Residential Mobility and the Reproduction of Unequal Neighborhoods

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Abstract

Housing assistance policy has shifted away from project-based assistance toward tenant-based assistance. This shift in approach reflects a common assumption that, if families have the option to find homes on their own in the private market, they will seek out better quality homes in racially diverse neighborhoods with lower levels of poverty. This article presents evidence to qualify this assumption by highlighting the limits of residential mobility in reducing, in any substantive way, the degree of racial and ethnic inequality in urban America. Two empirical observations form the basis of the argument. The first observation is that residential mobility typically serves to reproduce urban inequality instead of disrupting it. The second is that urban inequality is resilient: even when individuals or families make moves that disrupt patterns of racial and ethnic inequality, the changes such moves induce are undermined by system-level processes that serve to reproduce inequality in the urban landscape. As a result, changes in families' neighborhood environments arising from residential mobility are often temporary and are diluted by subsequent changes occurring around families. The article concludes with a discussion of implications for housing assistance policy.

Introduction

During the past two decades, there have been several high-profile federal housing programs and policies that reflect a shift away from project-based assistance toward tenant-based assistance (Orlebeke, 2000). The number of families receiving vouchers for rental assistance through the Section 8 program has grown steadily, the Moving to Opportunity (MTO) for Fair Housing demonstration launched with great fanfare to assess whether mobility out of public housing projects could transform families' lives, and the HOPE VI Program demolished some of the most notorious

highrise public housing projects across the country (Cisneros and Engdahl, 2009; Goering and Feins, 2003). This shift in approach has been driven at least in part by the widespread sentiment that the deterioration of highrise public housing projects has contributed to the problems associated with concentrated urban poverty and racial segregation in America's cities. It may also be driven by an underlying assumption that, if families have the option to find homes on their own in the private market, they will seek out better quality homes in racially diverse neighborhoods with lower poverty levels.

This article does not challenge this assumption—in fact, a good deal of evidence indicates that families receiving housing vouchers live in neighborhoods with lower levels of concentrated poverty and crime than families receiving project-based assistance (Devine et al., 2003; Lens, Ellen, and O'Regan, 2011; McClure, 2008; Newman and Schnare, 1998). Rather, this article presents an argument about the limits of residential mobility in reducing, in any substantive way, the degree of racial and ethnic inequality in urban America. Two empirical observations form the basis of the argument. The first observation is that residential mobility typically serves to reproduce urban inequality instead of disrupting it. Residential moves are made within the highly stratified residential landscapes found in most American cities, and most moves lead families into aggregate flows of mobility that reinforce the larger structure of racial and ethnic inequality in the city or metropolitan area as a whole. Structural constraints, arising from the supply of affordable housing in an area and the resources that families bring to the housing market, are obvious explanations for this pattern. Although I acknowledge these structural constraints, in this article I focus attention on the less obvious cognitive constraints that help to explain why families rarely make moves that disrupt the larger patterns of racial and ethnic inequality. To be perfectly clear, the term *cognitive constraints* has nothing to do with the cognitive skills or abilities of individuals or groups; instead, the term, as used here, captures the constraints on residential mobility arising from individuals' perceptions and understandings of which communities are possible or realistic residential destinations. Cognitive constraints affect the housing choice process for all groups, but the consequences of such constraints are not equal.

The second observation is that urban inequality is resilient. Even when individuals or families make moves that disrupt patterns of racial and ethnic inequality, system-level processes that serve to reproduce inequality in the urban landscape often undermine the changes such moves induce. As a result, change in families' neighborhood settings arising from residential mobility is often temporary, and it is reversed or diluted by subsequent change occurring around families.

The Structure of Residential Mobility

Evidence From the Project on Human Development in Chicago Neighborhoods

The first part of this article provides descriptive evidence on the relationship between residential mobility and neighborhood change. I begin in Chicago before expanding outward to consider national patterns. Much of the evidence I review is based on Sampson and Sharkey's (2008) analysis of neighborhood attainment trajectories, which drew on data from the Project on Human Development in Chicago Neighborhoods (PHDCN). The PHDCN is a longitudinal study that tracked a

sample of families with children living in a representative set of Chicago neighborhoods as of 1995. The analyses I discuss in this section are based on data from the 0-, 3-, 6-, 9-, 12-, and 15-year-old age cohorts of the PHDCN Longitudinal Cohort Study; these analyses exclude the 18-year-old cohort, because many members of this group lived independently at the first wave of the survey, but I present separate analyses focusing on the 18-year-old cohort subsequently. The study gave children and caregivers in the PHDCN sample extensive interview assessments at three interview waves and followed them wherever the family moved (in the United States) over a 7-year period extending to 2002. This feature of the data allows for the decomposition of change in families' neighborhood environments arising from residential moves and from change in the composition of the neighborhood residents surrounding a family. The extensive data available on caregivers and their children allow for an assessment of the degree to which the child or caregiver's individual characteristics, or the family's changing conditions, help to account for trajectories of change in the families' neighborhoods arising from residential mobility.

Exhibit 1 displays trajectories of change in families' neighborhood conditions, which are based on a set of multilevel growth curve models in which the time points at which families were interviewed are nested within individuals, allowing for the description of change in neighborhood characteristics and adjusting for stable and time-varying characteristics or circumstances of the family (see Sampson and Sharkey, 2008, for details on the models and the covariates included). This exhibit shows trajectories of change in families' neighborhood economic status—as measured by the median income in a family's neighborhood—separately for families who remained in the same neighborhood over the course of the survey, families who moved to a new neighborhood within Chicago, and families who moved to a new neighborhood outside Chicago's city limits. In each case, slopes of change are allowed to vary by race and ethnicity.
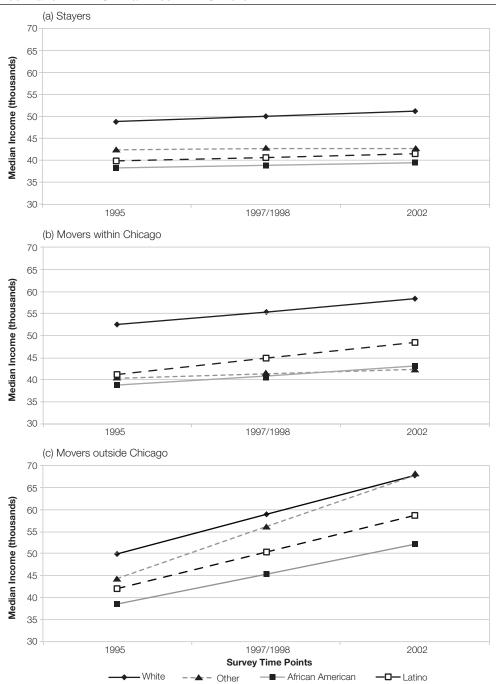
The racial and ethnic hierarchy in Chicago's neighborhoods is immediately visible from exhibit 1. Particularly notable is the persistent gap in neighborhood median income across racial and ethnic groups. This gap in neighborhood economic status is present among families who remain in their origin neighborhood, among families who move within the city, and among families who leave Chicago. In each case, White families live in the most affluent neighborhoods, followed by members of other ethnic groups (primarily Asian Americans) and then by Latinos and African Americans, respectively. This racial and ethnic hierarchy persists over the course of the study, and it persists no matter where families move.

A second observation is that change in neighborhood economic status is driven almost entirely by residential mobility. Families who remain in the same neighborhood over the course of the study experience virtually no change in neighborhood economic status, and families who move within the city find themselves in slightly more affluent neighborhoods over time. Only when families exit Chicago, however, do they experience substantial change in the neighborhood environment. After adjusting for any changes in the economic circumstances of the family, moves out of Chicago are found to bring about gains in neighborhood median income of more than $10,000 for all racial and ethnic groups.

Similar findings emerge in analyses of change in neighborhood racial composition. Families who remain in the city experience minimal change in neighborhood racial composition over the course of the study, but when African Americans move beyond Chicago's city limits, they move into

Exhibit 1

Trajectories of Change in Neighborhood Median Income, by Mobility Status and Destination: PHDCN Families With Children

(a) Stayers

(b) Movers within Chicago

(c) Movers outside Chicago

PHDCN = Project on Human Development in Chicago Neighborhoods.
Source: Adapted from Sampson and Sharkey (2008)

neighborhoods that are much more integrated than their origin neighborhoods. The probability of making this transition out of Chicago varies by race and ethnicity, however. After conditioning on stable and time-varying characteristics of families, the odds of African-American or Latino families moving out of Chicago are only about 40 percent as high as the odds for White families.

This first set of results leads to two conclusions about change in families' neighborhood environments. First, trajectories of neighborhood attainment are greatly constrained by the rigid structure of economic segregation and of racial and ethnic segregation within Chicago. As a result, moves made within the city lead to minimal change in families' neighborhood environments. Second, although moving out of Chicago leads to substantial change in families' neighborhoods, the likelihood of exiting the city is conditioned by race and ethnicity.
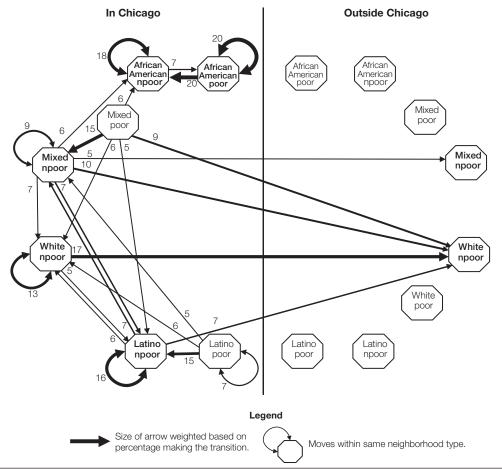
The result is a system of neighborhood inequality that is reproduced by the mobility of different groups within it. This system becomes visible through the analysis of flows of movement across different "types" of neighborhoods characterized by location (within or outside Chicago), by the dominant racial or ethnic group within the neighborhood (predominantly White, African American, Latino, or *mixed*, meaning none of these groups composes a majority of residents in the neighborhood), and by economic status (poor or nonpoor, with *poor* neighborhoods defined as those within the poorest quartile of neighborhood median income in Chicago). Exhibit 2 shows flows of movement across community subtypes. An arrow represents a flow of mobility if at least 5 percent of families in the origin neighborhood subtype undertake the transition to the new subtype, and circular loops represent flows of mobility that lead families from one type of neighborhood to a new neighborhood of the same type.

The dominant flows of families shown in exhibit 2 serve to reproduce the structure of racial and economic stratification within Chicago and the surrounding metropolitan area, rather than to disrupt it. Flows linking communities within Chicago and communities outside the city are few, and, by and large, they represent movement from nonpoor communities within the city to predominantly White, nonpoor communities outside Chicago. Within the city limits, the dominant flows depict a pattern of *circulation* between communities of similar economic status and similar racial and ethnic composition. This pattern is particularly pronounced within the set of predominantly African-American communities. Although movement from racially mixed neighborhoods into predominantly African-American communities occurs, not a single flow of migration leads out of African-American neighborhoods into neighborhoods that are mixed or that feature a majority of residents from other racial or ethnic groups. Instead, exhibit 2 reveals a pattern of circulation within the majority-African-American neighborhoods of Chicago.

Among the diverse set of communities found in Chicago, this pattern of circulation is unique to the city's African-American communities. Considerable exchange of families takes place between communities that are racially mixed, predominantly Latino, or predominantly White, whether these communities are poor or nonpoor. The flow of families across these communities reflects the high number of neighborhoods within the city undergoing a continuous process of transition, in which the community's population shifts from one dominant ethnic group to another, or, in some cases, reflects population change in neighborhoods that remain stably integrated over time. African-American neighborhoods are largely separate from these flows of migration, and they are distinguished by the absence of connections to other types of communities throughout the city.

Exhibit 2

Flows of Mobility Among White, African-American, Latino, and Mixed Neighborhoods, by Poverty and Destination in or Outside Chicago: PHDCN Families With Children

In Chicago | **Outside Chicago**

18 20 20

African American npoor 7 African American poor 20

African American poor African American npoor

6

Mixed poor Mixed poor

9 6 15 9

Mixed npoor 5 6 5 Mixed npoor

10

7 7

White npoor 17 White npoor

13 5

White poor

5 7

Latino npoor 6 Latino poor Latino poor Latino npoor

7 6 7 15

16 7

Legend

→ Size of arrow weighted based on percentage making the transition.

⬡ Moves within same neighborhood type.

npoor = nonpoor. PHDCN = Project on Human Development in Chicago Neighborhoods.

Notes: All flows represent the percentage of families in the origin neighborhood making a transition, either within (mover-stayers) or to another neighborhood type. Arrows are not shown for transitions under 5 percent. Numbers attached to the arrows indicate the percentage of individuals making the transition.

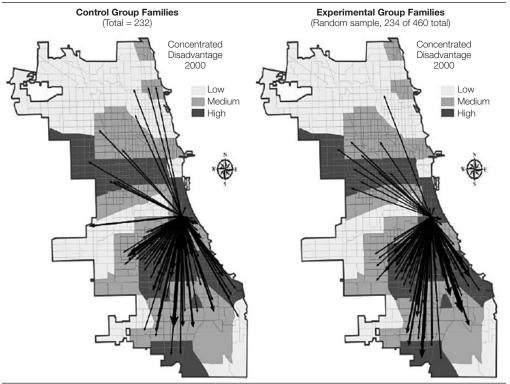*Source: Adapted from Sampson and Sharkey (2008)*

Evidence From Moving to Opportunity

The flows of mobility shown in exhibit 2 are based on data from a representative sample of families within Chicago. The implications of these findings for housing policy become clearer when examining similar mobility flows among a sample of Chicago families living in public housing that participated in one of the more ambitious social experiments of our time, the Moving to Opportunity (MTO) program. MTO is a social experiment in which public housing residents in five cities who volunteered for the program were randomly assigned to one of three groups: (1) an experimental group that received vouchers that the family could use to relocate only in

low-poverty neighborhoods, (2) a Section 8 group that received traditional Section 8 vouchers with no restrictions on where the family could locate, or (3) a control group that received no vouchers (see Briggs, Popkin, and Goering, 2010, and Goering and Feins, 2003, for details on the intervention and its history).

Analyzing mobility patterns within the Chicago sample of MTO families, Sampson (2008) generated a remarkable map comparing flows of mobility among families in the MTO experimental group with those of families in the control group, which is reproduced in exhibit 3. As the exhibit shows, the MTO sample, which was almost entirely African American, moved from the South Side neighborhoods where they originated to a set of neighborhoods across the south and west of the city, with only trivial numbers of families venturing into any of the other communities throughout Chicago. Families in both the experimental and control groups fanned out across the city in almost identical paths, creating aggregate flows of migration that are difficult to distinguish. The families in the experimental group did relocate into neighborhoods with lower poverty levels, but these destination neighborhoods were often contiguous to the higher poverty neighborhoods of the

Exhibit 3

Flows of Movement Among the Control Group and the Experimental Group in the MTO Chicago Site

| Control Group Families (Total = 232) | Experimental Group Families (Random sample, 234 of 460 total) |

MTO = Moving to Opportunity.
Note: Communities are shaded by the level of concentrated disadvantage as of 2000, and the size of arrows is weighted by the volume of movement.
Source: Adapted from Sampson (2008)

control group (Sampson, 2008). They located in neighborhoods that were similarly segregated by race and that offered similar quality schools, and they located in neighborhoods that were changing in different ways than the destination neighborhoods of the control group. All of the destination communities in Chicago were experiencing a decline in concentrated disadvantage during this period, but the destination neighborhoods of the experimental group were improving at a slower pace than the destination neighborhoods of the control group.

Sampson's (2008) analysis revealed the way that all moves made by families in the Chicago MTO sample were conditioned by the larger community structure of residential Chicago. Even holding a voucher that required them to move into neighborhoods with relatively low poverty levels, families in the experimental group moved along spatial pathways that were indistinguishable from those of the control group, they moved within the subset of predominantly African-American neighborhoods in the city, and they moved into neighborhoods that were on a trajectory of change that would make any differences between the neighborhoods of the control and experimental groups fade away over time. In the city of Chicago, the rigid structure of neighborhood racial and economic inequality overwhelmed the policy intervention; even with the capacity to "move to opportunity," MTO participants made residential moves that served to reproduce the larger structure of urban inequality (Sampson, 2008; see also Sampson, 2012).

Before moving on to consider potential explanations for these findings, it is important to acknowledge that the patterns of mobility uncovered in Chicago may be very different from patterns in other cities across the country, particularly the newer cities in the sunbelt regions of the South and West, which feature less entrenched patterns of racial, ethnic, and economic segregation. For instance, Clark (2008) provided similar evidence on the changes that MTO induced in all five cities in which it was carried out: Baltimore, Boston, Chicago, Los Angeles, and New York. The overarching conclusion from Clark's analysis was that the intervention produced minimal long-term changes in African-American families' neighborhoods, which is consistent with the argument made here. Note also, however, that the most pronounced changes in the geographic location and neighborhood environments of African-American MTO families were found in Los Angeles; a map showing the origin and destination locations of participating families from this city looks very different from the map produced from the Chicago sample. This difference does not imply that the findings from Chicago are irrelevant for families in other cities but, rather, that one cannot assume the patterns derived from a city like Chicago are identical to patterns in other cities (Small, 2007). I explore this issue in more depth in the following section, as I widen my perspective to the nation as a whole.

Structural and Cognitive Constraints on Mobility

To understand why residential moves tend to reproduce, rather than disrupt, patterns of inequality, one must first consider the wide array of factors that influence where families live. Residential decisions are influenced by families' preferences for their neighborhood's composition and the amenities, risks, and resources that it offers, and residential decisions are constrained by families' circumstances (for example, life-cycle stage, family size and structure, income and assets) and the supply of affordable, quality housing. I refer to constraints arising from the interaction of the supply of affordable housing and the economic resources that individuals bring to the housing market as *structural constraints*.

Less obvious than these structural constraints on residential mobility are the set of cognitive constraints on housing decisions and the way that these two sets of constraints interact and operate in tandem to influence housing and neighborhood choices. By *cognitive constraints*, I mean individuals' mental perceptions and understandings of which communities are possible residential destinations. Shroder (2002) captured a similar idea with the term *psychological constraints*. Individuals' ideas about possible residential destinations may be based on familiarity (or lack of familiarity) with an area, a sense of whether the individual would "fit" in the community, perceptions of the history of the community, or a range of other factors that affect the individual's understanding about whether a given community is a realistic residential destination.

Perhaps the clearest example of cognitive constraints comes from research on "community blind spots" that Krysan and Bader (2009) conducted. In an innovative survey of Chicago adults conducted in 2004, Krysan and Bader selected 41 specific communities in and around Chicago and asked adult respondents to look at a map and identify which of these communities they "don't know anything about." The researchers then analyzed how the prevalence of community blind spots varies by the racial and ethnic composition of the community and by the race and ethnicity of the respondent, after adjusting for the respondent's social and economic status and the distance between the identified community and the respondent's own community.

Their findings revealed that all groups have incomplete information about the communities in and around Chicago. Latinos had the largest number of community blind spots, followed by Whites and African Americans, who had similar numbers of blind-spot communities. Not surprisingly, respondents were more likely to know nothing about a community if the community's residents were predominantly members of a different racial or ethnic group; a large proportion of African Americans knew little about several all-White communities in the greater Chicago area, and a large proportion of Whites knew little about the predominantly African-American neighborhoods of Chicago and its surrounding suburbs. Of particular interest, the study found that Whites were more likely to know nothing about racially and ethnically mixed neighborhoods in and around Chicago; in some cases this was true even for mixed neighborhoods in which Whites represent a majority of the neighborhood population.

Krysan and Bader's study revealed very clearly that information on the full range of communities within an urban area is limited for all groups, and the existence of community blind spots is not limited to any segment of the urban populace. Within the context of an urban landscape in which community advantage and disadvantage are stratified by race and ethnicity, however, the consequences of these blind spots vary by group, even if the prevalence does not. The pattern of community blind spots suggests that African Americans making decisions about residential moves are likely to be limited to a choice set of communities dominated by racial and ethnic minorities. In most cities across the nation, this choice set includes the communities that have been the object of consistent disinvestment over time, communities with greater risks and fewer economic opportunities (Dreier, Mollenkopf, and Swanstrom, 2001). Although Whites are similarly limited in their knowledge of the full range of potential destination communities, their choice set includes predominantly White communities that are commonly the most advantaged within an urban area.

In focusing on community blind spots, I do not intend to suggest that cognitive constraints on mobility decisions are driven primarily by biased or incomplete information about potential

communities that are held by residential movers. Perceptions of specific neighborhoods or entire sections of an urban area are influenced by a combination of direct or indirect experiences, individual and collective memories, and community reputations that persist over time. It is a mistake to think that the legacy of racial and ethnic violence in urban America has been wiped clean from the memories of America's urban dwellers, or that racial and ethnic discrimination is a thing of the past.[1]

For instance, excellent evidence demonstrates very clearly that discrimination remains prevalent in America's residential markets and that it affects every aspect of individuals' search for housing. The evidence comes from a series of experimental audits of the real estate industry conducted under the auspices of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (Turner and Ross, 2005; Turner et al., 2002). The Housing Discrimination Study 2000 showed that, in 17 to 25 percent of cases, African Americans and Latinos were "consistently" treated unfavorably when compared with their White counterparts, meaning "whites were more likely to find out about available houses and apartments, more likely to be given the opportunity to inspect these units, more likely to be offered favorable financial terms, more likely to be steered toward homes for sale in predominantly white neighborhoods, and more likely to receive assistance and encouragement in their housing search" (Turner and Ross, 2005: 86).

Equally important as the presence of racial and ethnic discrimination may be the perception of how individuals from different racial and ethnic backgrounds would be received in various communities across a metropolitan area. As an example, a survey of individuals in the Atlanta metropolitan area found that nearly 90 percent of African-American respondents believed that Whites commonly used discriminatory practices in the housing market, and a majority of both White and African-American respondents believed that Whites in the northern, largely White suburbs of Atlanta would be upset if an African-American family moved into the neighborhood (Thompson, 2001). The perception of racial animosity in these communities is widespread, and this perception is highly likely to affect African Americans' decisions about whether to relocate to these suburbs, even in the absence of any personal experience with racism, racial discrimination, or informal hostility in these communities. For housing voucher holders, perceptions about whether landlords would accept their vouchers may be equally important (Briggs, Popkin, and Goering, 2010).

The overarching point is that individuals' cognitive maps of the metropolitan areas surrounding them play a large role in leading families to choose neighborhoods in ways that reproduce racial and ethnic inequality in urban areas. The supply of affordable housing, families' preferences, and families' economic resources are certainly important in generating urban inequality, but historical and current racial discrimination, racial tension, and racial violence—or the perception that there is the potential for discrimination or hostility—matter as well.

Hints of the importance of such perceptions are evident in a study predicting which families leased up as part of the MTO intervention. Shroder (2002) considered the characteristics of families, services provided, and the local housing markets in developing a model to better understand lease-up patterns for MTO experimental group families, to whom MTO offered vouchers that they could use only in low-poverty neighborhoods, and for Section 8 group families, who could

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[1] Massey and Denton (1993) provided the most comprehensive history of the formal and informal policies that generated and maintained racial inequality in American cities through the 1980s.

use their vouchers anywhere. In addition to finding that the constraint for voucher use reduced takeup substantially, Shroder found that families' self-reported "uncertainty" about whether they would like their new neighborhoods was strongly predictive of whether the family ultimately used the voucher. As noted in the article: "Metro vacancy rates and household size—standard features of an economic model—have some power to explain lease-up, but 'satisfaction,' 'uncertainty,' and 'discomfort' measures often have more predictive power at the individual level than standard economic indicators like the hourly wage" (Schroder, 2002: 336). This passage implies that it is not only the supply of housing and the resources of families that determine where a family ends up, but it is also the family's perceptions about what life would be like in different residential communities and which of these communities represents a realistic destination.

The interaction of structural and cognitive constraints on mobility is illuminated more explicitly in a study of mobility decisions among low-income families holding housing choice vouchers in Mobile, Alabama. In their interviews with minority voucher holders, DeLuca, Rosenblatt, and Wood (2012) found that respondents knew very little about the large number of predominantly White communities in the greater Mobile area and had only vague ideas about the types of housing that might be available in these communities. They found also that low-income families typically do not plan or research their residential moves for long periods of time but, rather, make moves in response to acute changes in their personal lives or housing circumstances (see also Coulton, Theodos, and Turner, 2009). The imposition of time limits to find an apartment through the Housing Choice Voucher Program quickens the pace of decisionmaking; families are under pressure to find a suitable apartment in a satisfactory community before their time to maintain their housing voucher runs out.

The type of "reactive" mobility that was documented in this study limits the degree to which moves can be planned in advance and elevates the importance of cognitive perceptions of potential communities in the residential search process. Combined with the structural constraints associated with finding decent, affordable housing with limited financial resources, the presence of cognitive constraints comes close to ensuring that most individual moves will reproduce the larger structure of urban inequality.

The Resilience of Urban Inequality

Evidence From the Project on Human Development in Chicago Neighborhoods

To this point in the article, I have described the way in which residential moves typically align with larger flows of mobility that tend to reproduce racial and ethnic patterns of urban inequality. Not all moves fit this pattern, however. A common finding in several recent studies is that residential moves that lead families beyond the borders of their origin city, county, or metropolitan area are the most likely to generate substantial change in families' residential environments (Keels et al., 2005; Sharkey, 2012). Moves that lead to long-range geographic mobility are the only type of moves that commonly disrupt patterns of urban inequality, particularly if such moves lead families out of highly segregated metropolitan areas.
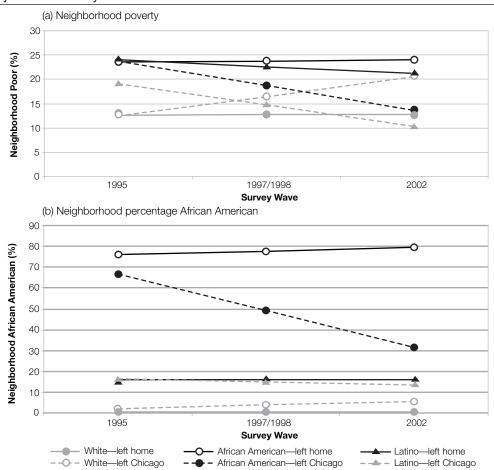
Evidence for this observation comes from multiple studies focusing on residential mobility and neighborhood change, two of which drew on data from the PHDCN. As discussed previously,

Sampson and Sharkey (2008) found that the only group of Chicago families experiencing substantial change in their neighborhood environments are families who move outside the city limits, whether they move into Chicago's suburbs or well beyond. Families who move beyond the city limits experience substantial improvements in neighborhood economic status, and African-American families who leave Chicago move into neighborhoods with much less severe racial segregation.

The "leveling" of racial inequality attributable to mobility out of Chicago is even more pronounced among young adults moving out of the family home. Analyzing neighborhood change in the 18-year-old cohort of the PHDCN, Sharkey (2012) found that gaps in neighborhood poverty between African-American and White young adults originating in Chicago are reversed among those who leave the city when they exit the parental home. The top panel of exhibit 4 shows that White young

Exhibit 4

Trajectories of Change in Neighborhood Poverty and Percent African American Among Homeleavers Who Remain in Chicago and Homeleavers Who Exit Chicago, by Race/Ethnicity: PHDCN 18-Year-Old Cohort

PHDCN = Project on Human Development in Chicago Neighborhoods.
Source: Adapted from Sharkey (2012)

adults who leave Chicago when they exit the parental home end up in neighborhoods with higher poverty levels than Latino and African-American homeleavers who make the same transition out of Chicago. This finding is partially explained by the movement of young adults to diverse college campuses, but this is only part of the story. College attendance does not explain declines in neighborhood poverty among African-American young adults who leave Chicago, and college attendance explains only part of the increase in neighborhood poverty among White homeleavers. Even White young adults who do not attend college typically move to neighborhoods with higher poverty rates if they exit Chicago when leaving the parental home.

Despite the change in neighborhood economic status among Whites who leave the city when they form independent households, this group does not enter into more racially integrated neighborhoods. As shown in the bottom panel of exhibit 4, all groups of White and Latino young adults continue to live in neighborhoods with minimal presence of African Americans regardless of whether they leave the city. However, African Americans who leave home and exit Chicago experience substantial declines in neighborhood racial segregation. After controlling for a range of individual and family characteristics, Sharkey (2012) found that African-American young adults who leave Chicago when forming independent households find themselves in racially integrated communities that are, on average, less than 50 percent African American.

Evidence From the Panel Study of Income Dynamics

The stark change in neighborhood conditions brought about by moves outside of Chicago raises the question of whether such findings are unique to this city, which continues to be distinguished by the severity of racial and economic stratification across its neighborhoods. To assess this question, Sharkey (2012) analyzed similar trajectories of change among young adults who leave home in a nationally representative sample from the Panel Study of Income Dynamics (PSID). Although the change induced by geographic mobility among the national sample is not as dramatic as the change among young adults leaving Chicago, the patterns of change are quite similar, particularly when the sample is limited to young adults originating in highly segregated urban areas.[2] Whites who exit highly segregated urban areas when they form independent households live in neighborhoods with a greater representation of African Americans and higher poverty rates, whereas African Americans who leave segregated metropolitan areas relocate into neighborhoods where the proportion of African-American residents and the poverty rate are substantially lower. The similarity between these patterns and those reported from the PHDCN suggests that this is a general pattern of change associated with exiting the residential structure of extremely segregated urban areas.

One might consider the changes in individuals' neighborhood environments that arise from long-range geographic mobility as a counterexample to the previous argument about the way that residential mobility tends to reproduce urban inequality. This conclusion is premature, however. Although geographic mobility can serve to reduce racial and ethnic gaps in neighborhood economic status and segregation, urban inequality is resilient. There are several explanations for this resilience.

The first explanation is that the types of long-range moves that cross municipal boundaries and disrupt urban inequality are much less commonly made by racial and ethnic minorities than they are by Whites. Sampson and Sharkey (2008) found that, among all Chicago families, Whites are the most likely to move beyond the city limits, followed by African Americans and Latinos. After

adjusting for a full range of stable and time-varying family characteristics, the odds of African Americans and Latinos moving out of Chicago were found to be roughly 40 percent as high as the odds of Whites leaving the city. The same racial and ethnic gaps in long-range mobility are found among the older cohort of 18-year-olds in Chicago, and among families in the PSID national sample (Sharkey, 2012). Coming to a full explanation for why there is such variation in the degree of long-range migration across different racial and ethnic groups is challenging, and it is beyond the scope of this article. Potential hints come from the literature on community blind spots and discrimination reviewed previously, on attachments to place, and on the role of spatial family and kin networks that may act to limit long-range migration among racial and ethnic minorities (Altman and Low, 1992; Shroder, 2002; Spilimbergo and Ubeda, 2004). The central point for the purposes of this article is that the types of moves that disrupt racial and ethnic inequality in urban neighborhoods are less commonly made by racial and ethnic minorities.

A second characteristic of moves that disrupt racial and ethnic inequality is that these moves commonly lead families into neighborhoods in the process of transition. To understand the implications of this observation for trends in urban inequality, it is necessary to shift from a perspective that focuses on individual trajectories of change and to a perspective that focuses on the dynamics of change in the families' destination neighborhoods. In an extension of the analysis of change in the neighborhood environments of young adults who exit Chicago when they leave the parental home, Sharkey (2012) described changes in the young adults' destination neighborhoods over the course of the 1990s. Results showed that moves out of Chicago led to substantial changes in young adults' neighborhood environments, but they also revealed that young adults from different racial and ethnic groups were moving into neighborhoods that were changing in very different ways. The average change in the poverty rate in the destination neighborhoods of Whites and Latinos was negligible, but poverty rose by an average of 3 percentage points in the destination neighborhoods of African-American young adults over the decade. During the 1990s, the destination neighborhoods of Whites, African Americans, and Latinos all experienced growth in the African-American population and a decline in the White population, but the degree of change varied markedly. The amount of change in the racial composition of Whites' destination neighborhoods was minimal. A more pronounced change took place in the destination neighborhoods of Latinos, but nothing approaching that found in the destination neighborhoods of African Americans, where the population of African-American residents rose by an average of 16 percentage points and the population of White residents declined by an average of 20 percentage points.

These results provide strong evidence to suggest that African Americans (and, to a lesser extent, Latinos) who leave home and leave Chicago enter neighborhoods with growing concentrations of minority populations. Whereas the individual trajectories of African-American homeleavers who exit Chicago show steep declines in racial segregation, figures describing change in the destination neighborhoods of homeleavers suggest a process of *resegregation*, in which the destination neighborhoods of African Americans who leave Chicago are transforming into racially and ethnically segregated neighborhoods that resemble the segregation found within Chicago. This evidence

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[2] Because of the small sample sizes for Latinos and other ethnic groups in the PSID, the sample for the national analysis in Sharkey (2012) was limited to African Americans and Whites.

is consistent with what Sampson (2008) found among families who moved as part of the MTO demonstration. Although families in the experimental group did move into neighborhoods with relatively low poverty rates, they moved into neighborhoods in which poverty was on the rise. Followup evaluations of MTO reveal that, roughly 10 to 15 years after the program was implemented, there were only minor differences in the neighborhood poverty rates of families in the experimental group and the control group (Ludwig et al., 2011).

A third explanation for the resilience of urban inequality is that residential moves are not made in isolation. Moves that disrupt patterns of racial and ethnic inequality are commonly undermined by subsequent mobility in individuals' destination neighborhoods. As a consequence, the change in neighborhood environment that occurs as a result of moves beyond the boundaries of highly segregated cities is often temporary change that fades over time.

Evidence for this phenomenon emerges most clearly in analyses of young adults who exit highly segregated urban areas when they leave the parental home and form independent households (Sharkey, 2012). Results discussed previously from Chicago and from the nation as a whole show that young adults who move beyond the boundaries of highly segregated urban areas experience a substantial leveling of racial inequality, with African Americans in particular moving into more integrated neighborhoods with less poverty. When the national sample of young adults is followed further into adulthood, however, these stark changes in individuals' neighborhood environments begin to fade and to reverse.
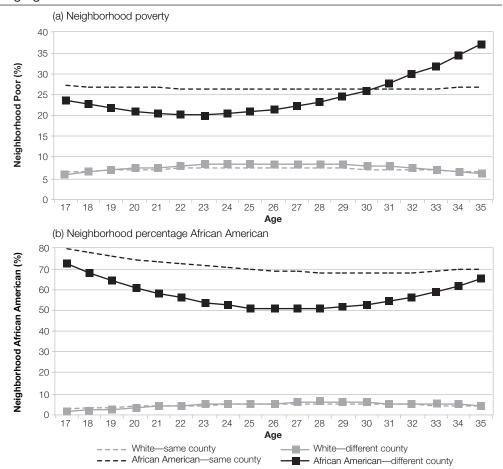
Exhibit 5 displays trajectories of neighborhood change for African-American and White young adults derived from growth-curve models covering an extended period of early adulthood. The dashed lines show trajectories of change for young adults who move to a different county when forming their own households, and solid lines represent trajectories of change for those who remain in the same county. All figures are based on models that adjust for a set of covariates that capture key aspects of individuals' economic status and life-cycle changes during this period of the life course.

The top panel of the exhibit shows that African Americans who exit highly segregated urban areas experience a pronounced drop in neighborhood poverty during early adulthood, and all groups of Whites experience rising neighborhood poverty over the same period. These trends shift as the sample moves further into adulthood, however. Whereas Whites experience slight declines in neighborhood poverty as they age beyond 25, the pattern of declining neighborhood poverty among African Americans flattens and reverses as they age further into adulthood. In early adulthood, a clear movement toward racial equality emerges among young adults who exit highly segregated metropolitan areas, but the long-term trend suggests a reproduction of racial gaps in neighborhood poverty as African-American and White young adults move further into adulthood.

The bottom panel of exhibit 5 displays the same results using the neighborhoods' percentage of African Americans as the dependent variable. Although Whites remain in neighborhoods with minimal African-American presence no matter where they reside, African Americans who exit highly segregated metropolitan areas enter neighborhoods that are much less segregated than those from which they came. Again, however, the longer term trend is one of resegregation; the percentage of African-American neighbors gradually rises as African Americans age further into

Exhibit 5

Trajectories of Change in Neighborhood Poverty and Percent African American From Age 17 to 35, by Race: PSID Young Adult Sample Originating in High-Segregation MSAs

(a) Neighborhood poverty

(b) Neighborhood percentage African American

MSA = metropolitan statistical area. PSID = Panel Study of Income Dynamics.
Source: Adapted from Sharkey (2012)

adulthood. By the time they are in their 30s, African-American adults who had moved into neighborhoods that were relatively integrated when forming their own households find themselves back in neighborhoods similar to those in which they started: neighborhoods that are mostly African American. Whites experience a very modest increase in the percentage of African Americans in their neighborhoods over the course of young adulthood but continue to live in neighborhoods with less than 10 percent African-American residents, on average, throughout this period. Thus, although the period of early adulthood shows a leveling of racial inequality in neighborhood economic status among young adults who exit highly segregated urban areas, a longer term pattern of resilient racial inequality emerges.
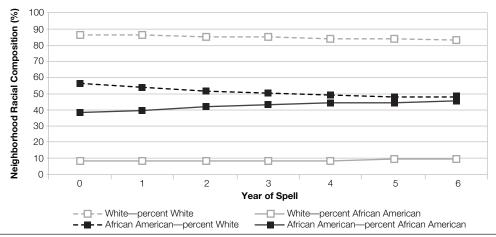
How is it that young adults who select out of extremely segregated areas when establishing inde-
pendent households return to segregated neighborhoods when they are further into adulthood? To
pursue this question, Sharkey (2012) analyzed the change occurring in young adults' neighbor-
hood environments after they have left their parental home and selected a new neighborhood
outside their origin city. Change in the neighborhood environment after the transition out of the
family home is decomposed into change occurring in the young adult's initial "spell" of residence
in the destination neighborhood and change occurring from additional residential moves.

Exhibit 6 shows average levels of change in the racial composition of young adults' destination
neighborhoods over the duration of their initial spell in the new neighborhood. The exhibit shows
that the average destination neighborhood of African Americans who exit highly segregated metro-
politan areas undergoes a process of demographic change during their time in the neighborhood.
Whereas the racial composition in the destination neighborhoods of Whites changes very little (see
the top and bottom lines in the exhibit), in African Americans' neighborhoods, the average propor-
tion of White residents drops steadily and the proportion of African-American residents rises.

Exhibit 7 complements this analysis by plotting *selected change* in neighborhood racial composition
arising from the first residential move after the initial spell of residential independence. Trends
of change for African Americans run in the opposite direction from those found in exhibit 6—
residential moves lead African Americans into neighborhoods with slightly lower percentages of
African-American and higher percentages of White residents than the neighborhoods from which
they moved. Moves made by Whites do not alter the racial composition of their neighborhood
substantially, although they do lead to neighborhoods with slightly lower percentages of African-
American residents and higher percentages of White residents.

Exhibit 6

Changes in Neighborhood Racial Composition During Young Adults' First Independent
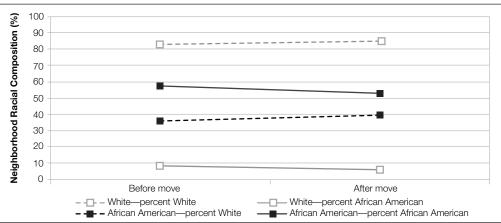Residential Spell: PSID Young Adult Sample Originating in High-Segregation MSAs

MSA = metropolitan statistical area. PSID = Panel Study of Income Dynamics.
Note: Sample limited to young adults who move to a different county when forming independent households.
Source: Adapted from Sharkey (2012)

Exhibit 7

Changes in Neighborhood Racial Composition Arising From Young Adults' First Residential Move After the First Independent Residential Spell: PSID Young Adult Sample Originating in High-Segregation MSAs

MSA = metropolitan statistical area. PSID = Panel Study of Income Dynamics.

Note: Sample limited to young adults who move to a different county when forming independent households.

Source: Adapted from Sharkey (2012)

Together, these two exhibits suggest that one important explanation for the persistence of racial inequality in neighborhood environments, even among young adults who have selected out of segregated environments, is a phenomenon that Sharkey (2012) referred to as *unselected change*. Unselected change refers to change in the neighborhood environment that occurs around individuals or families and that runs counter to the preferences of the individual, as inferred by his or her decision to relocate into the neighborhood. The idea relates closely to a strand of research that considers how the preferences of different groups of individuals interact to create aggregate patterns of racial segregation (Bruch and Mare, 2006; Clark, 2007; Schelling, 1971). The central lesson from this research is that to understand neighborhood change one must move beyond an exclusive focus on individual choices and instead consider systems of interrelated decisions made by individuals responding to the change that is occurring around them (see also Crowder and South, 2008; Quillian, 1999). In this example, African-American young adults who exit severely segregated metropolitan areas and select into racially integrated neighborhoods find themselves in neighborhoods that are undergoing a gradual demographic shift toward resegregation.

The pattern of unselected change suggests that the reproduction of neighborhood inequality from childhood to adulthood is not attributable only to the decisions of White and African-American young adults to live in segregated neighborhoods but, rather, to the decisions of those around them to exit or enter such neighborhoods. The analysis of change arising from the second move of African Americans reinforces this idea. Like the move out of the family home, African-American young adults again move into more integrated environments when they decide to relocate for a second time. In other words, selected change appears to lead African Americans into relatively integrated environments, whereas unselected change leads to increasing segregation around African-American young adults.

Implications for Housing Policy

The focus of this article on residential choice is motivated by a long-term shift in the approach of federal housing policy. As a result of the shift away from project-based assistance, low-income families receiving housing assistance are increasingly navigating the private housing market on their own when making decisions about where to live. This concluding section does not consider the merits of this shift in approach, nor does it consider the full range of policy approaches that might reduce neighborhood inequality. Many excellent studies have provided more comprehensive discussions of housing policy, with explicit focus on the supply side of the housing market and on the structure of federal housing programs (Briggs, Popkin, and Goering, 2010; Dolbeare, 2001; Grigsby and Bourassa, 2004; Katz and Turner, 2001; Quigley, 2011; Quigley and Raphael, 2004). My focus in this concluding section is more modest. Taking the shift in the approach of housing policy as given, I offer several suggestions for how mobility policies or programs might be altered in order to increase the probability that families are able to make residential moves that generate meaningful change.

These concluding suggestions derive from two overarching findings in the empirical evidence I have reviewed. The first finding is that residential moves made by low-income families tend to reinforce, rather than disrupt, patterns of urban inequality. Although individual residential choices are undoubtedly influenced by the availability of affordable housing in different parts of a given metropolitan area, the evidence reviewed in this article reveals the ways in which the structure of economic and racial segregation within urban areas interacts with individuals' economic resources and perceptions of the city to constrain the residential moves of low-income families in ways that reproduce urban inequality. The second finding is that urban inequality is resilient, meaning that change arising from residential moves is undermined by long-term patterns of unselected change. Despite this pattern, substantial evidence indicates that moves that cross city and county boundaries have the greatest capacity to bring about substantive change in families' neighborhood environments, but these moves are exceedingly uncommon.

Collectively, these findings indicate that any housing program or policy that relies on families navigating the private housing market on their own is unlikely to reduce neighborhood inequality in a meaningful way. Housing assistance programs that rely on residential mobility require extensive intervention into the process of housing choice to improve the likelihood that families are able to make moves, if they so choose, into neighborhoods that are less disadvantaged than the most common destinations of public housing recipients. Intensive assistance in the process of finding a neighborhood and a home is crucial to facilitating the type of residential moves that have the potential to reduce neighborhood disadvantage among recipients of housing assistance. I would argue that this mechanism is the only one by which tenant-based housing assistance can be used to confront urban inequality.

The most obvious form of such intensive assistance is housing counseling and support in the housing search. Many housing experts have called for more intensive counseling for housing assistance recipients, but altering the form of such support may also be important. For instance, instead of supplying voucher holders with a list of available units throughout the city, housing counselors might provide families with a "default" set of two or three units available in different communities

within the city (see also Briggs, Popkin, and Goering, 2010). Altering the "choice architecture" of voucher holders in this way may lead to substantial changes in the destinations of housing recipients without reducing their freedom to move wherever they wish.

The Gautreaux Assisted Housing Program in Chicago provides an example of an extreme version of this approach, because families participating in this program were offered specific units located throughout the Chicago metropolitan area based on their position on a waiting list (Rubinowitz and Rosenbaum, 2000). Unlike most residential mobility programs, the residential moves that arose from Gautreaux took families across the entire Chicago metropolitan area and brought about a change in families' neighborhood environments that persisted over time (Keels et al., 2005). I would not argue for a policy that assigns a specific unit to a family but, rather, a policy that provides a set of default units in several different communities across a city or metropolitan area from which a family could choose.

A more general principle might be that families should be provided the information, support, and resources necessary to make the types of moves that bring them into less disadvantaged parts of the city, or out of their origin city altogether, and that disrupt the structure of residential stratification within the metropolitan area: the types of moves that are rare among non-White, low-income families. The specific policies that would be most effective in achieving this goal are subject to debate. Providing more resources for housing counseling or more aggressive targeting of discrimination among landlords may be most effective (Goering, 2007). Establishing a "mobility bank" (Ludwig and Raphael, 2010) that provides credit for families lacking the information and resources to make long-range, risky moves is another creative alternative. Altering the structure of the housing search process so that families are provided with a default set of units is a third option, and many others undoubtedly exist. The central point of this article is that the most common current approach, which relies on families to navigate the private market largely on their own, has limited capacity to generate meaningful change in families' neighborhood environments. As a consequence, the dominant form of low-income housing assistance is unlikely to generate substantive change in the structure of neighborhood inequality in our nation's cities.

Acknowledgments

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