

## Moving Up versus Moving Out: Neighborhood Effects in Housing Mobility Programs

Xavier de Souza Briggs  
*Harvard University*

### *Abstract*

This article suggests ways to better design, conduct, and interpret evaluations of the effects of housing mobility programs on participants, with emphasis on how to isolate neighborhood effects. It reviews earlier critiques of neighborhood effects research and discusses the key assumptions of housing mobility programs—about the benefits of affluent neighbors, the spatial organization of opportunity for the urban poor, and the meanings of “neighborhood” to residents, researchers, and policy makers.

Studying mobility contexts, especially in suburban areas, offers special challenges to researchers. More research is needed that looks at residents’ social ties and uses mixed-methods approaches. Ethnographic data, in particular, would enhance the validity of the quantitative data that now dominate studies of neighborhood effects. Adding substantially to what we know about the processes or mechanisms—the “how” of neighborhood effects—mixed-methods approaches would also make research much more useful to policy makers and program managers.

**Keywords:** Housing; Mobility; Neighborhood

### **Introduction**

I heard the news first in a phone call from my mother. My youngest brother, Robby, and two of his friends had killed a man during a holdup. Robby was a fugitive, wanted for armed robbery and murder. The police were hunting him, and his crime had given the cops license to kill. The distance I’d put between my brother’s world and mine suddenly collapsed.... I could never run fast enough or far enough. Wherever he was, running for his life, he carried part of me with him.

Wideman, *Brothers and Keepers* (1984)

Wideman’s autobiographical account of two extraordinarily different lives—his own as a college professor and prize-winning novelist and his brother’s as a convict sentenced to life

imprisonment—highlights critical questions for policy makers and researchers: Can a change of neighborhood “rescue” the life chances of an individual or family? If so, how? In Wideman’s case, a new childhood neighborhood was the call to be studious and successful; to his brother, the same new neighborhood was a boring netherland. Wideman’s brother Robby kept his gaze and social ties fixed on the prior, riskier neighborhood that their family had left behind. And so the brothers’ lives diverged.

This article critically examines how evaluations of housing mobility programs should be conducted and interpreted and emphasizes how to isolate neighborhood effects on program participants. It reviews neighborhood effects research, both methods and findings, and discusses the key assumptions of most housing mobility programs—assumptions about the benefits to poor people of having more affluent neighbors, the spatial organization of opportunity for the urban poor, and the meaning of “neighborhood” to residents, researchers, and policy makers.

Unlike place-based community development efforts, which aim to revitalize poor neighborhoods, mobility programs enable low-income, mostly nonwhite families to leave high-poverty, mostly nonwhite neighborhoods and move to higher-income and often more racially integrated neighborhoods. Advocates for such “seeding” of poor households in nonpoor areas have listed numerous potential benefits, including access to better jobs and schools, reduced fear of crime, greater residential satisfaction among the poor, and enrichment of the lives of white, middle-class residents through exposure to more diverse populations (Burby and Rohe 1989; Downs 1973; Kain 1968; Rosenbaum 1991, 1995). Current programs include tenant-based mobility programs, such as the widely known Gautreaux program in Chicago (which provides Section 8 rental subsidies to low-income residents of public housing who move to privately owned units in new neighborhoods), and unit-based mobility programs, such as the scattered-site public housing built under court order in Yonkers, NY (Peterson and Williams 1994; U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development [HUD] 1994). A growing number of localities, some under court order, are experimenting with housing mobility. Some of these offer new “mobility counseling” within standard Section 8 programs. Although the high-profile programs are newer, the scattered-site public housing approach itself is almost 30 years old (HUD 1996).

The belief that housing mobility programs will promote the education and employment outcomes of low-income families led

the Bush administration to authorize and the Clinton administration to launch the Moving to Opportunity (MTO) demonstration, a tenant-mobility program in five cities (Gallagher 1994; HUD 1994). Hopes for MTO were largely based on studies of Gautreaux, which found better education outcomes for the children of suburban movers and modest job gains by their parents when compared with a matched group of city movers (see Rosenbaum 1991, 1995; Rosenbaum and Popkin 1991). Given the paucity of empirical data on housing mobility nationwide, and given the fact that some surveyed Gautreaux participants (hereafter, “movers”) wanted to return to their prior (high-poverty) neighborhoods (Lord and Rent 1987),<sup>1</sup> it is encouraging that HUD has also funded a large-scale evaluation of MTO.<sup>2</sup> This article seeks to enrich our understanding of how such evaluative research should be carried out and interpreted. It is as much about the “how” of neighborhood effects—that is, the mechanisms and processes—as about the “what”—the hoped-for social outcomes themselves.

One critical task of this article is to suggest ways to pinpoint the true effects of neighborhoods, apart from the effects of families or social networks, in lieu of elaborate experimental designs (as part of small-scale studies of a few housing complexes, for example). A second, more general task is to remind researchers, policy makers, and program managers that geographic proximity does not a neighbor make—at least not in the social sense. Housing mobility programs that place very low income families in new

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<sup>1</sup> In the early years, up to one-third of surveyed respondents wanted to move back, though later studies reported much higher levels of resident satisfaction (HUD 1996; Rosenbaum 1995). The 33 percent nonresponse rate for the 1988 Gautreaux survey may have biased downward the desire-to-return figure reported in Rosenbaum’s later studies. In addition, Lord and Rent (1987) indicate that 18 percent of Gautreaux respondents dropped out of the program altogether, some because their earnings made them ineligible for the housing subsidies and others for unknown reasons (poor recordkeeping by local housing authorities made tracking of the dropouts impossible). If movers in the five cities for which we have data (Chicago, Cleveland, Cincinnati, Dallas, and Durham: see Rosenbaum and Popkin 1991; Chandler 1991; Fischer 1991; Stacey, Brown, and Coder 1988; and Burby and Rohe 1989, respectively) like their new housing and neighborhoods, then, at least on balance, other movers seem to adjust poorly. They may fear or suffer discrimination and social isolation from important sources of support (McGrew 1981). Until MTO, Yonkers, and other research efforts mature and report, we will lack data on why and how.

<sup>2</sup> The MTO evaluation will track three randomly selected groups of Section 8-eligible households each year for 10 years: movers to nonpoor census tracts, movers who choose their new housing units without neighborhood constraint or counseling, and those who remain in place.

neighborhoods, often forcing them to navigate across wide lines of race and class, and that reshape connections to prior neighborhoods, generate real challenges to those who would understand whether and how the new neighborhoods, per se are having positive effects on the families. I am part of a multidisciplinary team researching Yonkers' mobility program, and I will use that research effort, along with the team's findings on early impacts of the program, to illustrate key ideas.<sup>3</sup>

After describing recent trends in research on neighborhoods, I question central, and often unstated, assumptions about the origins of mobility effects, elaborating on one central assumption: how residents, as opposed to researchers and policy makers, define their neighborhoods. The next section reviews key research findings on neighborhood effects, with an emphasis on how key lessons from a broad and methodologically uneven research domain may be applied to understand the effects of housing mobility. A brief conclusion distills key lessons for evaluators and for those who must read and interpret evaluations of housing mobility.

## **Recent trends in research on neighborhoods and opportunity**

Studies of the potential effects of neighborhoods on human behavior and social attainment have a long history in social science. The Chicago School (see, e.g., Shaw 1929) inspired scores of researchers to uncover those qualities of the collective—be it a school, neighborhood, or other unit—that might predict criminal behavior, achievement orientation, attachment to the world of work, and other phenomena. Early community studies (such as Whyte 1943) uncovered distinctive patterns of social organization and suggested effects on social attainment, in particular neighborhood settings. Defined broadly as studies of social ecology, this research has spanned the disciplines, from sociology (Briggs 1996; Gans 1962; Sampson 1992; Sampson and Laub 1994; Shaw 1929; Whyte 1943) and psychology (Bronfenbrenner 1989; Brooks-Gunn et al. 1993) to anthropology

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<sup>3</sup> Our projected 10–15-year study was launched in 1993 with funding from the Ford Foundation. It includes researchers at Columbia, Harvard, and Michigan State Universities. See findings on early impacts on participants in Briggs (1996) and on impacts on receiving neighborhoods in Darden and colleagues (1994) and Briggs and Darden (1996). Forthcoming reports will extend these analyses and will discuss impacts on citywide politics and race and ethnic relations.

(Lewis 1966; Sullivan 1989) and economics (Case and Katz 1991).

Recent concerns about the loss of central-city jobs and the creation of a socially and economically isolated “underclass” (see Anderson 1991, 1994; Gans 1990; Jencks 1991, 1992; Jencks and Mayer 1990; Kasarda 1992; Massey and Denton 1994; Wilson 1987) have motivated new, more quantitatively sophisticated studies of how neighborhoods influence such diverse outcomes as school completion and early childbearing (Crane 1991); delinquent behavior, social capital, and early career development (Briggs 1996); sexual activity (Brewster, Billy, and Grady 1993); teen childbearing (Brooks-Gunn et al. 1993); and child cognitive development (Brooks-Gunn et al. 1993; Entwisle, Alexander, and Olson 1994). Of special concern is the high rate of youth-on-youth homicide in many urban areas and how this rate may be tied to a “code of the streets”—an alternative code of conduct developed by young people in high-poverty, racially segregated neighborhoods who feel isolated from mainstream opportunities to earn respect (Anderson 1994).

Efforts to reconcile the personal and structural elements of opportunity have led to helpful frameworks for thinking about the “geography of opportunity” in urban areas (Galster and Killen 1995). Evidence on patterns of residential mobility (as distinct from studies of mobility programs) indicates that poor areas turn over quite rapidly, losing or gaining as much as 20 percent of their population in a single year, although the overall change of socioeconomic indicators in those areas may appear to be slow (Gramlich, Laren, and Sealand 1992). A recent study (South and Crowder 1997) emphasizes the importance of human capital (especially gains in educational attainment) and of life events (loss of job, divorce) in movements into and out of poor neighborhoods. It also suggests that African Americans are much less likely than whites to escape poor areas, even after socioeconomic status is controlled, and that increased citywide segregation by race and poverty status makes such escapes, by any racial or ethnic group, less likely.

The current debates over what effects high-poverty neighborhoods really have, and whether and how to respond to those effects through housing policy, must be considered in light of widespread cynicism about poverty programs and the public belief that ghetto neighborhoods are cages of pathology. From conservative to liberal, many believe that long-term joblessness and school failure, for example, are as much about the self-destructive “culture of poverty” (Lewis 1966, 1968) that

supposedly predominates in certain inner-city neighborhoods as about societal neglect or structural inequality. Some suggest that the rush to phase out guaranteed Aid to Families with Dependent Children payments are partly a reflection of such beliefs. Concerns about the association between self-sufficiency and motivation have led some scholars to discourage use of the word “underclass.” As Gans (1990) observes:

When Gunnar Myrdal invented or reinvented the term “underclass” in his 1962 book *Challenge to Affluence*, he used the word as a purely economic concept, to describe the chronically unemployed, underemployed, and underemployables being created by what we now call the postindustrial economy. He was thinking of people being driven to the margins, or entirely out, of the modern economy ... but his intellectual and policy concern was with reforming that economy, not with changing or punishing the people who were its victims.... Those who use underclass as a euphemism for the undeserving poor should instead talk and write about the undeserving poor, so that their political stand is explicit. The rest of us ought to analyze joblessness and poverty—particularly the persistent varieties—and then study their causes and effects. (pp. 271, 276)

As for the neighborhood element of these causes and effects, Aber (1993), in a report to the Social Science Research Council’s Working Group in Neighborhood Effects, calls the existing base of empirical research in this area “emergent,” adding that “the really important program and policy issues regarding family and community poverty and human development require a whole new generation of studies that we are just learning to design and conduct” (pp. 13–14). Aber emphasizes that, to date, few researchers have adequately distinguished direct neighborhood effects from the effects mediated by family, nonlocal friendship networks, or other factors—a point echoed by Brooks-Gunn and colleagues (1993) and Jencks and Mayer (1990). Apart from the widely cited Gautreaux research, local studies of families who change neighborhoods through housing mobility programs (e.g., Chandler 1991) generally lack a control group to mitigate potential selection effects. In such studies, positive outcomes may result from the individual or family-level strengths of the “upwardly mobile poor” and not from the neighborhoods to which the families move. Without expensive random assignment experiments, selection effects are difficult to mitigate. But even where experimental designs are impossible, housing mobility

programs represent special and, to a great extent, undervalued windows on these complex and important issues.

## **Questioning key assumptions**

We need more and better research on the effects of neighborhoods on human beings, and of changing neighborhoods in particular, in part because of our unexamined assumptions about why housing mobility effects should appear. Three types of assumptions are especially problematic: (1) the benefits to poor people of having more affluent neighbors; (2) where “opportunity,” from the perspective of the urban poor, is to be found; and (3) how people living in neighborhoods define those neighborhoods, as opposed to how researchers and planners may do so.

### *Benefits of more affluent neighbors*

Housing mobility programs are fundamentally based on the assumption that having more affluent neighbors will benefit poor people, either directly or indirectly. In their review of studies of the effects of neighborhoods on a variety of behavioral phenomena and social outcomes, Jencks and Mayer (1990) identified five conceptual models, not so much discrete theories as broad frameworks that suggest how such benefits may be conferred. A critical look at these models will suggest how vague and untested our assumptions may be:

1. Contagion theories, which focus on how peers (of whatever age) spread problem behavior and attitudes
2. Collective socialization, which emphasizes adult monitoring and role-model effects
3. Competition theories, in which those who share a neighborhood must compete for scarce resources, with the more affluent better placed to take advantage of them
4. Relative deprivation or social comparison models, which predict that individuals will assess their situation—such as joblessness—relative to those around them
5. Institutional models, which emphasize how the quality of services and facilities (e.g., schools, parks, police) depends on neighborhood affluence

The first two and the last would generally predict positive effects from having more affluent and higher-status neighbors, the third would predict at least some negative effects, and the effects of the fourth might be largely household-specific. The first four assume a degree of meaningful contact among neighbors. In the context of housing mobility—and particularly where physical design or extreme differences in race, class, or culture act as barriers—this assumption of social contact is quite heroic and unfounded, at least according to the empirical evidence on neighboring and community participation (Briggs 1996; Fava 1958; Fischer 1977, 1982; Gans 1967; Greenbaum and Greenbaum 1985; Tienda 1991).

With data on local institutions (including service quality and access) and on social interaction in hand, researchers may ask a variety of key questions: Are movers equally exposed or susceptible to “contagions” (whether positive or negative) in their new neighborhoods? Are those who move to higher-income neighborhoods exposed to *new* contagions—higher drug use among more affluent (but equally rebellious) school peers, for example? Our public conversation about policy and research in this area seldom considers this side of peer influence. Also, to what degree are effective monitoring and role modeling predicted by local neighborhood of residence (i.e., spatially defined) as opposed to nonlocal networks of kin? That is, whatever the census may suggest about aggregate income or occupational status in a higher- or lower-income neighborhood, who is actually monitoring whose kids?

Other unanswered questions concern the nature of competition and cooperation in neighborhoods. In what contexts might poor residents be set back by moves that provide few new concrete opportunities in exchange for heightened competition with hostile neighbors and weakened social support systems? For decades, researchers have pointed to the importance of ethnic and other ties in creating networks of social support, which often depend on close, everyday contacts with similarly situated individuals and families (Fernandez and Harris 1992; Mitchell 1969; Model 1993; Stack 1974; Williams and Kornblum 1994). In some new neighborhood contexts, housing mobility programs may actually leave the poor with less of this support dimension of social capital—the kinds of social resources that help individuals and families get by or cope with chronic poverty. The same programs may leave the same people with more of *other* types of social capital, including “social leverage”—social resources that help change people’s life chances or help them get ahead (Briggs 1996).



Finally, assumptions about the importance of social comparison (of judging one's efforts and attainment relative to those around one) must consider whom the poor, in various social-spatial contexts, consider the relevant comparison group to be. Is it any neighbor, or only those with whom the new in-mover feels some racial, ethnic, or other identification? It seems likely that the truth lies between these extremes and varies with both the degree and type of social contact and with individual beliefs about the importance of race and class for one's social attainment. In her pathbreaking study of student attitudes toward the value of educational achievement, Mickelson (1990) found that black adolescents' abstract attitudes—for example, adherence to the statement “education is the key to success in the future”—largely matched those of their white peers. It was black youth's *concrete* attitudes—for example, agreeing with the notion that “people in my family have not been treated fairly no matter how much education they have”—that diverged substantially from those of whites.

Two of Mickelson's findings are especially noteworthy for our discussion here. First, there was little class variation in black attitudes. Second, it was the contrast in concrete attitudes that explained much of the racial gap in educational achievement, suggesting that blacks begin early in life to contextualize American pieties about the rewards of individual effort—setting them in a context they have learned from parents, peers, and other significant social influences. Like the other causal models outlined above, social comparison theories demand in-depth qualitative research—or a good deal of skepticism until such research can be funded and conducted.

In general, a model-based approach to assessing the benefits to the urban poor of having more affluent neighbors suggests three things: (1) There may be costs as well as benefits; (2) some effects will depend highly on social contact with new, different neighbors while others will not; and (3) a variety of data (both qualitative and quantitative) are needed on several important levels or domains (individual, family, neighborhood, school). A fourth, more implicit suggestion is that we badly need views of these social processes as they unfold over time.

### *Assumptions about where “opportunity” lies for the urban poor*

The second fundamental assumption on which much of the faith in housing mobility is grounded is the assumption that

opportunity for poor people in urban areas has moved out of most central cities to the suburbs, overseas, or somewhere else outside of the urban core, creating a “spatial mismatch.”<sup>4</sup> Although the potential importance of superior services in more affluent neighborhoods is widely acknowledged (in particular of better schools as a way to improve the life chances of young movers—see, e.g., Peterson and Williams 1994; Rosenbaum 1995; Rosenbaum and Popkin 1991),<sup>5</sup> employment gains for adult heads of household are the critical near-term indicator of better opportunity. This is especially true in the current era of welfare reform. Having noted the potentially life-changing benefits of better schools for young movers, this section will focus on potential job gains for mover parents.

While the movement of jobs away from the inner city is well documented, especially for northeastern cities losing high-wage manufacturing jobs (see, e.g., Kasarda 1992; Wilson 1987), the simple assumption that opportunity for the urban poor has also moved outward seems problematic for at least two reasons. First, it is not clear that inner-city residents can readily access or retain the good jobs being created elsewhere, even if they are able to move closer to them. Many suffer discrimination; lack the necessary skills, adequate transportation, or well-placed contacts; or are held back by some combination of these factors. The Gautreaux findings are instructive. Controlling for educational attainment and other factors, Rosenbaum and Popkin (1991) found that low-income residents participating in the Gautreaux

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<sup>4</sup> A detailed discussion of the extensive spatial mismatch debate is beyond the scope of this article. For reference, a variety of studies have essentially upheld Kain’s (1968) original argument about the mismatch between blacks’ housing locations and metropolitan job growth (see Straszheim 1980; review in Holzer 1991; review in Hughes and Madden 1991). Others suggest that it is race, not space, that matters most for job outcomes (see Ellwood 1986 and Kasinitz and Rosenberg 1996 on the importance of social isolation from ethnic job niches), that race and space interact in powerful ways to influence hiring decisions (Kirschenman and Neckerman 1991), or that jobs and housing “co-locate” gradually to maintain equilibrium, despite racial discrimination and other barriers (Cervero 1966; Gordon, Richardson, and Jun 1991).

<sup>5</sup> These improvements will not likely come without some near-term strains, especially for adolescent children. As Rosenbaum (1995) notes, young suburban Gautreaux movers who were honor students in their central-city Chicago schools were often found to be reading below grade level in the more demanding schools of Chicago’s suburban districts. These students generally caught up after a year or two and were more likely than urban movers to attend college. Fischer (1991) found no differences between young city and suburban movers participating in Cincinnati’s Special Mobility Program; as in Yonkers, districtwide desegregation appeared to have equalized standards among schools in Cincinnati.

program who had moved to the suburbs were more likely to be holding jobs than their counterpart city movers, but that among the job holders in the survey, suburban wages were no higher than those in the city. Also, Gautreaux respondents reported lack of skills, lack of transportation, and racism as job obstacles (no formal data on job networks were collected).

Several kinds of mismatch may be confounded. Much recent metropolitan job growth is in the service sector (Bluestone and Harrison 1982; Cervero 1996), but skill requirements are considerable for higher-income service sector jobs—the kind with wages comparable to those of the factory jobs that once predominated in many large cities (Wilson 1987). Kirschenman and Neckerman (1991), in a study of Chicago-area employers, found that race and neighborhood of residence were often used as proxies for, and were even equated with, worker productivity, motivation, and dependability. Employers openly acknowledged the variety of skills tests, personal references, and “folk theories” they used to screen out inner-city job applicants. Kasinitz and Rosenberg (1996), in an ethnographic study of Red Hook, Brooklyn, found that the ethnic organization of unions—that is, social isolation and discrimination—and not physical distance barred the poor, mostly African-American residents of a nearby public housing complex from high-wage maritime jobs.<sup>6</sup> Newman and Lennon (1995) report similar findings for job seekers in the low-wage service sector in Harlem: Being poor and native-born black were bad characteristics from a job-getting standpoint, and being local to the neighborhood made matters worse.

It is fair to ask, then, whether the kinds of opportunities that the urban poor, especially single parents of color, will access from their new neighborhoods are substantially better (from the standpoint of supporting a family) than those they could access from the old neighborhoods. New neighborhoods may provide better access to equally “bad” jobs, reducing dependency on public assistance—certainly a desirable interim outcome—but leaving heads of household without health and other benefits, job security, and career ladders.

Research on the effects of job training and placement on chronically poor and welfare-dependent families has revealed a complex continuum of readiness for the world of work and a variety of pathways out of welfare dependence (Edin 1994; Herr, Halpern, and Conrad 1991). We should think about these

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<sup>6</sup> Such dense, and in this case exclusionary, social networks clearly demonstrate the potential downside of social capital.

pathways in studying the effects of housing mobility. Housing mobility programs may have greater effects on job readiness (including motivation and market information) than on job holding or job advancement. That is, one important effect in some contexts may be that the jobless poor are motivated by their new, more affluent neighbors in ways that they were not by earlier, poorer ones—not that the labor market per se is substantially different beyond the entry level. Rosenbaum and Popkin (1991) found that many suburban Gautreaux movers reported greater motivation to get jobs and training in their new neighborhoods, suggesting elements of positive social comparison (Jencks and Mayer 1990). Still, some of these changes rely on social, psychological, and other processes that will take time to mature. As Peterson and Williams (1994) note in their summary comments on the potential of housing mobility as an antipoverty strategy:

Physical access to jobs appears to have some impact on short-term employment, but the principal effects of location are likely to take longer to reveal themselves if they work through the intermediation of schooling, training, and advancement through career ladders. (p. 9)

A “thick description” (Geertz 1973) of job attitudes, job-search behaviors, and experiences on the job will be needed to shed light on these processes. It will take time and, ideally, both in-depth interviewing and firsthand observation to see and to understand these behaviors in ways that are meaningful for policy and program design.

The second problem with broad assumptions about the organization of opportunity for the urban poor is that metropolitan areas vary widely in the spatial particulars of restructuring. As Harris (1991) found in an extensive analysis of economic shifts in greater New York, jobs, households, and investment were redistributed during the past two decades in ways that defy simple models of outward movement:

The United States city in the postwar period has been likened to a ring donut, with a hole of poverty in the middle. In New York, the *poverty is being displaced outward* as a core of affluence grows. (p. 150; emphasis added)

A simple comparison will illustrate how significant this finding may be for research on the effects on poor adults of switching

neighborhoods. Based on Harris's analysis and on city economic development data (City of Yonkers 1993), Yonkers, NY, might be characterized as a declining, inner-ring industrial suburb of greater New York. In New York's regional economy, then, Yonkers is not likely to be an "opportunity generator," even of entry-level jobs, in the way that Chicago's suburbs appear to be for Gautreaux participants. Moreover, while much job growth has occurred along the commercial strip in East Yonkers, where scattered-site public housing was built, the fastest local growth in high-wage jobs has been in the Economic Development Zone and port area, both in southwest Yonkers—close to the very neighborhoods that people moving to the scattered sites left behind.<sup>7</sup>

Changes in the spatial organization of jobs appear to be driven by a variety of interrelated factors, including the nature of an area's historical industrial base, its competitive niche (or lack thereof) in a globalizing economy, its labor force makeup, and its political leadership (Bluestone and Harrison 1982; Galster and Mincy 1993; Peterson and Williams 1994; Sassen 1991). These differential changes hold at least two implications for research on housing mobility. First, because of regional variance in job movement, and not only because of higher skill requirements or discrimination, low-income residents may not access a better or different labor market when they move to higher-income neighborhoods, particularly when their moves are proximate. In a study of public-housing deconcentration in Durham, NC, for example, Burby and Rohe (1989) found that leaving inner-city housing projects led to reduced fear of crime but *greater* overall isolation from job opportunities.

The second implication of the reordering of jobs across space is that the residents of "host" neighborhoods may not be rolling in opportunity themselves. This is significant if it shapes social interaction between in-movers and longer-term residents—the key to several of the frameworks of neighborhood effects described earlier.<sup>8</sup> One hopes that the geographic range of MTO

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<sup>7</sup> The Enhanced Section 8 Program, the result of a second desegregation case in Yonkers, allows eligible households to move from mostly minority, high-poverty neighborhoods of southwest Yonkers beyond the city border to low-poverty areas of Westchester County (U.S. District Court 1993). Although no empirical data are available on job search by or job availability for these Section 8 households, that program may present different job opportunities to poor single parents than scattered-site public housing in Yonkers.

<sup>8</sup> While the "downward mobility" of middle-class Americans is a rediscovered topic for social researchers (see, for example, Newman 1988), considerable evidence exists that class threat, and not just racial animus, predicts attitudes toward neighborhood change. Downward mobility, whether real or perceived,

moves will allow researchers of that program to generate helpful insights on both issues.

### *Assumptions about how neighborhoods are defined*

Researchers and policy makers often assume that their definitions of neighborhoods are close enough to the definitions of neighborhood residents to make sense of the data gathered and to base important decisions on these data. While necessary to some extent, this simplifying assumption is unlikely to hold across all outcomes of interest (e.g., job getting, child rearing, school leaving). “Neighborhood” is both a social and spatial concept. A family’s working sense of neighborhood for shopping needs may differ from its understanding of neighborhood in terms of child care or recreation. For a second family, living next door, these “functional neighborhoods” (Gans 1967) for each social need may differ yet again.

Earlier in this section, I argued not that faith in housing mobility effects is unfounded, but only that we have been premature in our assumptions about the variety of mechanisms that may underlie them. This premature judgment is worrisome, given the difficulty of implementing mobility programs of scale, for as Jencks (1992) has observed, some of social policy’s greatest failures are owed to the flaws in policy makers’ and society’s unexamined assumptions about the nature of human behavior.

*Defining neighborhoods: Social and spatial aspects.* Any study of the effects of neighborhoods on human behavior and social

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may therefore drive the hostility that host-neighborhood residents express toward their new, lower-income (and often dark-skinned) neighbors and the political resistance (“NIMBY”, or “not in my backyard”) they express to their elected officials. Rieder (1985), for example, found tense expressions of territoriality, and he related them to widely shared feelings of economic insecurity, in his ethnography of Canarsie, a Brooklyn neighborhood that underwent racial and socioeconomic change in the 1970s. Gans (1967) found that a widely shared and spatially concentrated sense of status threat helped to explain why the first Levittown community fiercely resisted racial integration, while the second, where families who felt such a threat were dispersed, showed different responses. Finally, preliminary findings of our study of Yonkers’s controversial public housing mobility program indicate that opposition to public housing in largely white, middle-income neighborhoods is related not only to racial animus but to class-oriented beliefs about the poor in-movers (Darden et al. 1994). Response to local scattered-site housing complexes appears to vary widely according to the scale and visibility of the housing, the prevalence of media coverage of the program, and details of the local housing market (HUD 1996). A key distinction exists between single-family homes acquired by local public housing authorities and complexes, even small ones, that are identifiable as subsidized housing (see also Chandler 1991).

attainment must begin with a clear definition of the study area: What is considered “the neighborhood”? Crane (1991) observes: “The concept of a neighborhood is a little like the concept of obscenity; it is hard to define but most people know it when they see it” (p. 316).

The fact is, however, that definitions of any particular neighborhood, over and above definitions of the concept generally, appear to vary widely. In agencies, spatial definitions simplify the assessment of needs and the allocation and delivery of services; these create “statistical neighborhoods” (Tienda 1991). But for those who live in the neighborhoods, or those who would study them, social definitions are more important, especially if the aim is to isolate mechanisms for the transmission of “true” neighborhood effects, many of which depend on social interaction with neighbors.

*Social interaction in neighborhoods.* Tienda (1991) has outlined some of the dangers of confusing spatial proximity with social interaction. She notes, in particular, the causal primacy of the latter and the likelihood that typical measures of neighborhood context (e.g., poverty level or median family income) will obscure the heterogeneity that is crucial to how neighborhoods work in the social-interactive sense:

Spatial proximity may be a necessary condition for producing neighborhood effects, but interaction patterns are sufficient. Physical contiguity per se might activate “demonstration effects,” for example, but these will depend on the social ecology of the neighborhood and on whether individuals come into contact with one another.... That physical contiguity does not guarantee the existence of social cohesion is easy to appreciate in a highly segregated context where income segregation cross-cuts administrative boundaries or the micro-units of census geography. Chicago provides a good example because several census tracts are so highly differentiated in their income structure ... that neighborhood characterizations based on measures of central tendency would portray the prevalence of neither wealthy nor poor families. This ... underscores the importance of [also] considering measures of dispersion. (pp. 247–48)

But heterogeneity is more than a methodological hurdle for researchers to clear, since, as noted above, higher-income neighborhoods may confer benefits on low-income families through the more affluent institutions such neighborhoods

generally enjoy—and not primarily through direct contact between neighbors. That is, it may be the better schools, police protection, youth centers, and other services that constitute a “move to opportunity”—at least for young movers—and not primarily the availability of better jobs or more prosocial “normative climates,” which defy easy measurement (see below).

Still, the concentration of families who share a choice of neighborhood may create informal resources, including the social capital based on dense ties and shared norms, that promote social attainment by offering high levels of informal social control. These are the stable residential areas where everybody seems to know everybody, where community is both fishbowl and safety net. These residential concentrations would create “selection effects” of neighborhoods (Aber 1993), signaling the qualities both of individual families who select into certain neighborhoods and of the social context they create together. Research on MTO and other housing mobility programs will benefit, therefore, from analysis of resident choice patterns in particular urban contexts: Why have the neighbors of MTO families chosen to live where they do?

Beyond the impact of heterogeneity (racial, economic, or other), there is the issue of how spatial configuration shapes neighboring, both through direct effects and through the effects that may result from the interaction of spatial and social traits. The general notion that physical design—sight lines, access, density, materials, proximity of different land uses, and so forth—can help shape social interaction and interpersonal attitudes has received considerable attention from urban planners, environmental psychologists, and others (see, e.g., Hiss 1990; Michelson 1977; Newman 1972; Stokols 1996; Taylor 1989; Veitch 1995; Willmott 1963).

How might social and spatial factors affect social interaction in housing mobility contexts? Broadly, the latter include both urban and suburban neighborhoods, with some settings that may straddle these categories. I will focus on suburban or suburb-like neighborhoods, defined as relatively lower in density and more homogeneously residential than the typical urban neighborhood, since many families placed by housing mobility programs are relocated to such settings, and since empirical research on the impact on poor households of moving to suburban areas is especially meager.

*Neighboring in city and suburb.* Much empirical research on neighboring has focused on urban areas (see, e.g., Gans 1962;



Greenbaum and Greenbaum 1985; Kadushin and Jones 1992) and, within them, on lower-income neighborhoods (Briggs, Mueller, and Sullivan 1997; Hannerz 1969; Liebow 1967). Within the suburban vein of this literature is Gans's (1967) study of the new suburban communities (Levittowns) created in the late 1950s with hundreds of affordable, manufactured homes. In these overwhelmingly residential planned communities, where most households were headed by young, white parents with small children, Gans found relatively compact social or "functional" neighborhoods. Households that belonged to this majority group could find many compatible others nearby for socializing:

Neighboring rarely extended more than three or four houses away in each direction, so that the functional neighborhood usually consisted of about *ten to twelve houses* at the most, although people did say hello to everyone on the block. (p. 156; emphasis added)

These compact functional neighborhoods contrast sharply with the census geographies of block groups (which average 400 households) and census tracts (which average 4,000 persons). They also contrast sharply with the much larger functional neighborhoods for minority households in Levittown. With these insights, we might consider what functions spatially defined neighborhoods serve and fail to serve for poor in-movers in housing mobility programs. In addition to Gans's classic Levittown research, a great deal of empirical evidence suggests that physical proximity is a poor predictor of neighboring where low-density suburban neighborhoods include a diversity of family types (single-parent, two-parent, with and without children, etc.), classes, and ethnic groups (see, e.g., Fava 1958; Fischer 1982). At one extreme, imagine some of the receiving neighborhoods in Yonkers's scattered-site public housing program, wherein poor families of unmarried African-American mothers and their children abut the "empty nests" of middle-income white retirees.

*Housing mobility and "concentration effects."* Beyond the questions they pose for housing mobility evaluators in search of the true effects of neighborhoods, these findings of decades of neighboring studies beg important questions about the pros and cons of distinct approaches to implementing housing mobility—of what we might call "concentration effects." Among the unit mobility programs, some public housing authorities (PHAs) have acquired single-family housing units (both houses and single units in larger housing developments) dispersed across a wide geography, instead of building new multifamily complexes of

public housing, as Yonkers and other cities have done (HUD 1996). This structural difference may hold significant implications for the behavior and social attainment of program participants. Enclaves of poor, largely nonwhite families might act as sources of social support and buffers against racial harassment from surrounding whites; but they might also insulate program participants from needed contacts in the more affluent surrounding community and invite the stigmas traditionally placed on housing identifiable as public or subsidized housing.

For all of these reasons, studies of neighborhood effects that rely on social interaction, or at least on social observation (what Tienda terms “demonstration effects”), should consider functional neighborhoods wherever possible.<sup>9</sup> Obtaining reliable information on these neighborhoods will almost certainly require in-depth qualitative interviews beyond the census data more readily available.

*New and old neighborhoods: Which count?* A final and related issue is the proximity of poor residents’ “old neighborhoods” to their new ones. How much will families participating in housing mobility programs be drawn back to keep old social ties alive and obtain needed support? In other words, to what degree will the prior neighborhood be a salient social neighborhood, as it was for Wideman’s (1984) wayward brother in the opening paragraph?

The answers to this question may be especially important to poor adolescent movers, whose minority status in new, middle-income neighborhoods and whose emergent peer-group involvement may compel them to “look back” toward the old, disadvantaged neighborhoods for acceptance and a sense of belonging. Burton and Duncan’s (1993) preliminary findings on the effects of proximate family moves on adolescent behavior support the notion that there is a great deal of looking back. Findings on the early impacts of the Yonkers program suggest that strong ties to the old

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<sup>9</sup> To summarize, these may vary by spatial configuration, by behavioral phenomenon of interest (utilization of child care, shopping, adolescent leisure, job seeking, etc.), and by the race, ethnic, and class identities of neighbors. Research on housing mobility, which by definition tends to introduce sharp disparities in race and income between proximate neighbors, should help address the especially wide gaps in what we know about suburban neighboring among those who differ sharply on these traits. Such research, where mobility programs serve a diverse pool, should also help distinguish racial from ethnic factors. Our Yonkers research, which includes African-American, white, and a variety of Latino subgroups, could help inform students of housing integration about the relative importance of skin color versus language use and culturally encoded behaviors (e.g., greetings, favors, concepts and use of “private” space, and other “neighboring norms”).

neighborhood are especially important to young movers with delinquent behavior problems. Their ties to “problem peers” back in southwest Yonkers—which some mover teens perceive as offering more “action”—continue to influence the teens’ behavior and attitudes about school and work (Briggs 1996; Yonkers Family and Community Project 1997).

For similar reasons, prior neighborhoods seem to be magnets for adults in mobility programs, especially those who make proximate moves. Stack’s (1974) research on the coping strategies and informal networks relied on by poor urban families suggests that race/ethnicity and kinship, and not just space, drive patterns of neighboring and exchange. Where poor people’s access to social services and informal social supports is limited (as it appears to be in Yonkers’s middle-income suburban neighborhoods), adults, especially single mothers, are drawn back to friends and family left behind. Where informal family and peer supports are non-local, the census or other traits of the spatially defined (new) neighborhood of residence may be especially weak predictors of mover behavior and social attainment—or at least of those behaviors that are most dependent on established social ties to other neighborhoods. For these behaviors, the neighborhood of influence, or functional neighborhood, may be the one left behind or the one where important kin live.

In Yonkers’s mobility program, most mover parents return to their prior neighborhoods in the southwest quadrant at least twice per month, especially during the first two years after the move, and almost all church attendees go back to southwest Yonkers for church (Briggs 1996). These patterns fit with those observed for the somewhat higher-income minority families who moved into the early postwar suburbs (Gans 1967). Longitudinal data on MTO, Yonkers, and other mobility programs could teach us much about the persistence of the social ties of the urban poor, to both individuals and institutions, across time and geography.

*Exposure and support in neighborhoods.* As Tienda (1991) notes, a critical part of establishing neighborhood effects is demonstrating exposure to the normative environments presumed to influence behavior. In some unit mobility contexts, where enclaves of poverty are placed in more affluent neighborhoods and where local social support is limited for public housing residents, place of residence may be an utterly inadequate proxy for such exposure. Furthermore, it may be the lack of such support, along with discrimination and a weak sense of belonging, that explains attrition among mobility program participants. Fears about such

isolation and news about some movers' negative experiences in turn deter prospective participants (Burby and Rohe 1989; McGrew 1981). My colleague Bill Apgar has a simple term for the social marketing that local PHAs do to increase demand for mobility programs, especially in the most segregated cities: "courage building." Happily, the early evidence on mobility experiences in Yonkers suggests few complaints about new neighborhoods and healthy levels of social support among movers.

*Tricks of the trade: Advice to evaluators.* This section has emphasized the importance of considering socially defined or "functional" neighborhoods over spatially defined "statistical" ones but thus far has offered little methodological advice. How can researchers address social definitions of neighborhood without being fuzzy in mobility contexts and without breaking the bank? One overarching strategy is to begin by relating each outcome of interest (job getting, school achievement, and so on) to individual and family needs, relating the needs to family strategies for meeting those needs, and relating the strategies, in turn, to the social and spatial configuration of existing social networks. As for methods, a combination of surveys, firsthand observation, and informal interviewing would ensure representative samples along with thick descriptions of these micro-level (household-level) strategies and behaviors. The analytic strategy driving choices about data collection, though, would be to learn how families meet various distinct needs, where key networks are found, and how these networks change over time.<sup>10</sup> Sequencing less and more structured interview approaches may be especially helpful here—using qualitative interviewing to inform questionnaire construction, for example (see Bauman 1992), and to elaborate on the broad patterns that surveys detect reliably.

The second strategy would be to map these data by time, to learn when and for what duration respondents use particular networks and places—for example, through time-use diaries.<sup>11</sup> Diaries

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<sup>10</sup> Our research in Yonkers includes semistructured survey questionnaires administered to adult, adolescent, and child residents in the mobility program. For adults and adolescents, we inserted a network grid that distinguishes strong ties from weak ones (i.e., kin and friends from acquaintances) and residents of the prior neighborhood from residents of the new one (whether those "inside your complex" or "in your neighborhood but not in your housing complex"). In addition to these network composition and structure measures, the network element includes over a dozen measures of network contents—the substantive exchanges between the respondent and his or her social contacts (e.g., job or career advice, emergency aid, everyday aid, help with family problems). See the findings in Briggs (1996).

<sup>11</sup> I am grateful to Jeanne Brooks-Gunn for this suggestion.

represent one low-cost and fairly unobtrusive way to outline the frequency and rhythm of comings and goings between old and new neighborhoods, the nature of interpersonal (network) exchanges during those trips, and, therefore, the extent and nature of the individual's actual exposure to different expectations about behavior (norms). The data collected through such strategies might once and for all disabuse us of the notion, inspired by myths of the neighborhood as urban village, that poor folks' immediate neighbors are always and everywhere at the center of their interpersonal exchanges, attitudes, aspirations, and decisions.

### **Previous research: Neighborhood effects on social outcomes**

I will not replicate the extensive review of research on neighborhood effects found in Jencks and Mayer (1990), nor will I explore in detail the key methodological difficulties so carefully discussed in Tienda (1991). My aims are to synthesize the findings that appear most relevant to housing mobility contexts and to note the methodological problems and opportunities therein that may, in some ways, set mobility research apart.

I examine two strains of research: (1) the few studies that have analyzed housing mobility programs per se and (2) other studies on how neighborhoods affect behavior and social outcomes. In drawing boundaries around the latter, I have been more liberal in my definition of neighborhood-effects research than Jencks and Mayer (1990), partly because of the paucity of empirical data on how very poor people of color navigate socially as residents in middle-income, racially mixed neighborhoods. Mine is a broader concern with social ecology and with neighboring across lines of race and class, not the primary emphasis on quantitative studies made by Jencks and Mayer. Therefore, I also consider ethnographic studies of neighborhoods, which tell us much more about the mechanisms of influence in neighborhoods, particularly about the role of social networks, than quantitative studies are generally able to do.

#### *Evaluations of housing mobility*

Very few studies provide rigorous evidence on the effects of housing mobility on the social outcomes of resident

participants.<sup>12</sup> As mentioned earlier, Rosenbaum's study of female heads of household participating in the Gautreaux program found significant effects on job holding, educational attainment, and children's educational achievement (Rosenbaum 1991, 1995; Rosenbaum and Popkin 1991). The sample included 224 former residents of inner-city public housing projects who had been given Section 8 vouchers to move with their children to the Chicago suburbs, along with 108 families who had moved to city neighborhoods with the vouchers. This study did not, therefore, focus on the effects of mobility per se but on the relative effects of moving to suburban versus urban neighborhoods. A total of 64 percent of the suburban movers were employed after the move, compared with 51 percent in the city. Again, there were no wage differences between those job holders in the city and suburbs. This suggests, and interview data confirm, that even suburban movers accessed a low tier of primarily service sector jobs.

This study generated relatively limited data on why suburban movers were more likely to be employed. Respondents reported greater availability of jobs and greater neighborhood safety, which made them more confident that they could leave their children at school and work or study. But respondents also pointed to their own greater motivation in the suburban environment:

[The housing project] deteriorates you. You don't want to do anything.... [Living in the suburbs] made me feel that I'm worth something. I can do anything I want to do if I get up and try it. (Rosenbaum and Popkin 1991, 352)

Rosenbaum and Popkin (1991) argue that their findings support elements of the spatial mismatch (Kain 1968) and culture-of-poverty (Lewis 1966, 1968) hypotheses. As to the former, although the authors included no labor market data on suburban versus urban neighborhoods, the outward movement of jobs in metropolitan Chicago is well documented (Kasarda 1989; Rosenbaum 1991), and many respondents identified greater job availability in the suburbs as important. A structural economic advantage in suburban areas, then, appears to have been one

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<sup>12</sup> Such studies make up one part of a larger agenda of needed research, which should include studies of impacts on receiving neighborhoods, citywide politics, and other domains. While the impact of public housing on property value may not be the stuff of which social policy dreams are made, concerns about real estate values and property rights loom large in the minds of local government officials and homeowners associations, whose support for mobility programs is very important.

element in the neighborhood effect on employment identified by this study.<sup>13</sup> Confirmation of the effects of a more positive, work-oriented social climate in the suburban neighborhoods and analysis of the role of changes, if any, in job networks await the follow-up research recently launched by Rosenbaum's team (Briggs et al. 1997; De Graaf and Flap 1988; Granovetter 1974; Kasinitz and Rosenberg 1996; Smith 1995).

As for educational attainment and youth employment, Rosenbaum (1991) found that suburban movers were less likely to drop out of high school (5 percent versus 20 percent), more likely to be on a college track (40 percent versus 24 percent), more likely to attend college (54 percent versus 21 percent), and more likely to be holding a job (75 percent versus 41 percent) than their city mover counterparts. Rosenbaum (1995) has argued that the superior schools of suburban Chicago explain the lion's share of these effects, although social comparison and other mechanisms may be associated with the change of schools and much wider access to white, middle-income peers.

In a study of a Cleveland-area scattered-site public housing program, Chandler (1991) surveyed 85 heads of household living in single-family homes in 50 census tracts that were, on average, more affluent and racially integrated than their previous neighborhoods. Chandler found no significant effects of the move on employment, and less than one-third (32 percent) of respondents considered employment opportunities to be better in their new neighborhoods. Nearly one-half (48 percent) reported improved school performance and attendance by their children. However, these are subjective reports, since no labor market or school data were collected. Like the Gautreaux participants, Chandler's respondents reported lack of child care, transportation, and skills as key barriers to employment. As for community involvement, church attendance and other activities remained steady for many; only 26 percent reported a drop in churchgoing. Respondents reported generally positive interracial relations with their neighbors. Although 22 percent reported experiencing racial harassment, they added that these incidents declined with time spent in the neighborhood.

This study was conducted as an interim program evaluation, not as a study of neighborhood effects per se. For my purpose

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<sup>13</sup> Barriers to employment for suburban respondents included a lack of affordable child care (where informal sources back in the city were now unavailable) and of transportation, as well as discrimination and higher skill requirements (Rosenbaum and Popkin 1991).

here, its principal shortcomings are the subjective nature of key items, the paucity of data on premove characteristics, the lack of data on social interaction in the new neighborhoods (beyond the items on quality of race relations and experience of racial harassment), and the absence of a control group for reference. While the study confirmed that participants in the mobility program were generally satisfied, local housing authorities might note that so limited a research effort could not generate adequate information about resident participants' new lives.

### *Other research on neighborhood effects*

Jencks and Mayer (1990) review a large number of quantitative studies on the effects of neighborhood and school socioeconomic status (SES) on five outcomes: educational attainment, cognitive skills, criminal activity, sexual behavior, and economic success. Their "first and strongest" conclusion provides a concise statement of the conceptual and methodological difficulties faced by researchers of neighborhood effects and those who would make sense of their findings: "There is no general pattern of neighborhood and school effects that recurs across all outcomes" (p. 174).

Quantitative studies of neighborhood effects, which currently dominate the field, face four persistent challenges (Briggs 1996; Crane 1991; Jencks and Mayer 1990; Tienda 1991):

1. *The difficulty of defining "neighborhood" relative to the social outcome of interest*—This results in a strict reliance on census and other administrative definitions of neighborhood.
2. *Selection effects*—Because (most) households choose their way into neighborhoods, changes that appear to be effects of neighborhoods may actually reflect underlying differences in households.
3. *A failure to specify the role of families as mediators of neighborhood effects (endogeneity)*—Simple statistical controls do not suffice, as these eliminate the indirect effects of neighborhoods on families.
4. *An almost total lack of data on social interaction*—We rely on aggregate (census) data to infer patterns of social interaction, guessing, for example, that low-income teenagers in neighborhoods with some proportion of high-status workers do, in fact, interact with those workers.



As for specific outcomes, Jencks and Mayer found that educational attainment is higher for teenagers in higher-SES neighborhoods, even when family background is controlled; that the evidence for neighborhood effects on criminal activity is “thin and contradictory” (1990, 175); that teenagers in poor neighborhoods appear to initiate sexual activity younger and to be less likely to use contraception; and that racial makeup and rate of welfare dependency, not median income, appear to explain neighborhood effects on male employment and earnings.

Jencks and Mayer complain that too few studies have looked at the processes underlying potential neighborhood effects, and therefore researchers run the risk of misattributing selection effects to social interaction. Despite the measurement error, random sampling error, and specification error that plague studies in this area, Jencks and Mayer make two tentative hypotheses:

1. When neighbors set social standards for one another or create institutions that serve an entire neighborhood, affluent neighbors are likely to be an advantage.
2. When neighbors compete with one another for a scarce resource, such as social standing, high school grades, or teenage jobs, affluent neighbors are likely to be a disadvantage. (p. 176)

These preliminary arguments, each of which encompasses many discrete testable hypotheses, underscore the need for qualitative research on the true mechanisms of neighborhood effects. It may be helpful, for purposes of relating testable ideas to possible mechanisms of causation, to identify the component parts. The first broad argument encompasses elements of the collective socialization, contagion, and institutional models of neighborhood effects. The second appears to be derived from social comparison and competition theories.

A number of studies published since Jencks and Mayer’s review or excluded from it because of their primarily qualitative character are also noteworthy from a housing mobility perspective. First, when family characteristics were controlled, Case and Katz (1991) found support for the neighborhood contagion model in their study of young people living in three poor, central-city neighborhoods during Boston’s economic boom of the 1980s. Case and Katz focused on the effects of neighborhoods on youth job holding, church attendance, schooling, drug use, and criminal activity. Also, in limited support of Wilson’s (1987) hypothesis

about social isolation and the importance of role models, their study found that across lines of race and gender, “the [poor] youths are much more likely to know people in trouble with the law and welfare mothers than they are to know professionals. This suggests some possibility that they are socially isolated without middle-class role models in their communities” (p. 9). Even in a tight labor market, Case and Katz argued, “the company you keep” is a significant predictor of youth activity, and “[neighborhood] effects ... suggest that shocks or policy interventions that positively affect individuals will have positive multiplier effects within neighborhoods through peer influences and across generations through family influences” (p. 24).

Crane (1991) found significant, nonlinear effects of the proportion of high-status (professional or managerial) workers in a neighborhood on teenage dropout and childbearing rates. These effects were statistically significant, but small, until the proportion of professional workers in a neighborhood dipped below about 5 percent; then they were greater than the effects of neighborhood poverty rate or a variety of other measures of neighborhood social ecology. With few exceptions, teenagers in the very worst neighborhoods had dramatically higher dropout probabilities across lines of race.<sup>14</sup> It is noteworthy that males appeared to be much more susceptible to the dropping-out effect than females, so gender may be a critical mediator of neighborhood effects on young people.<sup>15</sup>

Consistent with Crane’s findings, once family traits were controlled, Brooks-Gunn and colleagues (1993) found “reasonably powerful” effects of the presence of high-status workers on childhood IQ, teenage births, and dropout rates. The proportion of two-parent families was also found to be statistically significant and substantial. Considering these in light of the nonsignificance of neighborhood poverty and male joblessness, Brooks-Gunn and

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<sup>14</sup> The key exception was that black females did not show the dramatic upswing in dropping out in the worst neighborhoods. As Crane notes, this may owe to significant sampling bias: “One possible reason for this exception is that black females living in inner cities were the ones most likely to be living away from home and were thus excluded from the sample” (1991, 315).

<sup>15</sup> Crane’s equations assumed no endogeneity (i.e., assumed that family and other control variables were not affected by neighborhoods), and so neighborhood effects may have been biased downward. More sophisticated models, using multilevel techniques such as hierarchical linear modeling (see, e.g., Bryk and Raudenbush 1988) would mitigate the potential bias associated with endogeneity, but these techniques call for large data sets structured in ways that housing mobility programs seldom allow.

colleagues argued that these findings support Wilson's (1987, 1991) hypotheses about the importance of community social control, including monitoring and role modeling, more than the contagion theory of neighborhood effects.<sup>16</sup>

In the final quantitative study reviewed here, Garner and Raudenbush (1991) found a significant association between neighborhood deprivation and educational attainment in Scotland. Unlike the above-mentioned studies, this one used hierarchical linear modeling to mitigate endogeneity bias; but, like other researchers, Garner and Raudenbush could only speculate about the mechanisms through which neighborhood effects were propagated.

Finally, several ethnographic studies have focused on neighborhood effects. Three seem especially relevant to research in housing mobility settings. First, MacLeod (1987) used a cultural reproduction model to explain the "leveled aspirations" of youth in a low-income Boston neighborhood. The strength of MacLeod's study is its rich data on differences in the education and work aspirations of black and white youth living in a single neighborhood setting. MacLeod's findings shed light on the effects of neighborhoods on young people, specifically through peer influences. Unfortunately, MacLeod's firsthand observation focused almost exclusively on the rich interactions within teen cliques, generating sparse and anecdotal data on how, if at all, the young people developed and made use of social networks beyond the strong ties of their peer group. Controlling for the structural factor of job availability, such weak ties—to employed adults, for example—may be significant predictors of youth job getting in housing mobility contexts. In addition, a critical question in mobility contexts is how, and from what range of choices, teen in-movers choose a peer group. The evidence in Yonkers is that adolescents are drawing on their prior neighborhoods and their schools quite heavily, especially if the new neighborhood offers few socially similar peers (Briggs 1996).

Sullivan (1989), in a study of youth crime and work in three Brooklyn communities, argues that neighborhoods should not be seen as deterministic "cages" of pathological values, nor as collections of problem-ridden individual choices and destinies, but rather as complicated "mediating" spaces:

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<sup>16</sup> Like Crane's analyses, these were subject to unknown endogeneity bias in the relation between family and neighborhood effects.

The community is seen as a locus of interaction, intermediate between the individual and the larger society, where the many constraints and opportunities of the total society are narrowed to a subset within which individuals choose. The local community is also the cultural milieu within which the worth of these specific options is defined. The cognitions and values embedded in the community are not so much different from those of the wider society as they are specific to the actual life experiences of local inhabitants.... The emphasis on the local neighborhood as a partially bounded sphere of interactions in which young males “choose” to go to school, to work, and/or to engage in criminal activities offers a perspective on “economic choice” and “cultural values” which has been missing or incompletely applied in previous studies. (pp. 9–10)

There are at least two valuable insights here for mobility researchers: (1) Neighborhoods are partially bounded social units, and (2) local cultural evaluations of community members’ activities matter because of—and not instead of—structural constraints and opportunities. As Sullivan acknowledges, neither is an especially new idea, but previous research on how individuals and families react to changes in opportunity seems to have applied these concepts tacitly, incompletely, or inconsistently.

As for the “partial bounding,” Sullivan found that given a declining local job base, social networks were very important for connecting youth to jobs outside their neighborhoods. Consistent with the more recent ethnographic studies of job markets mentioned above (Kasinitz and Rosenberg 1996; Newman and Lennon 1995), Sullivan found that three different types of networks—working-class white, poor Latino, and poor African-American—connected youth in those groups to different niches of the metropolitan labor market; geographic proximity to jobs was not important.

Sullivan’s argument about the interaction between structures of opportunity and local cultural “evaluations” suggests a rich vein for mobility researchers to explore. Where normative climate and cultural values are mentioned in existing research on Gauthreaux, data limitations have generally forced us to speculate about their effects. Future research on neighborhoods, particularly in mobility settings, should seek to generate more information on the interaction of local culture and economic structure in various contexts: how young people produce “mental maps” of the

job market, for example, apart from official (data-based) pictures that researchers and agencies may use (see also Galster and Killen 1995).<sup>17</sup>

Finally, Anderson (1991) provides a synthesis of two decades of ethnographic fieldwork in poor neighborhoods in Chicago and Philadelphia. The author argues that “decent culture” and “street culture” vie constantly for young adherents in neighborhoods buffeted by economic dislocations. The key point here for mobility research concerns the role of families as mediators of neighborhood influence. Even in very poor neighborhoods with high rates of teenage childbearing, unemployment, welfare dependency, and crime, argues Anderson, “young people who are raised with a sense of opportunity and are able to realistically picture a better life are often successful in avoiding the draw of street culture. For girls, the belief that they can be somebody in the community prevails over the lure of becoming somebody by having a prize baby at age fifteen” (p. 397).

Anderson’s findings support Wilson’s (1987) arguments about the importance of local social controls, several fine ethnographic studies of how families manage risk in high-poverty neighborhoods (Furstenberg 1993; Jarrett 1992; Jeffers 1969), and the survey analyses of neighborhood effects by Brooks-Gunn and colleagues (1993), as discussed above. Early MTO and Yonkers findings strongly corroborate these findings, indicating not only that increased neighborhood safety is the prime motivator for mobility participants, but also that the safer new neighborhoods have rapid, quite dramatic effects on some parenting practices, leading to less strict “bounding” of youth from neighborhood peers (Briggs 1996). All of this work underscores the importance of researching family-level processes. More specific to policy concerns, this body of work suggests that the self-sufficiency effects of housing mobility programs are mediated by families and social ties (many of them nonlocal), are life-stage dependent, and evolve over time and generations.

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<sup>17</sup> In our citywide telephone survey of Yonkers residents, we included items on values, norms, and sense of community. Our interviews with residents in the mobility program also included close-ended questions on norms that direct behavior. We asked adolescents, for example, how wrong it is for “someone your age to ... skip school without an excuse, steal something worth more than \$50, hit someone with the idea of hurting them, have sexual intercourse, smoke marijuana at parties, have a baby or father a child if you are not married,” etc. Finally, networks and norms are tied. We asked adolescents to tell us which of their named (significant) ties “think it is important for you to do well in school.”

## Discussion

Like the brothers in Wideman's autobiographical tale, participants in housing mobility programs respond to structural and personal forces, many of them beyond the sphere of the immediate spatial neighborhood, that defy simple models and crude measurement techniques—or even sophisticated measurement, for that matter. Any effort to synthesize the findings of neighborhood-effects studies, let alone to make sense of their implications for urban policy, must grapple with the wide variety of research design constraints and behavioral phenomena that drive such studies. In the context of “moving to opportunity” through housing mobility programs, I have emphasized (as a framing observation) that we must begin by questioning key assumptions more carefully. These include assumptions about the benefits of having more affluent neighbors, the spatial reorganization of “opportunity” from the perspective of the urban poor, and the ways that residents—as opposed to researchers or policy makers—define and use their neighborhoods.

First, as to the benefits of one kind of neighbor or another, studies that analyze the effects on poor families of moves to more affluent neighborhoods should invest substantially in extending what we know about the variety of mechanisms through which the benefits or costs of neighborhoods might be transmitted—that is, the “how” of neighborhood effects—whether contagion, collective socialization, social comparison, competition, institutional, or other models are applied. Quite often, we apply informal, untested, or even unfounded models of the way neighborhoods work. A variety of models suggest a variety of effects of having more affluent neighbors, both positive and negative, on particular social outcomes. These models also suggest a variety of questions and approaches to collecting data on several levels: individual, family, and neighborhood.

Second, we should look critically at the assumption that moving the urban poor out of poverty neighborhoods will necessarily move them closer to opportunity, at least in the context of near-term employment for the mover parent. Studies of housing mobility must identify the particular changes that have redistributed jobs, households, and opportunity in particular urban contexts. In some metropolitan areas, these changes defy simple models of outward movement (suburbanization), as the Yonkers case amply illustrates. Residents in housing mobility programs may be moving closer to equally “bad” jobs or moving away from job growth when they move away from poverty concentration and racial/ethnic segregation. Job gains will depend on a variety of

processes, most of which take time to mature. These include structural or personal changes that lead to education gains in the new neighborhoods by adults and their children, as well as changes in parenting strategies in less risky neighborhoods. The latter dynamics, already clear in Yonkers and some MTO sites, appear to be quite dramatic and to register quickly, although the developmental effects of these changes on children and adolescents are still unclear.

Third, future research on mobility—and policy based on such research—would benefit from more and better information on how mobility participants of various ages, ethnic groups, and household types define their neighborhoods (i.e., from information on their “functional neighborhoods,” as opposed to the spatial definitions or “statistical neighborhoods” on which policy makers and researchers typically rely). Given the importance of social interaction to most of the models of neighborhood effects listed above, social definitions of neighborhood are critical. I have suggested identifying family needs, strategies to meet those needs, and the role of social networks in such strategies. This approach emphasizes functional neighborhoods over statistical ones. We should stop guessing about social interaction or imagining cohesive urban villages with dense ties among diverse households; much evidence suggests a very different world.

Households’ strategies and social outcomes tend to ignore census maps and housing plans. Mobility research must address complex questions, including how race, class, and space (physical design) factors interact to affect neighboring and how mobility program participants move between new, prior, and other neighborhoods in search of social support and social leverage. These two dimensions of social capital—aid for “getting by” and “getting ahead”—may prove helpful in organizing our thinking about social resources in the geography of urban opportunity.

As for substantive findings, there is consistent, if limited, empirical evidence that neighborhood makeup influences child cognitive outcomes (including IQ), school dropout rates, and teenage childbearing. These appear to be more highly associated with the presence of high-status workers in the neighborhood, supporting Wilson’s social isolation and role model hypothesis, than with poverty rate or other measures of neighborhood ecology, although researchers have not persuasively explained the relationship. Of greatest concern in this era of welfare reform and government downsizing, employment outcomes appear to be affected by neighborhood racial makeup and welfare dependency rate and not by median income. Thus, moving poor welfare-receiving mothers out of high residential concentrations of

welfare recipients ought to be good from a self-sufficiency standpoint, even if the new neighborhoods are also low income. Again, however, “statistical neighborhoods” are poor proxies, and the mechanisms for these apparent effects are deceptively complex and take time to mature; they also appear to be dependent on life stage, social networks, and other factors.

Physical proximity to jobs appears to have limited effects in most places, for reasons that relate to the segregation of job networks along ethnic lines, discrimination on the basis of race/ethnicity and poverty status, and the multiple dimensions of job readiness for those at the bottom of the labor queue. Here, more than anywhere else, it is clear that thick description of job search and job holding in housing mobility programs—both firsthand observation and in-depth qualitative interviews—is badly needed.

In a general way, I have assailed the tyranny of numbers in this domain of research. As Garner and Raudenbush (1991) argue, “The question remaining is not, ‘Do neighbourhood effects exist?’ But rather, ‘How do they work?’” We need more mixed-methods studies on mobility programs. To paraphrase Geertz (1973), we need more thick description with policy sense. By teaching us about mechanisms of neighborhood effects and extending the scant substantive detail provided by mostly survey-based analyses, qualitative narrative would enhance the usefulness of research on neighborhood effects for policy and program designers, as well as for theory builders. In many program contexts, well-designed qualitative interviewing and observation—even of small samples of residents—would yield substantial new information of the kind useful for improving the programs. The existing literature suggests many areas for focus: There is no need to be broadly exploratory about most of this terrain.

I have not addressed a number of other housing mobility issues that concern policy makers and researchers, including the effects of possible “creaming” on mobility participants’ prior neighborhoods<sup>18</sup> and the impact of housing mobility on receiving neighborhoods, such as racial tipping and decreased property value (negative) or reduced racial prejudice (positive).<sup>19</sup> But properly addressing these issues, like the issues discussed in this article,

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<sup>18</sup> “Creaming” refers to selection processes that favor the most job ready or otherwise capable within a disadvantaged target group.

<sup>19</sup> See Peterson and Williams (1994) for a broad discussion of key issues; Fischer (1991) for a discussion of apparent creaming in Cincinnati’s housing mobility program; Fischer (1994) for the tipping effects of concentrating Section 8 recipients; and Briggs and Darden (1996) for the early impact on property values in Yonkers.



will require more careful thinking about our assumptions about neighborhoods and about how residents define and make use of them, as well as good mixed-methods data to inform decision making.

### *Author*

Xavier de Souza Briggs is an Assistant Professor of Public Policy at Harvard University's John F. Kennedy School of Government in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

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