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**Like Chicken and Eggs. On the Intricate
Interplay between Neighborhood Disorder
and Collective Efficacy**

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Abstract

Disorder and social cohesion are classical urban sociological themes which date back to the Chicago School theorists. Since the end of the 1990s, the scientific debate has moved from social cohesion to more specific concepts, such as social capital and collective efficacy. Collective efficacy is commonly defined as social cohesion among neighbors combined with their willingness to intervene on behalf of the common good (Sampson *et al.* 1997). Earlier research has shown that residents' willingness to intervene in unpleasant situations partly depends on the quality of (local) social interactions and mutual trust. However, the majority of research on this theme has been of a quantitative nature, which does not clarify the micro social processes underlying (dis)functioning efficacy of individual residents and resident groups. This especially applies to residents' risk assessments when they have to decide whether or not to intervene in unpleasant situations

This paper aims to fill this gap. We attempt to disentangle the intricate interplay between neighborhood disorder and collective efficacy, especially residents' willingness to intervene. We conducted 90 semi-structured interviews with residents in six inner-city neighborhoods in the Dutch cities of Amsterdam, Rotterdam and Dordrecht. An important precondition of collective efficacy, especially social control, is a certain minimum level of safety, social and physical disorder. Disorder problems negatively affect residents' risk assessments when they have to decide whether or not to intervene in unpleasant disorderly situations. However, the relation is much more complex than suggested by the famous broken windows theory (Wilson & Kelling 1982). Interview transcript analysis confirms that residents' willingness to intervene in unpleasant situations strongly depends on public familiarity, which is grounded in pleasant casual social interactions. Moreover, a number of other socio-psychological features plays a role, such as the seriousness of the disorder, personal experiences or hearsay, sophisticated communicative skills, the recognition of critical mass and several other factors. Finally, the 'collective' in collective efficacy can be questioned, as many residents may trust upon a few self-confident residents' to do the actual interventions.

Introduction

Perceived neighborhood disorder generally refers to the occurrence of litter, vandalism, housing deterioration, graffiti, noise, drug use, trouble with neighbors and many other incivilities (e.g. Brown *et al.*, 2003; Ross & Mirowsky, 1999; Skogan, 1990). Although neighborhood order and disorder are primarily indicated by visible cues perceived by residents, these cues are not the only cause of perceived disorder. There is a broad range of literature that identifies socio-structural factors as determinants of perceived disorder, such as concentrated poverty, ethnic heterogeneity and residential instability (Ross *et al.*, 2000; Sampson *et al.*, 1997; Sampson & Raudenbush, 1999, 2004; Sampson, 2009; Shaw & McKay, 1942; Skogan, 1990). Moreover, the way in which neighborhood residents, both individually and collectively, deal with visible cues of disorder, is strongly affected by their perception. In this context, an important concept is **collective efficacy**, i.e. social cohesion among neighbors combined with their willingness to intervene on behalf of the common good (Sampson *et al.*, 1997: 918). A common premise is that levels of disorder are lower where collective efficacy is well-developed (*ceteris paribus*). On the one hand, collective efficacy may, to some extent, prevent or remove some forms of disorder, because residents are willing to intervene in unpleasant situations, or trust in the positive, orderly behavior of fellow residents. On the other hand, neighborhood disorder can severely undermine trust and social interactions between residents, which are necessary preconditions for their willingness to exercise informal social control (Ross *et al.* 2002; Shaw & McKay, 1942). Here, we face a classic chicken-or-egg dilemma.

However, the majority of all research applies to American contexts, which are difficult to compare to, for example, northwestern European contexts. More importantly, almost all research and evidence on the relationship between neighborhood disorder and collective efficacy has been of a quantitative nature, which does not clarify the micro social processes underlying (dis)functioning efficacy of individual residents and resident groups. Although very sophisticated in its methodological approach, this quantitative research has its shortcomings in answering ‘how’ questions. This especially applies to the fine-grained experiences and considerations of residents who face a decision whether or not to intervene in unpleasant situations. Furthermore, the qualitative research often focuses at poor, highly deprived neighborhoods, thus ignoring socioeconomically more prosperous neighborhoods which may learn us crucial lessons in comparison with their deprived counterparts.

This paper aims to fill this gap. We attempt to disentangle the intricate interplay between neighborhood disorder and collective efficacy, especially residents’ willingness to intervene in unpleasant, disorderly situations. Hence, our main **research question** is: which factors influence residents’ decisions to intervene or not, and to what extent are these factors connected to social cohesion, the first component of collective efficacy?

This paper starts with a literature review on the main concepts of disorder and collective efficacy, with special attention to residents’ preparedness for informal social control. This review is spread over two sections. The subsequent section deals with the data and methods. Then, the results are discussed. The final section presents (preliminary) conclusions and policy implications.

The concepts of neighborhood disorder and collective efficacy

Basically, disorder is an umbrella term of a range of unpleasant phenomena in a certain environment. Neighborhood order and disorder are primarily indicated by visible cues perceived by residents. Neighborhoods characterized by order are clean, well-maintained and safe. Residents are respectful of one another and to each other's property. However, neighborhoods characterized by disorder confront their residents with observable signs that social control is weak or completely lacking (Skogan, 1990). More precisely, "in these neighborhoods, residents encounter litter, vandalism, graffiti, noise, drug use, trouble with neighbors and other incivilities associated with a breakdown of social control" (Ross *et al.*, 2000, p. 584; Kruger *et al.*, 2007, p. 262; Ross & Mirowsky, 1999). Moreover, these signs may cultivate a sense of individual and community vulnerability, as they translate into feelings of fatalism and a sense that incivilities will happen regardless of what one does (Carvalho & Lewis, 2003 : 782, 806). "Even if residents are not directly victimized, observable signs of disorder indicate a potential for harm-that people who live nearby are not concerned with public order and that the local agents of social control are either unable or unwilling to cope with local problems" (Ross *et al.*, 2000: 584; Velez, 2001).

Effective social control is the quintessence of a major concept in criminology and urban sociology: collective efficacy. This is generally defined as social cohesion among neighbors combined with their willingness to intervene on behalf of the common good (Sampson *et al.*, 1997: 918). Sampson and his colleagues showed that collective efficacy is negatively associated with variations in violent crime in neighborhoods, even when individual-level characteristics, measurement error, and prior violence are controlled. Their definition of collective efficacy (CE) has two components which are strongly interwoven: social cohesion and willingness to intervene. Although Sampson and colleagues do not explicitly define social cohesion, the following citation clearly shows which elements are at stake: "At the neighborhood level [...], the willingness of local residents to intervene for the common good depends in large part on conditions of mutual trust and solidarity among neighbors. Indeed, one is unlikely to intervene in a neighborhood context in which the rules are unclear and people mistrust or fear one another" (Sampson *et al.*, 1997: 919)¹. In other words, the second CE component (willingness to intervene) is highly contingent upon the first component (social cohesion), which includes trust, solidarity, and social norms of behavior. So what is known about the interrelation between these elements?

In a neighborhood context, casual, everyday social interactions between residents may develop into strong ties, but they usually remain of a weak nature and of "a shifting, moving, fluid character" (Lofland, 1985: 118), characterized by limited or even non-existent verbal communication and a short duration. Neighborhood residents may run into personal encounters in staircases, on streets and squares, in playgrounds, neighborhood shops and community centers. These micro settings are more important spatial levels for social interaction than neighborhood level as such (e.g. Fisher, 1982; Grannis, 1998).² Such interactions can result in public familiarity. Public familiarity implies that residents get sufficient information from everyday interactions to recognize and 'categorize' other people (Fischer, 1982: 60-61; Blokland, 2003: 90-93). This 'categorization' may develop

into trust, which can contribute to feelings of safety and lower barriers to interactions with others. “People who trust others form personal ties and participate in voluntary associations more often than do mistrusting individuals” (Ross *et al.*, 2001: 570; see also Putnam, 2000: 136-137). Trust enables asking to or providing other residents with practical help or working together to achieve a shared interest for the neighborhood. Here, a chicken-or-egg dilemma turns up in full throttle: precisely various forms of disorder undermine the main conditions for public familiarity, through indifference, mistrust and perceived vulnerability. Public familiarity may also raise *distrust*. “Distrust is not by definition at odds with feeling safe. One’s assessment that others cannot be trusted may equip someone to navigate the streets without becoming intimidated by the street codes” (Blokland, 2008: 113, *translation ours*; see also Sztompka, 1999). This shows that, in a neighborhood context, predictability of residents’ behavior is at the basis of (dis)trust. You may not like how your neighbors behave, but public familiarity will at least help you understand to a certain extent what to expect. According to Blokland (2008), such a situation can be preferred over a situation of *mistrust*, in which you cannot ‘categorise’ other people at all.

Next to trust and solidarity, unwritten social norms of behavior strongly matter for collective efficacy. The benefits of shared norms about treating each other and how to behave in (public) space are ample: nuisance that fails to occur, a clean street, informal agreements how to use scarce parking space, and parents also keeping an eye on other playing children than their own (Carpiano, 2007; Foley & Edwards, 1999: 152; Halpern, 2005: 11; Kleinhans, 2009; Putnam, 2000). The crucial question is to what extent certain norms and values are shared by various residents, and to what extent informal social control can maintain or enforce certain norms. Network theory claims that effective enforcement of norms is only possible if a social structure has closure³ (Coleman, 1988: 105-107). In a neighborhood, this implies that residents must know each other well to exercise effective informal social control. However, Bellair (1997) has suggested that the mere presence of social interactions is sufficient for a basic level for social control (*ibid.* p. 697; Völker *et al.*, 2007). Likewise, even the perceived presence of some form of community participation may foster a sense of empowerment from which residents may conclude that people are looking after the neighborhood’s concerns (Carpiano, 2007: 642). As for the violation of unwritten norms, residents may adopt varying sanctioning strategies to display their disapproval. Common strategies are directly addressing the ‘trespasser’, disapproving glances or by gossiping that damages the trespasser’s reputation (Halpern, 2005: 11). Even with occasional interactions, residents can profit from social control exercised by other residents (Putnam, 2000: 20). The latter example may question the validity of the adjective ‘collective’ in collective efficacy, as only a few residents create a collective benefit.

How disorder affects collective efficacy

A large body of evidence identifies individual and structural neighborhood characteristics as strong determinants of perceived disorder, but also of collective efficacy. ‘Iron’ factors are concentrated poverty, ethnic heterogeneity and residential instability (e.g. Laurence,

2011; Putnam, 2007; Ross *et al.*, 2000; Sampson *et al.*, 1997; Sampson & Raudenbush, 1999, Sampson, 2009; Shaw & McKay, 1942). Especially in deprived neighborhoods, residential turnover may result in lower levels of social interaction, thereby undermining public familiarity, trust, and predictability (e.g. Lelieveldt, 2004; Ross *et al.*, 2001).

Apart from socio-structural characteristics, “influential research and current social policy emphasize perceptions of neighborhood disorder as central in shaping the actions of various decision makers including current and prospective residents, investors, community leaders, potential offenders, and the police” (Sampson & Raudenbush, 2004: 336). Of course, ‘actions’ may also refer to residents’ interventions in unpleasant situations in their neighborhood. As mentioned before, collective efficacy assumes a basic level of trust as a precondition for residents’ willingness to actively exercise social control. But perceptions of disorder may exactly undermine this and other vital preconditions. Even if residents are not directly ‘victimized’, signs of disorder can be interpreted as a potential for harm. “This perception of threat is likely to create distrust, i.e. the cognitive habit of interpreting the intentions and behavior of other people as unsupportive, self-seeking and dishonest” (Ross *et al.*, 2002: 59). “Through daily exposure to a threatening environment, where signs of disorder are common, residents may learn that other people cannot be trusted” (*ibid.*, 63).

In the same vein, the *Broken Windows Theory* (BWT) (Wilson & Kelling, 1982) has strongly influenced thinking on the implications of neighborhood disorder. The BWT states that relatively ‘modest’ forms of disorder and petty crime, such as graffiti and broken windows can trigger more serious crime and disorderly behavior. The main underlying mechanism is the interpretation of visible cues of disorder by (potential) trespassers. If these cues are not ‘wiped out’, trespassers may perceive them as a sign that residents are indifferent towards what happens in their neighborhood and will not react on or try to prevent disorderly or criminal behavior. Hence, this behavior will spread and result in further neighborhood disarray. The policy implication is that removing (signs of) disorder may prevent its further spreading, partly through discouragement of potential trespassers.

Until recently, the BWT has been highly controversial and lacking much empirical support, at least in the Netherlands. Through a series of experiments, Keizer and colleagues (2008) found that “as a certain norm violating behavior becomes more common it will negatively influence conformity to other norms and rules. Signs of inappropriate behavior like graffiti or broken windows lead to other inappropriate behavior (e.g. litter or stealing), which in turn results in the inhibition of other norms i.e. a general weakening of the goal to act appropriately” (*ibid.*: 1684-1685). In sum, disorder may not only confirm trespassers’ suspicion that residents are indifferent to its visible cues. It may inhibit social norms that disapprove of certain forms of behavior, thus causing norm violations to spread (*ibid.*).

Importantly, several authors connect these findings to their criticism that a basic assumption of the BWT may be flawed, i.e. that visual cues of disorder are unambiguous (Franzini *et al.*, 2008: 84; see also Harcourt, 2001). Sampson and Raudenbush (2004) found that, while reliably observed disorder increases perceptions of disorder, social structure proved to be a more powerful predictor of perception. “As the concentration of minority groups and poverty increases, residents of all races perceived heightened disorder even after we account for an extensive array of personal characteristics and independently observed

neighborhood conditions” (ibid.: 319). Thus, on *neighborhood* level, black residents were no less likely to be affected by ethnic composition in predicting disorder than white residents. This seems to imply that pure racial prejudice does not play a substantial role. However, Sampson and Raudenbush (2004) also found that blacks and other minority groups perceive significantly less disorder than whites living in the same *block group*. They suggest that blacks and other minority groups have been exposed to more disorder in the past, which may affect current thresholds for perceiving it as a problem. Sampson and Raudenbush (2004: 329) conclude that “the two groups are judging disorder by the norms that have been generated in past, segregated environments: hence blacks perceive less disorder and whites more” (see also Harris, 2001).

Using a similar methodology as Sampson and Raudenbush, Franzini et al. (2008) found that neighborhood poverty is a strong predictor of perceived disorder, but they could not replicate a significant effect of racial segregation (see also Taylor, 2001). Nevertheless, with reference to findings of Sampson and Raudenbush, they refute a common policy implication drawn from BWT. “If perceived disorder is driven by a neighborhood’s racial and class composition and not by visual cues of disorder, attempts to reduce disorder by cleaning up graffiti, picking up the trash, and removing drug dealers and gangs will not reduce perceptions of disorder and will fail to affect crime and residents’ health and well-being” (Franzini *et al.*, 2008: 84).

Whereas Sampson and Raudenbush (2004) illustrate how racial stereotyping may affect disorder perception, Stapel and Lindenberg (2011) show a mechanism the other way round. They found that disorder activates the tendency to stereotype and discriminate others. A series of lab and field experiments revealed that disorder increases the need for structure and, thus, a goal to create order. Stapel and Lindenberg uncover how stereotyping is an effective mental way to reach this goal. Thus, the disorder-to-stereotyping effects are not driven by a lack of cleanliness itself, but by disorder affecting the need of structure (ibid.: 253). Consequently, and in line with the BWT, stereotyping and discrimination further undermine crucial conditions for (informal) social control and collective efficacy, i.e. basic levels of social cohesion and trust between residents.

To summarize: disorder perception and residents’ willingness to exercise informal social control are not only affected by socio-structural characteristics, but also perceptions of resident or institutional indifference and/or incapability, as well as stereotyping and breakdown of conformity to other norms and rules, resulting in norm violations to spread.

Data and methods

Data and area selection

The basis of this paper consists of in-depth interviews with residents in six neighborhoods in the Dutch cities Amsterdam, Rotterdam and Dordrecht. This qualitative approach was part of a larger study (Kleinhans & Bolt, 2010) which aimed to describe and explain the impact of various objective and subjective measures, especially collective efficacy on perceived disorder and feelings of safety in the three cities. Our conception of perceived

order includes litter, dog dirt, graffiti, vandalism, housing deterioration, noise, drug use, trouble with neighbors and several other incivilities. We did not separately analyse social and physical disorder, as there is no clear-cut distinction (Ross & Mirowsky, 1999: 424).

The area selection for the in-depth interviews⁴ was based on a multiple regression analysis predicting perceived disorder and feelings of safety, with objective neighborhood characteristics as independent variables. These data were drawn from the local statistical databases and monitors, covering all administrative neighborhoods in the respective city. The independent variables include average household income, share of ethnic minorities, share of households on social benefits, housing tenure distribution, residential stability (ratio between inward and outward moves), relative presence of shops, restaurants and cafés, and housing density. We also included measures of relative changes in the income and ethnicity indicators over the last five to seven years, depending on data availability. Explanatory power of these regression models was fair to good, with explained variances ranging from 43 to 83 per cent (Kleinhans & Bolt, 2010).

For each single neighborhood, the predicted values of disorder and safety were compared with actual (average neighborhood) scores on these two indicators. We assume that this residual score (i.e. difference between actual and predicted scores) may be caused, at least partly, by differences in collective efficacy. In each city, we sorted neighborhoods on their residual score from highly positive to highly negative. Thus, we created rankings of neighborhoods scoring much better to much worse on disorder and safety than predicted in the regression model. Neighborhoods that appeared in the bottom and at the top of both rankings were preselected. Neighborhoods with fewer than 1,000 residents (for statistical reliability reasons) and areas constructed less than five years ago (collective efficacy needs time to develop) were removed from this selection. From the remaining options in each city, we chose two neighborhoods relatively similar in appearance and physical lay-out.

Table 1 Key data selected neighborhoods

Neighborhood Indicators	Amsterdam		Dordrecht		Rotterdam	
	Transvaalbuurt	Postjesbuurt	Vogelbuurt	Indische buurt	Oude Noorden	Liskwartier
% Single-family households	54.0	57.0	53.0	42.6	51.0	51.0
% Households with children	28.0	19.0	28.0	33.8	30.0	25.0
% Non-Dutch households	52.8	24.1	30.0	13.9	54.0	36.0
Change in % non-Dutch households (2003-2009)	-3.6	-2.7	3.0	-0.4	2.0	2.0
Social benefits (per 1000 households)	171.1	73.9	134.0	35.1	210.0	117.0
Av. standardized household income*	83.2	99.0	87.4	100.5	78.2	89.4
% Owner-occupied housing	14.8	20.6	20.0	81.3	17.0	36.0
% Social housing	70.4	23.0	P.M.	P.M.	64.0	40.0
Housing density	7,219	8,993	2,226	3,140	7,269	6,272
Number of residents	9,413	6,415	2,430	3,390	16,746	7,341

*This is an index, with the Netherlands as a whole = 100.

Hence, our target areas are mostly inner-city areas built in the first half of the 20th century. In Dordrecht and Rotterdam, the selected areas were adjacent to each other, which implies that they fall in the same jurisdictions and administrative policy areas. Thus, governmental and institutional differences between these areas are partly eliminated by the area selection.

Methods and analytical approach

In each selected neighborhood, we conducted in-depth interviews with 15 local residents (see appendix A for a full table with their social characteristics). Interviewees were not intended to be a random sample of the research areas, but rather a purposive ‘sample’ of residents actively involved in tackling or countering neighborhood disorder. We assume that these residents are well-informed in this respect (see also Bell & Hartman, 2007: 898). Some of them are active in voluntary resident associations or other interest groups, or working together with local professionals on an individual basis.

The interviewers used a semi-structured instrument with open-ended questions. These questions covered a range of topics related to neighborhood disorder, individual and collective efficacy, as well as residents’ opinions on their co-operation with and efficacy of local active professionals, such as police officers, neighborhood wardens, welfare workers, housing association managers, etc. The interviews were conducted in respondents’ homes and lasted from approximately 40 minutes up to almost two hours. Interviews were recorded digitally and fully transcribed, yielding 90 transcripts⁵. The analysis in this paper is based on three main blocks of questions (and answers) in the interview schedule. The questions deal with livability and perceived safety, sources of disorder, various kinds of social interaction between residents, with special attention to (experiences with) informal social control, and results of collective activities of voluntary resident associations.

Our analysis was both deductive and inductive. We initially coded for the general topics represented in the interview guide. However, the merits of qualitative data analysis partly lie in identifying codes and patterns that we did not initially anticipate (Strauss and Corbin 1990). Especially inductive analysis revealed some of the issues discussed below. The respondents are denoted by field codes: only their sex and age are mentioned.

Mechanisms affecting residents’ risk assessments and preparedness for informal social control

In the preceding sections, various factors affecting residents’ preparedness for informal social control were distinguished. In summary:

- Social structural characteristics, such as concentrated poverty, (strong) ethnic heterogeneity and residential instability;
- Perception from observable signs that social control is weak or lacking and that residents are indifferent to what happens to their neighborhood (e.g. Skogan, 1990)
- Signs may cultivate a sense of individual and community vulnerability, as they translate into feelings of fatalism and a sense that incivilities will happen regardless of what one does (e.g. Carvalho & Lewis, 2003).

- Perception that local agents of social control are either unable or unwilling to cope with local problems (Ross *et al.*, 2000; Velez, 2001).
- Disorder increases one's need for structure and order in a chaotic context. Stereotyping is an effective mental way to reach this goal (Stapel & Lindenberg 2011).

Our in-depth interviews uncovered several other, partly related social mechanisms which impact on the extent to which residents are willing to tackle unpleasant situations, whether individually or as a group. Some issues are related to levels of social cohesion between residents, other mechanisms directly originate from various environmental factors. The common element in all these aspects is that residents facing a prospect of or actual situation of disorder which calls for intervention, implicitly or explicitly consider the potential reward or danger of their reaction.

You have to know people before you can tackle them

An important aspect cited by many respondents is that residents are more likely to tackle each other if they know him or her by sight or at a deeper level. In general, people are less likely to approach strangers or passers-by than people they recognize or know better. This does not only apply to tackling adults, but also to youths. In other words, the level of public familiarity appears as a strong determinant. Sampson and colleagues (1997) do not use the term public familiarity, but instead use social cohesion. While these concepts cannot be equated, they are related: strong public familiarity can easily develop into mutual trust, solidarity and shared norms, i.e. social cohesion. In terms of public familiarity, many respondents cited the importance of greeting each other on the street and (being able) to have a quick chat. Superficial contacts like these contribute greatly to recognizing each other and becoming 'intimate strangers' or more (see also Jacobs, 1961).

VB1 (*man, 39 years*): Like I said, we say hello to each other around here. Most people who know each other wave to say hello, which surprises me. It's like going back in time twenty years or so. All that hello or good morning around here.

However, people are also quick to point out the delicate balance between helping each other out and keeping your distance. Privacy must be respected, but agreeable forms of social control are tolerated if needed (see also Fischer, 1982; Blokland, 2003):

VP (*man, 53 years*): I think I said it before, but it's not like you have to go round for a cup of tea or anything, just say hello to each other, and if you notice something, you can say: hey, you've left your lights on. You know, just ring the bell and say: you've left your lights on or whatever.

Several respondents explicitly describe the perceived small step from knowing each other to other forms of social interaction or social control. Knowing or recognizing each other is almost always tied to the knowledge that other people live nearby.

TB7 (*woman, 54 years*): The Majube street has it also, it's a bit of a village street. And then, you know each other and you have more social control, and then it's easier to tackle each other. The Afrikaner Square (*Afrikanerplein*), I think, is much more detached, and there are also these bars where it can be a bit aggressive...

LKB3 (*man, 42 years*): ... what I see around me is that people are very sociable, seem to get on with each other and have a chat even if they don't really know each other. You see someone in the street and you know they live around here so you just say a quick hello. That's the least you can do. And, and, you talk to each other about what's going on and all that, yeah, it's like a village really [...] You know who lives where. And so you're more inclined to go and talk to someone about a problem than when you don't know who's going to open the door.

In both cases, respondents use a village metaphor to describe a favorable situation in terms of sociability, public familiarity and social control. Whether comparing a village with an inner-city neighborhood in social terms is appropriate, is irrelevant for these respondents. The metaphor conjures up a positive image, without referring to the strong social cohesion and social pressure that is often felt in close village communities. In the same vein, Watt (2006) showed how council tenants in an inner-city London borough expressed a desire to move to the suburbs or the countryside. This reflects a utopian place image characterized by a "concern with order, conformity and social homogeneity" (Sibley, 1995, pp. 38-39).

Greeting each other does not only serve as an important mechanism for public familiarity in a neighborhood. It also reflects a standard of good manners (whether shared or not), which can make clear whether people are on the same wavelength. The remark of resident above, 'That's the least you can do' reflects an implicit social norm that people should greet each other. While many respondent adhere to this norm, other respondents succinctly point out that alongside the standard practice of greeting each other, there is also the aspect of one's 'mood of the day'.

Interviewer: And does everyone here just say hello in the street or ... can we call that getting on well?

TB5 (*man, 52 years*): Yes, but saying hello isn't something you have to do, is it? I sometimes have an off-day and wonder how I'm going to get through the day. If I bump into my neighbor on one of those days, I'm not really with it, but we still say hello to each other.

Many respondents realize that tackling each other can be much more effective if, alongside the situation leading up to this confrontation, a pleasant form of contact (brief or otherwise) has already been established. Having said this, it does not completely dispel the natural fear that the other person may not respond well (see next section). In other words, talking to someone about a difficult situation should ideally be in balance with the level of pleasant social interaction with the same person. This is succinctly described by ONB5 and ONB7:

ONB5 (*man, 64 years*): Err... yes. There's a problem family living around here, they get on everyone's nerves. We sometimes tackle them about it. But in a very cautious way. Because some of them are criminals who spend some time in jail now and then. So you don't want any fuss, that they may get physical... But their next-door neighbor knows exactly what to do. He communicates with them, he just says: hey, I don't like that, or whatever. But he is also very open, chats with them on the street. And this gives them a feeling of, OK, we are accepted. So they've reached a kind of understanding so the family's toned it down a bit...

ONB7 (*woman, 44 years*): Those, those international call shops, young lads are hanging around there. And like I said, I know most of those lads. I once had a right go at one of them, who swore at me. I said: you can say that to your mother, but not to me. And then the rest of them kicked off to him: hey, don't do that. She's, no, she's *chill*. What? That's nice to know; I'm *chill*. Things are looking up.

As in so many communities, the problem of communication between the Dutch and the ethnic minority groups is an issue. The language barrier is cited as a major problem, in combination with the variation in social, cultural and economic backgrounds. The respondents from the *Oude Noorden*, for example, see a clear connection between the wide range of nationalities in the district, and the language and communication barriers that this causes. As one respondent succinctly put it:

ONB2 (*man, 49 years*): People from sixty different nationalities live around here, none of them speak Dutch, they keep to themselves. A family with seven children living next to a single gay guy. They don't have much to say to each other, do they?

This is in line with the literature on negative impacts of ethnic heterogeneity on collective efficacy and preparedness for informal social control (e.g. Laurence, 2011; Putnam, 2007; Ross *et al.*, 2000; Sampson *et al.*, 1997; Shaw & McKay, 1942).

Fear as counselor

Not surprisingly, the foremost reason that interviewees gave for not tackling others is fear of getting an aggressive reaction, or even worse, being confronted with violence. This fear appears not just related to perceived disorder in the local context, but as a more general sense that tackling others on their behavior has nowadays become a dangerous enterprise. That is, this sense can be completely disconnected from the perceived local 'reality':

PB6 (*man, 67 years*): People are scared. They see too much, but what can you do? No-one dares open their mouth anymore. These days it's: if you interfere, you get an axe in your neck. And nobody wants that, do they?

Interviewer: But do you think people ever complain to each other about nuisance?

PB13 (*man, 60 years*): Yes, I think so. But there are always people, people who say: I'm keeping my nose out of it, otherwise I'll be next, and all that.

Interviewer: So why don't residents tackle each other about anti-social behavior?

TB14 (*woman, 50 years*): Because you don't want to be sworn at, you don't want hassle. Because you think: it doesn't change anything, does it?

Clearly, these interviewees perceived widespread reluctance of tackling other residents, fearing an aggressive reaction. However, this does not imply that interviewees' own individual risk assessment has turned out negatively. Some interviewees echoing the considerations above mentioned, report that they acted themselves on various accounts. Moreover, public familiarity is clearly stamped as a necessary but not sufficient condition for tackling other residents. Some respondents, who described quite strong levels of public familiarity, still refrain from any form of active informal social control. Their reasons are often connected to the nature and seriousness of the perceived disorder:

TB3 (*man, 50 years*): I think that when junkies and dealers are concerned, it [tackling each other] doesn't happen as much, because people feel intimidated by those lads. I find that quite understandable.

In line with the abundant literature on fear of crime, the crime itself already discourages any action, regardless of other factors. Another respondent from the same area is even more explicit in this respect:

TB12 (*woman, 28 years*): the biggest problem here is dealing and using all kinds of drugs and alcohol. Especially on the streets and under the fly-overs [...]. As I told you, that boy just broke a car window and grabbed the handbag. Recently, I had to pick up my kid from under that fly-over and there was a man who had forced another guy's hands behind his back and started to search him. And people just come and go by and no one dares to say anything.

The specific nature of any incident witnessed is crucial. If the witnessed problems are clearly evident and linked to crime, such as drug dealing, the risk assessment often means that the person concerned decides against tackling the culprit(s) (see also Ross *et al.*, 2001, 2002). Obviously, the fear that the culprit would turn aggressive or violent is based on more than just a kernel of the truth. At the other end of the spectrum, tackling other residents appears much easier if the perceived offence is relatively modest. An example is given by one of the respondents:

TB3 (*man, 50 years*): Depositing your bulky garbage on the street for the garbage men. Yes, we have tackled each other successfully about that. After all, it's not a big issue to be tackled about.

The processes described above are connected to reports about tackling one or sometimes two trespassers. However, the fear component takes on extra weight if groups are involved. Almost without exception, our respondents report experiences with and perceptions about disorderly behavior or groups of children or youths. This is a common problem, not just in the Netherlands, but in many other European countries (Binken & Blokland, 2009).

TB10 (*woman, 37 years*): Here we've got, I think we've got a lot of kids living around here and a lot of them hang around the streets after school, in the evenings. A lot of people are scared to say anything to them about their behavior. Or they leave a right mess and no-one dares say anything. Even a small group of lads can seem quite intimidating.

TB3 (*man, 50 years*): Youths hanging around, they just come and go... I think they are just allowed to hang around. That is, only if they do not cause trouble. And then the question is: when does a loitering youngster cause trouble? Many residents define nuisance if it happens close to their home, even if it's only hanging around.

The quote above is particularly interesting. TB3 implies that a group of (loitering) youths is often perceived as nuisance and intimidating in itself, whether or not they actually cause noise, litter, or something else. The simple fact of being outnumbered can be enough reason to refrain from tackling loitering youths, even when the fears of the respective respondents never became reality. This is succinctly described by the following respondent:

ONB8 (*woman, 48 years*): Yeah, because you're always having bad experiences. And, yeah, I suppose you're a bit scared really, aren't you? There's a big group of them, like. And if you annoy one of them, they don't just sort it out, they start smashing things up. I live on the ground floor and I don't want my windows smashed thank you very much.

Interviewer: Yes. But you've never actually had your windows smashed, have you?

ONB8: No, it's never happened to me. No, not yet luckily.

The residents that pluck up the courage to take on the group on their own usually opt for a cautious, friendly approach (see next section). Unfortunately, in some cases respondents have had bad experiences trying to tackle groups of youths about their conduct. This puts them off trying next time round.

VB8 (*woman, 55 years*): And then you have a go, you try to by saying something like: hey, chuck that in the container or in your bin at home. Right, and then, yeah, then they just swear at you, they really lay into you. So eventually you just think: let them get on with it, I'm not saying anything anymore 'cause I don't need the hassle. But because of that, the whole neighborhood's going down the drain. Like, at first you thought you could keep the lid on it, but not anymore.

Others think it sensible to say nothing in situations like this, particularly in the case of one-against-the-group situations and when the youths are from an ethnic minority. The reason is that some (indigenous) people assume that youths from ethnic minorities are less likely to accept someone tackling them about their behavior.

VT (*woman, age unknown*): Well, that's how it works in other cultures, right? And if a Dutch person says something to one of them, you're discriminating, aren't you? So they answer back. So people don't bother anymore, they don't know what to do. And people from other cultures, they just, well they just don't like it.

Although this can be considered as an example of stereotyping (cf. Sampson & Raudenbush 2004), VT is hard to blame for this account if it is rooted in an actual experience. However, the culture argument was never put forward by respondents with a non-Dutch background. In their perception of disorderly behavior of groups of ethnic youths, the issue of public familiarity played a large role, i.e. whether or not they know the youths by sight or more extensively. If that is the case, they know more or less what they can expect from these youths. For these respondents, the ethnic background of the youths did not add anything specific to the risk assessment of tackling them on disorderly behavior.

Personal experience or 'I've heard...'

Fear is an important factor which explains why many of our respondents never engage in an act of social control towards other residents or passers-by in their neighborhood. A related, but distinct factor is the expected outcome of tackling a perceived trespasser. That is, regardless of whether you fear the trespasser's reaction, what kind of result do you expect from you addressing his behavior, and whereupon is this expectation based?

We probed all respondents who reported acts of tackling other residents or passers-by about antisocial behavior, and asked them about the outcome of their intervention and its effect on their subsequent preparedness to intervene. Although 'success stories' came up, several respondents cited their own unfortunate experiences (see also previous section):

VB12 (*woman, 43 years*): But I did once speak to a group on the Bird Square: 'Hey lads, there are bins over there, you don't have to chuck it in the bushes'. I wouldn't want to repeat what they said to me. So I think, you've got to give a good example. It's all you can do really. And after a while, you even stop doing that, because, yeah, well you're just winding yourself up. And it just makes you more frustrated.

However, not everyone calls on their own actual experiences. Many respondents refer to experiences of other residents, which they have heard about, or things that have been featured in the local or national media, such as on the internet, newspapers or television. The residents in question are not overly concerned about whether the stories are actually based on fact. The 'I've heard...' experiences are enough to incite doubt or fear, which immediately influences their risk assessment.

TB4 (*man, 38 years*): Well I've heard about people getting involved and then getting themselves sworn at because they've asked people why they were throwing their litter on the ground. They just say like: 'Why are you doing that?' And they get told: 'What's it got to do with you?' or something. That's what I've heard.

TB7 (*woman, 54 years*): Yeah, people do tackle other people about things, but it's always like, well that's what I've heard from other people of course. It's like if they think someone's not quite right, they don't dare.

A few respondents make a direct connection between not daring to speak up and the fear of an aggressive reaction on the one hand, and media reports about incidents on the other (see also Watt, 2006: 788). As one respondent eloquently remarks:

VB5 (*man, 65 years*): You can moderate things like that by making sure that everyone feels confident enough to say something, however little. And [...] most people wouldn't dare to confront everyone. And then that's why it happens, because we all make such a fuss about *if* you dare to speak up you might get slapped, and then someone does ... While most of the time if... in 95% of cases if you tackle someone, they're quite reasonable and they say: yeah, okay. But the other 5% get so much attention that people think this is par for the course.

Again, the mechanisms described show that residents' expectations about the effectiveness of their tackling efforts can be influenced by either local, actual experiences or commonly negative reports from media of hearsay, or both. As the respondent above rightly observes, this expectation can be unjustly disconnected from a local 'reality' in which the chances of a positive, co-operative response from an act of social control are high. However, actual experiences of negative feedback and not getting what was hoped for, clearly decrease residents' preparedness to intervene in a future situation.

Communication skills, patience and counter threats

Whether or not effective, the stories told by various respondents show the importance of certain skills when trying to tackle others about their behavior. A combination of caution, confidence, calm and friendliness appears essential to successful intervention, particularly if the trespasser being addressed ignores the person speaking to him/her or becomes aggressive. The respondents that managed to combine these traits at the *moment supreme* are examples of just how important it is to take the right tone.

VD (*woman, 62 years*): So if there's trouble, if someone's causing a nuisance, you have to be polite, not swear at them of course, but say: hey, remember there are other people around, will you? Then they'll just do it. It's all about how you say it.

VB? (*woman, 68 years*): If I see them at it near me, a group of about 5 or 6 of them sometimes hang out here round the corner 'smoking', but it's actually a joint [...].

So I say to them: Listen lads, I don't mind you hanging around here, but take your rubbish away with you. And I have to say, most of them do it if you tell them. It's often the case, if you have a friendly word you're more on their level than if you say: 'get out of here', 'take your trash with you' and 'do you do that at home too?'

Apart from caution, confidence, calm and politeness, patience is another important skill. It sometimes takes time for what people say to have an effect, because it has to 'sink in'. This is convincingly propagated by the following respondent:

IBO (*man, 54 years*): The main success factor is showing the person you're tackling some form of respect. Speak to them politely, ask them pleasantly. That's the success factor. And don't always expect them to change their behavior straight away. You might have to repeat yourself a few times before the message sinks in ...

A few respondents identify a direct link between the communication skills needed and level of education. Obviously, good communication skills are ascribed to well-educated people, but ONB2 suggests that education is also an important factor in the reaction of the person being spoken to.

ONB2 (*man, 49 years*): You open the door, and there's someone letting his dog piss up against your house. Now I'm from Rotterdam, so I say: 'So where do you live, mate?' And he says: 'Why do you wanna know?' 'So I can come and piss up against your front door'. 'Why's that?' Some people are so stupid. I say: 'What do you think, you're doing letting your dog piss up against my window? Are you nuts or something?' 'Oh sorry', he says. You know: the population of Rotterdam isn't known for its intelligence. You have to spell things out for people. You have to say what you mean and mean what you say.

In the above example, ONB2's tone does not stand out as respectful. While the majority of respondents is convinced that this is a key success factor, the opposite is also reported. That is, a threatening tone can have a positive effect in some cases, as illustrated by VB5:

VB5 (*man, 65 years*): Take this: in the nineties, we were having problems with people breaking into our sheds. After a while, some had had enough. So we went to talk to a group that was well-known for breaking into sheds, and they were mainly junkies. So we said something ... and we can all laugh about it now, but it worked: 'Lads... the next time we see you near the sheds, there'll be seven of us, and we'll all have 30 centimeter steel blades in our hands and we'll slit you open from top to bottom'. And that was the end of the break-ins. So what's the secret? They're more frightened of a madman with a knife than they are of the police.

From a legal and ethical point of view, VB5's behavior⁶ is highly questionable. However, from his perception and of his fellow shed owners, their act of social control has clearly

been effective. Additionally, it was a conscious joint action, which they perceived as considerably less dangerous than an individual intervention.

Interfering and mutual dependency

Earlier, we discussed the widely mentioned balance between helping your neighbors out and keeping your distance, in order to respect privacy. In the same vein, some residents do not see the point of tackling others about their conduct, either because they do not think it any of their business, or because they think they should not interfere at all.

Interviewer: And why do you think that other residents don't tackle people about this type of behavior?

TB13 (*woman, 30 years*): Probably for the same reason as me, or perhaps 'it's none of my business, why should I?' I think that's more what it is. You can't help noticing that so many people keep themselves to themselves.

One respondent indicated in a lengthy argument that he was not prepared to interfere with others because he would see this as a breach of his own privacy if anyone tackled him about his behavior. But reluctance to meddle is not the only aspect that plays a role. The specific character of social interactions and relations between neighbors who live at close quarters is also significant. All those concerned benefit from a good relationship, i.e. knowing each other versus keeping your distance, because escalation can lead to difficult situations. That is, you cannot just call off all contact with your neighbors; you live next door to each other, so you can only avoid them to a certain extent. In other words, the fear of meddling, either on the part of the respondent or perceived in the behavior of others, is partly down to a fragile balance in the interaction between neighbors.

Interviewer: So what makes residents decide whether to tackle each other about undesirable behavior or unpleasant matters or not? What makes the difference?

LKB11 (*woman, age unknown*): Well, being scared. Scared of how the other person will react. And not wanting to interfere in each other's lives. Hanging on to your privacy. I think lots of people, they often don't tackle each other because they don't want to fall out with their neighbors or something. They don't want to rock the boat.

Or, as another respondent puts the delicate balance between neighbors:

IBB6 (*man, 60 years*): That's what makes it difficult, not wanting to spoil the relationship. I mean my neighbors on the corner, they've got a parking space in their garden and then they park on the pavement. They sometimes even park two cars on the pavement. And they're big cars too; those ATVs. So really, look there's one now, we don't like it. But yeah, I mean it's like: you're stuck with each other, aren't you? It's all very well talking to one of them about it, but if you know it'll end up in a row and get really serious like, then what's the point?

Social norms and diversity

According to a broad sociological literature, the more alike the characteristics of the people concerned are, the easier it will be to share social standards and values (e.g. Fischer, 1982; Coleman, 1988). In some of the study areas, respondents referred to a high degree of consensus about standards and reactions to undesirable behavior. In the *Postjesbuurt*, there seems to be an unwritten social norm about tackling other people displaying undesirable behavior. This is apparent from respondents' expectation that others will also tackle trespassers if they witness an offence. They perceive a widely-supported 'rule' (see also Sampson *et al.*, 1997: 919) which is seldom discussed openly.

PB6 (*man, 67 years*): I don't know exactly, but somehow, Paramaribostraat is a tidy street. I do a lot myself, but there are more residents who help sort out the street if there's, if there's, like a fuss or whatever. We don't leave rubbish in the street. If someone makes a mess, we grab him by the collar and he has to clear it up.

PB7 (*man, 39 years*): And, yes, it's like that here [leaving each other alone], yes, that's the same here too, but if you cause nuisance, if you get bolshie, then everyone thinks like, yeah, that's not on, is it? That's not the way we do things in this street [...]. It's like this: if you mess things up, the whole street will be on your case.

Clearly, the unwritten social norm about tackling other people is adhered to by a kind of critical mass of residents. More important, this appears widely recognized and accepted as a characteristic of the neighborhood, and as such generates the expectation that others will act accordingly (Foley & Edwards, 1999: 152).

A respondent from the *Vogelbuurt* suggests a more explicit and openly discussed and agreed norm about tackling your neighbors:

VB (*woman, 68 years*): We've all made a sort of agreement: if you get on each other's nerves, there's a bell on the front door. So if your neighbor's annoying you, you ring the doorbell. And your neighbor says: 'what can I do for you?' 'Listen mate, I've got a headache and your kids and blah blah blah... We know you've got problems at the moment, but we can hear them two houses away and that's not on'. It's worked perfectly up until now.

The main difference with the respondent quotes from the *Postjesbuurt* above is that the respondent below implies that the agreement includes near and next-door neighbors, yet it remains unclear if this agreement also extends to the street level or beyond.

Of course different people can have different standards. Some respondents clearly emphasize that population diversity is a meaningful factor in the perceived diversity or congruence in manners and standards. Diversity can take on many meanings (see also Bell & Hartmann, 2007), not just in terms of ethnic background, but also age, household composition, position in the life cycle, and housing tenure.

TB14 (*woman, 50 years*): I usually say hello to everyone and most people say hello back. Of course there are some people who don't say anything. And there are ... yes, there are big differences. There are older Dutch people from a sort of working-class background, who still live here. You know them 'cause they're usually quite stern and have those small dogs. And if you say anything about their dog, they can get quite aggressive, that's the type you get around these parts. But you've got people here in these streets, about three-quarters of them own their own houses and they're pretty friendly but often just get into their cars and they're gone.

In relation to what we described in the section *Interfering and mutual dependency*, there are respondents who proclaim that you should not try to achieve norm convergence in a diverse neighborhood. Whether this is rooted in practical sense or a personal conviction, remains unclear in the quote below. Moreover, TB10 suggests that getting on well with each other has more to do with a shared history in the neighborhood than with differences in personal norms and standards.

TB10 (*woman, 37 years*): I don't think it's indifference. No. You've got people in all those different phases, all different types of people living at close quarters, so you can't try and impose the standards that you've impressed on your kids, who just get along with everyone, on all the other people living in the street [...]. We get on well with people here in the street and round the corner, near the water. But that's because so many of the people around here have lived here for decades.

It sometimes helps if the general consensus about standards is widely shared and explicitly laid down, for example in the form of local etiquette or street agreements (Diekstra, 2004; Kleinmans, 2009). Especially in Rotterdam, such efforts have become a strong part of local policy stimulating residents to organize social control in their neighborhood (Uitermark & Duyvendak, 2008: 1498). But as is the case with public familiarity, which needs 'periodical upkeep', the question is how sustainable the effect of such efforts really is.

LKB6 (*man, 45 years*): We've got the '*People Make the City*' program⁷ or whatever it's called. They're trying to help us. But it comes and goes. They hung up a load of boards with rules, saying that this street is a play area, and that everyone has to drive really slowly ... a sort of street agreement. So we all signed it, seems that there's a grant for this. But you tend to forget about it after a while, don't you? And then someone gets all active and we all have to sit up and take notice again.

'I hope someone else will do it'

This paper has discussed various reasons why residents may refrain from intervening in a form of disorder. Many reports were based on *individual* experiences or actions. This raises the question of the extent of the adjective 'collective' in collective efficacy. Obviously, residents can profit from social control exercised by others (Putnam, 2000: 20), even in cases in which only one or two residents actually exercised control. A simple example is a

resident who tackles a neighbor about putting his garbage next to instead of in an underground garbage container. All residents near this garbage container enjoy a benefit.

In more serious instances, people do not always realize straight away that that they are not alone in experiencing a particular type of nuisance or disorder. They may consider themselves as the only one and refrain from action, maybe even from checking with others about their experience. Ironically, if they know that other neighbors are troubled as well, this knowledge may rather inhibit the process of taking action instead of searching support and trying to establish a collective reaction. This is succinctly illustrated below:

ONB13 (*woman, 47 years*): And then you find out if someone else talks to you: 'Yes, I am turning crazy about that barking dog of hers'. I said: 'Did you ever talk to her about her dog?' No, no, I won't do that'. And that was when I found out that I wasn't the only one being bothered by that dog. Another neighbour has written her a letter about it, but someone else around the corner is troubled even more, but does not dare to say anything about it. And then I think, look, I am someone who dares to raise the issue, but then she [the dog owner] may respond: 'Well, no one else is complaining'. And then I think, 'OK, I may be the only one bothered'. But then, you find out in a different process that many more people are bothered by it, but don't say a word.

This account raises two issues. First, the 'trespasser' may be truly unaware of the extent of the nuisance of her dog (although we cannot exclude the possibility that she is fully aware and does not care either). This implies that she has no 'chance' to do something about it. Secondly, the people who keep quiet, benefit from the action taken by residents who take the trouble of tackling others about their behavior. 'Free riders' do not always keep quiet because they are lazy, but because they are afraid, feel that they lack the communication skills to tackle a fellow-resident, or that they are not sure whether other neighbors would support them, as is shown in another example.

Interviewer: You say you might call the police or the housing association. Would you tackle someone yourself about his or her behavior?

ONB9 (*woman, 30 years*): I find that difficult, hard to do...

Interviewer: Could you please indicate why you find that difficult?

ONB9: I would be inclined to..., yes, I don't know...

Interviewer: You mean the uncertainty of how they would react?

ONB9: Yes, and especially the uncertainty, I mean of... I don't know how many neighbours would support me in it. Well, if you know that more neighbours would say 'I will come with her'. And we would do something about it. But, well, that's not really the case here.

In sum, the examples illustrate how a successful intervention may be more a matter of individual than of 'collective' efficacy, as residents trust upon a few confident fellow residents' to do the actual interventions.

Preliminary Conclusions

This paper has presented a detailed analysis of residents' experiences with and perceptions of informal social control in inner-city neighborhoods dealing with various forms of social and physical disorder. On the basis of a literature review and semi-structured interviews with 90 residents, we have sought to reveal factors that influence residents' decisions to intervene or not, and to what extent are these factors connected to social cohesion, the other component of collective efficacy.

The literature review has highlighted the dominance of quantitative research in this field, especially with regard to the impact of neighborhood disorder on collective efficacy. A large body of evidence points at individual and structural neighborhood characteristics as strong determinants of perceived disorder, but also of collective efficacy. 'Iron' factors are concentrated poverty, ethnic heterogeneity and residential instability (e.g. Laurence, 2011; Putnam, 2007; Ross *et al.*, 2000; Sampson *et al.*, 1997; Sampson & Raudenbush, 1999, Sampson, 2009; Shaw & McKay, 1942). Although very sophisticated in its methodological approach, this research has its shortcomings in answering the 'how' questions. Additional sources are more clear in this respect. Many evidence is connected directly or indirectly to the *Broken Windows Theory* (Wilson & Kelling, 1982). That is, visible cues of disorder may be perceived as a sign that residents are indifferent towards what happens in their neighborhood and that social control is weak. Even if residents are not directly victimized, signs of disorder can be interpreted as a potential for harm. This perception of threat is likely to create distrust in other residents and may cultivate a sense of individual and community vulnerability. Moreover, these signs may send out a message that local agents of social control, i.e. various institutions are either unable or unwilling to cope with local problems. Finally, disorder may not only confirm trespassers' suspicion that residents are indifferent to its visible cues. It may also inhibit social norms that disapprove of certain forms of behavior, thus causing norm violations to spread further. Finally, recent research has shown that the disorder-to-stereotyping effects are not driven by a lack of cleanliness itself, but by disorder affecting the need of structure (Stapel & Lindenberg, 2011).

The interviews have uncovered various other (social) mechanisms which are connected to findings from quantitative studies. In line with the social cohesion component of collective efficacy, residents emphasize the importance of public familiarity i.e. residents getting sufficient information from casual interactions to recognize and 'categorize' other people (Fischer, 1982; Blokland, 2003). Greeting each other on the street and (being able) to have a chat are important functions in establishing and maintaining public familiarity. Moreover, knowing each other at least superficially is a precondition for tackling someone else. Connected to this, talking to someone about a difficult situation should ideally be in balance with the level of pleasant social interaction with the same person.

Regardless of the willingness to act, language barriers and the seriousness of the witnessed problem are important factors: crime, e.g. drug trade is much more discouraging than relatively modest offences. Connected to language barriers, we found evidence of ethnic stereotyping. Several respondents posed the argument that ethnic youths do not accept being tackled. However, this view was not shared by non-Dutch respondents.

In line with much quantitative research, fear is an important barrier to informal social control. Some residents have reported bad experiences with social control, which negatively affects their risk assessments to do it again. In this respects, we found strong evidence that residents' expectations about the effectiveness of their tackling efforts can be influenced by either local, actual experiences or commonly negative reports from media of hearsay, or both. These expectations can be unjustly disconnected from local 'reality'. Moreover, communication skills are important. A combination of caution, confidence, calm and friendliness appears essential to successful intervention.

Other considerations are privacy and good neighbor relations. Some residents do not see the point of tackling others about their conduct, either because they do not think it any of their business, or because they think they should not interfere at all. This can be connected to the specific relation between direct neighbors, i.e. knowing each other versus keeping your distance, because escalation can lead to difficult situations.

Finally, the number of residents intervening in disorderly situations is an important issue. On the one, the extent to which a(n unwritten) social norm about tackling others is adhered to by a critical mass of residents. On the other hand, we found that successful interventions may be more a matter of individual than of 'collective' in collective efficacy, as residents may trust upon a few confident neighbors to do the actual interventions.

Implications for policy

In this stage of our research, it is difficult to provide clear implications for policy. However, and in connection to earlier research, some indications may be given at this point. As we found that public familiarity is so crucial to for social control, policymakers could stimulate programs strengthening conditions for public familiarity. Here, the chicken-or-egg dilemma turns up in full throttle: precisely various forms of disorder undermine the main conditions for public familiarity, through indifference, mistrust and perceived vulnerability. Hence, and in connection to the discussion of the BWT, there is growing evidence that wiping out visible cues of disorder is an important remedy to fight neighborhood disarray (e.g. Keizer *et al.*, 2008; Kleinhans & Bolt, 2010; Stapel & Lindenberg, 2011; Wilson & Kelling, 1982). Such claims are contradicted by Franzini and colleagues (2008), who emphasize the primordial effects of structural disadvantage on disorder perception. They claim that more fundamental policies promoting neighborhood revitalization and economic growth are needed to reduce perceptions of disorder. "The frequent relationship between minority neighborhoods and poverty indicates that such policies are especially needed in segregated neighborhoods" (ibid.: 91). It is up to politicians to choose which strategies receive priority.

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Appendix A Demographic characteristics of the respondents

Demographic characteristics	Number
<i>Gender</i>	
Male	36
Female	51
<i>Household type</i>	
Adult (no children)	20
Couple without child(ren)	17
Couple with child(ren)	33
Single-parent family	9
Other	2
Unknown	6
<i>Age</i>	
18 – 34	8
35 – 44	21
45 – 54	23
55 – 64	13
65 – 74	11
75 or older	3
Unknown	8
<i>Tenure</i>	
Renter	40
Owner-occupier	37
Unknown	10
<i>Length of residence in this neighborhood</i>	
0 – 5 years	15
6 – 10 years	18
11 – 15 years	15
16 – 20 years	10
21 – 25 years	7
More than 25 years	17
Unknown	5

Endnotes

¹ This verges on the concept of social capital. However, the concept of collective efficacy emphasises residents' sense of active engagement more strongly than in the term social capital. 'Collective efficacy' is distinct from social networks and extends the trust and solidarity dimensions of social capital to include the collective capacity to translate social resources into specific outcomes (Browning & Cagney, 2002, p. 385).

² Moreover, the size of administrative neighbourhood units is usually much bigger than the neighbourhood perception of most residents, i.e. "an area of 5–10 minutes walk from one's home" (Kearns & Parkinson, 2001, p. 2103).

³ Closure is the extent to which different persons in a social setting are interconnected (Coleman, 1988).

⁴ For a full description, see Kleinmans & Bolt (2010, pp. 51-52).

⁵ A full (anonymous) overview of respondent characteristics is available on request with the first author.

⁶ Here, we assume that the story of this respondent accurately reflects what actually happened.

⁷ For a more extensive discussion of this program, see Uitermark and Duyvendak (2008, pp. 1497-1498).