How Do Places Matter? The Geography of Opportunity, Self-efficacy and a Look Inside the Black Box of Residential Mobility

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ABSTRACT *The culture of poverty model implies that low-income individuals who acquired a low sense of efficacy will retain it, while the geography of opportunity model implies that that they will change if their opportunities improve. The Gautreaux Program moves low-income black families to the city or suburbs in a quasi-random procedure. Participants who moved to higher SES neighbourhoods had higher efficacy and felt safer, which mediated the neighbourhood effects on efficacy. This paper examines which experiences participants identify as having an influence on their sense of efficacy, and the ways those experiences have these effects.*

KEY WORDS: voucher, violence, efficacy, neighbourhood effects

Introduction

Galster & Killen (1995) proposed the term 'geography of opportunity' to refer to the various ways in which geography influences individuals' opportunity and may even "modify the innate and acquired characteristics of participants … [and their] ability to plan and sacrifice for the future" (pp. 9, 12). If, as they contend, "our options are limited both by the very real social and economic conditions of our existence and by the limitations we perceive regardless of the accuracy of those perceptions" (p. 28), then places may affect individuals' sense of their own control over the events in their lives. This paper examines this contention.

'Efficacy' is a concept which involves individuals' sense of internal control over the events that happen to them. Researchers have shown that efficacy is an important influence on individuals' behaviours (Rotter, 1966) and on educational, occupational and earnings attainments (Jencks *et al.*, 1979).

Efficacy is usually conceived as a relatively permanent attribute of individuals. Oscar Lewis (1968) contends that certain individuals reside in a culture of poverty, and children absorb their culture in their early socialisation and carry their culture with them thereafter. The fatalism underlying the culture of poverty affects everything they do; in effect, culture is internal. Similarly, in the traditional psychological view, efficacy is an aspect of an individual's personality, an early formed, relatively stable characteristic that is unlikely to change

with the situation (Rotter, 1966). Similarly, Moynihan (1968) maintains that "at the center of the tangle of pathology is the weakness of the family structure. Once or twice removed, it will be found to be the principal source of most of the aberrant, inadequate, or antisocial behavior that did not establish, but now serves to perpetuate the cycle of poverty and deprivation".

These views imply that individuals' sense of efficacy is a relatively persistent attribute of individuals. Even if they moved to a new location, they would carry these efficacy dispositions with them to their new neighbourhoods. These low-income individuals would have low efficacy, whether caused by early formed personality, a culture of poverty, or pathologies of their family circumstances, and this low efficacy would not be changed by residential moves.

Thus, we have two opposing models. The culture of poverty model implies that low-income individuals who acquired a low sense of efficacy will retain it, regardless of subsequent events, while the geography of opportunity model implies that that they will not retain it if they subsequently move to a place which offers more opportunities.

This paper examines these issues by looking at the experiences of low-income black families in a residential mobility programme. The Gautreaux Program is a good way to examine the two theories, because it moves families to radically diverse neighbourhoods in the city or suburbs in a quasi-random procedure. Participants were all low-income families residing in, or on the waiting list for, low-income public housing, and 90 per cent were headed by single mothers. They are just the types of families that have been described as residing in the culture of poverty, for which the theory predicts that these dramatic residential moves would have little effect on their efficacy, even if they moved to a place that offers more opportunities.

While participants in various locations were highly similar at the time of placement, in terms of many attributes, many years later differences could be discerned, in mothers' employment and AFDC receipt (Rosenbaum & DeLuca, 2000). Indeed, a survey of 655 Gautreaux participants found a significant relationship between placement neighbourhood and participants' later sense of efficacy (Rosenbaum, 2000). Moreover, this relationship was statistically mediated by how safe participants felt in the neighbourhood. Specifically, participants who moved to higher SES neighbourhoods tended to feel safer, and their greater safety helped to explain the neighbourhood effects on efficacy.

This paper examines how and why these statistical relationships occur. The experiences of programme participants are examined, which experiences participants identify as having an influence on their sense of efficacy, and the ways those experiences have these effects. Qualitative research is used here to identify processes and mechanisms. These results aim to suggest possible processes, which can be tested in subsequent quantitative research.

The Gautreaux Program

Correlational studies of neighbourhood attributes and individual efficacy cannot be certain that neighbourhoods affected mothers, as opposed to the possibility that mothers chose their neighbourhoods (Furstenberg *et al.*, 1999, p. 119). The Moving to Opportunity Program (MTO) addressed this concern by randomly assigning low-income families to low-poverty areas or to high poverty areas in the mid-1990s. Early results suggest that moves to low-poverty neighbourhoods

have led to some important gains in employment and earnings in some cities, but not in others. However, the authors suggest that two years may not be sufficient time to assess changes. MTO was designed as a test of some of the findings of the Gautreaux Program. Unlike the Gautreaux Program, MTO has an explicit random assignment design, and it considers only the income of neighbourhoods, not racial composition. The experimental group is assigned to census tracts with less than 10 per cent of residents below the poverty level, although families can choose where they live within those tracts and those tracts often have high black composition (Hanratty *et al.*, 1997; Katz *et al.*, 1997; Ludwig *et al.*, 1999).

An older and larger social experiment operated in Chicago between 1976 and 1998. The Gautreaux Program resulted from a 1976 Supreme Court consent decree. Administered by the non-profit Leadership Council for Metropolitan Open Communities in Chicago, the Gautreaux Program allowed public housing residents (and those on the waiting list) to receive Section 8 housing certificates (or vouchers) and move to private-sector apartments either in mostly-white suburbs or in the city of Chicago. Placement counsellors notified families as apartments became available, counselled them about the advantages and disadvantages of these moves, and took them to visit the units and communities. Between 1976 and 1998, over 7000 families participated, and over half moved to suburbs.

Socio-economic and racial integration of neighbourhoods are rare in the US, and even when it occurs, it must be suspected that low-income families who get into middle-income neighbourhoods are exceptional, so their subsequent attainments may reflect more about themselves than about the effects of neighbourhoods. Gautreaux participants circumvented the ordinary barriers to living in suburbs, not by their jobs, personal finances, or values, but by getting into the programme, receiving a rent subsidy, and being randomly assigned to suburbs. Gautreaux permitted low-income blacks to live in middle-income white suburbs. Participants moved to a wide variety of over 115 suburbs throughout the six counties surrounding Chicago. Programme constraints eliminated few suburbs in the entire region. The receiving suburbs ranged from 30 to 90 minutes driving time to their former homes.

To assure landlords they would get good tenants and to make it more likely that participants would remain in these apartments, the programme tried to avoid overcrowding, late rent payments, and building damage by not admitting families with more than four children, large debts, or unacceptable housekeeping. None of these criteria was extremely selective, and it is estimated that all three criteria reduced the eligible pool by less than 30 per cent. Although they were selected, participants were not a 'highly creamed' group. As Popkin (1993, p. 562) wrote:

> Gautreaux participants are similar to a random sample of Chicago AFDC recipients in their length of time on public assistance (about seven years) and their marital status (about 45 per cent never married, 10 per cent currently married. However, Gautreaux participants are less likely to be high school dropouts (39 per cent vs. 50 per cent), tend to be older (median age 34 vs. 31), and have fewer children (2.5 vs. 3.0), but are more likely to be second-generation AFDC recipients (44 per cent vs. 32 per cent). In sum, although Gautreaux participants may be

of slightly higher socio economic status than the average public assist-
ance recipient, most differences are not large.

While all participants came from similar low-income black city neighbourhoods
(usually public housing projects), half moved to mostly-white suburbs, while
others moved to mostly-black urban neighbourhoods. In principle, participants
had choices about where they moved, but, in actual practice, participants were
assigned to city or suburb locations in a quasi-random manner. Apartment
availability was unrelated to client interest, and clients got offered a unit
according to their position on the waiting list, regardless of their locational
preference. Although clients could refuse an offer, few did so, since they were
unlikely to get another. As a result, participants' preferences for city or suburbs
had little to do with where they ended up moving, and analyses indicate that the
two groups were nearly identical. A survey of 330 families found the two groups
were similar in age, education, marital status, AFDC, long-term AFDC receipt,
and second-generation AFDC (Rosenbaum, 1995). An analysis using adminis-
trative records on 1500 participants (Rosenbaum & DeLuca, 2000) found no
correlation between mothers' attributes (age and initial AFDC) and placement
attributes (city/suburb, tract percentage black, percentage in poverty, percentage
of unemployed, or percentage with low education).

   The Gautreaux Program was mandated to make the suburban moves to
census tracts which were not over 30 per cent black, and the analyses here
confirms that at least 94 per cent were. In contrast, the city moves were often to
mostly black tracts (39.0 per cent of city moves were to tracts that were over 85
per cent black). It was also found that the suburban moves were mostly to areas
with highly educated neighbours, while city moves were mostly to areas with
less educated neighbours, although this difference is not as large as for race
composition.

The Data

This paper is based on interviews with about 100 mothers and children in 1998.
These respondents were selected as a subsample of the mailed survey respon-
dents, selected randomly from those agreeing to be contacted for interviews.
Respondents were paid $10 for telephone interviews averaging 45 minutes.

Preconditions for Perceiving that One Has Control

As noted, the survey of 655 Gautreaux participants found that people who were
randomly assigned to lower SES areas reported significantly lower efficacy.
What are the circumstances in the environment that affect the sense of efficacy?
Although city moves generally resulted in better housing than their prior
housing, the new city neighbourhoods were often no better than the ones they
left. The mailed survey found large and significant relationships between neigh-
bourhoods and respondents' feelings of safety in their locations. In addition,
safety had a large and signficant relationship with mothers' sense of efficacy on
the survey, and safety mediated the influence of neighbourhood on efficacy
attitudes in multivariate analyses.

   Respondents' reports in interviews help explain these statistical relationships.
Respondents specifically noted that drugs and gangs made them feel unsafe and

gave them the constant feeling that they were not in control. For participants whom the programme moved from one city neighbourhood to another, gang and drug problems sometimes persisted. Mr L and his wife moved within Chicago. When asked what the worst thing about their new neighbourhood was, Mrs L replied, "One difficult thing is that … there are people selling drugs out on the streets". This happened every day, but they did not tell anyone. Mrs L's reaction was to "I … play like I'm a tough Chicago person and ignore 'em" and "I pray that it will stop", while Mr. L simply replied, "I don't pay attention to it".

This failure to act might be interpreted as a personal fatalism, similar to what is implied by the culture of poverty conception. But they were prevented from action not by internal restraints, but by external restraints. Their low efficacy was simply adaptive to the situation. They reported that they had to consider the risks involved with reporting gang activity and drug use to the police. Their fear of retaliation, rather than a lack of faith in their ability to change things, was the determining factor. Similarly, Ms V, another city mover, responded to drugs in the neighbourhood by ignoring it "as much as possible, cause there wasn't a whole lot that I could do about it".

For some people, reactions like this stemmed from clear evidence that action would not be effective. Ms N observed that the security guard in her apartment complex would stand around, talking and laughing with the local drug dealers when the building's office was closed. This guard, who was paid a low salary by the apartment complex, was happy to take gifts from the local drug dealers who had expensive jewellery and clothes. She had good reason to believe that if she took any steps to report the drug dealers, she would get little protection from this security guard.

If they cannot change their immediate environment, middle-income people frequently move when their neighbourhoods are unsatisfactory. Indeed, Ms N had taken some steps to try to move. She had contacted various people who were in a position to help, but "no one tried to help". Unlike someone whose income pays the rent, she was restricted by the housing set-aside agreement to stay in this apartment to keep her rent subsidy. Here is a person who took steps to improve her circumstances, but her steps were ineffective. Her perception of the lack of efficacy was not inside her personality or in her culture, but in the unresponsive environment.

In contrast, for suburban movers, moving to a new environment often led to remarkable changes in attitude. Ms P equated the housing projects to prison, while the suburbs represented freedom.

> I think it was the richness in the atmosphere that the children re-alised … they no longer had to be in the projects; they no longer had to dodge bricks and things coming in the building where they lived. Here they could just sit out and enjoy themselves, and they did. And they just fit right in … Because it was like living in a prison, you know. And when you can't go out whenever you like and play or whatever—I had to go out with my kids—it's hard. But up here, it's a lot different; it's quieter, much quieter. I'm able to sleep at night.

Similarly, Mr K, a single father raising five children in the Robert Taylor homes before moving to a western suburb, remarked: "There is a freedom that I didn't have over there in that concentration camp. It was very restrictive. I couldn't

take my kids outside … My kids were in peril. I feared for them. It was my main objective to get out of there".

This freedom from danger and worry contributed to a greater sense of efficacy for Ms P, Mr K, and many others. Freedom from fear gave them a more positive outlook on the situations they must face daily.

The suburban move removed some people from bad influences which limited their efficacy. Ms Q, who moved to a northern suburb, remarked that prior to the move "I was hanging with the wrong crowd". The young adults around her were partying into the early hours, sleeping late, watching television through the day, and some were involved with drugs. She found it difficult to avoid these activities if she was to interact with her neighbours. Having a job did not fit into this life style. After moving to the suburbs, she reports "Now I'm trying to work and better my life … I have a better house, but I can't live off of this [Program] forever, so now I'm trying to strive and get going back to school and trying to work and just better myself". In her old neighbourhood, Ms Q felt constrained by poor role models, peer pressure and a lack of opportunity. Living in the suburbs gave her a new outlook; she began to realise that she could actively control her life: "I felt better about where I lived, and that made me want to try to do something with my life other than just sit back and be nervous and worried all the time".

In the same way, Ms F's move to a north suburb made her realise that she had to take more responsibility for her daughter. She recalled:

> I was out, like, running around, trying to party and go out. If I hadn't moved to the suburbs, I would still have been doing that and I probably wouldn't have been being responsible for [my daughter] … I probably wouldn't have paid any attention to things that she needed, because I probably would've been a wild person—like I was!

The suburb move allowed her to see an alternative way of acting. Unlike her old neighbourhood, where it had been acceptable to run around, her suburban neighbours took responsibility for their children. She saw neighbours making sure their children did their school work, taking them shopping for school supplies, going to school to talk to teachers, and she wanted her daughter to have the same opportunities as the neighbouring children. She saw how she could have some control over her daughter's outcomes, which gave her a sense of efficacy.

Contrary to models that assume that fatalistic attitudes reside within a person's personality, family or culture, these individuals reported that their attitudes changed as a direct result of experiences in their new neighbourhood environments. Environments that prevent individuals from improving their circumstances, especially when the circumstances are unpleasant and life-threatening, force individuals to conclude that they lack control over their lives. Environments that permit individuals to improve their circumstances, especially when they can see improvements coming from their own actions, allow individuals to conclude that they have control over their lives.

Specific Features of Suburbs that Encouraged Efficacy

Respondents identified specific features in their new neighbourhoods that improved their opportunities for control over improving their lives.

Efficacy from a 'Better Address'

A 'bad address' itself reduces efficacy. Ms P, for instance, noted the benefits of their new address.

> Well, it opened up quite a few opportunities for me and my children, too, because they were able to get jobs … On the south side (pre-move), they only worked at McDonald's or something like that. And when they moved out of the projects, they was able to get jobs … my daughter got a job working for the Internal Revenue Service … [while previously} she had tried to get a job, and she couldn't get one … my youngest son, he got a job in walking distance of the building here… I guess it's the area you live in … people ask you where you live and … [then don't] hire you … It helped me an awful lot in getting credit, also. Because they don't usually like to give you credit when you live in public housing. You know, different places nowadays, you'll get a small loan from the bank to pay off your credit cards!

The move put them near more jobs, greater variety of jobs, and closer jobs. By moving out of the housing projects, they avoided the stigma of a housing project address, which made it harder to get a job and get credit, which, in turn, increased the costs of debt. An address in a more 'respectable' part of the city gave business people the impression that they could trust participants to be good employees and to pay their bills on time. In turn, the ability to get jobs or credit gave the participants an opportunity to see themselves as capable of being financially independent.

Similarly, Ms R described an increased sense of control she felt from getting a suburban job which provided job training. Large numbers of good jobs left the city for the suburbs over the past three decades (Wilson, 1996), so when participants moved from Chicago to the suburbs, they moved to a better labour market that offered better jobs and jobs that provided training. Living in a good labour market changed Ms R's skills and capabilities and gave her a sense that she could have greater control over her future employment.

Efficacy from Racial Integration

In the housing projects, all neighbours were black, and nearly all of the people they saw in shops were black. Their exposure to other races came from television sitcoms, soap operas or newscasts, which often communicated racial tension and separation. In fact, many people mentioned the common feelings of hostility towards whites in the housing projects. People sometimes just assumed the worst or went by stereotypes.

The moves into racially integrated neighbourhoods gave participants the opportunity to get to know people of other races. Ms H discussed the benefits her daughter gained from moving to a northern suburb, saying: "She isn't prejudiced towards people. It helped her understand the cultures and love people for who they are, not for their color … by being with them, they were her friends … The parents invited her to their homes, so you got to know that people are people."

Integration improved people's efficacy, as they realised that they could interact with white people as peers and friends, not as a hated, feared and

unknown group of people. They learned that they could interact casually and comfortably with people of other races. They learned that they could understand them, and be understood by them. This gave them a sense of control that racial segregation did not permit. Instead of being held back by stereotypes or fears of other people's stereotypes, they learned that they could get along with people who were different from themselves.

Racial integration also influences people's self-perceptions. When they were segregated, mothers and children had no way to know anything about white people firsthand. In segregated housing projects, they learned the mistrust of whites that was pervasive in housing projects, and the only whites some of them knew were on television and magazines—beautiful actors and actresses who can do anything. This presented them with an impossible standard, one that was very intimidating. One Gautreaux child reported that before moving to the suburbs, she thought all white people were as beautiful as the models who appeared in magazines, and so she thought she was very ugly in comparison. When she moved to the suburbs, it was a great revelation to discover that most white people did not look like magazine models. Many white people were ugly, and she felt better about herself.

Efficacy from Middle-class Know-how

Increased aspirations does people little good if they do not know how to take advantage of the opportunities. Ms S described her son's feelings of frustration and confusion:

> He felt like he was trapped and he didn't know how to get out … he knows there's other opportunities and things … but he can't seem to figure out how to get there.

Her son was "planning on going to school for computers", but he did not know how to do this. Many participants set high goals for themselves, but they had no sense that they could achieve them because they could not see any actions they could take that would lead to their plans.

In contrast, the suburbs provided information and access to ways of attaining their goals. A suburban high school provided information about an aeronautical engineering programme held at a local college which Ms A's son took in his junior year of high school. Enrichment programmes such as this were more widely available and encouraged in many suburban neighbourhoods, fostering greater feelings of efficacy in young people. At the time of the interview, Ms A's son had earned a bachelor's degree in both business and computer science, and he had opened his own business consulting firm.

Suburban teachers also provided know-how. Ms H reported that teachers showed her daughter how to study, how to organise her work demands, and how to solve difficult problems she encountered on assignments. As a result, she gained a sense that she could master school tasks. She earned a place in the National Honor Society and graduated with a 3.8 grade point average. She was a junior at a state university at the time of the interview, majoring in pharmacy.

Participants also observed friends and neighbours who had high levels of internal control and learned how to do things from them. A neighbour served as a role model for Ms C's daughter by "trying to teach her how to take care of herself, how to interact with adults, how to cook and everything".

Many suburban movers commented on their teens' plans to attend college, which involved decisions and actions that they would not have known about in the housing projects. Several of the teens' new suburban friends had grown up in an environment where higher education was taken for granted and where the prerequiste actions were well-known (Cicourel & Kitsuse, 1964). Ms B remarked that most of her son's friends were "into school, into talking about college, not gangbangers". When these friends made visits to college, her son went along, something he would not have done otherwise. Similarly, Ms J remarked, my daughter is "the first person in my entire family that graduated from college, so I think it was the influence of kids … wanting a future … and knowing how to make it happen".

Low aspirations are not always the problem. Some children had very high aspirations—city students with poor grades talked about going to Harvard. What they lacked was any information about how to turn their high hopes into realistic plans, and how to turn their plans into actions that would lead to realistic goals (Rosenbaum, 2001). In the suburbs, students learned from their teachers, counsellors, and peers how the college application process worked, what were realistic goals, and what actions one must take to accomplish those goals. Being around peers who were much like themselves, who had confidence in their ability to succeed, and who knew how to make their college goals happen gave many suburban-mover teens confidence and know-how that they, too, could achieve higher education.

Manageable Challenges Encouraged Efficacy

Although the suburbs presented some challenges, the challenges in the suburbs were different from those in the city. The threats of drugs and violence in the housing projects were diffuse, unpredictable, and omnipresent. Gunfire could come from any one of 400 anonymous windows in a high-rise housing project building. These attacks were life-threatening, anonymous, and backed by organised gangs, so they were impossible to confront. The victim of an attack in the city could not take control and confront her aggressor; the best she could do was to hide in a safe place and try to move away.

In the suburbs, the threats of harassment or bias came from one or a few individuals. They were not supported by the larger community, and indeed, when neighbours learned of them, they often actively supported the victim and criticised the aggressor. These attacks were occasionally physical but more often they were verbal. The victim of an attack in the suburbs could take control and confront her aggressor. Many did.

A few suburban movers used threat tactics to take control of difficult events in their lives. Ms K, who moved to a western suburb, described how she dealt with threats from neighbours:

> Some biker people that lived across the complex … would come and start fights. I had conflict with not just the mother but the father, but they found out that I wasn't playing it with either one …Their son came and hit my nephew and he's an asthmatic and he couldn't breathe so I had my daughter hit the boy back. [When the father confronted me in a threatening way, I responded] "as black as I am, I am not afraid of

nobody, OK, I'm not running from nobody. If we have to deal with it in that kind of way, I'm a city girl".

Unlike the gang-controlled housing projects where threats were ineffective and dangerous, Ms K. found that threatening the use of physical force was an effective way to get her prejudiced neighbours to leave her family alone. Indeed, it worked, and it contributed to her sense of internal control. She used her history of living in the projects and being a 'city girl' to scare others into co-operating, even if she had no intention of actually harming anyone.

Some families responded to bias by challenging its fairness. Ms J noted that her daughter "said one time that kids would shout out racial remarks, but … nothing that she couldn't deal with, because I've always taught them how to … stand up for yourself". Her daughter confronted her offenders, and in doing so, she realised that she was capable of changing situations herself. Eventually the harassment subsided, and her refusal to let people talk down to her enhanced her strong sense of internal control.

Ms C's children also ran into racism from their classmates. "The kids questioning them about their hair and, you know, skin colour", so Ms. C got "involved in school, I would do lunch supervision just so I could be there. And I would explain to the class, like when they would have show-and-tell or different things, I would … bring in things from my heritage to discuss with the class …"

Ms C's strategy of educating other children about African American heritage confronted bias, but in an indirect manner. This apparently worked; her children's problems decreased after her actions.

Contacting authorities was another way in which participants took control of their lives. Being able to trust the police and other authority figures is an important factor in neighbourhood satisfaction. Unlike the projects, where participants did not call the police to report crimes because the police would not respond and because gangs would retaliate, in the suburbs, many participants did contact authorities and the police did respond. In the projects, Ms E said: "I was afraid to let my kids go … to the game room … [because] they might be selling drugs up in there. But see, the police out here [in a western suburb] … they don't play that kind of stuff … I mean that it's zero tolerance out here". Ms E called the suburban police, because she knew beforehand that they would not tolerate misconduct.

Unlike the housing projects, where violence and drug use were overwhelming and challenges were fruitless, harassment or drug dealing in the suburbs were specific, isolated events over which they could take control. Calling the police to report drug use, for example, or confronting racist individuals was usually effective for the participants who used these methods. New environments prompted major changes in participants' attitudes toward control. The above cases illustrated how a change in a person's life situation can alter what was once thought to be an inherent, unwavering individual characteristic.

Perhaps as a result of this combination of circumstances, harassment declined over time in the suburbs. While suburban movers experienced significantly more harassment than city movers immediately after moving, harassment in the suburbs declined over the first year, and the difference had become negligible after 2–3 years (Rubinowitz & Rosenbaum, 2000). Support by police and neighbours, and individuals' own actions may have contributed to this result, chang-

ing the neighbourhood as a result, and perhaps increasing participants' efficacy even more.

Conclusion

Based on prior findings, social scientists have described the ways that "housing project residents" behave. Some theorists have inferred that these behaviors indicate underlying capabilities, often described by the 'culture of poverty' model. Evidence has been found that behaviours seen in 'housing project residents' do not indicate inherent capabilities. These behaviours are not seen in former 'housing project residents' after they move if the random assignment placed them in middle-class suburbs.

Participants describe processes which prompt them to act in the ways they do. The usual model is that people begin with a repertoire of behaviours, and they learn whether they have efficacy by whether environments reward or punish their actions. However, people can acquire this learning without taking any action. They can learn from others' efforts, from getting warnings, or from anticipating outcomes. Gang retaliation may be anticipated even without any actions, and security guards' inaction could be inferred from their friendships with gangs.

Moreover, people's repertoire of capabilities may vary by context. Sometimes people acquire new abilities. It has been found that new social contacts, opportunities and information are forms of social capital which suggest new actions and provide support for new actions (cf. Briggs, 1998). While it seemed hopeless to complain to the police about random gunfire in the housing projects, specific harassers could be identified in the suburbs, and police were generally perceived as responsive and effective. Individuals may even take actions which they might not have had in their prior repertoire of capabilities.

Unlike the culture of poverty model, it has been seen that the very same individuals who report having very little efficacy over their life experiences in housing projects subsequently show considerable efficacy in middle-class suburbs. Places matter. The attributes of neighbourhoods and the experiences provided by neighbourhoods have profound effects on people's capabilities and their ideas about what they can accomplish.

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