

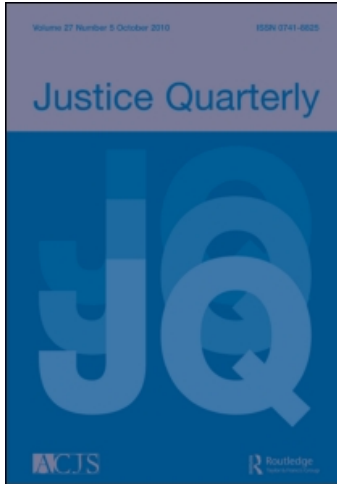
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# Misperceived Neighborhood Values and Informal Social Control

*Barbara D. Warner and Keri Burchfield*

Social disorganization theory explains the effects of neighborhood structure and culture on crime and delinquency. Within this perspective, the role of neighborhood informal social control is argued to be an important protective factor against many social problems. While a growing body of research supports the importance of informal social control, we still have limited understanding of its development. Of the research that does exist in this area, most examines structural processes supporting informal social control, while cultural aspects of communities have only rarely been examined. We further develop this limited body of research by drawing on the prevention literature that focuses on social norms and their misperceptions. Specifically, this study examines the role of pluralistic ignorance regarding neighborhood values on the likelihood of informal social control. The results are discussed in relation to social norms theory and their relevance for crime-prevention strategies.

*Keywords* informal social control; pluralistic ignorance; social norms; community values; social disorganization theory

## Introduction

Informal social control has long been discussed as an important aspect for the control of deviant and criminal behavior (see, e.g., Ross, 1901/1929), but like many important concepts, it has waxed and waned across the decades in terms of its contemporary relevance. With the re-emergence of social disorganization

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theory in the late twentieth century, informal social control once again began to be viewed as a critical concept in explaining spatial variation in crime rates. The concept of informal social control includes residents watching what is going on in the neighborhood as well as directly or indirectly intervening in inappropriate behavior. While current social disorganization theory has generally adopted Hunter's (1985) delineation of three levels of social control—private, parochial, and public—the most substantial interest has been in terms of parochial control, or the control of inappropriate neighborhood behavior by neighborhood residents (see, e.g., Elliott et al., 1996; Lowencamp, Cullen, & Pratt, 2003; Sampson & Groves, 1989; Silver & Miller, 2004; Warner, 2007). Informal social control at the parochial level includes behaviors such as reprimanding children, explaining to youth or adults the negative effects of their behavior on the community, notifying parents regarding their child's inappropriate behavior, gossiping among neighbors, or contacting formal agents of social control regarding the behavior.

According to social disorganization theory, the likelihood of residents engaging in informal social control is determined first by structural characteristics of the community, predominantly levels of disadvantage and residential mobility, which in turn effect aspects of structural or cultural disorganization. Specifically, the systemic model of social disorganization theory views disadvantage and residential mobility as effecting the level of friendship and kinship ties, and organizational participation within the neighborhood which, in turn, effect the likelihood of informal social control (Bursik & Grasmick, 1993). Similarly, the collective efficacy model of social disorganization theory suggests that disadvantage and residential mobility decrease the social cohesion and trust required for informal social control (Sampson, Raudenbush, & Earls, 1997).

In contrast to these approaches that focus on structural processes of social disorganization, other social disorganization scholars have argued that disadvantage (particularly) and residential mobility may impact social and cultural norms and values that are critical to the likelihood of informal social control. In their original formulation of social disorganization theory, Shaw and McKay (1942/1969) argued that inconsistent or competing values within neighborhoods led to an inability to appropriately socialize youth and provide other forms of informal social control. More recently, Kornhauser (1978) and others have argued that it is not as much a matter of inconsistent values but rather attenuated conventional values that decrease or inhibit the development of informal social control (see also, Warner, 2003).

The study of values within current social disorganization models, however, has overlooked what we believe is an important issue—the misperception of values. Social norms theory suggests that people often act or refrain from acting, on the basis of their perceptions of norms or values, rather their own norms and values. Drawing heavily on the concept of pluralistic ignorance, social norms theory further suggests that the perceptions of norms that guide behaviors are often inaccurate (Berkowitz, 2003; Katz & Allport, 1928; Kauffman, 1981; Miller & McFarland, 1987, 1991). According to Miller and McFarland (1991, p. 287), the concept of pluralistic ignorance was created to explain the contradiction of

"widespread public conformity to social norms in the absence of widespread private support." This idea of pluralistic ignorance is central to a social norms approach in that it assumes people incorrectly understand the attitudes or private behaviors of others and that these incorrect understandings are then the basis for their own behavior (Berkowitz, 2003). Recently this approach has been extended by Berkowitz (2003), who has suggested that social norms theory can also account for people's *inaction* toward inappropriate behaviors due to misperceived beliefs regarding the appropriateness of others' behavior. Berkowitz (2003) argues that when individuals underestimate others' discomfort with inappropriate behavior, they will refrain from doing anything that demonstrates their own discomfort with the behavior. On the other hand, if others' discomfort was accurately discerned, these same individuals would be more likely to express their own discomfort with the behavior. Hence a social norms approach suggests that the likelihood of intervening in inappropriate behavior hinges, not only on the actual strength of conventional values or norms in the community, but also on the accurate assessment of those values or norms.

In this study we hypothesize that the misperception of community values may be a salient predictor of informal social control, along with other structural and cultural disorganization measures, such as the extent of social ties and the actual level of shared values. As a "social process" measure, we further argue that misperceptions are a result of neighborhood structure, particularly disadvantage, and mediate some of the effects of structural variables on informal social control.

### The Role of Norms and Values in Providing Informal Social Control

A cultural (rather than structural) disorganization approach to understanding informal social control has been generally based on Kornhauser's idea of attenuated culture (Kornhauser, 1978; Sampson & Wilson, 1995; Warner, 2003).<sup>1</sup> This literature suggests that high levels of disadvantage within the community lead to a weakening of the conventional value system rather than the presence of a duality of value systems, such as suggested in subcultural theories. Within neighborhoods with weakened conventional values, residents are less likely to attempt to enforce values that they believe may not be relevant to residents' lives. Informally intervening in inappropriate neighborhood behavior clearly

1. While several scholars have argued against Kornhauser's view of culture, and in particular her devastating critique of cultural deviance theories (Matsueda, 1988; Sampson & Bean, 2006), work that has been done in a cultural disorganization framework, rather than a subcultural framework tends to rely on her interpretation. Subcultural approaches, such as the subculture of violence, argue that values supportive of criminal behavior exist in certain neighborhoods and thus, crime is actually normative in these neighborhoods (e.g., Anderson, 1999). Unfortunately, the current data do not allow us to adequately examine a subcultural approach in which non-conventional values are held within neighborhoods, and the extent to which these are accurately or inaccurately perceived. However, the data from this study do suggest that the majority of respondents in this study do agree with the conventional values assessed here. Other recent theoretical discussions of the role of culture in criminal behavior, including Sampson and Bean's (2006), offering compelling ideas about the role of "culture in action" but are difficult to assess empirically.

provides the potential for disapproval from both the target and other neighbors or bystanders if the norms are not recognized as being relevant to their lives. Hence, the likelihood of informal social control relies, at least in part, on some shared understanding of neighborhood values and norms.

The attenuated culture perspective was most strongly articulated in the work of Kornhauser (1978), who argued that the strength with which conventional values are held varies across neighborhoods, and that when these values are weakened they cannot provide effective social control. Thus, cultural attenuation occurs when conventional values cannot be realized, and therefore, fall into disuse (Kornhauser, 1978, p. 77). For example, although most residents of disadvantaged neighborhoods may value honesty, they may feel required to be less than honest with regard to certain situations necessary for survival, such as reporting all sources of income or who is living in their residence, when applying for government assistance. Thus while honesty is valued it cannot always be used. When conventional values fall into disuse, they become invisible in the daily life of the community. This invisibility of conventional values makes unclear the extent to which these values are actually subscribed to within the community. This uncertainty of the extent to which conventional values are subscribed to, in turn, decreases the likelihood that residents will try to enforce them through informal social control.

Empirical support for the importance of cultural strength in providing informal social control was found by Warner (2003). In her study, Warner found that the extent to which residents perceived neighbors to hold conventional values was affected by levels of neighborhood disadvantage, mobility and social ties. In turn perceptions of conventional values held by neighbors were positively related to informal social control. That is, neighborhoods in which residents stated their neighbors were unlikely to agree with conventional values were likely to have lower levels of informal social control. The implications of this research are that understanding community values is important, and that developing informal social control might require programs to strengthen more conventional belief systems. But what if those perceptions of neighborhood values were inaccurate? The implications would then be to change those misperceptions, rather than to try to change the acceptance of conventional values that, in fact, may already be accepted by most residents. In this paper we suggest a modified understanding of the role of culture with regard to informal social control. We conceptualize the issue of weakened culture in terms of misinterpretation and pluralistic ignorance. While pluralistic ignorance may ultimately still lead to a type of attenuated culture, the implications for policy are quite different. We turn next to some of the literature highlighting the relevance of perceptions and misperceptions within the study of crime and disorder.

### Perceptions (and Misperceptions) of Neighborhood Characteristics

Much of the community and crime literature has focused on objective characteristics of communities. However, perceptions of community characteristics

have also been recognized as important. Indeed, Logan and Collver (1983) have noted that “residents’ *perceptions* of what their community and other communities are like are as important to urban theory as the information on objective characteristics on which most urban research is based” (p. 432, italics in original). Similarly, Small’s (2002) ethnographic study examining changes in community participation argued strongly for the importance of understanding the shared perceptions of neighborhood.

Neighborhood-level criminological research has concerned itself with perceptions in respect to a variety of methodological and theoretical concerns, including the accuracy of perceptions and the causes and consequences of perceptions (e.g., Latkin & Curry, 2003; Lewis & Maxfield, 1980; Perkins & Taylor, 1996; Piquero, 1999; Rountree & Land, 1996; Skogan, 1990; Skogan & Maxfield, 1981; Sprott & Doob, 2009; Taylor & Hale, 1986; Wilcox, Quisenberry, & Jones, 2003; Wyant, 2008). However, only a small portion of this literature specifically examines what is relevant to the current study, that is, *misperceptions* and their causes and consequences (e.g., Quillian & Pager, 2001; Sampson & Raudenbush, 2004; Taub, Taylor, & Dunham, 1984). This literature has focused on examining perceptions, *net* objective measures of the same concept. For example, Quillian and Pager (2001) find that perceptions of neighborhood crime, *controlling for the actual levels of crime*, are influenced by the percent of young black males. Specifically, higher percents of young black males in the neighborhood “add on” to the perceived level of crime that is directly reflective of the actual level of crime.

Sampson and Raudenbush’s (2004) study of disorder also found that once objective measures of disorder were accounted for, the remaining perceptions of disorder were influenced by neighborhood social and economic characteristics, specifically the levels of poverty, proportion black, and proportion Latino. Such misperceptions have consequences beyond those of the actual levels of crime and/or disorder they are assessing, as they often influence other social processes, such as residential mobility and segregation (see also, Taub et al., 1984).

Other studies have investigated misperceptions of neighborhood variables, such as racial composition or incivilities, and their consequences for criminological variables, such as the perception of crime and fear of crime. Generally, these studies suggest that *perceptions* of high percentages of racial minorities and *perceptions* of extensive incivilities have positive effects on perceptions of crime rates or fear of crime, beyond the actual racial composition, level of incivilities, or crime rate within the neighborhood (see, e.g., Chiricos, Hogan, & Gertz, 1997; Covington & Taylor, 1991). Thus, while perceptions may in part reflect objective reality, they are often distorted, and these distortions, or misperceptions, may have important consequences of their own.

We believe that the value in identifying and examining inaccurate perceptions lies in the potential policy implications. As Sampson and Raudenbush (2004) noted in their study of disorder, reducing actual levels of disorder within communities may not remove the negative consequences of perceptions of disorder, as these perceptions are partially based on other neighborhood factors. Thus, the identification of such factors and their relationship to perceptions (and

misperceptions) of neighborhood conditions has important implications for the appropriate target of policies that are designed to empower residents of socially disorganized neighborhoods.

Understanding the consequences of misperceptions, specifically as they relate to policy implications, has often been the subject of study within public health. Many of these studies have used social norms theory as their framework. In the next section we provide a brief discussion of this theory and some of the findings from public health studies supporting the theory to further expand upon our research question regarding the potential impact of misperceptions of neighborhood norms and values on informal social control.

### Pluralistic Ignorance and Social Norms Theory

As discussed above, the concept of pluralistic ignorance is central to social norms theory. The concept of pluralistic ignorance refers to “shared cognitive error” (O’Gorman, 1986). The concept emanated from the work of Floyd Allport (1924/1967) and Katz and Allport (1931). Allport, like other social psychologists, viewed social life as dependent upon a shared understanding of the social world. However, Allport noted that individuals often do not actually know the feelings, beliefs, or behaviors of others. He called attention to what he referred to as the “illusion of universality,” in which actors misperceive others as sharing the same feelings or beliefs as they have (Allport, 1924/1967, p. 307). The accuracy of these perceptions of others’ beliefs and behavior was viewed as important because, as social animals, people were viewed as tending to conform to the expectations of others, or “to submit one’s self unconsciously to their standards” (Allport, 1924/1967, p. 278). He referred to this as the attitude of social conformity, and noted its importance in maintaining social control. This idea of the illusion of universality was further articulated by Katz and Allport (1931), who coined the term “pluralistic ignorance” to refer to shared cognitive misperceptions. Katz and Allport examined students’ actual opinions and behaviors as well as students’ perceptions of others’ opinions and behaviors in relation to excluding certain types of individuals from fraternities and college cheating. They found that students’ own opinions supported admission of racial minorities into fraternities, but they (inaccurately) believed that others were not supportive. Similarly they found that while most students engaged in cheating, they mistakenly believed that other students did not cheat. In addressing their findings, they noted, “in nearly every instance in which (the students) express their feelings to one another, this illusion of ‘what the group feels’ enters to distort their expression. An inaccurate estimate of the ‘group opinion’ is therefore universally accepted” (Katz & Allport, 1931, p. 152). This phenomenon, pluralistic ignorance, produced “an exaggerated impression of the universality of the attitudes in question” (Katz & Allport, 1931, p. 152). Although Katz and Allport (1931) acknowledged pluralistic ignorance as different from individual cognitive bias, they were really not interested in understanding this shared error from a sociological perspective, focusing instead on

individual-level bases for misinterpretation. Therefore, the concept remained undeveloped in terms of the social structures and processes that were likely to create such shared misperceptions (O’Gorman, 1986).

It was another student of Allport’s, Richard Schanck (1932), who first examined pluralistic ignorance in relation to group variables. Some of Schanck’s findings suggested that pluralistic ignorance varied across groups (O’Gorman, 1986). Schanck pointed out that the extent of knowledge that group members had of other members’ attitudes varied on two important social variables: the actual distribution of attitudes within the group and the extent to which attitudes could be confirmed through their visible presence. However, because Allport and his students were more interested in psychological mechanisms, research on *pluralistic* ignorance, that is, *shared* cognitive error, was never really developed until the 1970s when O’Gorman and others, particularly public opinion researchers, took a renewed interest in the concept. While this work did not yield full theoretical models, it did suggest, like Schanck’s (1932) research before it, that pluralistic ignorance was due to false information cues from the environment (O’Gorman, 1986; Shamir & Shamir, 1997).

Pluralistic ignorance research once again emerged in the 1990s, although this time in a more psychological framework, focusing on psychological processes, such as how individuals process information, and internal motivations and defense mechanisms. This literature ultimately contributed to the development of the social norms approach to responding to misperceptions. On the basis of the idea of pluralistic ignorance, social norms theory argues that misperceptions of public attitudes or behaviors effect how people act or refrain from acting, in public. Thus, according to social norms theory people often act or refrain from acting, on the basis of misperceived community norms or values, regardless of the fact that their own personal values are inconsistent with the behavior in question. It is, therefore, argued that behaviors can be changed by making people aware of their misperceptions.

Studies have found misperceptions of norms in relation to a variety of social behaviors including alcohol use (Borsari & Carey, 2001; Perkins, Meilman, Leichliter, Cashin, & Presley, 1999; Prentice & Miller, 1993), illegal drug use (Perkins, 1994; Perkins et al., 1999), cigarette smoking (Chassin, Presson, Sherman, Corty, & Olshavsky, 1984; Grube, Morgan, & McGree, 1986; Sussman et al., 1988), eating disorders (Kusch, 2002; Mann et al., 1997), behaviors related to non-committed sex, and sexual violence (Cohen & Shotland, 1996; Fabiano, Perkins, Berkowitz, Linkenbach, & Stark, 2003; Lambert, Kahn, & Apple, 2003; Schwartz & DeKeseredy, 1997). Specifically, these studies have found that people often overestimate the frequency with which others engage in these behaviors and that these misperceptions are, in turn, related to the frequency of their own behavior.

On the basis of these findings and social norms theory, researchers have sought to examine whether correcting misperceptions can decrease problematic behaviors. For example, misperceptions regarding the frequency and amount of drinking by college students have been addressed through a variety of techniques



including media campaigns and personalized normative feedback regarding actual norms. Several studies have shown that some of these techniques are effective in reducing misperceptions of alcohol use and further, that reducing misperceptions reduces drinking behavior (Borsari & Carey, 2000; Haines & Spear, 1996; Neighbors, Larimer, & Lewis, 2004).

More importantly for our current purposes, Berkowitz (2003) has recently suggested that social norms theory may also be important in increasing intervention in inappropriate behavior. People who believe that others are accepting of inappropriate behaviors may be less likely to intervene—not because they personally accept the behavior, but because they believe others do. They are inhibited by the false belief that others do not view the behavior as inappropriate. The absence of intervening, then, only further obscures actual attitudes or beliefs regarding the inappropriate behavior. As Berkowitz (2003, p. 261) has noted

misperception thus functions to strengthen beliefs and values that the carriers of misperception do not themselves hold and contribute to the climate that encourages problem behavior. For a norm to be perpetuated, it is not necessary for the majority to believe it, but only for the majority to believe that the majority believes it.

A social norms approach, therefore, would focus on addressing these issues by bringing to light actual norms, which would then have consequences for people's behavior.

### Hypotheses and Analytic Strategy

Our study borrowed from this social norms approach to intervention to expand the investigation of the role of values in the likelihood of intervening in inappropriate neighborhood behavior. The study examined the following central hypothesis: neighborhoods in which residents perceive neighborhood values as being less conventional than the values actually are, will be less likely to provide informal social control, controlling for other neighborhood characteristics, such as disadvantage, mobility, social ties, satisfaction with police, and the variability of conventional attitudes within the neighborhood.

Furthermore, we hypothesized that misperceived values, like other social process variables, are effected by neighborhood disadvantage and mobility and, in turn, mediate the effects of these variables on informal social control. In prior social disorganization research, disadvantage has been argued to decrease informal social control due to weaker social ties and/or weaker conventional values (Warner, 2003). The social perspective on pluralistic ignorance, as discussed above suggests that pluralistic ignorance arises from false cues in the environment. We suggest that disadvantaged neighborhoods may provide more false cues about norms and values than other neighborhoods. Wilson (1996, p. 69) noted that residents in disadvantaged neighborhoods, while strongly agreeing

with conventional values, may nonetheless be constrained by structural circumstances such that they must sometimes violate those conventional norms. This may lead other residents who observe this behavior to mistakenly conclude that their neighbors do not share conventional values. Also, because non-normative behavior, such as selling drugs or public drinking, is more likely to occur in public rather than in private in more disadvantaged neighborhoods, witnessing this behavior, although representative of only a minority of residents, may be more common and lead to assumptions that the behavior is normative. Furthermore, because residents of disadvantage neighborhoods are often more constrained in their choice of residence, they may be more likely to believe their neighbors are different from themselves, and therefore would be more likely to misperceive neighborhood values (see, e.g., Warner, 2003; Wilson, 1996). Residential mobility, on the other hand, simply decreases the amount of time residents have to actually accurately ascertain what the values of the neighborhood are.

The analysis used hierarchical linear models (using HLM 6.0) to examine the effects of neighborhood-level variables on levels of informal social control, while controlling for individual-level compositional effects. In each of the HLM models presented in Tables 2 and 3, the independent variables were grand mean centered; thus the neighborhood-level coefficients can be interpreted in relation to the mean levels of neighborhood informal social control adjusted for individual-level, or compositional, differences in the neighborhoods (Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002).

## Data and Methods

### Sample and Data Sources

The study used survey data collected from 66 neighborhoods in the two largest cities of a southern state. Each of these cities had a population of over one-quarter million (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). The survey data were supplemented with neighborhood-level data from the 2000 US Census. Census defined block groups were used as the units of analysis because they were relatively small, homogenous areas appropriate for the examination of neighborhood dynamics. At the same time, block groups were large enough to provide some of the standard census data necessary for this type of study.<sup>2</sup>

The survey data were part of a National Institute of Justice-funded study examining informal social control in high drug use neighborhoods. The study included neighborhoods with high levels of drug use, neighborhoods adjacent to high drug use neighborhoods, and a random sample of neighborhoods that were non-adjacent to high drug use neighborhoods. Survey data were collected from persons 18 years of age or older in randomly selected households. Approximately

2. Throughout the text the terms neighborhood and community are used interchangeably and equivalently with block groups.

75% of the surveys were telephone surveys, with the remaining surveys being administered face to face. The surveys lasted approximately 20 minutes and were collected between February and August 2000. Respondents were paid \$15 for their participation. The average number of respondents in the 66 neighborhoods was 35, with a minimum of 33 and a maximum of 36 respondents per neighborhood. The overall cooperation rate for the study was 60%.<sup>3</sup> (See Warner [2003] for a further discussion of the sample.)

### Dependent Variable

The dependent variable, *informal social control*, was a measure of the likelihood of neighborhood residents intervening in inappropriate neighborhood behavior. This variable was measured with questions concerning the likelihood of someone in the neighborhood intervening in the following six behaviors: children spray painting graffiti on a local building, children showing disrespect to an adult in the neighborhood, someone being beaten up in front of your house, someone breaking into your house, someone trying to sell drugs to a neighborhood child, and someone trying to sell drugs to an adult in plain sight. These items followed previous work on informal social control, which has examined the same or similar behaviors (see, e.g., Elliott et al., 1996; Sampson, 1997; Sampson et al., 1997). Response categories were (1) very likely, (2) somewhat likely, (3) somewhat unlikely, and (4) very unlikely, with scores being recoded such that higher values are indicative of a higher likelihood of intervening. For each respondent, as long as there was a valid response for three or more items, the items were summed and then divided by the number of valid responses. The average likelihood of intervening in this study was 3.19, and Cronbach's alpha was 0.82.

### Independent Variables

Disadvantage and residential mobility are neighborhood factors that have consistently been found to be associated with measures of informal social control in the social disorganization literature. Similar to earlier studies these variables were measured at the neighborhood level with census data. Several census variables indicative of disadvantage and residential mobility were factor analyzed. These variables included percent on public assistance, percent with

3. The cooperation rate is based on the percent of eligible respondents contacted. Cases of unknown eligibility (busy signals, disconnects, and no answers) and ineligibility (no longer living at that address) were excluded from this calculation as defined by the American Association for Public Opinion Research (1998). For telephone interviews, attempts with no answers were tried at least 20 times and some were tried as many as 30 times. Disconnects were treated as temporary and retried after two weeks. For face-to-face interviews, interviewers made up to five attempts to find someone at home.

less than a high school degree, percent African American, percent female-headed households, percent renters, and percent of residents not living in their current household in 1995 (five years previous to the study). The factor analysis (with a varimax rotation) produced two factors with eigenvalues greater than one. Together these two factors account for 81.23% of the variance in these items. Substantively, these factors represent *disadvantage* and *mobility*. The variables that loaded on the disadvantage factor and their factor loadings were the percent on public assistance (0.89), percent of female-headed households with children (0.81), percent African American (0.87), and the percent with less than a high school degree (0.77). Both residential mobility (0.95) and percent renters (0.89) loaded on the other factor—a mobility factor. Regression-based factor scores were created for each of these measures on the basis of this analysis. Cronbach's alpha for both indices was 0.78. Because recent research suggests that local crime rates influence a neighborhood's "social climate," specifically trust among neighbors (Garcia, Taylor, & Lawton, 2007), which in turn may effect the level of informal social control, we control for this by including a measure of neighborhood crime, the violent crime rate (police reports of murder, rape, robbery, and assault) per 1,000 residents averaged across the three previous years (1997-1999).

The key independent variables in this analysis centered around conventional values: both the respondents' own reported values and their perceptions of the values of their neighbors. The value items included the following seven items: it is important to get good education; it is important to be honest; family members should make sacrifices in their personal life for the good of the family; it is wrong to drink alcohol to the point of getting drunk; selling drugs is always wrong; children should always respect their elders; and it is wrong for young women to get pregnant before they are married. Responses to the items were (1) strongly agree, (2) somewhat agree, (3) somewhat disagree, and (4) strongly disagree. The responses were recoded such that higher scores represented higher levels of agreement.

Respondents were first asked how strongly they *personally* agreed or disagreed with each of the seven value items. Then, in the next section of the survey respondents were asked about their perceptions of their neighbors' agreement: "Based on what you see and hear in your neighborhood, how strongly do you feel your neighbors would agree or disagree" with each of the same value items.

An average (across the seven items) was calculated for each respondent on their own conventional values (respondent's values) and on their perceptions of neighbors' conventional values (perception of neighbors' values). Furthermore, the neighborhood average for respondents' statements of their own values was also calculated (average stated neighborhood values). These measures provided the basis for the calculation of the central independent variables in the study as described below.

The central variable in this analysis, *misperceived values*, is based on the difference between respondents' perception of neighborhood values (perception

of neighbors' values) and the actual neighborhood values based on the average of respondents' reports of their own values (average stated neighborhood values). For each respondent this measure of misperceived values represented the extent to which respondents over (positive values) or under (negative values) estimated the actual conventional values in the neighborhood. Thus, higher values represented a perception of more conventional values than existed in the neighborhood, and lower values represented a perception of less conventional values than existed in the neighborhood. This individual-level measure of misperceived values was aggregated to the neighborhood level to assess the level of misperceived values within the neighborhood.

The perception of values would obviously be more difficult, for residents, to accurately ascertain in neighborhoods where there is more heterogeneity of values among residents. Therefore, as a control measure we include a measure of variability in neighborhood values, *shared values*. In order to capture the extent to which there is variability in values within the neighborhoods, we include the standard deviation of the *average stated neighborhood values* measure for each neighborhood. Thus, neighborhoods with smaller standard deviations had more shared values, while neighborhoods with larger standard deviations were less similar.

The systemic model of social disorganization theory argues that social ties are central to the capacity for a neighborhood to provide informal social control. Social ties are argued to be an important mechanism through which values come to be known and shared within the neighborhoods. Therefore to be sure that misperceived values are not simply acting as a proxy for low levels, or insular, social ties, we also included a control for the level of neighborhood social ties in the model. *Social ties* were measured in terms of the sum of the number of friends and relatives respondents reported lived in their neighborhood. Specifically, respondents were asked, "How many of your relatives live in your neighborhood, not including those in your household?" and "Not including people in your household, how many of your neighbors do you consider to be friends?" The sum of these two items was then averaged across all respondents in the neighborhood, to obtain the neighborhood-level measure of social ties.

Neighborhood residents' satisfaction with the police has also been found to be a variable that influences informal social control (e.g., Silver & Miller, 2004) and we therefore included a measure of this as an additional control variable. *Satisfaction with the police* was measured by averaging across residents' responses to the following three items: (1) The police play an important role in preventing crime in this neighborhood, (2) The police do a good job in responding to people in this neighborhood after they have been victims of crime, and (3) Police are generally helpful when dealing with people in this neighborhood. Response categories were (1) strongly agree, (2) somewhat agree, (3) somewhat disagree, and (4) strongly disagree. Again, responses were recoded such that high scores reflected stronger levels of agreement. Individual average responses to these items were then aggregated to the neighborhood level. Cronbach's alpha for this index is 0.84.

In order to control for compositional differences in neighborhoods, we included several control variables at the individual level, from the survey data. These measures included dummy variables for female-headed household (respondent was a single woman with children under the age of 18 living at home), less than a high school degree, African American, renter and length of time at their current address. To be consistent with the neighborhood-level variable, responses to the latter variable were re-coded such that residents who had lived at their current address less than 60 months (five years) were coded 1. Residents residing at their current address 60 months or more were coded 0. These five socio-demographic measures were also factor analyzed, using a varimax rotation and two factors with eigenvalues greater than one emerged. As with the neighborhood-level measures these factors represented disadvantage (with female-headed household [0.56], less than a high school degree [0.53] and African American [0.80] loading highest on this factor) and mobility (with renters [0.79] and those living less than 60 months at their current address [0.88] loading highest on this factor). Again, regression-based factor scores were computed for both of these factors. We also include the respondent's own average on the seven conventional values items at Level 1, as well as dummy variables for male and single, and a variable representing age.

## Results

### Descriptive Results

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics for the neighborhood-level and individual-level variables. The neighborhood-level variables showed considerable variation across neighborhoods. The variable representing misperceived values ranged from  $-0.63$  to  $0.02$ , with a mean of  $-0.29$ , indicating that, in most neighborhoods in our sample, residents underestimated local conventional values. The shared values variable had a mean of  $0.32$ , representing fairly little variation in actual neighborhood values. The mean number of social ties was  $7.52$ , and the mean value for satisfaction with police was  $3.35$ . Regarding the neighborhood structural variables, disadvantage ranged from  $-2.27$  to  $1.80$ , residential mobility ranged from  $-2.11$  to  $2.28$ , and the violent crime rate ranged from  $0.78$  to  $169.96$ .

Regarding the individual-level variables, 33% of the respondents were male, 36% were single, and the average age was 46 years. The mean value for respondent's own values was  $3.71$ , with a range of 1-4, indicating high agreement with the conventional values items. Disadvantage at the individual level ranged from  $-1.29$  to  $2.64$ , and mobility ranged from  $-1.49$  to  $1.62$ . Finally, the mean for the dependent variable, informal social control, was  $3.19$ , with values ranging from 1 to 4. (Neighborhood-level correlations are presented in Appendix 1.)

**Table 1** Descriptive statistics for analytical variables

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard deviation
Neighborhood level ( <i>n</i> = 66)				
Misperceived values	-0.63	0.02	-0.29	0.17
Shared values	0.15	0.55	0.32	0.08
Social ties	3.66	16.83	7.52	2.41
Faith in police	2.73	3.79	3.35	0.22
Disadvantage	-2.27	1.80	0.00	1.00
Mobility	-2.11	2.28	0.00	1.00
Violent crime rate	0.78	169.96	33.63	35.96
Person level ( <i>n</i> = 2,309)				
Informal social control	1.00	4.00	3.19	0.76
Age	18.00	94.00	46.03	16.97
Male	0.00	1.00	0.33	0.47
Single	0.00	1.00	0.36	0.48
Social ties	0.00	70.00	7.58	9.33
Faith in police	1.00	4.00	3.35	0.76
Disadvantage	-1.29	2.64	0.00	0.99
Mobility	-1.49	1.62	0.00	0.99

## Multivariate Results

The first step in the multilevel analyses was to assess the effects of neighborhood-level variables on our dependent variable, neighborhood informal social control, while controlling for individual-level variation between neighborhoods. The calculation of the intraclass correlation coefficient determines the amount of variance in the outcome measure, informal social control, which exists between and within the 66 neighborhoods. For the null model, with no covariates included, the between-neighborhood variance component was 0.064 ( $p < 0.001$ ), indicating significant variation in levels of informal social control between neighborhoods. The within-neighborhood variance component was 0.512. Thus, 11% of the variance in informal social control was between rather than within neighborhoods  $\{[0.064 / (0.064 + 0.512)] \times 100\}$ .

Next, individual-level controls were added to the null model to determine how much of the 11% variation was due to compositional differences between neighborhoods. Adding these controls reduced the between-neighborhood variance component to 0.038 ( $p < 0.001$ ); the within-neighborhood variance component was reduced slightly to 0.501. These results indicate that 41% of the between-neighborhood variance in informal social control in the null model was due to compositional differences in the kinds of people the neighborhoods contained  $\{([0.064 - 0.038] / 0.064) \times 100\}$ . Thus, a majority of the observed between-neighborhood variation in informal social control remained to be explained.

Because we hypothesized that the effect of disadvantage would be mediated by misperceived values, we next examined the effects of our exogenous neighborhood structural characteristics—disadvantage and mobility—on misperceived values, controlling for crime rates, to determine whether these variables do in fact generate misperceived values.<sup>4</sup> We also included individual-level variables in these models to control for compositional effects. As shown in Table 2, the results of these HLM analyses indicated that, at the neighborhood level, disadvantage and mobility were inversely related to misperceived values, suggesting that these structural variables lead local residents to report that their neighbors hold fewer conventional values than they actually do. Disadvantage was highly significantly related to misperceived values, while mobility was just slightly significant ( $p = 0.039$ ). The neighborhood violent crime rate was not significantly related to misperceived values. At the individual level, age, gender, social ties, satisfaction with police, and disadvantage were all significant and positive predictors of misperceived values.

**Table 2** Hierarchical linear models predicting neighborhood misperceived values (standard errors in parentheses)

Neighborhood-level variables			
Intercept	-0.301		(0.019)
Disadvantage	-0.084	***	(0.016)
Mobility	-0.032	*	(0.015)
Violent crime rate	0.000		(0.000)
Neighborhood variance explained <sup>1</sup>		46%	
Individual-level controls			
Age	0.005	***	(0.001)
Male	0.067	**	(0.024)
Single	-0.048		(0.026)
Social ties	0.006	***	(0.001)
Faith in police	0.139	***	(0.014)
Disadvantage	0.055	***	(0.014)
Mobility	0.005		(0.014)

<sup>1</sup>The denominator for this calculation is the neighborhood-level variance component, controlling for person-level characteristics (0.01).

\* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ .

4. We examine the impact of the exogenous neighborhood structural variables on our mediating variable, misperceived values, as the first of three steps to determine mediation. As Baron and Kenny (1986) point out there are three criteria to be met to determine whether a variable is a mediator. First, the exogenous variable must account for a significant amount of variation in the mediating variable. Second, the mediating variable must significantly effect the dependent variable. Third, the effect between the exogenous variable and the dependent variable must be significantly decreased by the mediating variable.



We next turned to the examination of informal social control. Table 3 presents the results of the HLM analyses predicting neighborhood levels of informal social control. The neighborhood-level coefficients produced by each model reflect their effect on the mean neighborhood level of informal social control. Though the main theoretical focus was on the neighborhood-level variables (the upper portion of Table 3), each model also included individual-level controls.

Table 3 presents two models predicting informal social control. Model A included the exogenous neighborhood structural characteristics (disadvantage, mobility, and crime rates), along with controls for other neighborhood processes—social ties and satisfaction with police. Model B added the independent variable of interest, misperceived values, along with the control for level of shared values.<sup>5</sup>

As shown in Model A, both of the neighborhood structural characteristics were inversely related to informal social control, although only the coefficient for

**Table 3** Hierarchical linear models predicting neighborhood informal social control (standard errors in parentheses)

	Model A		Model B	
Neighborhood-level variables				
Intercept	2.014	(0.384)	2.202	(0.382)
Misperceived values			0.510	** (0.140)
Shared values			-0.144	(0.232)
Social ties	0.027	** (0.009)	0.023	** (0.008)
Faith in police	0.299	* (0.113)	0.312	** (0.107)
Disadvantage	-0.108	*** (0.026)	-0.059	* (0.028)
Mobility	-0.043	(0.024)	-0.005	(0.025)
Violent crime rate	-0.001	(0.001)	-0.001	* (0.001)
Neighborhood variance explained <sup>1</sup>	82%		90%	
Individual-level controls				
Age	0.001	(0.001)	0.001	(0.001)
Male	-0.047	* (0.038)	-0.048	(0.038)
Single	-0.007	(0.044)	-0.010	(0.044)
Respondent's conventional values	0.252	*** (0.048)	0.251	*** (0.047)
Disadvantage	-0.023	(0.025)	-0.026	(0.025)
Mobility	-0.063	** (0.024)	-0.063	** (0.023)

<sup>1</sup>The denominator for this calculation is the neighborhood-level variance component, controlling for person level characteristics (0.04).

\* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ .

5. Due to a sampling strategy that involved over-sampling high drug use neighborhoods, we also estimated a model which included a measure of drug activity, in this case, drug arrests. Results were unchanged (available from the first author upon request).

disadvantage was significant. Consistent with other social disorganization studies, neighborhoods characterized by greater disadvantage were found to exhibit less informal social control. Both social ties and faith in the police were also significantly related to informal social control, with neighborhoods having fewer social ties and lower levels of faith in the police being less likely to provide informal social control. At the individual level, respondents' own values and mobility were significantly related to respondents' perceptions of neighborhood informal social control in the expected directions. Model A explained 82% of the between-neighborhood variance in informal social control that remained after controlling for individual-level characteristics.

Model B added neighborhood misperceived values and shared values. Misperceived values were significantly and positively related to informal social control. Neighborhoods in which residents underestimated the level of conventional values were less likely to provide informal social control. To illustrate the magnitude of this relationship, the predicted values were calculated for informal social control when the value for misperceived values was made to vary from its minimum ( $-0.63$ ) to its maximum ( $0.02$ ), assuming mean values for all other variables. Neighborhood levels of informal social control increased from 3.01 to 3.44 under these conditions. Thus, as hypothesized, neighborhoods in which there was more misperception of (a lack of) conventional values among their neighbors decrease the likelihood of informal social control. Adding these variables to the model increased the between-neighborhood explained variance to 90%.

Furthermore, comparing the coefficients for the structural variables before and after adding these variables showed evidence of mediation. Specifically, the coefficient for disadvantage was reduced by 45% (from  $-0.108$  to  $-0.059$ ) and the coefficient for mobility was reduced by 88% (from  $-0.043$  to  $-0.005$ ). This finding supports our argument that it may be difficult for residents to engage in informal social control in neighborhoods characterized by high levels of disadvantage and mobility, because these characteristics inhibit accurate perceptions of neighborhood values. The coefficient for social ties was also slightly reduced when misperceptions were added, suggesting that some of the effect of social ties on informal social control may be due to social ties providing accurate information on neighborhood values. Interestingly, the coefficient for satisfaction with police increased in magnitude. Though suppressor effects like these can be difficult to interpret, one likely reason for this finding may be the negative bivariate correlations that exist between satisfaction with police and shared values, and shared values and informal social control ( $r = -0.27$  and  $r = -0.028$ , respectively). Thus, the presence of shared values in the equation in Model B increases the relationship between satisfaction with police and informal social control.

## Discussion

Since Shaw and McKay's discussion of "competing ways of life" in urban neighborhoods, scholars working in the social disorganization framework have

grappled with the role that norms and values play in diminishing neighborhood capacity to "realize common goals" (Kornhauser, 1978; Sampson & Bean, 2006). While social disorganization studies have attempted to assess the role of norms and values through examining either aggregated individual responses to statements of values or perceptions of neighborhood values, these studies have missed the important role that misperceptions of values may play. Studies that have focused on aggregated measures of residents' reports of their own values have missed the importance of residents' perceptions of their neighborhood which has been found to be critical in residents' behavior toward their neighborhood (Small, 2002). In contrast, studies that examine only stated perceptions "uncoupled" from any objective assessment of neighborhood values cannot determine the extent to which those perceptions accurately portray neighborhood values or are a reflection of other circumstances. In the current study we specifically examined the role of shared inaccurate perceptions on residents' likelihood of providing informal social control.

We first examined the extent to which disadvantage and mobility may lead to misperceived values, controlling for crime rates. We found that in disadvantaged and mobile neighborhoods, residents, on average, were more likely to perceive less adherence to conventional values than actually existed. Community values are likely to be ascertained by residents through watching public behavior. When public behaviors are not indicative of privately held values, residents are likely to misperceive neighborhood values. As Wilson (1996) suggested, the pressure to behave in ways inconsistent with one's own values may be stronger in disadvantaged neighborhoods. Furthermore, the use of "on stage" vs. "off stage" behavior (Miller & McFarland, 1991) or "code-switching" in public arenas (Anderson, 1999) may lead to the perception of a pervasive oppositional culture where actual adherence to conventional values remains high among most residents. Mobility may allow these false perceptions to persist because of a lack of long term knowledge of neighbors.

Our second important finding was that these misperceptions may be just as important in establishing communal consensus about intervening in local problems as the extent of shared values. Indeed, misperceived values were significantly related to levels of informal social control while the variance in shared values, as measured by the standard deviation among residents stated values, was not. Regardless of the extent to which there is value consensus in the neighborhood, when residents perceive others' values to be different from their own, they are unlikely to intervene in behaviors which they personally may believe to be inappropriate. Further, findings from studies done by Prentice and Miller (1993) suggest that such perceived differences in values lead people to feel alienated from the group. This alienation from others in the neighborhood would only further discourage residents from intervening in inappropriate behaviors for the common good (Sampson et al., 1997).

While our results do not dispute earlier findings that weakened values are related to diminished informal social control, they do suggest that one crucial

step in the weakening of culture may be the misperception of values.<sup>6</sup> If residents misperceive community values they may act in ways that are inconsistent with their own (conventional) values leading others to further misperceive community values. These misperceptions may then lead to a belief that conventional values are not strongly held, consequently further inhibiting residents from actively engaging in informal social control.

Our recasting of the attenuated value issue into one of shared misperceived values is particularly relevant in terms of policy. Our findings suggest that one important way that communities might develop increased levels of informal social control is through increased awareness of true community norms (Berkowitz, 2003). One approach to addressing pluralistic ignorance can include media campaigns that provide factual material regarding true community values. For example, posters could be printed that state, "85% of residents of this community believe that selling drugs is wrong." Or, "78% of the adults in this community state that they would like to be contacted by neighbors if their child is seen misbehaving." Likewise, any community-building activities in which conventional values can play out publicly (e.g., father and son activities), or accurate community information be provided (such as through community meetings or community centers), can help change misperceived values.

However, even though an awareness of the true values of the community may increase residents' desire to intervene they may still need the skills to intervene appropriately. Therefore we also suggest that residents be provided access to training programs that provide the knowledge, skills and abilities to intervene in non-confrontational ways. Finally, consistent with Berkowitz (2003) we suggest the use of high status residents, particularly high status youth, to be trained to appropriately intervene and model this behavior for other youth in the community. Such an approach to informal social control of crime capitalizes on the positive assets of disadvantaged communities that often get overlooked in criminological literature. Many residents in these neighborhoods do subscribe to conventional values and these norms can be strengthened and encouraged by accurate presentations of shared norms that reinforce these common norms, and the development of non-coercive strategies to implement those norms.

The findings from our study suggest that community-level studies of cultural norms and values, whether in relation to oppositional culture or attenuated culture, could benefit from further understanding how residents develop an understanding of neighborhood norms, and how both accurate and inaccurate perceptions of those norms affect neighborhood behaviors. Most current studies of culture view culture as inter-subjective, something that is created as people interact in everyday activities (Matsueda & Heimer, 1997; Sampson & Bean,

6. Supplemental analyses included a measure for weakened values and found both misperceptions of values and weakened values to significantly reduce informal social control. (Results available from the second author by request.)

2006; Swidler, 1986). We urge others to explore how part of this culture may be created on the basis of false understandings.

Finally, while we believe the findings from this study further our understanding of the role of culture in providing informal social control, we also note some important weaknesses of the study. First, we recognize the potential endogeneity problem due to our independent and dependent variables being from the same survey. However, without theoretically and empirically credible instrumental variables to address this problem, we lean on theory and previous research which supports the model specified. That is, that perceptions of values influence action in the form of informal social control, rather than the other way around. Certainly our results call for further examination of these relationships with longitudinal data.

Second, we also recognize that because respondents were assessing both neighbors' values (part of the misperceived value measure) and the likelihood of someone in the neighborhood intervening, there is potentially shared measurement error in these variables. We believe that while our findings should be interpreted with this in mind, there is a reason to believe that this problem is minimized. First, the questions regarding perception of neighbors' attitudes ask specifically about neighbors' attitudes and were asked after asking about respondents' own attitudes. We argue that this is likely to yield a type of part-whole contrast effect (Schuman & Presser, 1981) in which respondents' first subtract out their own attitudes and then report solely on neighbors' attitudes in the second set of questions. In contrast, the social control questions ask how likely it is that *someone* in the neighborhood is to intervene, with no questions regarding their own behavior preceding these questions. Thus, these questions are likely to be heavily influenced by what the respondents themselves would do, and therefore would be more empirically linked to statements of their own attitudes. Further clarity on these issues however must await future research. We believe that future research in social disorganization theory will continue to benefit from developing more innovative measures of culture as well as more precise measures of informal social control that allow for an examination of both what individuals themselves are likely to do and what residents perceive others in the neighborhood are likely to do.

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Appendix 1. Neighborhood-Level Correlations

		Informal social control	Misperceived values	Shared values	Social ties	Faith in police	Disadvantage	Mobility	Violent Crime Rate
Informal social control	Pearson correlation	1.00							
	Sig. (two-tailed)	—							
	N	66							
Misperceived values	Pearson correlation	0.70	1.00						
	Sig. (two-tailed)	0.00	—						
	N	66	66						
Shared values	Pearson correlation	-0.28	-0.10	1.00					
	Sig. (two-tailed)	0.03	0.42	—					
	N	66	66	66					
Social ties	Pearson correlation	0.44	0.37	-0.04	1.00				
	Sig. (two-tailed)	0.00	0.00	0.78	—				
	N	66	66	66	66				
Faith in police	Pearson correlation	0.71	0.42	-0.27	0.22	1.00			
	Sig. (two-tailed)	0.00	0.00	0.03	0.08	—			
	N	66	66	66	66	66			
Disadvantage	Pearson correlation	-0.60	-0.53	-0.05	-0.06	-0.58	1.00		
	Sig. (two-tailed)	0.00	0.00	0.68	0.61	0.00	—		
	N	66	66	66	66	66	66		
Mobility	Pearson correlation	-0.52	-0.42	0.40	-0.47	-0.36	0.00	1.00	
	Sig. (two-tailed)	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.00	—	
	N	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	
Violent crime rate	Pearson correlation	-0.266	-0.035	0.155	0.132	-0.198	0.169	0.186	1.00
	Sig. (two-tailed)	0.031	0.779	0.213	0.292	0.112	0.176	0.136	—
	N	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66