



Youth in mixed-income communities replacing public housing complexes: Context, dynamics and response



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ABSTRACT

Several of the theories that drive the rationale for mixed-income development as a response to urban poverty and the problems of traditional public housing are directly concerned with children and youth. These include assumptions about the possible “role modeling” effects of living among working and middle class people as well as social capital arguments, in which children may act as a kind of “bridge” to foster relationships among adults with children. In spite of these assumptions, young people—particularly older adolescents and young adults—are often at the contentious core of how problems of social control and organization play out on the ground. This paper draws on research on the Chicago public housing transformation in the United States to investigate how young people are viewed by those working on and living in mixed-income developments being built to replace public housing complexes, and how young people themselves contribute to the dynamics of these new communities.

We find that while there have been improvements in the lives of young people who have been able to move into these new mixed-income developments in terms of living in safer, more orderly environments, their overall experiences are not altogether positive and are proving to be problematic for the broader community. Residents of different income levels employ different parental management strategies that serve as a barrier to engagement and a sense of commonality among families with children. An overriding dynamic in these new communities is the perception among (mainly) higher-income residents that unsupervised youth are having a negative influence on the broader community. Our research raises concerns about the future viability and sustainability of these mixed-income environments in the absence of more intentional and effective investments in structured supports and activities for young people.

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Introduction

Neighborhoods are important contexts for youth development. They serve as sites of socialization and provide environments that present both opportunities and dangers that young people must navigate and families must learn to manage. Families make decisions about where to live based in part on what these local environments provide for their children, such as safe space, good schools, recreational opportunities, and positive peer groups. Choice of neighborhood is often constrained, however, particularly for those with fewer resources. For the very poor, and particularly for poor African Americans in the United States, this has sometimes led to being “trapped” in neighborhoods of significant disadvantage or,

when moving, of leaving one disadvantaged area only to settle in another (Massey & Denton, 1993; Sampson & Sharkey, 2008; South & Crowder, 1997).

In the context of urban poverty, concerns about the negative effects of growing up in poor neighborhoods have over the past 25 years both driven significant research on “neighborhood effects” (see Gephart, 1997; Jencks & Mayer, 1990; Sampson, Morenoff, & Gannon-Rowley, 2002; Small & Newman, 2001 for reviews) and generated important debate on appropriate policy responses to urban poverty. Most of the literature on neighborhood effects focuses in particular on the impact that concentrated poverty has on a broad constellation of social problems, including potentially negative outcomes for young people (e.g., Elliott et al., 1996; Jencks & Mayer, 1990; Musterd, Murie, & Kesteloot, 2006; Rankin & Quane, 2002). In the United States in particular, public housing communities are emblematic of such environments, and have led to policy responses focused on poverty deconcentration through the relocation of public housing residents to less poor neighborhoods and the redevelopment of public housing complexes as mixed-income

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communities.¹ Through these policies, relocation to “better” neighborhoods is meant to have a beneficial effect on youth by removing them from negative influences, providing a safer and healthier built environment, and better connecting them to positive social contexts and resources from which they were isolated in public housing.

Neighborhood influence is difficult to untangle, however, and it is not unidirectional; neighborhood residents (young people among them) contribute to the nature of neighborhood life and the dynamics that influence residents’ experiences in reciprocal ways (Gotham, 2003; Visser, 2011). While much research has focused on the extent to which neighborhoods affect youth outcomes and on whether moving to less poor neighborhoods contribute to better outcomes for poor youth who move, less has focused on the contributions of these young people to community dynamics.

This paper explores the role of and responses to youth in three mixed-income communities in Chicago that have been built on the footprint of large public housing complexes. Specifically, we examine both *expectations* about youth in mixed-income developments and the *perceptions* of how young people contribute to social dynamics and social interaction in these contexts, the nature of their engagement in community organizations and activities, and their role in shaping concerns about and responses to crime, safety, and social control. First, we review the key theoretical arguments and empirical evidence regarding neighborhood effects on youth development and how they inform policy aimed at improving youth outcomes through poverty deconcentration policies. Second, we summarize the research evidence regarding such policies’ effects on public housing youth who have been relocated to less poor or intentionally mixed-income neighborhoods. Third, we briefly describe the research contexts, data, and methods that provide the foundation for our empirical analysis. We then turn to our findings. After investigating how young people are perceived and the expectations that residents, policymakers, and development practitioners in these communities have for the effect of moving to a mixed-income community on youth development, we turn to an exploration of the roles and engagement of young people in these communities and their contributions to community dynamics. Finally, we outline some possible implications for policy and practice.

Concentrated poverty, neighborhood effects, and youth development

The neighborhood effects literature has generated a good deal of debate about the causal relationship between neighborhood contexts and residents’ well-being, as well as about the nature, magnitude, and mechanisms through which neighborhoods might influence residents and the developmental trajectories of their children (e.g., Ludwig et al., 2008; Sampson, 2008). A large body of research finds associations between living in high-poverty neighborhoods in the US and social problems, including high rates of child abuse (Coulton, Korbin, Su, & Chow, 1995; Garbarino & Crouter, 1978), teenage and out-of-wedlock births (Anderson, 1991; Coulton & Pandey, 1992; Crane, 1991), school drop-out rates (Crane, 1991), crime and delinquency (Coulton & Pandey, 1992; Sampson & Groves, 1989), and adult employment (Holloway & Mulherin, 2004). Much of the literature has focused on the relationship between structural and compositional factors at the

neighborhood level—concentrated disadvantage, residential (in)stability, racial segregation—but also, increasingly, on the mechanisms and processes through which neighborhood context influences individual well-being or mediates the effect of disadvantage on individuals, their life-course trajectories, and neighborhood circumstances and dynamics. Sampson, Morenoff and Gannon-Rowley (2002), for example, find evidence in their review for the validity of four kinds of neighborhood-level mechanisms—social relations (networks and interaction), social norms and collective efficacy (trust and the willingness of neighbors to intervene for the common good), institutional resources (including both the presence and use of a broad range of organizations that serve the community), and routine activities (and how they unfold in space) (see also Galster, 2012).

Although research on neighborhood effects often treats such effects as applicable across contexts and populations, as Small and Feldman (2012) point out, neighborhoods are likely to have differential effects on different people, at different developmental stages, and depending on the particularities of context—including the relative “dosage” (Galster, 2012) of neighborhood factors that influence individual-level outcomes. Such effects are often mediated by other contexts (household, school) and circumstances (family income, parental education) (cf. Aber, Gephart, Brooks-Gunn, & Connell, 1997; Sampson, 2008). And while direct neighborhood effects are relatively weak when factors such as family poverty and mother’s level of educational attainment are taken into account (e.g., Jencks & Mayer, 1990), neighborhood context can have a significant effect on the social processes—such as parenting behavior and monitoring, peer influence, and informal social control—that contribute to family functioning and child well-being (Furstenberg, Cook, Eccles, Elder, & Sameroff, 1999; Rankin & Quane, 2002). While the influence of neighborhoods on younger children may be more strongly mediated by the family, neighborhood effects become more immediate and direct for older youth who spend more time outside the parental home (Aber et al., 1997).

Informed in part by such research, policies focused on deconcentrating poverty draw on a set of assumptions about the effects of both neighborhood compositional factors and neighborhood-level social processes. Neighborhoods of concentrated disadvantage are seen to have negative effects on youth living in them because of what they provide (or fail to provide) by way of institutional and relational resources, the nature of informal mechanisms of social control and social support, and the normative frameworks that guide action within such contexts (Bursik & Grasmick, 1993; Hunter, 1985; Jargowsky, 1996; Jencks & Mayer, 1990; Kornhauser, 1978; Small, 2009; Wilson, 1987). In addition to lack of access to formal resources (schools, youth programs, health care, employment), it is argued that living in high-poverty neighborhoods increases the likelihood that young people’s social interactions will be constrained largely to encounters with those who are similarly poor and of low educational status. These interactions may limit the types of resources a young person can leverage through them, and they may also shape the development of aspirations, attitudes, and norms of behavior (Anderson, 1991; Briggs, 1997; Crane, 1991; Wilson, 1987). In particular, the negative influence of delinquent peers (Crane, 1991; Darling & Steinberg, 1997; Gephart, 1997; Sampson & Groves, 1989) and the lack of middle-class “role models” (Anderson, 1990; Wilson, 1987) has been argued to undermine the development of mainstream norms and values, including educational aspirations and a strong work ethic. The extent to which relocating people to more diverse, less disadvantaged neighborhoods is likely to lead to cross-class or interethnic interaction, however, is open to question. Several European studies, for example, find that social networks and day-to-day interactions among residents in diverse neighborhoods tend to remain homogenous with regard to class and ethnicity (Atkinson, 2006; Blokland &

¹ Notable poverty deconcentration programs in the US include the Gautreaux program in Chicago, a court-ordered desegregation effort for a select group of public housing households (Rubinowitz & Rosenbaum, 2000); Moving to Opportunity (MTO), a federal government social experiment in five cities that randomly assigned public housing families to comparison groups, one of which received vouchers to exit public housing (Briggs, Popkin, & Goering, 2010; Sanbonmatsu et al., 2011); and the HOPE VI program, which funds redevelopment of public housing complexes into mixed-income developments (Cisneros & Engdahl, 2009).

van Eijk, 2010; Butler, 2003) and that neighborhood composition has no effect on interethnic contacts (Boschman, 2012). Findings from the US are somewhat less consistent. Some studies find little interaction among residents of different race and class backgrounds, even under conditions of residential proximity (Kleit, 2005; Lee & Campbell, 1998; Lee, Campbell, & Miller, 1991) while others suggest that some of these divisions may decrease over time (Rosenbaum, Popkin, Kaufman, & Rusin, 1991; Rosenbaum, Stroh, & Flynn, 1998; Rubinowitz & Rosenbaum, 2000).

Social cohesion and effective mechanisms of informal social control are also likely to be diminished in high-poverty neighborhoods. Residential instability, high levels of crime and disorder, and high levels of anonymity can undermine the socialization efforts of families, because parents cannot rely on reinforcement of family norms in the broader neighborhood, and people who are less familiar with their neighbors are likely to be less willing to intervene and sanction unacceptable behavior of neighborhood youth (Anderson, 1990; Bursik & Grasmick, 1993; Elliott et al., 1996; Sampson, 1988; Sampson & Groves, 1989; Shaw & McKay, 1942). Exposure to violence in such contexts also poses an immediate hazard to well-being, and fear of victimization affects how young people navigate their spatial environment (Anderson, 1990) and shapes the ways in which parents attempt to manage their children's activities and exposure to community dynamics, often leading to restrictive parenting strategies in dangerous and impoverished neighborhood environments (Burton, 1990; Furstenberg et al., 1999; Jarrett, 1999; Klebanov, Brooks-Gunn, & Duncan, 1994).

The rationale for replacing public housing complexes with mixed-income developments and integrating public housing residents into these contexts builds on these arguments (Joseph, Chaskin, & Webber, 2007). In addition to socialization, social contagion, and social capital theories about the positive effects of living among working and middle class people, mixed-income environments are argued to support greater social control and provide better institutional resources. Higher levels of income and homeownership are expected to lead to more residential stability, organizational involvement, normative pressure to maintain order and enforce rules, and vigilant law enforcement (Logan & Molotch, 1987; Sampson, Raudenbush, & Earls, 1997). Higher-income residents are also expected to attract greater investment and insist on higher-quality and more responsive services from both public and private-sector sources (Khadduri, 2001; Logan & Molotch, 1987; Sampson et al., 1997).

Poverty deconcentration and youth: current evidence

Several studies have sought to measure the effects of poverty deconcentration policies on young people's relationships, behavior, and developmental outcomes. Regarding relationships, moving from high-poverty to less disadvantaged neighborhoods appears to lead to the establishment of some new connections in their new environments, but these connections seem to have come at the cost of old ties (Clampet-Lundquist, 2007; Sullivan & Lietz, 2008). The dynamics of forming relationships is influenced in part by particular aspects of young people's new neighborhoods and parental responses to them. The physical characteristics of a neighborhood can facilitate or limit interactions and the formation of social networks among residents by patterning routine activities and providing opportunity—or setting up barriers—for casual everyday encounters (Hallman, 1984; Sampson, 2001). A study of 27 families in the federal Moving to Opportunity relocation experiment in the US (see Footnote 1), for example, found that concerns with safety among parents who moved to more dangerous neighborhoods led to restrictive parenting strategies, which made it harder for young people to establish new connections compared with parents

and children who moved to safer, middle-class neighborhoods. Parents of younger children in middle-class neighborhoods, however, were concerned with the higher costs of after-school programs, which often prevented their children from participating (Pettit, 2004). Similarly, mothers in the Gautreaux Two Housing Mobility Program in Chicago reported a lack of programs for low-income children, the high costs of those programs that did exist, and transportation issues as the main obstacles to program utilization of their children after moving to less disadvantaged neighborhoods (Zuberi, 2010). The Urban Institute's evaluation of the CHA Family Case Management Demonstration, by contrast, found high rates of engagement, increased employment, and more stable health for parents, but these benefits did not translate into better educational outcomes for their children (Getsinger & Popkin, 2010).

The overall evidence with regard to risk behavior, mental health, and delinquent behavior for children and youth who move out of high-poverty neighborhoods is mixed. The Urban Institute's HOPE VI Panel Study (Popkin, Levy, & Buron, 2010), which tracked a sample of 198 former public housing residents in Chicago between 2001 and 2009, found no consistent pattern across youth with different forms of housing assistance. Over time, young people 18 and older in the sample seem to do better than youth under 18 with regard to negative and delinquent behaviors, though other studies suggest that particularities of context (urban versus suburban, school environment) and youth reactions to their new environment (sense of control, daily routines, making friends) are important factors in influencing youth engagement in criminal or risky behaviors (Clampet-Lundquist, Edin, Kling, & Duncan, 2011; Sharkey & Sampson, 2010). Girls across different types of housing assistance were doing much better than boys with regard to negative behavior and school engagement (Gallagher, 2010). The findings on MTO youth are similarly mixed, suggesting that girls—but not boys—seem to have improved mental health outcomes and reduced risk behavior relative to the control group (Clampet-Lundquist et al., 2011; Kling & Liebman, 2004), with no significant effects on physical health or educational outcomes for either boys or girls (Ludwig et al., 2011; Sanbonmatsu et al., 2011). Popkin, Leventhal, and Weismann (2010) and Popkin, Levy, et al. (2010) suggest that these gender-based differences in mental health and behavior outcomes for girls in the MTO program can be attributed to a decrease in gender-specific risks (e.g., of sexual assault and pressure for early sexual initiation) associated with living in high-poverty neighborhoods.

Finally, there is no convincing evidence that simply moving children from disadvantaged to better neighborhoods increases their educational attainment. In their review of the empirical literature on assisted housing and school choice programs, DeLuca and Dayton (2009) found that while housing programs helped poor families move to safer and less disadvantaged neighborhoods, their overall effect on educational attainment is inconclusive. An analysis of administrative data in Chicago showed no gains on various educational achievement measures between public housing children affected by the demolition of public housing and their peers who were not so affected (Jacob, 2004). A study of the Yonkers Project, by contrast, found *negative* effects—lower school performance and higher rates of substance use and behavior problems—among 15- to 18-year-old low-income Black and Latino youth who had relocated to more affluent neighborhoods (Fauth, Leventhal, & Brooks-Gunn, 2007).

Methods and context

One way to begin to understand what lies behind the mixed evidence about the benefits of poverty deconcentration policies on

Table 1
Fieldwork data sources, by site.

	Oakwood Shores	Park Boulevard ^a	Westhaven Park	Total
<i>Panel interviews with residents, 2 waves</i>				
Relocated public housing residents	11	12	12	35
Renters of affordable units	4	–	6	10
Renters of market-rate units	6	–	5	11
Owners of affordable units	5	4	6	15
Owners of market-rate units	5	4	5	14
<i>Panel interviews with key stakeholders, 3 waves</i>				
Private developers, service providers, property managers	8	6	10	24
Community stakeholders and resident leaders	11	9	14	34
Public agency staff, advocates, and other informed observers ^b	–	–	–	26
<i>Focus groups with residents</i>				
Relocated public housing residents	15	16	19	50
Renters of affordable units	11	–	10	21
Renters of market-rate units	9	–	8	17
Owners of affordable and market-rate units	7	3	4	14
Total				271

^a At the time fieldwork was completed, Park Boulevard did not contain affordable or market-rate rental units.

^b “Macro-level” stakeholders not affiliated with a specific development.

youth is to interrogate the nature of community dynamics that are at play in the receiving neighborhoods to which public housing youth move. This requires focusing not just on the ways in which neighborhood context may affect young people, but on the *reciprocal* ways in which young people shape and have an impact on their local environment. It also requires understanding the perceptions of community members about their neighborhood and the young people who live there. In the context of mixed-income communities, of particular importance are the ways in which youth from low-income households are perceived to interact with higher-income residents, and how they may both contribute to and be influenced by these interactions.

The analysis presented here is geared toward these ends. It investigates the perspectives of residents and other neighborhood stakeholders on these communities’ potential for influencing youth behavior and well-being and explores how the presence and actions of young people themselves are perceived to contribute to the neighborhood environments that are supposed to have an impact on their development. In doing so, it focuses in particular on the ways in which assumptions about public housing youth are informed by institutionalized narratives of the urban “underclass”—especially as it informs perceptions of young African American males—and the expectations for behavior these narratives suggest.

The analysis is based on in-depth interviews, focus groups, field observations, and a review of documentary data concerning three mixed-income developments that are being built in place of public housing complexes that have been demolished as part of the Chicago Housing Authority’s Plan for Transformation, launched in 1999.² Oakwood Shores is the development taking the place of Ida B. Wells/Madden Park, one of the oldest public housing developments in Chicago, and will be the largest of the three at full build-out. Park Boulevard is the redevelopment of Stateway Gardens along

² The Plan for Transformation involves the redevelopment of 25,000 units of public housing, including over 7000 units to be included in mixed-income developments along with rental and for-sale units for higher income families.

the State Street Corridor, which had been emblematic of some of the more notorious high-rise public housing developments in the country. Westhaven Park is the second phase of the redevelopment of Henry Horner Homes on the city’s west side, the first phase of which involved new-construction, town-house style units for public housing residents. Westhaven Park will therefore have a larger proportion of public housing residents (63%) and the lowest proportion of for-sale units (27%) than any other site.

A total of 274 interviews were conducted over three waves of data collection that included panels of both residents and key informants involved in the developments (see Table 1). Resident interviewees were randomly selected from developer occupancy lists and included residents of all housing tenures in each site, including 35 relocated public housing residents, 25 residents of “affordable” units (either rented or owned, subsidized by tax credits), and 25 residents of “market-rate” units (again, either rented or owned). Most residents were interviewed twice with the exception of those at Park Boulevard, where interviews were only conducted in the second wave due to construction delays. In the third wave of data collection focus groups were conducted with a new, randomly selected sample of residents. Residents were grouped according to site, income, and housing tenure and included 50 relocated public housing residents, 26 residents of affordable units, and 26 residents of market-rate units. Because we were unable to interview young people directly, our analysis focuses on parent and other stakeholder perspectives on youth.³ In addition to residents, three waves of interviews with stakeholder key-informants were conducted, including a total of 84 individuals involved in the Transformation, either as “development-team” members (developers, service providers, and property managers), as “community” key informants (such as service providers, community activists, and public officials active in the neighborhoods in which these developments are being built), or as “macro-level” key informants (including officials with the Chicago Housing Authority and public housing advocates).

Interviews were guided by a semi-structured interview instrument that allowed for comparison of perspectives across interviewees while providing the opportunity for individuals to generate narratives in response to basic interview themes that speak to their particular experience and perspectives. Interviews were recorded digitally, transcribed, and coded for analysis using the NVivo qualitative data analysis software program. Focus groups were guided by a semi-structured instrument and facilitated by an independent moderator. The groups were audiorecorded, and reports were compiled to highlight common themes and major points of disagreement among participants. Documentary and field observation data allow us to contextualize interview and focus group data within the specific dynamics of each site, and provide both a check on and new insights into the dynamics described by interviewees.

Findings

Our findings focus first on perspectives on young people and expectations regarding the effect on youth of moving to a mixed-income community on youth development. We then turn to explore several aspects of the neighborhood environments the mixed-income developments provide, focusing in particular on

³ The analysis presented here draws on a larger study of the transformation of public housing in Chicago, with a particular focus on the mixed-income component. Although the research was not initially designed to focus explicitly on young people (and therefore youth interviews were not part of the original design), dynamics around children and (especially) youth have provided a major cross-cutting theme that emerged from the work (see, e.g., Chaskin & Joseph, 2010, 2011, 2012; Joseph & Chaskin, 2010). This paper explores these dynamics as the central focus of analysis based on the perspectives of residents (including parents) and other stakeholders. Subsequent research will incorporate the participation and perspectives of young people themselves.

the dimensions of youth social interaction, youth engagement in services, programs, and opportunities, and the ways in which young people's use and appropriation of space contributes to neighborhood dynamics.

Perspectives on youth in mixed-income communities

Overall, respondents' notions about the potential for mixed-income communities to influence youth development and well-being are highly consistent with the arguments rehearsed above. The role that public housing in Chicago played in creating some of the worst examples of concentrated urban poverty in the country is widely recognized. Within a few decades of their construction, many of the public housing complexes were characterized by severe physical deterioration, high levels of violence and crime, racial segregation, and social isolation (Hunt, 2009; Kotlowitz, 1991; Massey & Kanaiaupuni, 1993; Venkatesh, 2000). Many factors contributed to these outcomes, including discriminatory site selection (informed in part by virulent resistance to racial integration), political conflicts, racist policies, exclusionary market dynamics, limited funding, a weak and shrinking social welfare infrastructure, and poor design, construction, maintenance, and management (Hirsch, 1983; Hunt, 2009; Popkin, Gwiasda, Olson, Rosenbaum, & Buron, 2000). In contrast, the mixed-income communities replacing these complexes are seen as having the potential to provide safe, healthy environments in which young people can grow up, removed from the pervasive negative influences of delinquent peers and the dangers of crime and unsanitary conditions that characterized their former public housing neighborhoods, and better connected to resources, opportunity, and the positive influence of higher-income neighbors. Indeed, most respondents saw the potential benefits of mixed-income development to hold most particularly for young people—in terms of both potential influence on their behavior and well-being and on their aspirations for the future—rather than for their parents. In this vein, a Chicago Housing Authority official describes the strategy as a “two-generation prospect” resting on the children of relocated public housing residents:

The children of these public housing residents have got to see, be exposed to on a day to day basis something different than that which they saw in those developments. They have to be exposed to people going to school through college and see that as the norm, not as an exception because it's hard to build your life around being an exception.

The potential effect of middle-class role models was particularly emphasized by professionals—housing authority officials, development team members, community leaders—and higher-income residents, especially homeowners. This orientation is informed by a set of institutionalized assumptions about an urban “underclass” that is seen to have internalized values and embraced behaviors in opposition to those (e.g., toward work and self-sufficiency) held by those in the “mainstream” culture (e.g., Kasarda, 1990; Murray, 1984). Such notions of a “culture of poverty” (Lewis, 1966) have been strongly criticized as confusing “cultural” patterns with the external conditions of poverty (Katz, 1993; Valentine, 1968) and as empirically unfounded (Duneier, 1992; Newman, 1999; Small & Newman, 2001). Nevertheless, many higher-income residents' and professionals' perceptions of the public housing population continue to be informed by these narratives (Briggs, Popkin & Goering, 2010; Chaskin & Joseph, 2010). Relocated public housing residents also reflected on the benefits of these communities on their children's well-being and aspirations, but most focused more on the benefits of greater safety and a better-maintained built environment than on cross-class influence (cf. Chaskin & Joseph, 2010).

Beyond the effects of the neighborhood on youth behavior and aspirations, young people (especially younger, school-aged children) were also seen by some respondents, particularly professionals at the developments and particularly early in the life of these communities, as being well-positioned to contribute positively to community dynamics, operating as a kind of relational bridge between residents of different incomes and housing tenures. This bridging potential of youth, however, has for the most part not moved past the aspirational, and hopes have dimmed over time. Interviews with residents and stakeholders, supplemented by observation and documentary data, suggest that this is due principally to three factors.

First, there are demographic realities. For the most part, relocated public housing residents are more likely to have children, to have more children, and to have older children than market-rate renters or homeowners. Given this, there is less likelihood of child-to-child relationship-building across incomes and housing tenures.

Second, there are structural circumstances, including limited formal contexts and informal spaces in which young people from different backgrounds can get to know one another. Children tend to go to a range of different schools, for example, rather than a single or small set of neighborhood schools, and middle-class residents have largely abandoned the Chicago public school system in favor of private or, in some cases, competitive public school options such as magnet schools. In addition, (as we will explore further below) there are relatively few local youth programs or informal public spaces where young people from different backgrounds spend time together.

Finally, there are differences in the ways higher-income residents experience these neighborhoods and interpret the values and behavior of both their low-income neighbors and their neighbors' children. Indeed, as we will detail further below, the behavior of unsupervised youth—particularly older youth—and their use and appropriation of public space lies at the contentious core of perceived problems with regard to safety, social control, and the maintenance of community norms in these neighborhoods, and contributes to both family management strategies that reinforce separation and to efforts to monitor and enforce rules controlling access to space and policing youth public behavior.

Neighborhood environment and neighborhood dynamics

The neighborhood environments provided by the new mixed-income developments are dramatically different from the public housing contexts from which relocated public housing residents came. The built environment is significantly improved, with new construction, lower density, better integration into the street grid and better access to surrounding neighborhoods. There is also less violence and crime, some better neighborhood amenities, and some more (and more targeted) supportive services for both families and their children. And there are new neighbors, most of whom differ from relocated public housing residents in terms of income, occupation, education, cultural background, family structure, life experience, and (in some cases) race.

In light of these changes, how are young people responding to these new contexts? How do they contribute to and help shape social dynamics within them? We turn now to an exploration of these questions with regard to young people's influence on neighborhood relations and social interaction, their engagement in services, institutions, and programs, and the dynamics surrounding public behavior and the use of public space.

Youth, social interaction, and the management of neighborhood relationships

A major outcome for the youth who have moved from public housing into the new mixed-income developments are the benefits

of living in higher-quality housing in a safer and more stable environment. These community improvements have meant less anxiety and stress due to fear of crime and the burdens of navigating an unpredictable environment as well as more freedom for youth to be outside by themselves. In spite of this, there has been limited interaction among young people of different backgrounds across the three communities. When respondents note instances of positive interactions across class, they are mostly between adults or between higher-income adults and relocated public housing youth—and almost invariably younger children. These limited adult–youth encounters tend to be quite casual in nature, shaped by proximity, and often facilitated by some quotidian activity that provides an opening for causal interaction. Dog-walking, for example, as many respondents observed, provides just such a bridge, at least with younger children. As the renter of an “affordable” unit notes:

[T]he new people that come in—now, I do see some—a very few white people being friendly with the kids. And especially the white people with dogs. You know, the kids love the dogs and they got to know the dog’s name, and they follow the people and walk with them and help them with the dog-walking.

Overall however, distance best characterizes the relational dynamics between different income and tenure groups in these new communities. This distance is significantly influenced by the different ways in which parents experience and evaluate the neighborhoods as places for their children to grow up. Most relocated public housing residents, for example, highlight the decrease in violence and crime as the primary benefit of moving to these new communities. The relative safety of their new environments has led them to allow their children greater freedom to play outside without having to fear for their safety and well-being. As a relocated public housing resident notes:

I thank the good Lord that I can finally release him to have some type of socialization because he could not play at all outside at Ida B. Wells. There was too much shootings and everything and it bothered him.

Higher-income parents by contrast, perceive these environments in general to be *less* safe than their prior neighborhoods and express concern about young people’s destructive and disrespectful behavior in the neighborhood. These concerns have led many higher-income parents to closely monitor and manage the leisure-time activities of their children. As a market-rate renter puts it:

I’ve never allowed my children to be out there playing with anybody. And that’s not to be condescending, but I’ve never allowed it because I’m very—I’m in control of my children, and I don’t want any negative influence, so I’ve always kind of kept them away from outside.

Such monitoring and management strategies are often coupled with active support for the maintenance of their children’s old relationships. Many higher-income parents talked about the restrictions they placed on their children’s exposure to the new environments while encouraging the preservation of old friendships and connections:

It’s just so far as his behavior so far as having—socializing with friends, I don’t let him do that because he got his friends at his dad’s house. He has friends at school. He has friends when he goes to camp.

Such different assessments of the environment and the resulting parenting practices limit the opportunities for casual encounters and the possibility of forming new connections among

young people of different incomes and housing tenures in these three communities. Underlying these strategies are some specific tensions grounded in fundamental assumptions of difference that generate both fear and avoidance. In this way, rather than acting as relational bridges between residents of different incomes and housing tenures, young people are sometimes a barrier, instantiating difference and generating avoidance. A relocated public housing resident notes her neighbors’ strategy of avoidance and interprets it in racial terms:

And then once our kids leave the playground, then the white people be bringing their kids out. So, to me, that’s prejudice. You don’t want your kids mixing with our kids. You don’t want your kids getting to know our kids. Our kids is not bad. You just got to choose the right ones.

But avoidance on the part of higher-income residents is also often grounded in fear—of unknown (poor, black) youth in general, or more specifically of retaliation by youth with whom one might intervene or of potential conflicts with parents. Counter to theoretical expectations about the role-modeling and higher levels of informal social control that higher-income adults might provide, this has given rise to a non-interventionist stance among many adults in the face of what they perceive to be (actual or incipient) destructive or anti-social behavior by young people in these new developments, or to their relying on formal (property management, police) rather than informal mechanisms of social control.

Engagement in services and activities

The limited cross-class interaction among young people in these new developments is also the result of differences in institutional engagement and participation, as well as a lack of formal and informal spaces that could facilitate such encounters. Differences in institutional engagement among young people in these communities are particularly apparent in patterns of school attendance. Overall, young people from public housing continue to attend the same schools that they attended prior to the move or, in light of the wave of public school closings that coincided with the relocation process, to transfer to schools far away from the new developments. This educational separation is reinforced by higher-income parents’ school-selection strategies. As a development team member notes:

There are a lot of folk who don’t want their children in the same schools as public housing children because they feel that their children are being deprived of learning, because of disruption, because of disciplinary reasons, and the fact that the children are at different points in life and in education and they feel like their kids are being held back while the teachers are trying to bring the poor kids or the public housing kids up to par.

Beyond school, there are some programs available for young people—after-school programs, internships, workforce training, summer jobs, sports programs—but they both fall far short of demand and tend to engage different youth. Higher-income residents, for example, have greater access to the market for youth programs in which fees are required for participation, and most youth opportunities generated specifically in response to the Transformation, particularly with regard to workforce opportunities for older youth, are means-tested and geared toward public housing youth. As a market-rate renter complains:

Why the hell you put all this together for one community but you separate all the children? You say that only low-income kids can do this but mine can’t? Ain’t no earn to learn for him, ain’t no community center for him, ain’t no job for him, ain’t no nothing for him because [I’m] not CHA.

Although relocated public housing residents report that their children are more engaged in programmatic activities and are benefitting from better institutional resources in the new developments, respondents across income and housing tenure expressed a much greater demand for structured programs and supervised activities than is met by what currently exists, particularly for older youth. Problems of access due to distance, difficulties effectively targeting young people in the new developments, a lack of information about what is available, and insufficient year-round programs during late evening and weekend hours are particularly constraining factors. As one community member describes it:

[T]here's nothing really here for them to do. You see the kids in the park. You see the teenagers kind of mingling, walking around. There's no real structure. There doesn't seem to be the kinds of structure in terms of sports to keep them busy. We've inquired over here at the [social services] center... across the street and they have some activities but not enough. They close too early. They don't have anything pretty much for the kids in late evenings, you know, just quick after school and that's it, kind of go home. There's just not enough for them to do.

Public behavior and public space

These gaps in the provision of institutional resources, the relative lack of dedicated space for youth activities, the dynamics of avoidance and lack of informal social control, and the establishment of and response to formal rules relating to youth behavior and the use of public space all contribute to contentious dynamics of spatial appropriation and youth public behavior in these communities.

For some, the question of available space for socializing and play lies at the heart of the issue. As a CHA official puts it:

There's nowhere for them kids to play. I'm like, where's the playground, guys? You're talking about communities with children; you need a playground. You need a sandbox. You know, and then you wonder why kids get in trouble? 'Cause they can't stay in the house all day, you know.

And, of course, young people don't "stay in the house." In the absence of dedicated space or in lieu of engagement in formal programs, many young people—largely relocated public housing residents and other low-income youth from the development or the surrounding neighborhood—make use of available spaces that developers, property management, and higher-income residents generally view as inappropriate for socializing. This contributes, in many cases, to negative perceptions and expectations of trouble. As a development team member puts it:

When you see a group of young African-American boys just hanging out on the corner, it doesn't necessarily mean they're up to no good; they're just talking, but if you don't understand that and all you've seen was what you've seen on television, then you make the implication that, you know you may imply, oh they must be up to no good, when that's not the case at all.

In light of this, young people, primarily youth from the relocated public housing families in the development or living nearby, who are seen "hanging out" (on street corners, in parking lots, in front of buildings) or riding bikes or playing ball in the streets become flashpoints for conflict and generate formal rules (curfews, privatized access to playgrounds, codifying increasing numbers of behaviors as lease violations) to minimize youth presence and perceived disruption. While there are some serious issues of crime in these communities, and while much of the stated rationale for these rules is grounded in concerns about safety and fear of crime, most of the complaints by adults of all income levels and

backgrounds focus more on incivility—loud noise, unruly behavior, trash—than on actual crime (cf. Chaskin & Joseph, 2012). As a market-rate owner puts it:

Sometimes we've had to find young adult teenagers sitting on the steps, loitering on the steps. A lot of noise outside... Standing outside in clusters and sometimes skipping, playing. I just feel—play out back, but instead they play out here and I just feel that it's a bit scary, especially when it's young teenaged boys. They were out there throwing bottles, screaming, fighting.

These perceptions of youth and dynamics around youth behavior—and the resulting attempts to manage a broad range of behaviors and use of space in these communities—tend to deepen existing divisions between residents of different income levels and housing tenures. While many higher-income residents question the sincerity of relocated public housing parents' willingness (or ability) to control the behavior of their children, relocated public housing parents criticize the unfair targeting of their children by efforts to enforce rules controlling access to public spaces and to police youth public behavior. Thus, rather than relocated public housing youth being motivated to change aspirations and behavior in light of new interactions with middle-class peers and role models, the presence of and perceptions about the behavior of low-income youth in public has contributed to community dynamics of cross-class division and the implementation of formal rules and social control mechanisms that reinforce separation.

Conclusions

The public housing transformation investments in new housing and safer, more orderly communities has led to improvements in the lives of youth who have been able to move into these new mixed-income developments. However, their overall experiences in these new environments are not altogether positive for them and are proving to be problematic for the broader community. In large part, the expectations for the positive influence that poverty deconcentration would have on the youth in terms of their social experiences, and the positive role that youth might have on the community building process, are proving to be elusive. Rather than children and youth serving as a shared point of connection, the different monitoring and management strategies that families of different backgrounds employ tend to serve as a barrier to engagement and a sense of commonality. Rather than the socially diverse environment serving as a positive influence in shaping the development of young people, the overriding dynamic in these new communities is informed by the negative influences that youth, particularly unsupervised youth with little structured activity to occupy them, are perceived to have on the broader community. Although crime rates are largely declining in these neighborhoods and the "negative" activities by youth are primarily minor issues such as littering, unruly play, and uncourteous behavior, the response demanded by residents, particularly higher-income residents, is focused on increased policing and formal social control.

Returning to the four mechanisms identified by Sampson et al. (2002) through which neighborhood improvements can be translated into positive individual outcomes is a useful way to highlight exactly why theoretical propositions about mixed-income neighborhood effects for youth may be failing to be realized. First, there is limited social interaction and network formation across race and class boundaries, and rather than helping to bridge relationships among households of different income levels, the perception of and dynamics around youth often promote distance and avoidance. Second, the strained and tense tenor of relations across income levels lead neighbors to be unwilling to intervene

informally to promote common social norms and collective efficacy. Third, institutional resources to promote positive youth recreation, enrichment, and employment opportunities are sorely lacking. Fourth, routine youth activities tend to be unsupervised and viewed by many higher-income residents and development professionals as encroaching upon and detracting from the value of shared public property and space.

Our research raises concerns about the future viability and sustainability of these environments in the absence of more intentional and effective investments in structured supports and activities for youth. This will require development-level attention by responsible actors such as property managers, service providers, and resident leaders to develop more constructive ways of engaging youth and families of all income levels in agreeing to shared norms of behavior and providing more structured activities for youth. It may also include fostering a (difficult to accomplish) shift in institutionalized perceptions and attitudes—reinforced by media portrayals and reflected in a range of punitive responses, from zero-tolerance policies in schools to ordinances seeking to limit public gathering of youth to the increasing privatization of civic space—that view youth (particularly poor urban youth of color) first as likely threats to be controlled rather than young people as likely to be engaged in the developmentally normative activities of informal socializing, building relationships, and exploring autonomy. Beyond attention to these micro-level interactions and perceptions is the need to recognize the challenges facing youth in these contexts are related to much broader systemic challenges, particularly in urban environments, and involve issues such as the quality of schooling, a lack of employment opportunities for youth, and limited resources to support constructive out-of-school time. More attention to and investment in these resources and opportunities is critical.

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