reasons and continues to draw the attention of researchers in various fields. The aim of this article, too, is to further the research on neighborhood satisfaction. The article also represents a more recent attempt at examining the determinants of neighborhood satisfaction in the particular context of an urban community struggling with blight and decay, namely, Camden, New Jersey. More specifically, the article identifies and discusses the neighborhood perceptions that determine the level of neighborhood satisfaction among residents in a Camden neighborhood.

The article has seven sections following this introduction. The second section discusses the motivations behind the study and provides a brief description of the study context. The third section explains the overall research approach. The fourth section examines the literature on neighborhood satisfaction relevant to this study and the expected results. The article continues with a description of the data and analysis methods in the fifth section. The sixth section presents and discusses the findings of the research. The final and concluding section of the article provides an overview of the findings and their theoretical and practical implications, brings into focus the limitations of the study, and proposes ways in which the identified limitations could be addressed in future research.

Background and Context

Possibilities for community action that could result from the identification and analysis of factors associated with greater neighborhood satisfaction served as a primary motivating factor behind this study. Similar to Grogan-Kaylor et al. (2006), this study followed the emerging tradition within community-based research that emphasizes the importance of neighborhood strengths and assets (Mowbray et al. 2007). As Grogan-Kaylor et al. (2006, p. 28) suggested, "when neighborhoods are faced with challenges, understanding the neighborhood characteristics that influence the subjective perceptions that residents have of their neighborhoods, becomes an important part of understanding neighborhood resiliency." This study aligns with the idea that inquiries into neighborhood satisfaction can provide insights into aspects of community resilience. Within a neighborhood exist individuals with varying sets of preferences and beliefs. An accurate understanding of their individual and collective perceptions of the neighborhood can guide decisions related to resource allocation in areas of disinvestment and disenfranchisement. Hence, a focused inquiry on neighborhood satisfaction within the context of a poor urban community targeted for redevelopment can not only provide evidence

for residential evaluations of the neighborhood but also inform actions and responses by local actors in their collective effort to build stronger and more resilient communities.

This study was conducted within the context of North Camden, a neighborhood in Camden, New Jersey. As Bowden (1972) argued, neighborhoods are geographical forms that possess some commonality in terms of their physical and cultural characteristics, and individuals living within these spaces occupy innumerable but identifiable spatial dimensions. The neighborhood in this study is spatially defined by the Benjamin Franklin Bridge at its south boundary and Admiral Wilson Boulevard, a multilane expressway on the east edge of the neighborhood. The strong physical boundaries isolate the 0.59 square mile neighborhood from the rest of the city. Large stretches of vacant land also separate the core of the neighborhood from its waterfront on the Delaware River. According to the 2010 Census data, the neighborhood is home to 2,223 households. Most housing units in North Camden are renter-occupied, with only approximately 29% being owner-occupied. Of the total number of housing units in the area, about 10% are vacant. As evidenced by the North Camden Neighborhood Plan (2008), which was developed through an effort led by a community-based advocacy organization with the participation of residents, community leaders, service providers, and local government officials, North Camden is viewed as a single community for redevelopment purposes. Following the practice of local community development actors, North Camden is considered the "neighborhood" in neighborhood satisfaction for the purpose of this study. It is important to note, however, that while the study is aimed at understanding neighborhood satisfaction in North Camden, this area encompasses two smaller neighborhoods that roughly correspond to Cooper's Poynt and Pyne Poynt census tracts. The study accounts for the variation in neighborhood satisfaction across these two smaller geographic areas.

Camden is a unique, extreme case to study residential satisfaction. According to data from the U.S. Census Bureau, in 2011, the median household income in the city was approximately US$26,000, and the average individual income was a little over US$13,000. Almost 40% of Camden's 77,000 residents lived below the poverty line, making the city one of the poorest in the United States. These numbers remained practically unchanged over the past years. A relatively low number of residents are employed and few achieve high levels of education. Only 62% of residents 25 years and over had at least graduated from high school and only 7% had a bachelor's degree or higher in 2011. The numbers somewhat improved over recent years, but a wide gap between Camden and national educational attainment remains. The unemployment rate was 22% in 2011 and continues to remain

high. As other once-thriving urban areas that are now experiencing the long-term effects of deindustrialization, Camden struggles with issues of large-scale land vacancy and property abandonment. Public safety was and remains a major concern in the city. With over 2,000 violent crimes recorded in 2011, the city was one of the most dangerous in the country. The discussion here reflects the severe economic and social challenges that individuals, and the broader community, experience in Camden. For far too long, the city has been an example of urban blight with few amenities for local residents, and North Camden is no exception, mirroring the rest of the area drastically changed by deindustrialization. Despite these challenging conditions, as this article will show, many residents are satisfied with living in their community. However, some variability exists in the level of neighborhood satisfaction among residents in North Camden. This article identifies and discusses the sources of that variability.

The study used data from a resident satisfaction survey conducted among residents in North Camden in 2011. The survey was conducted on behalf of Cooper's Ferry Partnership, a local community development organization, and its partners. Cooper's Ferry Partnership has been active in the North Camden area, funding several initiatives, such as building renovations and park restorations, and providing consulting and technical services to community members. Like community members, community development organizations have a vested interest in strengthening neighborhoods, and they have long been the champions of redevelopment within local communities (Basolo and Strong 2002). Redevelopment, however, does not always produce results that align with the interests of the communities in which it unfolds. Physical displacement, which is still intensely debated in the redevelopment literature, as well as social displacement, exclusion, loss of place, and loss of political influence for longtime residents are some of the negative effects that could accompany redevelopment (see Atkinson 2004, 2015; Butler, Hamnett, and Ramsden 2013; Fraser 2004; Hyra 2016; Martin 2007; Shaw and Hagemans 2015). To be truly beneficial to local communities, redevelopment initiatives have to be responsive to community needs. Therefore, it is important for community development organizations and other local development actors to assess the perceptions related to various neighborhood aspects among the community members that they serve as well as consider the needs and views of residents when designing and implementing redevelopment programs. This observation has become even more important in the context of Camden since the survey was conducted. With recent revitalization efforts through the use of tax credits, the creation of a county-run police department, and heavy investment from local education and medical institutions, Camden is transforming in numerous ways (Sheridan 2016).

Making a continuous effort to integrate the voices of longtime residents in the redevelopment process is critical to ensuring that the unfolding transformations respond to the needs of the existing community.

The neighborhood satisfaction survey among residents in North Camden was precisely conducted to inform priorities for action and serve as a benchmark for evaluating the success of revitalization initiatives in the area. The survey assessed the overall resident satisfaction with the neighborhood, individual characteristics of respondents, and perceptions of various social and physical neighborhood conditions. The study discussed in this article furthers the purpose of the survey by examining how neighborhood characteristics influence the satisfaction of residents with their neighborhood. The study provides a baseline for understanding neighborhood needs as a prelude for evaluating the impact of subsequent development initiatives. Conducting similar studies within the same context as redevelopment efforts unfold will also allow for a better understanding of neighborhood dynamics and adjustment of local efforts and programs to the evolving needs of the community.

Overall Research Approach

The determinants of neighborhood satisfaction have been researched extensively, and several theories have been developed to explain an individual's level of neighborhood satisfaction. Hipp (2009) and Basolo and Strong (2002), for example, identified two groups of theories that explain differences in neighborhood satisfaction among residents: (1) theories that primarily rely on individual and household-level characteristics and (2) theories that primarily rely on neighborhood-level characteristics. Although theories from both groups contribute to the understanding of neighborhood satisfaction, Parkes, Kearns, and Atkinson (2002) confirmed findings from previous research and concluded that perceived neighborhood attributes are better predictors of neighborhood satisfaction compared with personal and housing background variables.

The research presented in this article, due in part to limited data availability on individual and household characteristics of survey respondents, primarily focused on neighborhood attributes to identify the determinants of neighborhood satisfaction among North Camden residents. Parkes, Kearns, and Atkinson's (2002) findings appear to provide a plausible justification for this approach. In addition, the study followed the subjective school and focused on perceived neighborhood characteristics rather than objective measures of neighborhood attributes. Recognizing the importance of psychological factors in determining the level of neighborhood satisfaction among residents, other scholars have explored the relationship between the subjective evaluation of neighborhood characteristics and neighborhood satisfaction, using subjective measures independently or in

conjunction with objective measures in their analyses. Studies comparing the two types of measures have shown that subjective rather than objective measures of neighborhood attributes explain better the satisfaction of residents with their neighborhoods (Grogan-Kaylor et al. 2006; B. A. Lee and Guest 1983; S. M. Lee et al. 2017). The imperfect relationship between external conditions and internal psychological states noted in previous research explains the focus of this study on subjective measures of neighborhood attributes.

The outlined framework and the availability of data determined the choice of variables for the research. The study analyzed the relationships between neighborhood satisfaction and perceptions of social and physical neighborhood characteristics, including perceptions of safety, neighborhood physical conditions, quality of social interactions, neighborhood accessibility, quality of public services, and access to employment opportunities in the neighborhood. The extent of social networks served as an additional measure of neighborhood social interactions. The study controlled for length of residence, tenure, and census tract.

Relevant Research and Study Expectations

Previous research identified some of the outlined variables as important predictors of neighborhood satisfaction, therefore, supporting the choice of variables in the study. The relationship between safety, measured as perceived safety, perception of crime, or fear of crime, and neighborhood satisfaction, for example, has been researched in great detail. Studies examining the topic have produced consistent results. Adams (1992, p. 365) found that perceived safety "was the single most important factor in determining the level of satisfaction respondents experienced toward their local community." Other studies, with a few exceptions (Batson and Monnat 2015; Newman and Duncan 1979), similarly identified various subjective measures of safety as important predictors of neighborhood satisfaction (Basolo and Strong 2002; Chapman and Lombard 2006; Harris 2001; Hipp 2009; Hur and Nasar 2014; Marans and Rodgers 1975; Miller et al. 1980; Parkes, Kearns, and Atkinson 2002; Sampson 1991; Skogan 1990). Examining how perceptions of safety are related to neighborhood satisfaction is especially important in the context of this study. At the time of data collection, the city was struggling with a soaring violent crime rate. Furthermore, facing a major budget deficit, the city cut its police force nearly in half at the beginning of 2011. Using state government funding, the city rehired some of the laid-off police officers later that year. However, the police force remained far from its previous size. In 2012, the city disbanded its local police force altogether, placing the responsibility for the provision of public safety services in the hands of a countywide police force.

Perceptions of safety are associated with perceptions related to the physical environment of neighborhoods (Hur and Nasar 2014). Residents associate physical disorder with social disorder, and their perceptions about the appearance of their neighborhoods influence their satisfaction with the communities in which they live. Physical neighborhood features, such as upkeep of homes, street lighting, and overall neighborhood cleanliness, also have a direct effect on neighborhood satisfaction (Batson and Monnat 2015; Dassopoulos et al. 2012; Hur and Nasar 2014; Newman and Duncan 1979; Sirgy and Cornwell 2002).

Research also shows that the extent and nature of social ties shape the satisfaction of residents with their neighborhoods (Batson and Monnat 2015; Dassopoulos et al. 2012; Parkes, Kearns, and Atkinson 2002; Sampson 1991) and foster neighborhood attachment (Mesch and Manor 1998; Sampson 1988). Scholars have confirmed the relationship between social features and neighborhood satisfaction at different levels and using diverse measures. At the individual level, Sampson (1991), for example, found that social ties, measured as the number of local friendships and acquaintanceships, and social cohesion, expressed in terms of perceptions related to helping behavior among residents, determine the level of neighborhood satisfaction among residents. At the neighborhood level, the density of social ties affects social cohesion, which, in turn, determines community satisfaction (Sampson 1991). Using a composite measure of social capital that included such dimensions as willingness to help among neighbors, closeness of ties, and trust, Vemuri et al. (2011) found that there is a positive relationship between features of social organization in a community and neighborhood satisfaction. Employing a different, but in part overlapping, composite measure of social relationships that aimed to capture the level of neighborliness across communities in Las Vegas, Batson and Monnat (2015) obtained similar results.

Social cohesion may be an especially important determinant of neighborhood satisfaction in disadvantaged communities. As Desmond (2012) explained, sociologists have argued for some time that the urban poor use their social networks to overcome economic adversity. In her ethnographic study, Stack (1974) showed that residents in a poor urban community used their networks of kin and friends as survival mechanisms. Desmond (2012, p. 1311), however, argued that disposable ties—relationships characterized by "accelerated and simulated intimacy, a high amount of physical copresence (time spent together), reciprocal or semireciprocal resource exchange, and (usually) a relatively short life span"—may be more important to survival mechanisms than relationships with family and friends. Therefore, survival among the urban poor may depend on the quality of social ties, rather than their length or level of intimacy. Given previous findings from research on neighborhood satisfaction and the important role that social networks play

in the lives of low-income urban dwellers, this study included measures of quality and extent of social ties to explore their relationship to neighborhood satisfaction in the context of Camden.

Few studies examined the relationship between the overall quality of public services and neighborhood satisfaction (Basolo and Strong 2002). However, a positive relationship between the two variables may exist given the findings in the past research (Ahlbrandt 1984; Basolo and Strong 2002; Connerly and Marans 1985). Studies have also shown that accessibility, measured as proximity to various types of establishments (Cook 1988; Hur and Morrow-Jones 2008) or as ability to use transportation through either ownership of a personal vehicle or through the use of public transportation (Dawkins, Jeon, and Pendall 2015), may dictate how people feel about their neighborhood. For these reasons, the analysis in this study included evaluations of the access to transportation and the quality of public services among residents. Having access to jobs or employment agencies is an additional factor that may determine the satisfaction of residents with their living environment. The relationship between access to employment opportunities and neighborhood satisfaction is particularly important in the context of this study, considering the well-documented spatial mismatch between jobs and residence experienced by the urban poor. A measure of access to employment centers was, therefore, also included in the analysis.

Inquiries into neighborhood satisfaction generally provide little supporting evidence for any relationship between length of residence and neighborhood satisfaction (Adams 1992; Basolo and Strong 2002; Batson and Monnat 2015; Connerly and Marans 1985; Hipp 2009; Miller et al. 1980). However, some studies found a significant, albeit negative, relationship between the two variables (Ahlbrandt 1984; Parkes, Kearns, and Atkinson 2002). The relationship between homeownership and neighborhood satisfaction is similarly ambiguous. Although some studies found that there is a positive relationship between homeownership and neighborhood satisfaction (Grinstein-Weiss et al. 2011; Lu 1999), other studies failed to detect a significant relationship between the two variables (Adams 1992; Hipp 2009; Oh 2003; Parkes, Kearns, and Atkinson 2002; Sampson 1991). Despite the ambiguous findings, homeownership and length of residence may have important effects on neighborhood satisfaction. Therefore, the study controlled for the two variables in the analysis. The study also included a census tract variable to control for any differences between the two geographic areas.

Data and Method

The study used data from the North Camden Resident Satisfaction Survey, which was conducted in July and August of 2011. The survey targeted a total

of 660 households, selected at random from a population of approximately 2,299 households in North Camden (Hangen n.d.), according to the 2000 Census data that were available at the time of data collection. The number of households in the area decreased slightly over the years to 2,223 households, according to the 2010 Census data. Out of the total number of targeted households, 218 or 33% completed the survey. In addition, 82 nonrandomly selected households completed the survey for a total of 300 responses. The preliminary analysis of the data showed no statistically significant differences between responses from randomly selected and nonrandomly selected households, with a few exceptions. Answers to questions regarding the North Camden neighborhood planning process differed across groups (Hangen n.d.). In addition, tests on differences in means for the variables included in the study showed that respondents from randomly selected households differed from respondents from nonrandomly selected households only based on their housing tenure. For all other variables included in the study, tests on differences in means and variances were statistically insignificant. Therefore, the 82 nonrandomly selected households were included in the analysis.

To identify the determinants of neighborhood satisfaction, the study employed a binary logistic regression model. The study examined the relationships between resident satisfaction with the neighborhood, on one hand, and individual perceptions on a range of issues including neighborhood safety, extent and quality of social networks, neighborhood physical conditions, neighborhood accessibility, quality of public services, and access to employment opportunities, on the other (Table 1). The dependent variable in the study, neighborhood satisfaction, represents a transformation of a six-category ordinal variable into a binary variable that distinguishes between respondents who are satisfied and respondents who are unsatisfied with their neighborhood. Respondents who reported to be *very satisfied, satisfied*, and *somewhat satisfied* were assigned to the *satisfied* group, and respondents who reported to be *very unsatisfied, unsatisfied*, and *somewhat unsatisfied* were assigned to the *unsatisfied* group. Perceptions on neighborhood safety, accessibility, quality of public services, and access to employment opportunities are ordinal variables measured on a five-category scale. The means of the survey response categories for the number of neighbors with whom respondents speak regularly for five minutes or more were used to measure the extent of social networks.

Quality of social networks and neighborhood physical conditions are composite measures representing averages on six and three variables, respectively. The quality of social networks variable accounts for how likely neighbors are to provide help with rides, accepting the respondent's mail, watching the respondent's house, doing other favors, watching for an elderly in the neighborhood, and taking care of a neighbor's child, if needed. The

Table 1. Variable Scales and Measures.

Variable	Survey Question/Statement	Coding
Neighborhood satisfaction	. . . How satisfied would you say you are living in this community?	0 = *unsatisfied* 1 = *satisfied*
Access to employment centers	Access to employment centers is satisfactory or better.	1 = *strongly disagree* 2 = *disagree* 3 = *neither agree/disagree* 4 = *agree* 5 = *strongly agree*
Quality of public services	The quality of public services is satisfactory or better.	
Neighborhood safety	My family and I feel safe in the area.	
Access to transportation	Access to transportation is satisfactory or better.	
Extent of social networks	With how many of your neighbors do you speak regularly for five minutes or more?	0 = *none* 2 = *1–3* 5 = *4–6* 8 = *7–9* 11 = *10 or more*
Quality of social networks	*Mean* of the following: How likely do you think it is that people in this community would help out if . . .	
	You needed a ride somewhere?	1 = *not at all likely* 2 = *not very likely* 3 = *somewhat likely* 4 = *likely* 5 = *very likely*
	A package was delivered when you were not at home and it needed to be accepted?	
	You needed a favor such as picking up mail or borrowing a tool?	
	You needed someone to watch your house when you were away?	
	An elderly neighbor needed someone to periodically check on him or her?	
	A neighbor needed someone to take care of a child in an emergency?	

(continued)

Table 1. (continued)

Variable	Survey Question/Statement	Coding
Neighborhood physical conditions	*Mean* of the following: How would you rate each of the following aspects of this community?	
	Cleanliness of the community	1 = *very poor* 2 = *poor* 3 = *fair* 4 = *good* 5 = *very good*
	Physical condition of homes in the community	
	Physical condition of streets, sidewalks, and public spaces in the community	
Length of residence	How long have you lived in this community?	Years
Housing tenure	Do you currently rent your home or do you own it?	1 = *own* 2 = *rent* 3 = *other*
Census tract	Entered by interviewers based on the respondent's address	0 = *6007 (Cooper's Poynt)* 1 = *6008 (Pyne Poynt)*

Table 2. Means, Standard Deviations, Minimum and Maximums for All Variables.

Variable	Observations	*M*	*SD*	Minimum	Maximum
Neighborhood satisfaction	300	0.7200	0.4497	0	1
Quality of social networks	274	3.5797	0.9213	1	5
Extent of social networks	298	5.4161	3.6378	0	11
Neighborhood safety	288	2.7014	1.2273	1	5
Neighborhood physical conditions	292	2.3961	0.7544	1	5
Quality of public services	290	3.3414	0.8867	1	5
Access to transportation	295	3.6441	0.7860	1	5
Access to employment centers	286	3.0699	1.0098	1	5
Length of residence	291	20.6721	15.9245	0.08	66
Housing tenure	292	1.7568	0.5102	1	3
Census tract	300	0.7933	0.4056	0	1

Cronbach's alpha for the six dimensions measuring the quality of social networks is .85, indicating a good level of internal consistency among components. The neighborhood physical conditions variable averages scores on cleanliness, physical condition of homes, and physical condition of streets, sidewalks, and public spaces. The Cronbach's alpha for the three dimensions measuring the neighborhood physical conditions is .77, indicating an acceptable level of internal consistency among components. Length of residence, measured in years, housing tenure, and census tract served as control variables. Housing tenure is nominal in nature and distinguishes among owners, tenants, and respondents living with their family or friends. The census tract variable is dichotomous in nature and distinguishes between residents living in Cooper's Poynt and Pyne Poynt census tracts.

Descriptive Statistics and Data Imputation Approach

The analysis showed that most respondents are satisfied with living in North Camden (Table 2). Approximately 72% of respondents in the sample declared that they were *somewhat satisfied, satisfied*, or *very satisfied* with living in their community. Despite the generally poor neighborhood safety and physical conditions in North Camden, the result was predictable given the similar findings in previous research. Frequency distributions (Table 3) show that over 70% of respondents *agreed* or *strongly agreed* that access to

Table 3. Frequency Distributions and Percentile Ranks for Selected Variables.

	Access to Transportation		Quality of Public Services		Access to Employment Centers		Neighborhood Safety	
Response Category	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Strongly disagree	7	2.37	11	3.79	23	8.04	67	23.26
Disagree	20	6.78	40	13.79	60	20.98	66	22.92
Neither agree/disagree	60	20.34	86	29.66	84	29.37	46	15.97
Agree	192	65.08	145	50.00	112	39.16	104	36.11
Strongly agree	16	5.42	8	2.76	7	2.45	5	1.74
Total	295	100	290	100	286	100	288	100

Response Category	Extent of Social Networks	
	Frequency	%
None	25	8.39
1–3	82	27.52
4–6	89	29.87
7–9	39	13.09
10 or more	63	21.14
Total	298	100

Response Category	Housing Tenure	
	Frequency	%
Own	82	28.08
Rent	199	68.15
Other	11	3.77
Total	292	100

Percentile Rank	Quality of Social Networks	Neighborhood Physical Conditions
10%	2.33	1.67
25%	3.00	2.00
50%	3.67	2.33
75%	4.17	3.00
90%	4.83	3.33

Table 4. Proportion of Data Missing for All Variables With Missing Data.

Variable	Missing	% Missing
Quality of social networks	26	8.67
Extent of social networks	2	0.67
Neighborhood safety	12	4.00
Neighborhood physical conditions	8	2.67
Quality of public services	10	3.33
Access to transportation	5	1.67
Access to employment centers	14	4.67
Length of residence	9	3.00
Housing tenure	8	2.67

transportation was satisfactory or better in the neighborhood, and over half *agreed* or *strongly agreed* that the quality of public services was satisfactory or better. Approximately 40% of respondents *agreed* or *strongly agreed* that access to employment centers is satisfactory or better in the neighborhood, approximately 30% *neither agreed nor disagreed* with this statement, and approximately another 30% *disagreed* or *strongly disagreed* with this statement. Although a little over 35% of respondents felt safe in the neighborhood, a little over 45% *disagreed* or *strongly disagreed* that they and their family felt safe in the area, and approximately 15% expressed a neutral opinion on the issue. The average length of residence in the sample was 20.7 years, and almost 70% of respondents were renters. The average and median for the quality of social networks are 3.58 and 3.67, respectively, indicating a relatively high quality of neighborhood social networks overall. The average and median for neighborhood physical conditions are 2.40 and 2.33, respectively, indicating that residents perceived the neighborhood physical conditions to be relatively poor overall. Most respondents lived in the Pyne Poynt area of North Camden.

As shown in Table 4, the data set is characterized by varying degrees of missing data. The quality of social networks variable contains the largest share of missing data, with approximately 9% of the data missing. Access to employment centers and neighborhood safety have approximately 4.5% and 4% of values missing, respectively. The remaining variables have a smaller share of values missing. The result of Little's missing completely at random (MCAR) test showed that the data could be assumed to be MCAR, but the test was only marginally insignificant ($p = .07$). In addition, approximately 25% of observations in the initial data have missing values on at least one variable in the study, which is a fairly large share and cannot be ignored.

To address the missing data in the study, a multiple imputation by chained equations (MICE) was employed. MICE can accommodate mixed types of missing data, including data measured on ordinal and nominal scales. Given the nature of the data in this study, MICE was the method of choice for handling the missing data. The literature does not provide a clear answer on the necessary number of imputations, with five imputations generally being considered sufficient to obtain valid results (Rubin 1996; van Buuren, Boshuizen, and Knook 1999). To reduce the sampling error, a full data set was obtained by using 20 imputations, which is in line with the recommendation of using a number of imputations similar to the percentage of missing data in some of the recent literature on the subject (Bodner 2008; Graham, Olchowski, and Gilreath 2007). Models were also run using the listwise deletion approach. The two approaches provided similar results. Hence, only the results obtained by using the fully imputed data are reported and discussed in the reminder of this article.

Results and Discussion

Table 5 shows the results of the binary logistic regressions using the imputed data for the full model and three restricted models. Odds ratios for the full model are also provided in Table 6 for ease of interpretation. The coefficients are stable across models and, with a few exceptions, provide expected results for the direction of relationships between the dependent and independent variables. Most coefficients for the independent variables in the study are statistically significant at the .05 significance level in the full and restricted models, including coefficients for variables measuring social capital, physical conditions, safety, quality of public services, and access to transportation in the neighborhood. Although neighborhood safety remains significant across all models, with the inclusion of the neighborhood physical conditions variable in the analysis, its coefficient approaches the threshold level of significance ($p = .047$). Previous research showed that neighborhood physical conditions are associated with perceptions of safety (Austin, Furr, and Spine 2002; Perkins and Taylor 1996), which helps explain the observed changes in the analysis in relation to these two variables. Furthermore, Batson and Monnat (2015) found no relationship between neighborhood satisfaction and perceptions of crime after controlling for all the other variables in their study, making the results presented here unsurprising. The census tract control is also significant across models and warrants further discussion below.

The results of the regression show positive relationships between neighborhood satisfaction, on one hand, and resident perceptions related to the quality of social networks, neighborhood physical conditions, and safety, on the other.

Table 5. Binary Logistic Regression Results for Neighborhood Satisfaction.

Variable	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Quality of social networks	0.995***	0.928***	0.843***	0.816***
	(5.31)	(4.78)	(4.22)	(3.78)
Extent of social networks	−0.111*	−0.113*	−0.133**	−0.128**
	(–2.53)	(–2.51)	(–2.81)	(–2.60)
Neighborhood safety		0.434***	0.277*	0.297*
		(3.40)	(2.01)	(1.99)
Neighborhood physical conditions			0.828**	0.684**
			(3.29)	(2.60)
Access to transportation				−0.829**
				(–3.28)
Quality of public services				0.599**
				(2.78)
Access to employment centers				0.244
				(1.38)
Length of residence	0.008	0.007	0.005	0.004
	(0.81)	(0.67)	(0.51)	(0.33)
Housing tenure: Rent[a]	0.383	0.528	0.512	0.423
	(1.11)	(1.48)	(1.40)	(1.11)
Housing tenure: Other[a]	0.560	0.397	0.451	0.770
	(0.72)	(0.50)	(0.52)	(0.83)
Census tract[b]	0.916**	1.140**	1.073**	0.962*
	(2.71)	(3.21)	(2.93)	(2.50)
Intercept	−3.033***	−4.135***	−5.125***	−4.279***
	(–4.02)	(–4.77)	(–5.33)	(–3.77)
N	300	300	300	300

Note: t statistics in parentheses.
a.Own is the base category.
b.Cooper's Poynt is the base category.
*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$.

These results are consistent with the social disorganization theory employed to explain neighborhood satisfaction and attachment in some recent studies in the field (Batson and Monnat 2015; Dassopoulos et al. 2012; Woldoff 2002), with measures of both physical disorder and neighborhood safety being associated with the satisfaction of respondents in this study with the community in which they live. Specifically, residents who felt safer and had a better view of the neighborhood physical conditions were more likely to be satisfied with living in their community. Likewise, residents who had better perceptions

Table 6. Factor Change in Odds for Neighborhood Satisfaction for the Full Model.

Variable	Coefficient	Odds Ratios
Quality of social networks	0.816***	2.2604
Extent of social networks	−0.128**	0.8797
Neighborhood safety	0.297*	1.3459
Neighborhood physical conditions	0.684**	1.9822
Access to transportation	−0.829**	0.4364
Quality of public services	0.599**	1.8195
Access to employment centers	0.244	1.2767
Length of residence	0.004	1.0037
Housing Tenure: Rent[a]	0.423	1.5261
Housing Tenure: Other[a]	0.770	2.1590
Census tract[b]	0.962*	2.6171

a.Own is the base category.
b.Cooper's Poynt is the base category.
*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$.

regarding the quality of local social networks reported greater levels of neighborhood satisfaction. The analysis also shows a positive relationship between neighborhood satisfaction and the quality of public services.

The results discussed above suggest that local development initiatives focusing on addressing physical disorder and crime in poor urban communities could contribute to an increase in the overall level of neighborhood satisfaction among residents. Initiatives aimed at improving social relationships at the local level could also have a positive effect on the satisfaction of residents with their neighborhoods and should be considered when local development strategies are devised. Similarly, taking into account the findings in this study and those in previous research, consideration should be given to initiatives aimed at improving the quality of public services if increasing the satisfaction of residents with their communities is the goal. In addition to being consistent with most studies in the field, the findings discussed here align with some of the main recommendations outlined in the North Camden Neighborhood Plan (2008), which, as explained previously, was developed with input from residents and local organizations. The plan emphasized the importance of improving public safety, physical fabric, and social health for the development of the community, lending further support to the discussion here.

Contrary to expectations, the coefficient for the extent of social networks is negative and statistically significant, suggesting that individuals having larger social networks are less likely to be satisfied with living in the neighborhood

compared with individuals having smaller social networks. Lipsetz (2000) found that having friends and relatives living nearby has a negative effect on the neighborhood satisfaction of urban dwellers (quoted in Hur and Morrow-Jones 2008), which is a somewhat similar finding to the relationship between neighborhood satisfaction and the extent of social networks established in this study. Perceptions of friendliness may mediate the relationship between the two variables and explain the negative coefficient of the extent of social networks variable. Communicating frequently with a large number of neighbors perceived as unfriendly or viewed with suspicion may result in a decreased overall satisfaction with the neighborhood. Nevertheless, including a control variable for friendliness of neighbors in regression models did not support this hypothesis. The coefficient for the control was insignificant, and the relationship between neighborhood satisfaction and extent of social networks remained statistically significant and negative. In addition, the control for friendliness may have been redundant because the quality of social networks variable, measuring the likelihood of neighbors to help with different activities, may also be measuring friendliness to a certain extent. Given the large number of respondents that reported feeling unsafe in the neighborhood and the overall perception that physical conditions in the neighborhood are relatively poor, an alternative explanation for the negative coefficient of the extent of social networks variable may be that talking to more neighbors and having the opportunity to share dissatisfaction with neighborhood conditions results in increased concerns about the neighborhood environment, concerns that ultimately lower neighborhood satisfaction. The relationship may also be reversed because unsatisfied individuals may be maintaining larger social networks to build trust, share concerns, or engage in activities that could improve neighborhood conditions.

The coefficient for access to transportation is negative and statistically significant, suggesting that individuals perceiving access to transportation as relatively satisfactory are less likely to be satisfied with living in the neighborhood compared with individuals perceiving access to transportation as relatively unsatisfactory. The result is unexpected. It is possible that the access to transportation variable is measuring some underlying conditions, such as pollution, traffic, noise, or other unobserved factors, that render the negative sign of the access to transportation coefficient in regression results. Brereton, Clinch, and Ferreira's (2008) findings provide some support to the suggestion. In their study on life satisfaction, they found that proximity to major roads has a negative effect on well-being. However, their study focused on life satisfaction and used objective measures of access to transportation. Some models estimated by Dawkins, Jeon, and Pendall (2015) in a study on transportation access, rental vouchers, and neighborhood satisfaction showed

that transit access is negatively associated with neighborhood satisfaction, but only among those with access to vehicles. Dawkins, Jeon, and Pendall argued that the relationship potentially captures such undesirable features as increased density, congestion, or crime that may be present in transit-accessible areas. Hence, the effect of access to public transportation variable on neighborhood satisfaction in this study, although surprising, is in line with some other research on the topic.

Although some arguments exist that could explain the relationships between neighborhood satisfaction, on one hand, and access to transportation and extent of social networks, on the other, the exact relationships between these variables remain unclear, and further exploration on the topic is needed. Rephrasing the survey questions and adding additional questions in future research may provide a better understanding of the negative coefficients in the binary logistic models estimated in this study. Residents in North Camden have direct access to the city's downtown and the Walter Rand Transportation Center, a major transportation hub that provides access to Trenton, Philadelphia, and the broader region. However, relatively few residents own cars in the city. The survey asked respondents about their access to transportation in general and did not specifically refer to access to public transportation. The survey also did not include a question about car ownership. Rephrasing the access to transportation question to refer specifically to public transportation or other modes of transportation and adding an additional question that would assess the actual use of different modes of transportation in similar surveys may provide data for a better understanding of the effect of neighborhood accessibility on the satisfaction of residents with their communities.

Even if confirmed, the negative relationship between neighborhood satisfaction and access to transportation should not prevent organizations from focusing on improving perceptions related to this neighborhood characteristic. Having residents satisfied with access to transportation in their neighborhood may be desirable in and of itself. The same argument applies in relation to the extent of social networks. Large social networks may be desirable despite the consistently negative relationship with neighborhood satisfaction in the analysis. A closer examination of the variables that have unexpectedly negative coefficients could provide a better understanding of the specific dimensions that these variables measure and allow for the identification of those dimensions that determine the negative relationships between neighborhood satisfaction, on one hand, and access to transportation and extent of social networks, on the other, in the models presented in this article. Conducting in-depth qualitative interviews with residents on access to transportation and extent of social networks could provide additional clues toward understanding the unexpected results in the study.

Although the census tract variable was included as a control in the study, the significant coefficient for this variable across models warrants a brief discussion. The results indicate that residents in the Pyne Poynt area of North Camden are more satisfied with the community in which they live compared with their neighbors in Cooper's Poynt. The explanation for the difference in the level of satisfaction across the two census tracts may lie in the individual characteristics of respondents, which may differ in the two areas. A comparison of the 2010 Census data for the two tracts shows that the areas are similar in terms of some core demographic characteristics including age, sex, race, ethnicity, and educational attainment, providing little insight into the potential explanations for the observed difference in neighborhood satisfaction. The data also show that the two census tracts differ substantially in terms of housing tenure. Approximately 43% of housing units are owner-occupied in Cooper's Poynt compared with approximately 26% in Pyne Poynt. However, this study controls for housing tenure in the models. Some previous research has shown that income may determine to a certain extent the level of neighborhood satisfaction among residents (Loo 1986; Lu 1999; Miller et al. 1980). Nevertheless, estimates presented by the U.S. Census Bureau for household income and poverty are highly volatile and imprecise for the two census tracts, especially for Cooper's Poynt, because of their small population size, making the comparison of the two areas based on these characteristics unreliable. Hence, future studies should include demographic and socioeconomic characteristics of residents in the analysis to help clarify the difference in neighborhood satisfaction between Cooper's Poynt and Pyne Poynt areas of North Camden.

It is also possible that treating North Camden as a single, homogeneous area may be inappropriate. Neighborhood boundaries are subjective in nature, varying from one resident to another. Examining how residents define their neighborhoods using a mapping exercise, Coulton et al. (2001) found that residents living in the same census-defined units have varying views on the boundaries of their neighborhoods, and their views often do not correspond to census boundaries. Nevertheless, they also found that the average size of resident-defined neighborhoods is similar to the size of census tracts. Examining the level at which social context affects neighborhood satisfaction more strongly, Hipp (2010) found that micro-neighborhood-level measures may produce more nuanced and robust results. Hence, the North Camden area may be including in actuality multiple neighborhoods, which are the size of census tracts or smaller, with residents in the survey having different views on the boundaries of their community. If that is the case, some census tract-level characteristics could explain the difference in neighborhood satisfaction across the two areas. With a population of 5,053 according to the 2010 Census

data, Pyne Poynt is a larger census tract compared with Cooper's Poynt with its 1,475 residents, and a larger community may mean a different community experience to residents. Based on a study from 2010, Pyne Poynt was also better served by open space, having approximately five times more park acres per 1,000 residents compared with its neighboring census tract (CamConnect 2010). In addition, although housing tenure was included as a control in this study, and the analysis showed an insignificant relationship between tenure and neighborhood satisfaction, the share of owner-occupied housing units at the census tract level may still be important in determining the satisfaction of residents with their community. These are just a few factors that may explain the difference in neighborhood satisfaction across the two census tracts that need to be explored further in future research. Identifying the precise factors that explain the difference in neighborhood satisfaction between Cooper's Poynt and Pyne Poynt areas of North Camden is important to devise appropriate development initiatives tailored to the characteristics of residents and place.

Perceptions of access to employment centers appear to be unrelated to neighborhood satisfaction based on the results of the analysis in this study. The failure of the model to establish any relationship between the two variables may be due, in part, to the phrasing of the survey question. Respondents may have interpreted the phrasing "employment centers" as referring to employment agencies or areas that provide concentrated opportunities for employment. Perceptions of actual availability of employment opportunities in the area may be more important in determining an individual's level of neighborhood satisfaction compared with perceptions of accessibility of employment agencies. Therefore, using a question that would specifically refer to employment opportunities in the area may provide different results. The study also failed to establish a relationship between neighborhood satisfaction and length of residence, confirming findings from previous research. Similarly, and as already stated above, the analysis showed that the relationship between tenure and neighborhood satisfaction is statistically insignificant, which is consistent with part of the literature on neighborhood satisfaction.

Conclusion

This study aimed to identify the determinants of neighborhood satisfaction among residents in North Camden. Confirming, in part, findings from previous studies, this research established that perceptions related to the quality of social networks, safety, physical conditions, and quality of public services in the neighborhood have a positive effect on neighborhood satisfaction. Surprisingly, the study found that the extent of social networks and access to

transportation have a negative effect on neighborhood satisfaction. The census tract control was also a significant predictor of the residents' satisfaction with their community. The study found no relationship between resident perceptions on access to employment centers and their satisfaction with the neighborhood. Length of residence and housing tenure coefficients in the tested models were also insignificant.

Further research can help explain whether the findings in this study are unique to North Camden, the study sample, or are the result of research limitations, including the absence of objective measures and individual- and household-level characteristics from the analysis. Previous research supports some of the methodological choices in this study. Parkes, Kearns, and Atkinson's (2002) findings provided justification for the focus of this study on neighborhood attributes. B. A. Lee and Guest's (1983) argument supported the use of subjective measures of neighborhood attributes. In addition, because all respondents in the study lived in the same neighborhood and, generally, faced similar neighborhood conditions, the study implicitly controlled for the objective neighborhood characteristics. Nevertheless, the absence of individual- and household-level characteristics in the analysis, with minor exceptions, and the lack of objective measures remain important study limitations, which should be addressed in future research on neighborhood satisfaction in North Camden and in similar environments. Including the absent variables in future studies may reconfigure the results and provide a better understanding of the determinants of neighborhood satisfaction in poor urban communities. Developing survey questions that would provide more focused measures of neighborhood attributes, particularly in the case of access to transportation and access to employment centers, should also be considered in future studies. A more focused approach could help clarify the relationships between the perceptions related to the identified neighborhood characteristics and the level of neighborhood satisfaction among residents. Given the identified limitations, the results of the study should be interpreted with caution.

Although establishing causality was beyond the purpose of this research, and despite limitations, the findings described in this article provide a better understanding of the relationships between resident perceptions of various neighborhood factors and neighborhood satisfaction in North Camden. The study confirmed that several physical and social neighborhood characteristics identified in previous research are associated with the level of neighborhood satisfaction among residents in North Camden. The findings suggest that initiatives aimed at improving neighborhood satisfaction and the overall quality of life among residents should take into account both social and physical aspects as well as the potential impact of physical improvements on the existing social relationships within a neighborhood. The findings are relevant in the context of redevelopment efforts in Camden and can guide the actions of

community development organizations and other local actors interested in improving the level of neighborhood satisfaction and overall quality of life among residents in this particular location and beyond, in communities that struggle to survive in the face of poverty, crime, and property abandonment.

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Author Biographies

Patricia Ciorici is an independent researcher and development professional. Her research interests revolve around local development, international development cooperation, and the intersection of the two. She currently serves as a project analyst on a U.S. Department of the Treasury's Office of Technical Assistance project in Moldova. In the past, she worked on U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID)– and European Union (EU)–funded projects. Her PhD in public affairs is from Rutgers University–Camden.

Prentiss Dantzler is an assistant professor of sociology and mellon faculty fellow at Colorado College and the co-chair of the Urban Studies Minor. His research largely focuses on urban poverty, race, housing, and community development, particularly among recipients of housing assistance programs. His work has appeared in *The Urban Lawyer* and the *Journal of Urban History*. He received his PhD in public affairs from Rutgers University–Camden.