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Article

"Trailer Trash" Stigma and Belonging in Florida Mobile Home Parks

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Abstract
In the United States, residents of mobile homes and mobile home communities are faced with cultural stigmatization regarding their places of living. While common, the "trailer trash" stigma, an example of both housing and neighborhood/territorial stigma, has been understudied in contemporary research. Through a range of discursive strategies, many subgroups within this larger population manage to successfully distance themselves from the stigma and thereby render it inconsequential (Kusenbach, 2009). But what about those residents—typically white, poor, and occasionally lacking in stability—who do not have the necessary resources to accomplish this? This article examines three typical responses by low-income mobile home residents—here called resisting, downplaying, and perpetuating—leading to different outcomes regarding residents' sense of community belonging. The article is based on the analysis of over 150 qualitative interviews with mobile home park residents conducted in West Central Florida between 2005 and 2010.

Keywords
belonging; Florida; housing; identity; mobile homes; stigmatization; territorial stigma

Issue
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1. Introduction

In 2006, a full-page advertisement by the National Center for Family Literacy in the *New York Times* showed a grainy black-and-white picture of an extremely crowded and dirty mobile home park with one home missing. The text at the bottom said: "The best way out is by coming in," suggesting that *this* is the kind of environment one is able to leave behind by taking advantage of the Center's services to improve one's literacy skills. While not all depictions of mobile home living in American culture are equally extreme, the general, negative message they deliver has remained virtually unchanged for several decades. In the United States, where displays of material wealth indicate respectability and success, living in a mobile home and mobile home park is a sign of failure, instability, and moral inferiority. This article investigates some of the views and experiences of lower income Americans who are living in mobile home parks. The ubiquitous "trailer" stigma in American culture is an example of social marginalization that is based on a type of home (the "trailer") and a type of neighborhood (the "trailer park"), both resulting in a tainted category of persons ("trailer trash"). The workings of this particular stigma are currently understudied in the relevant scholarly literature, and the most vulnerable target—low-income whites living in non-urban areas—is a population that is frequently misunderstood (Hochschild, 2016). The primary goal of this article is to examine three typical responses to the stigma among those who are most affected.

Even though stigmatization is a powerful form of othering (Link & Phelan, 2001), it would be wrong to assume that place-based prejudice and discrimination affect everyone who is generally targeted in similar ways and degrees. Certain subgroups and individuals within the larger category of mobile home dwellers manage to successfully distance themselves from the stereotype while drawing on positively valued social memberships (Kusenbach, 2009). However, others are more vulnerable and must come to terms with the housing and neighborhood-based stigma they experience as a serious challenge, often among many other obstacles. In this article, I focus on the latter, especially disadvantaged group of mobile home residents. More precisely, I seek to an-

swer the question of how the "trailer trash" stigma affects those who cannot isolate themselves from it by drawing on advantageous spatial or social boundaries (Lamont & Molnár, 2002). The following analysis reveals that issues of agency and identity play large roles in determining how stigma is experienced and managed, and how it affects someone's sense of belonging in the larger community, including perceptions of, and interactions with, neighbors.

The article proceeds as follows. First, in the next section, I offer some general information on mobile home living and the "trailer trash" stigma, followed by a brief review of the relevant literature on housing and neighborhood stigma and belonging. I then describe the article's research methods and data. Next, in a first analytic section, I discuss the particular directions and targets of the trailer stigma. In the following parts, I examine three different responses by those who are targeted the most—here called resisting, downplaying, and perpetuating—and their effects on residents' interactions and senses of belonging at the neighborhood level. I end the article with a short conclusion.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Mobile Home Living and the "Trailer Trash" Stigma

In the United States, mobile homes are a very common form of private housing for people with lower incomes, and mobile home parks are a widespread neighborhood type. According to the latest estimates (American Community Survey, n.d.), approximately 17.7 million people live in 8.5 million mobile homes in the United States. While mobile homes exist in every state and region, they are most concentrated in the Sunbelt across the Southern border. Florida has the highest number of mobile homes of all states, nearly 840,000 in total. Within Florida, the highest concentration of mobile homes—nearly 250,000—can be found in the Central Gulf region, the area in which the research for this article was conducted.

Miller and Evko (1985) report that the negative image of trailers dates back to before World War II, a time when makeshift accommodations on wheels originally meant for vacationing became popular permanent homes for low-income retirees and migrant workers. The use of trailer homes expanded during World War II by providing housing for defense industry workers near manufacturing plants. Due to the serious housing shortage after the war, the use of many such homes and communities, originally meant to be temporary, continued. Thousands of soldiers and military service workers were stationed in Florida during World War II and many stayed or returned to Florida afterwards, leading to high pressure on the housing market and a record number of mobile homes particularly in this state (Irby, 1999). According to Irby (1999), the label "trailer trash" was first recorded in the 1950s and it has been in use ever since.

Images of trailer living as transient, deprived, and morally deficient persist in American mass media and popular culture. Popular movies offer detailed depictions of the myriad inadequacies of mobile home residents and communities. Newspaper articles and TV stories frequently report on crimes, accidents, and disasters in these places. Advertisements (such as the opening example), books, cartoons, games, and even recipes featuring trailer-themed problems or jokes are abundant. The majority of media images propels the message that people living in these places are indecent and objectionable due to a range of personal and cultural deficiencies. Understandably, many mobile home residents take issue with such negative views.

2.2. Housing Stigma, Neighborhood Stigma and Belonging

According to Erving Goffman (1963, p. 3), a stigma is a "deeply discrediting" attribute that renders its carriers less socially desirable and respectable than so-called regular people. Stigma is formed when certain characteristics come to be viewed by others as flawed within the context of historically and culturally specific beliefs. Mobile home residents are prone to experiencing two (of three total) kinds of stigma described by Goffman: "blemishes of individual character" and "tribal stigma" (Goffman, 1963, p. 4). These two kinds of stigma vary in the perceived origin of the discrediting attribute (personal character versus group membership) and, accordingly, in the emotions stigmatized individuals might experience—such as guilt and shame for blemishes of individual character, or humiliation and anger in the case of tribal stigma. Unlike some bodily, tribal, and associational (courtesy) stigmas (e.g., Green, Davis, Karshmer, Marsh, & Straight, 2005; Kusow, 2004), the discrediting attribute—in this case, living in a "trailer" and "trailer park"—is neither always immediately apparent, thus allowing for some degree of "passing" (Goffman, 1963, pp. 73–91), nor can it be hidden permanently from everyone, resulting in a rather complex example of housing and neighborhood stigma.

Overall, Goffman's classic conception is an important source of inspiration for studying and theorizing housing and neighborhood (or territorial) stigma today (e.g., Vassenden & Lie, 2013). Even though Goffman did not explicitly develop a spatial understanding of this form of social injustice, one could argue that "tribal" stigma, as a collective category, might conceptually contain housing and neighborhood stigma as subtypes. However, the fact remains that Goffman did not examine housing or territory as potentially stigmatizing attributes. This particular gap in Goffman's theory was recognized and filled by Loic Wacquant's (see, for instance, Wacquant, 2008a, 2008b; Wacquant, Slater, & Pereira, 2014) groundbreaking concept of "territorial stigmatization," which largely builds on the work of Pierre Bourdieu and, in difference to Goffman and his followers, emphasizes sym-

bolic power and structural inequalities over identities and emotions. The state's complicity in creating and then using the stigma against its targets is of particular interest to this new and influential approach to stigma (for detailed discussions, see Jensen & Christensen, 2012; Kirkness, 2014).

Inspired by the works of Wacquant and his colleagues, a large share of the contemporary literature on housing and neighborhood stigma is devoted to examining low-income, urban, and (typically) minority neighborhoods (for exceptions, see Allen, Powell, Casey, & Coward, 2007; Kudla & Courey, 2019; Vassenden & Lie, 2013). Overall, the literature is substantial and growing quickly internationally; it is thus too large to be fully reviewed here. One of the most vibrant strands of research on territorial stigmatization examines public (or social) housing contexts (see, for instance, Arthurson, Darcy, & Rogers, 2014; Hancock & Mooney, 2013; Hastings, 2004; Kirkness, 2014; Palmer, Ziersch, Arthurson, & Baum, 2004). Research on stigma in privately settled low-income communities also exists (see, for instance, Horgan, 2018; Jensen & Christensen, 2012). One important finding is that, contrary to Wacquant's (2008b) predominant views, targeted groups and individuals typically do not fully internalize the stigma they are exposed to but find ways to battle and overcome it, at least to some extent (e.g., Hastings, 2004; Jensen & Christensen, 2012; Kirkness, 2014). In this regard, the vast existing literature on homelessness, a severely stigmatized housing condition, offers special insights into the complex issue of managing and resisting cultural stigmatizations of certain places, materialities, identities, and conduct (see, for instance, Anderson, Snow, & Cress, 1994; Roschelle & Kaufman, 2004).

At least one recent study has confirmed that neighborhood stigma exists independent of racial stigma (Besbris, Faber, & Sharkey, 2019). Indeed, this is the case for the "trailer trash" stigma discussed in this article which is primarily aimed at whites. Unlike the cases of territorial stigma examined in Wacquant's work and in a large share of contemporary studies, the "trailer trash" stigma is not aimed at minorities, not aimed at renters (most mobile home residents are homeowners), not primarily urban or suburban, exclusive to a specific type of dwelling, virtually unchallenged in media and popular culture, and involves the state only peripherally—thus making it a very different and particularly interesting case of housing and neighborhood stigma. Due to its many differences, examinations of the "trailer trash" stigma will substantially broaden the existing literature and may even introduce new theoretical insights into this field of study.

In contrast to the above body of research, the literature specifically on the "trailer trash" stigma is small overall. Three recent books (Dunn, 2019; Salamon & MacTavish, 2017; Sullivan, 2018) on mobile home living in the United States provide some theoretical discussion and empirical coverage of how the cultural "trailer trash" stigma, besides many other structural inequalities and injustices, impacts the lives and identities of mobile home residents (see also Saatcioglu & Ozanne, 2013). Some scholars have investigated the impact of the stigma on youth and in schools (MacTavish & Salamon, 2006; Miller & Evko, 1985; Morris, 2005) and in family contexts (Edwards, 2004). In addition, autoethnographic accounts (e.g., Callahan, 2008; Dunn, 2019) offer insightful details on personal experiences with, and resistance to, this stigma. Even though incomplete and largely embedded in other academic discourses, these publications offer valuable insights that have enriched my own research and analyses.

Another key concept in this article is "belonging" which signifies the existence of a meaningful connection between a person and a particular social-spatial environment. One belongs where one is deeply familiar and comfortable with the surroundings and its people, where one fits in. A thoughtful, scholarly definition offered by Savage, Bagnall, and Longhurst (2005, p. 12) describes belonging as "[a] socially constructed, embedded process in which people reflexively judge the suitability of a given site as appropriate given their social trajectory and positions in other fields." In other words, in establishing belonging, people make judgments about their personal fit within a given setting—may it be a type of home, a neighborhood, a city, or a country. These cognitive and emotional interpretations draw on, and align with, other life experiences and identities, and are firmly embedded within larger cultural and social structural contexts, i.e., systems that provide normative views of what is deemed appropriate for whom and regulate access to social statuses (see Yuval-Davis, 2006, on the "politics" of belonging). The relatively new, but fast growing, literature on "belonging" predominantly focuses on larger geographies; only few studies of belonging at the local and neighborhood level exist to date (for recent examples, see Davis, Ghorashi, & Smets, 2018; Kusenbach, 2018; Watt & Smets, 2014). To contribute to this body of work, this article aims to link residents' varying responses to the trailer stigma with different senses of belonging (and unbelonging) in the neighborhood context, thereby connecting housing and territorial stigma with belonging.

3. Methods and Data

Research for this article was conducted between 2005 and 2010 in a total of 24 mobile home communities located in four counties (Hillsborough, Pasco, Pinellas, Polk) on the Central Gulf Coast of Florida. Following a pilot study, research conducted between 2008 and 2010 was supported by a National Science Foundation grant titled "Community Resources and Disaster Resilience in Florida Mobile Home Parks." The larger goal of the funded study was to investigate community and disaster-related issues among working and lower-middle class Florida residents living in mobile home communities. Research overall included the collection of qualitative and quantitative data sets, such as household interviews and surveys, observational fieldnotes, visual data, as well

as an analysis of United States Census data and other community level information. All components of the study were approved by the Institutional Review Board of the University of South Florida. This article is based on the analysis of 151 qualitative interviews with mobile home households that were conducted during both the pilot and funded research stages. 103 of these interviews were completed between 2008 and 2010 in four family communities in Hillsborough County in which residents owned their homes but rented a plot of land (which is the most common community type), while the rest were conducted earlier across a larger variety of communities and locations within the four-county area. Primary household participants in the interviews were sixty-eight percent white, twenty-two percent Latino, and ten percent African American, Native American, or other. Over sixty percent of primary interviewees were female, and over one third of households included children under the age of 18. Ages of primary interviewees ranged from 18 to 89. In about one fourth of the interviews, other household members—typically partners, adult children, or other family members—participated as well.

All interviews lasted between thirty minutes and two hours, with an average of over one hour. All interviews were audio-recorded and then transcribed verbatim. Five of the interviews were conducted in Spanish and later translated into English. Almost all interviews were conducted at the homes of participants; in less than a handful of cases, interviews were completed at a nearby location such as the park's clubhouse. The interview schedule included open-ended questions on four topics: personal life history and background information; mobile home living in general; community issues; and disaster experience and preparation. All names of participants and communities used in this article are pseudonyms.

Two graduate research assistants, Juan (who identifies as a male Latino) and Marc (who identifies as a male person of mixed race/ethnicity), conducted about half of all interviews, and the author (who is white and female) conducted twenty of them. The remaining interviews were completed by a diverse group of undergraduate students who had received in-depth research methods training and were supervised closely. Interview transcripts were analyzed according to the steps and principles of grounded theory analysis (Charmaz, 2014). This process involved several rounds of open (or initial) and focused coding, both manually and in the qualitative data analysis software program Dedoose, as well as writing memos. Various themes and subthemes were repeatedly grouped and regrouped until larger patterns clearly emerged.

4. Analysis

A complex picture emerged from the overall interview data regarding the issue of housing and neighborhood stigma. Many—in fact, most—mobile residents largely bypassed a discussion of the trailer stigma and told very positive stories about living in their homes and neighborhoods (Kusenbach, 2017, 2018). In contrast, other participants were clearly affected and felt that the stigma targeted and disadvantaged them in many ways, resulting in a broader variety of views regarding living in mobile homes and mobile home communities. The following analysis aims to examine these nuances in more detail and is divided into four parts. The first subsection delivers information and evidence on the particular directions and targets of the trailer stigma, in an effort to provide some helpful context for the following sections. The three main analytic subsections examine three typical responses to the stigma that were observed among low-income mobile home residents—resisting, downplaying, and perpetuating—while also discussing related consequences regarding neighborhood belonging and interaction.

4.1. Directions and Targets of the Trailer Stigma

In our study, mobile home residents of all backgrounds shared the common understanding that "trailer trash" as a stigmatizing label is primarily applied to white people. This was indicated, for instance, in researcher Marc's interview with Jane, a white woman in her fifties, following the question of whether she has ever experienced a negative reaction due to living in a mobile home:

> Jane: I kid around and say, "I'm 'trailer trash'!" I don't know [pause] no, no! [laughs]
>
> Marc: What does that mean, what does "trailer trash" mean?
>
> Jane: "Trailer trash" is kind of like "ghetto," I guess, it's similar. But it's probably white. "Trailer trash" would be white, whereas "ghetto" would be more [pause] minority groups.

Jane's impression that the label "trailer trash" applies only to white people was echoed in interviews and conversations with many other informants, including Latino/as and African Americans. The above excerpt also exemplifies humor as a universal strategy of coping with stigma that cannot be examined further in this article. Similarly, in their recent book, Salamon and MacTavish (2017, p. 122) argue that:

> For African Americans who live in trailer parks the trailer-trash slur lacks power to tarnish either the family's identity or its achievement of homeownership. In fact, these racially integrated parks informed our understanding that the stigma has a particular sting for white families but not for blacks or Hispanics.

This, of course, does not imply that African Americans and Hispanics living in mobile homes do not experience other forms of stigma and discrimination in their daily lives.

The particular racial affinity of the label "trailer trash" is revealed by its frequent combination with the historically and regionally significant insult "white trash." Analyses of the "white trash" label (e.g., Gibbons, 2004; Hartigan, 2003; Neewitz & Wray, 1997) indicate that it is most often utilized by whites in order to distance themselves from other white people who are feared and despised because of their economic and physical proximity to minority groups. According to Neewitz and Wray (1997), the (racist) stigmatization of white people as "trash" fundamentally challenges the presumed universal privilege of white racial identity. In this interpretation, in the contemporary United States, "trailer trash" and "white trash" are both serious insults because they threaten the targeted persons' membership in the privileged white racial group and imply that they are similar or equal to poor minorities at the bottom of the social order.

However, by far not all study participants who were white felt targeted or impacted by the stigma. There were many other privileging attributes and social categories that offered protection and isolation from the sting of the "trailer trash" stigma, such as residency in an age-restricted (so-called "senior") mobile home community, living in a high income neighborhood, living in a normative nuclear family household (two heterosexual parents with their own children), working full-time work in a respectable job, and full ownership of a new mobile home. In a previous article (Kusenbach, 2009), I examine the distancing strategies that were associated with these and other privileging—as opposed to stigmatizing—conditions in more detail. People with these advantageous attributes typically believed that "trailer trash" lives elsewhere but that they could not possibly be considered part of this group. There is broad support in American culture for the view that high-income neighborhoods, full-time work, good health, full home-ownership, and normative family status are deeply intertwined with moral respectability. In the eyes of many Americans, especially those who can claim them, these "virtuous" characteristics outweigh the potential blemishes associated with living in a mobile home.

But how does the trailer stigma affect those who cannot successfully distance themselves from it via the distinctions of geography, neighborhood type, family type, or other privileging memberships? What about those mobile home residents who were white, had low incomes, lived in older homes that had little value, often in less "mainstream" families and households, did not work full-time in rewarding jobs, and often struggled with illness and disability—in short, those others who, at first glance, "fit" the stereotypes that Americans typically hold regarding people who live in mobile homes and mobile home parks? What were their perceptions and responses?

4.2. Resisting the Trailer Stigma and Finding Belonging

In describing the first response of low-income white informants, I draw on the strategy of "normalizing" as proposed in Hastings' (2004) study of neighborhood stigma in the United Kingdom. Hastings (2004, p. 244) explained that even though normalizers "admitted that some residents could be problematic, they were keen to emphasize that these were in the minority." Likewise, in this study, a group of study participants who ostensibly fit the "trailer trash" image of being white, poor, and lacking stability, fought back against the validity of the stereotype in order to reclaim their own and their neighbors' respectability. They refused the idea that their current place of living reflected an inferior moral character. Due to its contrarian views and actions that, in effect, challenge the dominant beliefs, I refer to this response as "resisting" the stigma, and to members of this group as stigma "resisters."

Consider the following example in which Russ—a married white man in his fifties who lived in a low-income community—denied the stigma's accuracy. When asked how mobile home residents are shown on TV and in movies, Russ explained:

> [They show] the negative side of your "trailer trash." Mobile homes have the highest crime rate, it's where most of the murders happen….They depict mobile home parks as trashy, alcohol [filled], drug-related, only poor people live there, your ladies of the night live there. And that's nowhere close to how the majority of the mobile home parks actually are.

Another representative of this group was Arnold, a young white man in his early twenties who lived in a small mobile home that needed repairs together with his girlfriend and their infant son; a second child was on the way. Arnold also resisted the negative image of mobile homes and mobile home parks but took a more comparative approach:

> You can go to million dollar houses and still get scum from the bottom of your foot living in them! Or you can go to cheap, garbage places, like this one next door. She's got a real small place but she's an awesome woman at heart, you know what I mean? I don't look at it like that, never have, never will, 'cuz it's not right. Don't everybody get a chance to excel in life and have everything, the fame, and glory, and shit! People get screwed up in situations, got to do what they got to do to survive. It's life. It isn't a bad thing to live in a trailer park.

Arnold explained that his own, and his neighbor's, character did not correlate with their (modest) material success in life or their current place of living, and that the same was true for high income neighborhoods. He appears to say that good people can live in bad places and vice versa, thus making it wrong to judge a person's character based on outside circumstances. Some people experience challenges through no fault of their own and, as a result, must cope with living in less than ideal situations

while doing the best they can to survive. In her article, Hastings (2004, p. 245) notes that within the normalizing discourse a neighborhood's problems are explained as a "consequence of external structures and influence, rather than as resulting from the internal tendencies and characteristics of residents." A similar belief is implied in Arnold's account.

Like several other participants, in addition to defending himself against the stigma, Arnold went on the offensive as well, by downplaying the views of people who did not carry his responsibilities—such as maintaining a home and supporting a family—and looked down on mobile home residents like him:

> Of course, people always got their opinions. It's not a big deal 'cuz half of these motherfuckers that say shit, they're living with their parents! They're 24 and 25 [years old] and shit. It's like: "Dude shut up!" I'm happy, I'm happy with what I got.

It appears that, in Arnold's view, by living with their parents and depending on outside support, other young men of his age have lost the right to judge his living situation. As seen, stigma resistance can take various forms and include both defensive and offensive efforts, as well as diverting blame away from individuals.

In general, mobile home residents who utilize this form of discourse liked their neighbors and were well integrated in their community. They regularly interacted with others in the park and considered many of them to be friends. In Arnold's words:

> Everyone in here helps everybody, and everyone looks out for everybody. There was a couple of guys robbing and stealing here, but they finally got those guys out of here. But generally, everyone around here is really nice….Ain't nobody out there for themselves. You know, we help each other around here. It's just what it is, it's a neighborly thing.

As implied in this last excerpt, resisters often emphasized the high degree of community belonging and satisfaction they and many other locals experienced in their daily life. In other words, in addition to attacking the dysfunctional image of mobile home residents and communities, resisters offered alternative descriptions of positive community life that facilitated interaction, support, and belonging among neighbors—in short, they depicted functional places that were appropriate and desirable environments for decent people.

4.3. Downplaying the Trailer Stigma and Community Indifference

Another group of informants, many of them middle-aged to older men (often living alone following divorce) or couples, expressed to interviewers that the trailer stigma did not affect them in any way. They tended to downplay or ignore the negative image of their homes and neighborhoods. Consider, for instance, the following excerpt from Marc's interview with Harry and Marisa, a white couple in their forties:

> Marc: What do you believe other people think about those who live in a mobile home?
>
> Harry: I don't care.
>
> Marisa: They don't like it, oh well! [laughs]
>
> Harry: I mean, I've got friends who live in nice houses. I've got friends who live in worse places than I am. You know, it's just the person. Other than that, I don't care what they think.

Here, without denying or resisting the stigma, Harry and Marisa conveyed that whatever other people might think did not affect them in any way. Harry's second statement implies that one's place of living should not matter at all, and that his own friends were not selected based on housing but rather based on personal qualities.

In another example, Harley, a single white man in his seventies who selected his own pseudonym, expressed a similar position. He explained:

> I just don't care what people think. It doesn't matter to me what you think of me! It doesn't matter to me what you think about where I live. The only thing that matters to me is what *I* think, and *I* think I'm fine, so I don't give a shit what you think [laughs]. You know, and most people should think that way. If more people thought that way, there would be a whole lot less violence in the world.

Harley here reiterated the belief that, when matters of his own life are concerned, only his own opinions counts, and that opinions held by others were not relevant. He also implied that this kind of non-engagement with other people was a positive stance that would benefit everyone, leading to less "violence" and conflict overall.

Overall, Harry, Marisa, and Harley represent a group of participants that did not reveal much about their members' personal views of mobile home residents while consistently claiming that those views should not matter. Saying that these views were irrelevant may not have meant that they had no validity—in fact, there appeared to be a mild acceptance of the stigma—only that these participants preferred to downplay the issue and tended to deny any influence of the "trailer trash" stereotype on their lives.

As could be expected, a preference to ignore the opinions of others was often coupled with a high degree of withdrawal from engagement and social interaction with neighbors. For instance, Harry and Marisa told Marc that they did not have, nor cared to have, any friends in the park because "too many of them are into bad things."

Or consider how Larry, a single man in his seventies, described his contacts with neighbors:

> The ones that I wave to, I get along fine. The ones who want to stop and yak, I don't get along with too well….All things considered, I stay by myself, I'm perfectly happy as long as it stays that way.

While it appears that Larry was comfortable with a minimum level of interaction (waving), he disliked and avoided more focused contacts with neighbors. As in other cases, in Larry's case it remained unclear whether he simply disliked social interaction with neighbors or whether this preference was rooted in the belief his neighbors were not worth any attention (as was implied by Marisa), thereby signaling some degree of acceptance, and perhaps internalization, of the stigma.

What clearly distinguished people like Harley, Larry, Marisa, and Harry from members of the following (third) group was a basic satisfaction with their personal lives that was, however, not rooted in their participation in, and enjoyment of, the neighborhood community. These people were not seeking to move out or actively denigrate their neighbors; they did not feel a need to explain how "good" people like them had landed in a "place like this"—this lack of a defense perhaps confirming that they truly did not care. In any case, accounts by downplayers revealed that they had some sense of choice and control in their lives, and that they had achieved some degree of satisfaction regarding their living situation, coupled with a high degree of indifference toward their community and social environment.

4.4. Perpetuating the Trailer Stigma and Feeling Unbelonging

A third and final discourse in which residents engaged while responding to housing or neighborhood stigma is similar to what Hastings (2004) earlier described as "pathologizing." While I do not use the same term here but rather prefer the concept of "perpetuating" the stigma, our study confirmed that a small, yet not insubstantial, group of participants reacted to the stigma in the opposite fashion of resisters, leading to a different outcome regarding belonging. As Hastings (2004, p. 245) explained, this group believed that "the poor are to blame for their own misfortune," thereby expressing a "classic behavioural" view in contrast to the more "structural" interpretation of stigma offered by resisters.

Due to a very poor perception of their social and spatial environment, mobile home residents in this category—many of whom were women heading single-parent families—struggled considerably with their current living situation. Because they fully accepted the validity of the "trailer trash" stigma and believed that it was a correct depiction of their community, they did not attempt to distinguish between image and reality.

For instance, Myrtle, a woman in her forties who lived in a blended family with two teens, told researcher Marc during the interview:

> Myrtle: I don't like living in mobile home parks.
>
> Marc: Why is that?
>
> Myrtle: Well, because you live too close, trailer park drama.
>
> Marc: How would you describe this park?
>
> Myrtle: You work for it, or are you affiliated with *Happy Place* mobile home park in any way? [laughs]
>
> Marc: No, no, this is anonymous research.
>
> Myrtle: I hate this park! I hate, hate, hate it!
>
> Marc: What do you like best about living here?
>
> Myrtle: Nothing! There's nothing positive about this place.

Here, after making sure that Marc was not affiliated with the park owners or managers, Myrtle admitted "hating" her community due to the "trailer park drama" that is typically found in such places, thus implying that she believed in the accuracy of the stigma.

Other participants were even more outspoken—for instance Betty, a single mother in her thirties who lived with her four children and her oldest daughter's baby in a crowded mobile home:

> I think, really, the biggest mistake I have ever made in my life was moving into this park….When I saw it, you know, it looked nice. And it looked clean, so I thought it wouldn't be like living in a trailer park, you know. I thought it'd be a better place [pause] it's not. It's just like any other trailer park! It's full of trailer trash.

Betty strongly regretted moving into her community due to the, in her opinion, low quality of fellow residents, something that surprised her because she had not expected it based on the "clean" look of the park. This is one of the few examples in our entire study in which the insult "trailer trash" was used by a mobile home resident to denigrate her neighbors directly. Betty confirmed the accuracy and appropriateness of the stereotype, a response that could be described as perpetuating the stigma.

In general, what characterized the third group of residents is a strong dislike for both one's particular community as well as mobile home parks in general. Both actual and typical residents were described as "low class" or "low quality" people, "riff-raff" or even "trash," as seen above. In some cases, these judgements were backed up

by accounts of personal experiences that involved verbal conflicts, violence, drugs, theft, and other problems. In all of these stories, other residents were depicted as inferior and blamed as culprits, making them classic instances of "othering."

Importantly, participants in this last group did not consider themselves to be typical mobile home residents but rather "good" people who were only living in a "bad" place due to some kind of mistake or outside force, such as an evil former partner, a bad parent, or someone else's misdeeds. One interviewee explained: "These people are trailer dwellers, you know. I'm just out of place in a time warp living here." Due to their conceived lack of fit and a very low opinion of nearby others, it is not surprising that these residents had, and sought, very few contacts with their neighbors, and that they did not participate in neighborly social activities. A strong sense of unbelonging and social distance characterized their accounts, contrasting both the high level of neighborhood belonging displayed by resisters and the more neutral sense of place satisfaction shown by downplayers. As indicated, a final feature of this discourse is a profound feeling of victimhood and passivity, of being "stuck" in a terrible place that one cannot escape. What united Myrtle, Betty, and others was their strong desire (yet inability) to move out as soon as possible and find a social environment they considered to be more "appropriate" for themselves, away from "those" people the vast majority of whom they despised.

To offer a final observation on the three examined responses, it was interesting to note that varying reactions to stigma could be combined by individuals to a degree—as in the case of downplayers and perpetuators who both did not challenge the stigma—and also change over time, typically in the direction from perpetuating toward resisting. Consider, for instance, the following story told by Ruth, a white woman in her thirties who shared a home with her husband and two children:

> I guess my thoughts have been kind of evolving about it. Honestly, when I first moved in here, I had kind of a snobby attitude. I thought "these are all trailer people, I'm not like them!"….I guess the longer I'm here, the more I think "you know, these are all people," and, "you know, we're all just people," and it's where we live, so! [laughs] That's how I think about it now. I was embarrassed to tell people what we decided to do, even though my husband thought it was the right thing for us to do, to move here.

Ruth described how she "evolved" from disliking her community and looking down on her neighbors to valuing her neighborhood and developing a sense of belonging. During her journey of becoming a resister, over time, Ruth learned that the cultural stereotypes that initially had made her feel "embarrassed" were undeserved and needed to be challenged, signaling a growing sense of agency and control over her life.

5. Conclusion

This study confirms a finding observed in some of the previous relevant literature, namely that a full understanding of housing and territorial stigma must account for "the agency of the urban poor" (Jensen & Christensen, 2012, p. 90), in addition to a consideration of social, structural, and political forces. Even when desirable social memberships are absent or fail to protect people from cultural stigmatization and social discrimination, some members of stigmatized groups manage to mobilize defenses that not only prevent self-stigmatization yet appear to facilitate the development of positive personal identities and senses of belonging. As other scholars have shown (Hastings, 2004; Kirkness, 2014), resistance to housing and territorial stigma is as possible as it is common—however, it is not universal, as some stigmatized people seem to fully or partially legitimate negative stereotypes in their own treatment of others. Even though there are some demographic and situational similarities within the various subgroups, there are also considerable differences (for instance in age, gender, family status, and resources), making it difficult, if not impossible, to predict which mobile home residents develop views and actions that undermine mainstream cultural stereotypes and which ones do not. In the future, I suggest that more research will need to be devoted to exactly how strategies of stigma resistance develop on the ground, and which exact background and situational factors foster these alternative responses. I believe that both current theoretical strands of stigma research—interaction and identity-focused research drawing on Goffman, and structure and conflict-focused research building on the works of Bourdieu and Wacquant—are needed to fully understand stigma and stigmatization as part of our effort to, ultimately, develop and support successful strategies of destigmatization.

Further, in this article, I have attempted to connect research on housing and territorial stigma with the emerging multilevel and multidisciplinary discourse of belonging. In the limited space available, I have not been able to go into much detail in this regard beyond scratching the surface, nor make meaningful connections to related discussions of home and, more generally, place. Much more work remains to be done in the future to describe the connections between stigma and belonging across a larger variety of settings, in order to bring together these two vibrant and innovative areas of study, as well as develop constructive exchanges with other discourses in the study of cities, places, migration, politics, and emotions.

Lastly, my article shows that housing and territorial stigma can impact members of social groups that are typically associated with structural positions of power and privilege, such as whiteness, native citizenship, heterosexuality, mainstream family values, and even homeownership. Likewise, it shows that not all instances of housing and territorial stigma involve the state or related insti-

tutions as central agents. Past research on housing and territorial stigma appears to have, somewhat narrowly, prioritized research on public housing, minority communities, contexts of migration, and impoverished urban neighborhoods in particular. It is time to broaden this focus and strategically examine different locations and types of communities, and undertake new comparisons, in the hope that this will help us develop more differentiated theories of housing and territorial stigma that do not conflate this particular form of injustice with other structural inequalities yet recognize it as a distinct and complex form of othering and discrimination in contemporary global societies.

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Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interests.

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