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New Capabilities in New Places: Low-Income Black Families in Suburbia

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Housing assistance traditionally aims only to provide shelter. However, recent research suggests that if housing is combined with residential mobility strategies, it also can provide families with access to social and economic opportunities and improve their lives. Through the Gautreaux program, low-income families were able to move to white middle-class suburbs throughout the six-county metropolitan area of Chicago. In the Moving to Opportunity (MTO) program, low-income families moved to low-poverty neighborhoods in five metropolitan areas (Baltimore, Boston, Chicago, Los Angeles, and New York City). Research on these residential mobility programs has discovered remarkable changes in participants' attitudes, behavior, and performance, but it also suggests important caveats about the limits of place as an arbiter of opportunity.¹

However, as Xavier de Souza Briggs has stressed, that research focuses on outcomes, not process.² Most of the studies do not examine what features of the social environment are major influences or the underlying mechanisms that might explain observed outcomes. This is an important shortcoming, for it means that policymakers do not understand what it is about the residential moves that results in particular outcomes and that therefore they cannot be sure

1. Goering, chapter 6, this volume; Katz, Kling, and Liebman (1997); Ludwig, Hirschfeld, and Duncan (2001); Rubinowitz and Rosenbaum (2000).

2. Briggs (1997).

when they replicate some features of the program that they capture the necessary elements.

Studies find that the presence of middle-class, affluent neighbors is positively related to adult employment and children's educational attainment and eventual earnings, some finding positive effects for whites, others for black male teenagers. Studies also show that youths achieve greater academic success if they live in areas with lower proportions of blacks; unemployed males; lower-income, female-headed households; or welfare-dependent families and higher proportions of managerial or professional workers. Further, the higher the percentage of unemployed males and welfare recipients in a given neighborhood, the fewer hours a person will work.³ Many assume that resources by themselves—better schools, more activities, greater affluence—explain these results. If so, it is conceivable that low-income families could benefit from the superior resources in their new affluent communities without having any meaningful interaction with their neighbors. This tends to happen in some school busing programs: Children gain educationally even though their after-school interaction with their schoolmates is limited.⁴

The affluence hypothesis is the implicit model of the MTO program, which, in effect, randomly assigned low-income families to low-poverty or high-poverty census tracts so that research could focus on the effects.⁵ If families benefited, it was assumed that they benefited simply by being surrounded by affluent neighbors. However, since families chose their own units within a tract, many aspects of their local circumstance were not controlled, and those effects have not been examined. Researchers are only beginning to examine the process by which residential mobility affects individuals or to consider whether outcomes might depend on certain conditions (enclaves, race or class of next-door neighbors, friendships, activities, and so forth).

However, having affluent neighbors may not be sufficient. Neighborhood affluence may not necessarily benefit all residents—low-income newcomers may not be included. Resource disparities could lead to competition, resentment, perceived deprivation, and negative outcomes, especially for young people.⁶

3. Sampson, Raudenbush, and Earls (1997); Sampson, Morenoff, and Earls (1999); Sampson, Morenoff, and Gannon-Rowley (2002); Brooks-Gunn and others (1993); Crane (1991); Datcher (1982); Corcoran and others (1990).

4. Wells and Crain (1997).

5. MTO assigned families resident in public housing projects to one of three treatment groups. The experimental group received counseling assistance and vouchers and was required, as a condition of voucher receipt, to choose a low-poverty neighborhood (based on 1990 census data), while a second group received vouchers without restriction, and a third group (the controls) did not receive any change in their housing assistance (though they were not restricted from leaving the projects on their own). See overview and research at www.mtoresearch.org (accessed September 24, 2004).

6. Jencks and Mayer (1990).

Families may have to have private transportation or to pay fees to benefit from the resources available in affluent suburbs, such as theaters, summer camps, a YMCA, or a superior public library. If a camp or program has a limited number of spaces, only people whose social networks provide early notification or people who have other useful connections may have access to them. Although a strong labor market means that jobs are available, employment is possible only for workers with the right skills and for those who have access to good child care and transportation.⁷ Resources alone are not necessarily sufficient to guarantee access and improved outcomes.

The Social Capital Hypothesis

Social capital provides another explanation of the greater capabilities people show after they move to the suburbs. Social capital has been defined in a number of ways. Robert Lang and Steven Hornburg state that “social capital commonly refers to the stock of social trust, norms, and networks that people can draw upon in order to solve common problems. Social scientists emphasize two main dimensions of social capital: social glue and social bridges.”⁸

While that definition covers a broad variety of socially supportive phenomena, James Coleman’s original proposal refers to a more narrowly defined set of mechanisms, and he contends that they have powerful impacts on an individual’s capabilities. He suggests that some aspects of social environments provide social capital, which enables people to take actions that they could not otherwise take. Social capital takes three forms: social norms that guide behavior; reciprocity—“people . . . doing things for each other”—which provides “credit” on which individuals can draw; and information channels—social networks that provide information about jobs and other resources. Social capital is more than merely social acceptance or social support. Coleman contends that “social capital is productive, making possible the achievement of certain ends that in its absence would not be possible.”⁹ In other words, social capital confers ability: It gives people capabilities that they would not have otherwise.

While Coleman provides convincing examples about the enhancing effects of communities, many questions remain. First, Coleman’s examples are taken from close, tightly knit ethnic communities. Do more typical communities in modern America create useful social capital? Second, do middle-class white suburbs, which often are characterized as lacking in community cohesiveness, offer social capital to anyone? According to some stereotypes, suburbs are not real communities. They are “bedroom communities,” where people come to sleep before

returning to school or their job or visiting friends in some other location. Herbert Gans has presented evidence indicating that homeowner suburbs are communities; however, that has not been shown to be true in the kinds of suburban apartment complexes where the Gautreaux families lived, especially in recent years when so many women are working and rarely at home.¹⁰

Third, Coleman’s examples mostly involve social insiders. The individuals who benefit are part of the social fabric of these closed communities—they were born there and have lived there all their life. It is not clear from his account whether newcomers would receive the same benefits. Fourth, inclusion is even more problematic if the newcomers are of a different income level and race, visibly distinct from the vast majority of residents. Do the more homogeneous suburbs offer acceptance to newcomers of different race and income? Do these outsiders become insiders in any meaningful sense and acquire any of the benefits of insiders?

Fifth, do low-income blacks choose to comply with middle-class white norms, even norms that conflict with their own experience? The adults in the Gautreaux program have typically lived their entire lives in housing projects, and they are accustomed to different social norms. Suburbs may impose norms and expect behaviors that are uncomfortable, undesirable, or impossible for low-income black families. Sixth, it is not certain that low-income black in-movers’ compliance with norms will give them the same social capital benefits that other neighbors would get. Indeed, the opposite—the imposition of new costs—might occur. Despite the wild enthusiasm about social capital, the social norms and cohesion required for social capital could actually be harmful to some individuals.¹¹ In the enthusiasm about social capital, the aspects of social norms that sometimes coerce, ostracize, and constrain are often ignored. In the 1950s sociologists noted the ways that social norms suppress individualism, dissent, and disagreement; these critiques centered principally on the emerging affluence and conformity of postwar suburbs.¹² Such social processes may be particularly constraining for minorities.

Last, is social capital, if one can access it, beneficial for family outcomes? Previous analyses of surveys show that low-income black mothers and children did interact with their white suburban neighbors and that their level of interaction was similar to the amount of interaction of their counterparts who moved to mostly black city neighborhoods. We found that Gautreaux mothers talked with their neighbors and Gautreaux children played with their neighbors and did homework with their classmates. Contrary to our worst fears, these families were not ostracized; they had many kinds of interaction with their neighbors.¹³

7. Rubinowitz and Rosenbaum (2000).

8. Lang and Hornburg (1998, p. 4).

9. Coleman (1988, p. S98).

10. Gans (1967).

11. Portes (1998).

12. Riesman (1950); Whyte (1956).

13. Rubinowitz and Rosenbaum (2000).

But interaction alone is not sufficient to demonstrate social capital. Social capital implies that social relationships confer capabilities, and that is hard to demonstrate with the survey data. Do these suburbs relieve mothers of anxieties and demanding obligations regarding social connections? Do the suburbs free up mothers' time or energy for other activities? Do the suburbs actually provide support, services, or social or material resources that enhance mothers' capabilities?

As Briggs notes, "geographic proximity does not a neighbor make—at least not in the social sense."¹⁴ Social cohesion in the suburbs may be a mechanism for excluding outsiders, particularly those of another race and lower income. Social norms in white middle-class suburbs may constrain low-income blacks or prevent their access to activities. The social capital hypothesis seems highly problematic in this case. Rather than finding their new communities to be sources of social capital, new residents may feel that they are highly constraining and intolerant of the kinds of behaviors and attitudes with which they are comfortable. Consequently, in considering the applicability of Coleman's social capital explanation, the Gautreaux program studied here provides an opportunity to test the most extreme—and the most problematic—form of this question: Do middle-class white suburbs provide useful social capital to new low-income black residents?

The Analytic Approach

This chapter uses open-ended interviews that we conducted with sixty-nine mothers in 1989 and with eighty mothers in 1996, all black and all of whom had moved to mostly white, middle-income suburbs from high-poverty public housing in inner-city Chicago. The 1996 sample had been living in the suburbs for an average of thirteen years. We examined participants' reports about their interactions with their suburban neighbors, how it differed from their own experiences in the city, and how they believed those differences affected their behavior and their capabilities.

This study is one step in the larger process of understanding what the experience of moving entails and, in particular, what it means to become part of a very different community. We do not provide definitive evidence. We are trying to discover underlying processes about which social scientists and policymakers currently know very little. Unlike prior studies of the Gautreaux program, which used surveys on fairly large samples or administrative data on more than 1,500 families,¹⁵ this study examines the statements volunteered by individuals. We take individuals' descriptions of changes and their interpretation of causality at face value. While we must be wary of methodological concerns that individuals

may misperceive or misinterpret their experiences, these respondents know more about their experiences than we do, so it is important that we learn from their reports and understand their subjective experiences of navigating a new environment. Nearly a decade ago, Briggs bemoaned the scarcity of qualitative data on these issues, and the intervening years have done little to change that.¹⁶

Although retrospective reports have shortcomings, they do provide information on long-term outcomes. Other research has shown movers' early difficulties (see John Goering, chapter 6, this volume), but some of these difficulties may be temporary problems of adjustment for movers or their new neighbors. Previous research finds that mothers and children gradually make friends over time and that any early harassment by neighbors gradually subsides or disappears over the first few years.¹⁷ The long-term perspective presented here is especially pertinent for evaluating social outcomes from the moves. Unlike the vast majority of quantitative research on neighborhood effects, which focuses on individuals' academic or economic outcomes in the short term, this chapter focuses on social outcomes and interactions over the long term.

Recent findings have led some observers to conclude that residential mobility has no significant effect on receipt of public aid or employment. That hasty conclusion is probably not warranted, but even if it were there are several reasons for policymakers, public advocates, and researchers to focus intently on residential mobility programs. First, human development theory suggests that social programs are likely to have much larger effects on children than on adults,¹⁸ and studies of both Gautreaux and MTO generally find larger changes in children than in adults. Second, temporary adjustment difficulties are likely to prevent individuals from benefiting from residential mobility in the first few years, especially when the move entails radical changes. We may discover the benefits of residential mobility only over the long term, after individuals have adjusted to their new environment. Third, program effects on social behaviors may be at least as important as the effects on economic behaviors. The United States has struggled over most of its history with the question of how to reduce race and class barriers in a society that espouses equality. The residential mobility program described in this study was designed to explore one approach, and this study emphasizes social outcomes and social interactions, quite apart from individuals' economic status. Moreover, this study finds that individuals can acquire new social competencies when they move to very different social environments, and it is quite possible that these competencies have a powerful impact on the next generation.

We focus on descriptions of concrete behaviors more than on impressions or attitudes, so the risks of distortion are reduced. We examine families' reports of

14. Briggs (1997, p. 197).

15. DeLuca and Rosenbaum (2000, 2001, 2003).

16. Briggs (1997).

17. Rubinowitz and Rosenbaum (2000).

18. Carneiro and Heckman (2003).

their experiences and whether families report any examples that illustrate important social processes—in particular, the development and use of useful social capital. If individuals act differently and have different capabilities in a new location—and if they attribute those changes to certain aspects of their location—then we have some indication that the new locations generated access to social capital.

The Gautreaux and MTO Programs

The Gautreaux program, a result of a 1976 Supreme Court decision, was created to allow Chicago public housing residents (and those on the waiting list) to receive Section 8 housing certificates and move to private apartments either in Chicago or in its mostly white suburbs. Between 1976 and 1998, more than 7,000 families participated. This program presents an unusual opportunity to see what happens when low-income black families accept an offer to move to middle-income white suburbs.

Participants avoided the typical barriers to suburbs not by virtue of their jobs, personal finances, or values but through a program that assigned them to suburbs through a quasi-random process, according to housing availability at the time and their position on the waiting list. In principle, participants could refuse an offer, but few did since they were unlikely to get another equivalent. Analyses in several studies suggest that placements also were largely unrelated to family attributes: Suburban and city movers were initially similar in many ways (age, number of children, education, marital status, welfare status).¹⁹

By necessity, the program excluded people who seemed unlikely to handle program demands. It eliminated about one-third of applicants because their families were too large for apartments or because they had poor rent payment records, which would likely lead to eviction. However, all participants were very poor, and they qualified for public housing. The best-documented pattern of black suburbanization involves working-class blacks moving to working-class suburbs, but Gautreaux moved low-income blacks into middle- and upper-income white suburbs. Only a few families moved to any one neighborhood, and participants moved to more than 115 suburbs in six counties around Chicago. Only a few high-rent suburbs were excluded.

The Moving to Opportunity program grew out of the Gautreaux program.²⁰ It assigned low-income families to one of three groups: a group moving to a low-poverty area, an open-choice Section 8 group, or a control group that remained in public housing in high-poverty areas. Gautreaux and MTO represent different models of leveraging potential neighborhood effects, and we can

learn from each. First, while Gautreaux moved families to distant suburbs, limiting interaction with former neighbors, many MTO moves were to city neighborhoods, sometimes clustered together or near poor neighborhoods. Second, while Gautreaux assigned families to specific addresses, MTO assigned them to specific census tracts, and families chose apartments in those tracts. Maps of MTO placements suggest that many moved near tract boundaries (perhaps to get affordable rents or to be closer to low-income neighbors) and some to high-poverty enclaves within the low-poverty tracts. Third, while Gautreaux created both racial and income integration (suburban movers went to areas averaging 90 percent white populations), MTO is a program for income, not race, integration: 32 percent of MTO movers to low-poverty areas went to areas with a black majority. If families are affected by attributes of place besides poverty rate or income mix (for example, racial composition, job opportunities), MTO does not systematically test those effects. These three factors—shorter moves, self-selection of address, and mixing of income but not race—make MTO more practically feasible than Gautreaux, but they may create smaller neighborhood effects. When MTO studies find neighborhood effects, therefore, these studies may underestimate the effects of a Gautreaux-type intervention. Other models are also possible. In Yonkers, New York, just north of the Bronx, an explicit enclave model was implemented, wherein residents live together in separate housing developments but potentially benefit from their middle-class community.²¹ Each model has advantages and disadvantages (for example, political feasibility and applicability), and researchers need to examine various models in order to understand the dynamics of neighborhood effects.

Gautreaux and MTO also have distinctive features in research design. First, MTO was designed as an experiment, with random assignment, a no-change control group, and pre- and post-move data collection. Most evidence suggests that Gautreaux approximates random selection, but because it is not perfectly random, it leaves uncertainty about the initial comparability of suburb- and city-mover groups. MTO has a superior research design. Second, while MTO is a much newer program that (thus far) allows the study of short-term outcomes, Gautreaux studies report long-term effects almost two decades (seventeen years) after placement. Third, while MTO studies focus on quantitative outcomes, they are only now beginning to examine causal mechanisms (using survey data at the five- to seven-year mark and more recent qualitative interviews and ethnographic fieldwork).

Gautreaux research has long included qualitative observations about the ways social context affects individuals' behavior. A study of a random sample of 342 heads of household finds that five years after moving, suburban movers had

19. Mendenhall, Duncan, and DeLuca (2004).

20. Turner (1998, p. 376).

21. Briggs (1997).

higher employment rates than city movers.²² A study of children finds that suburban movers were more likely than city movers to graduate from high school, to attend college, and to attend better colleges (four-year rather than two-year colleges); those who did not attend college were more likely to have a job, and their jobs offered higher pay and benefits. Examining social interaction, this survey found no significant differences between city- and suburban-mover adults on six interaction measures, the combined interaction scale, individual isolation, or number of friends. Suburban movers reported significantly more incidents of harassment when they first moved, but it declined over time, and there was no difference between city and suburban movers in their current reports of harassment. Regarding children's interaction, another study finds no difference between city and suburban movers in the time they spent with black friends and the amount of interaction they had with black friends, but suburban movers were significantly more likely than city movers to interact with white students in doing schoolwork, in engaging in activities outside school, and in visiting in their homes. These results provide quantitative evidence that the suburban moves led to a considerable amount of "bridging" social interaction that crossed racial lines.

The use of administrative data avoids two common problems in surveys: nonresponse and distorted responses. For instance, while previous surveys located about two-thirds of the initial respondents, this study located current addresses for 1,504 of 1,506 families.²³ Similarly, while families might be reluctant to report being on public aid, Illinois state records provided complete and valid data on public aid for all participants.

Encouragingly, the first study using administrative data finds that of families placed in suburbs, only about 30 percent had returned to the city an average of seventeen years later. Moreover, while virtually all suburbs in the program were less than 30 percent black, when those suburbs are divided into quintiles of black composition, the highest rates of return to the city come from the highest and lowest black quintiles and the middle quintile has the lowest return rate (25 percent). However, in no quintile do more than 33 percent return to the city.

The second study finds that families that moved to better neighborhoods, as defined by the education level of the placement census tract, were much less likely to be on public aid. Merging data from the Illinois state government with program records, we find that public aid rates went from 26 percent to 39 percent when families placed in the highest- and lowest-quintile neighborhoods are compared. The difference remains very strong and significant after controlling for years in the program, age, and premove public aid (see table 7-1). This

22. See Rubinowitz and Rosenbaum (2000) and the review there.

23. For the previous surveys, see DeLuca and Rosenbaum (2001, 2003); Rosenbaum and DeLuca (2000).

Table 7-1. *Logistic Regression, Aid to Families with Dependent Children Program, by Initial Placement, 1989^a*

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Coefficient</i>	<i>Standard error</i>	<i>Significance</i>	<i>Exp(B)</i>
Neighborhood socioeconomic status	1.1563	0.4442	0.0092	3.1782
Years in program, 1989	-0.1793	0.0233	0.0000	0.8359
Age in 1989	-0.0521	0.0094	0.0000	0.9493
AFDC at entry ^b	1.4873	0.1903	0.0000	4.4251
Constant	0.3832	0.3806	0.3140	

Source:

a. $N = 1,330$; chi square = 282.04, $p < .000$.

b. Yes = 1, no = 0.

analysis is important because it suggests that initial placement has a long-term effect on family outcome (public aid receipt). The analyses also suggest that the suburb/city distinction was not an influence on this outcome, but the underlying social composition of suburb and city neighborhoods was a major influence. But even these analyses cannot examine *how* these composition factors influenced participants' behaviors. For that we must do qualitative analyses of social processes.

Qualitative Analyses

How might these effects have occurred? Families were placed far from their friends and family members in mostly white settings that initially were very uncomfortable. While jobs were plentiful, transportation and child care were not. While the large survey finds that many mothers or children had a great deal of interaction with suburban neighbors, survey data cannot tell us how this interaction arose or what consequences it had. We must turn to qualitative analysis to address those issues.

Normative Constraints

Contrary to the widespread enthusiasm about the effects of social cohesion and of compliance with shared social norms—both of which are important in social capital theory—Gautreaux participants in the suburbs were not always so happy about those effects. James Coleman emphasizes that social capital benefits come at the expense of being subject to informal social control. Suburban movers describe their new neighborhoods as more demanding than their previous neighborhoods. They speak of an uptight, highly constraining environment in which loud partying, public drinking, and other disturbances common in their previous neighborhoods are not tolerated. Some mothers describe struggling with the more restrictive environment, as the following indicate:

I partied more freely in the old neighborhood, without fear of offending the neighbors. It was more relaxed. I felt more comfortable. I felt that I didn't have to explain anything about myself or about my background. It was accepted because we were all the same race.

Suppression of self is necessary; I go to the city for release. I liked the freedom of movement and parties in my old neighborhood.

I think more suburban now. I do. . . . I used to like to go out and stuff like that. But I don't do that anymore. I'm mostly just interested in church and stuff like that. It's a change within me.

These highly constraining norms were also difficult for some children. Some mothers reported that their children struggled with the strict expectations about their behavior:

So he [her son] usually has more activity when he goes to the city with his friends. Because he can just let himself go—let his hair down, so to speak. Feel freer, I think.

When we first moved out here, they would call the police when his [her son's] music was turned up.

It makes me so upset. It's like these little kids out here, they're perfect. They don't do anything but go to school and come home. . . . I just can't understand it . . . [my son's misbehaviors are] just something that a ten-year-old boy is going to get into.

Similarly, mothers report feeling obligated to take care of their houses, buildings, yards, and neighborhoods. They perceived that they were regarded with suspicion and had to prove themselves, prove that they could meet the standards expected in the suburbs:

When I first moved here, I had little problems with the people. But now they know what to expect from me. They know I'm clean. I think they were worried more about my coming in and messing up. Somehow, white people get the idea that black people are nasty . . . don't take care of anything. I think now they know I'm clean and they accept me more now. . . . I think the first few days we were living here they just wanted to see how nasty we were going to be. See if we going keep the house clean or have paper all over the yard. And when they saw we were going to keep our grass done, I think that they began to accept us.

Even as mothers struggled to meet expectations, they perceived that the normative constraints had many benefits. For example, the social norms in the Chicago suburbs prevented certain negative actions. Some mothers perceived

less tolerance for drugs in the suburbs than in their city neighborhoods, a normative constraint that helped them to feel safer:

I mean that it's zero tolerance out here. Especially over here on the side of town where I live.

Because it was so easy to get drugs [in the city], a lot of kids are strung out on drugs because of their environment. . . . A single parent, you can't be with your child twenty-four hours a day. Some of the adults and older kids influenced them to do certain things that they might not do, and so by me moving away, it cut down the influence of them being in drugs.

Some mothers in the first study perceived the constraints as affecting them and their teenagers disproportionately and note instances in which police and neighbors treated their children with suspicion and bias and instances of police harassment, unwarranted detention, and arrests. Although it may be that these families were subjected to closer scrutiny than other neighbors and that their mistakes received a harsher response, their own reports suggest that norms were not selectively enforced.

Later, mothers reported that the constraints helped them to feel safer. High standards for safety were kept and enforced. They describe a strict, active, concerned police force and system of rules concerning curfews and loitering:

Out here, they have a curfew. I think it's 10 o'clock. You don't see anybody on the streets. If the police are in the area, they will want to know what's happening.

Here in the suburbs, the police are much stricter. I guess they have a smaller territory to cover. In the city they have so many things to do, but here they are very strict. And if you need any assistance from the police, or if any problems come up with these teenagers or anything, they're right on the spot and working with you as a concerned parent to alleviate the problem.

In the city, [teens] hang on the corners. Here they can't hang on no corner, and he [my son] would be with his friends, and they'd be on the corner. Police would stop them. . . . They think they was being harassed by the police, and they just telling you to get off the corner.

Here the policemen are much nicer. There's a difference in the city and 'burbs' policemen. My kids like policemen. In Chicago, kids do not like policemen. Out here they are really Officers Friendly. When you see them on the street, they wave. The kids are comfortable with them.

The police were not the only enforcers. Neighbors were constantly watchful, and they had a low tolerance for crime. Neighbors looked out for each other's safety and apparently succeeded in promoting informal social control, a phenomenon often attributed to a form of social capital known as *collective*

efficacy.²⁴ Suburban Gautreaux participants reported that neighbors kept watch for them at night, watched over their homes and cars, and were willing to call the police or come to help in times of emergency. Specifically, suburban participants described how interaction with their neighbors led to looking out for one another's safety and how that type of community protection was different from what they experienced in the city, as these quotes from six mothers indicate.

In the summer, most of the families in the complex look out for each other. In my old neighborhood in the city, I would run from the front door to back door, fearful about my kids' safety . . . but not here.

I usually come in at 10:00 p.m., and the man down on the first floor, he knows what time I come in. He usually stands at the door when I come in.

I mean, it's quiet, and they—I guess to a certain extent they will let me know if they see something or hear something. I do have a neighbor on the side of me that, you know, every now and then, you got someone coming around trying to break in, and we watch out for one another.

Everybody spoke, and they really cared about what was going on with the other people—if somebody's car got broken into or something. People were concerned about what was going on with their neighbors.

'Cause she has grown up here, she had been here almost ten years now so she knows everybody, and basically everybody knows her, so when you know the people in your community you can come and go and feel safe and people look out for you.

You can leave and rest assured that someone will watch your house. You can swap keys and neighbors will take care of your house.

Similarly, Gautreaux participants felt that, unlike their city neighbors, their suburban neighbors would call the police in an emergency or that they would come to help themselves:

They seem to be concerned and look out for one another. In the suburbs, the whole neighborhood would call the police.

They all came out [in response to a domestic disturbance]. It was like a big street thing. Everybody came out and was talking to the husband. The men took the husband to one side and the women took the wife. No one was hurt. He was just mad she had did something and she told him not to do it and she wasn't home when he got home or something like that. Some stupid thing.

I was robbed [when she lived in the city]. My purse was snatched, and when I screamed, no neighbors called the police.

24. Sampson, Morenoff, and Gannon-Rowley (2002).

They broke into my house [when she lived in the city], and the people next door said they didn't even hear it. They broke into our house, and a lot of more people's houses where I lived and nobody ever called for help. I've seen people . . . I've heard people saying that they've seen people getting beat up on the street and people won't even call for help. It's like they're afraid to even go to the phone and call.

In my Chicago neighborhood, no one would call if I needed help because that was a common thing. Somebody was always down there fighting their girlfriend or somebody hollering, Help, help, help. That was a common thing. . . . You weren't sure whether you should, could get involved or not.

Even though the discriminatory actions by neighbors who already lived in the neighborhood were unfair and at times illegal, they also were predictable and flowed from processes similar to those Coleman describes so positively. However, those actions did not persist, and many participants now feel that their neighbors and the police are watching out for them. When norms are enforced in a discriminatory manner, and special scrutiny is given to a certain group of people, those norms are a constraint, not a protection, for that group. However, when norms are perceived to be enforced universally, then they constrain everyone's behavior and become a protection for all. These norms gave Gautreaux mothers peace of mind and reduced their concerns about their own safety and that of their children. Shared social norms, which were initially a barrier, became a form of social capital on which Gautreaux participants could draw.

Collective Child Care

Coleman contends that the collective caring for children that occurs in some cultures is an important example of social capital:

A mother of six children, who recently moved with husband and children from suburban Detroit to Jerusalem, describes one reason for doing so as the greater freedom her young children had in Jerusalem. She felt safe in letting her eight-year-old take the six-year-old across town to school on the city bus and felt her children to be safe in playing without supervision in a city park, neither of which she felt able to do where she lived before. . . . In Jerusalem, the normative structure ensures that unattended children will be "looked after" by adults in the vicinity, while no such normative structure exists in most metropolitan areas of the United States. One can say that families have available to them in Jerusalem social capital that does not exist in metropolitan areas of the United States.²⁵

Just as this type of social capital may be greater in Jerusalem than in suburban Detroit, as Coleman observes, it appears to be greater in the suburbs of

25. Coleman (1988, pp. S99—S100).

Chicago than in its inner city. Coming out of the inner city, Gautreaux mothers perceived that children were kept under better control in the suburbs than they were in their city neighborhoods and that those normative constraints reduced the risks that their children would get hurt or get in trouble. Gautreaux participants in the suburbs reported feeling significantly stronger that a neighbor would help their children if they were in trouble than did Gautreaux participants in the city.²⁶ The qualitative data support and extend this finding, suggesting how Gautreaux mothers became reassured that their children were safe:

You know, from moving from [the city], you've got peace and you've got quiet. You got neighbors that would look or [say], "I see your daughter running in so and so . . ." But [in the city] it was nothing like that.

If they see your children participating in an activity and they figure you're the type of person that doesn't allow that, they'll come and tell you, or they will try to talk to your child about it.

We speak and we talk. We all show concern about, you know, the neighborhood and keeping it safe for the children and for ourselves. We all kind of watch, too, for the kids because we don't want anything happening around here.

In the city, in contrast, Gautreaux suburban movers reported that requests for aid in an emergency were regarded with suspicion, out of fear of retaliation or creating dependence relationships.²⁷ One possibility is that individuals' expectations about what kind of support is possible may change with a new experience. Suburban movers came to see their previous experiences somewhat differently after being exposed to unimagined suburban experiences. Adults' perception of neighborly support and safety in the city changed once the adults experienced the suburbs. Herbert Gans argues that suburbs are different not because of any ecological feature but because of selection: Suburbs attract middle-class households raising children. Because of their life stage and resources, the focus of these households is their children. In moving from the city to the suburbs, low-income Gautreaux mothers seem to be picking up on this theme, which they report was not as salient in the city. James Coleman notes that "intergenerational closure" (parents knowing each other and acting collectively for children's benefit) is an important resource for childrearing: "When the parents' friends are the parents of their children's friends, a closed community is formed in which behavior can be monitored and guided. Parents decide on norms and sanctions, monitor each other's children, and aid in child raising."²⁸

In the context of the Yonkers housing mobility program for low-income families, moving to safer neighborhoods changes how parents manage risk for

their children. Parents in more dangerous areas closely regulate their children's neighborhood peer relationships, but those living in safer neighborhoods feel less need to do so.²⁹ Gautreaux mothers also describe the suburbs as much freer of violent crime and gang activity than their city neighborhoods were. They could let their children go out and play without hovering over them:

In the suburbs there are no gangs. I don't have to stand in the window and watch out for my kids. They know not to leave the complex. Any time I call, they can hear me.

The violence in the area was shocking and scary. . . . I was always uneasy. . . . Here in the suburbs I don't have to worry about people shooting at people, seeing people chase people and shooting, fighting. . . . I didn't care too much for letting my daughter go out for fear of her life. I was always afraid that a fight would break out when she was down the street. . . . My fear was that a stray bullet would come from one of the higher floors, and you would never know who shot you.

In the city . . . we were often broken into, robbed. . . . I used to always carry knife. Not anymore, since I moved out to suburbs. I feel safe night and day.

Ironically, the city environment, where everything was permitted, was like living in a prison. As two Gautreaux mothers describe it:

I think it was the richness in the atmosphere that the children realized . . . 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. They was more happy than I was, I believe, you know, just to get out of there. 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.

I give them more leeway, more freedom. I don't try to enforce some of the rules I tried to enforce on my other kids. The neighborhood was a violent place, so I had to keep them inside most of the time because I feared for their lives. It's just an entirely different breed of people around here. These people are hardworking; they make money. Therefore, you don't have that much fear.

Social and Material Benefits

Where competing ideas about the power of place are concerned, the affluence hypothesis is problematic, because it lacks a mechanism. Living in the midst of

26. Rubinowitz and Rosenbaum (2000, table 7).

27. Rainwater (1970).

28. Coleman (1988, pp. S106–S107).

29. Briggs (1998, p. 203).

affluent neighbors does not automatically confer benefits on low-income people. Indeed, there were unforeseen new costs. Gautreaux mothers were surprised to find that suburban public libraries charged a fee for library cards, which were free in the city, and suburban summer camps and YMCAs charged a fee for their programs, which also were free in the city. In addition, summer activities sometimes filled up quickly, even before they were formally announced in the local paper. Affluent suburbs offered many opportunities, but barriers to access existed.

However, mothers report that they received many benefits through their relations with neighbors. Gautreaux mothers say that they feel able to ask for help from their neighbors, and they describe a living environment in which people help one another:

I think if I needed something and went to them, it would be okay. For example, if my car broke down or if I had a flat, if they had the time, they would help me with it.

We have a list of everyone's name, address, phones. You feel free to call them if you want to. They are all very nice neighbors. If they have prejudice, they don't let you know it. We get along. I think that's the way it should be . . . very friendly.

When something went wrong [in the city, neighbors] wouldn't help each other. Stuff like that. There's a big difference out here.

Suburban Gautreaux mothers describe incidents when neighbors picked up each other's mail, shoveled snow off each other's sidewalks or driveways, borrowed cooking ingredients from each other, and offered to pick things up for each other at the store, as these mothers report:

I guess I'm the closest to the lady across the hall. . . . She will get my mail for me, and I do the same for her. She looks out for my house.

They [neighbors in suburbs] shovel my walkway. It's hard for me to do it in my condition. They have those snowblowers, and they come over and blow the walkway. Sometimes I come home from work and my yard is all shoveled, my garage. He doesn't have to do it. I got locked out, and he climbed up on the roof and let me in.

The suburbs help you out more, and they have more to offer. . . . Out here when Christmastime comes they help you. They help the needy . . . whereas in the city, you're on your own.

If I need anything, I have neighbors I can go to and say, "Well, I need an egg." It's nice to know that there's someplace you can go other than the neighborhood grocery store fifteen minutes away.

Especially during times of need, Gautreaux mothers were often pleasantly surprised by the neighborly behavior of suburban residents, who would bring gifts at times of celebration or provide extra help. Some mothers received acts of kindness like gifts for their newborn babies and meals for housewarming occasions.

We let each other know if we need anything. When I had my baby, I was surprised because everyone came and brought gifts for her. They were nice. Once when I went to the hospital, a neighbor cooked dinner. . . . When I lived in Chicago, nothing like that ever happened.

My neighbor right next door, she made me a casserole the very first day I moved in. And her kids came over to talk to me and to try to help me get my house together.

My neighbor across the street came over when we first moved in to offer to help.

Similarly, other mothers report receiving passed-down items that their neighbors did not want.

I just accumulated stuff. People would throw away stuff and would always remember to ask me if I wanted it. Or they are going to have a moving sale or a garage sale, and they always give me a deal on things. I've been very blessed. And this house—all the stuff—look at it. I'm proud of it. When I moved out here I had nothing. I've been carrying in all the stuff since I've been here. Most of it's hand-me-downs, but I like it. I'm very proud of what I got.

He didn't have a bike, so the people in the community provided one. There's always a bike being handed down.

In emergencies, other suburban Gautreaux mothers report that neighbors came to their rescue:

At Christmas when I had to bury the [stillborn] baby that I had, they didn't know, but when they found out, the phone was ringing and they were offering all sorts of help. . . . They were extremely for real about help. They offered to keep the kids.

When my water pipe busted, we had to get water from the neighbors next door, who had just moved in, and they were always bringing things over.

Once my lights were turned off, and out of the clear blue sky, she [a neighbor] gave me \$50 to put on my lights. Now, you hardly find friends like that. So I could put her in the category of a friend.

In some cases, there were bartering relationships. Some Gautreaux mothers saw the situation as a system of give and take:

You do something for me and I'll do something for you. It helps considerably when people don't have money. When people didn't have money before, they did something for you, and you turned around and did something for them. This is the way it was at the time when money was not so important. You could very easily get someone to vacuum the halls and take some off of their rent for doing that. . . . If my car broke down and I couldn't make it to work, they'd see to it that I got to work. If I got stranded at any time . . . if I needed anything, they were always there, and vice versa, because with five babies you were always needing.

Given the meager public transportation in the suburbs, transportation was often a problem. Some mothers had cars, but they were old vehicles that sometimes broke down. Gautreaux mothers report participating in car pools and receiving rides from their neighbors:

It was a white girl across the hall. Now, she went out of her way to be nice . . . and she was taking me to work. And she was always on hand trying to help me.

Any time my car would break, they [my neighbors] would take us somewhere.

One teacher, like if I didn't have transportation for her [her daughter] to get to school, he'd see to her getting there.

My neighbor down the way there, she's real nice. Because like on some days, like I work late, and [my daughter] didn't have her car, she would go and pick her up for me. Like when I had problems with my car, she would help out.

School activities required money and transportation. That could have been an obstacle, but sometimes school staff took steps to remove such obstacles:

A teacher paid the way for my child to go to a ranch for three days with his class because I couldn't afford it.

The school counselor took my daughter and other kids on ski trip and brought her home afterwards. . . . I don't think we would have got that in Chicago.

Gautreaux mothers report that neighbors frequently watched over their children and that they themselves looked after their neighbors' children:

They [neighbors] used to babysit my son, and I'd take care of their daughter for a couple of hours.

My daughter babysits two little boys of the very nice neighbors next door.

If I need a favor from a neighbor, I can get it babysitting. I had no contact with neighbors in Chicago.

By sharing obligations and returning favors, Gautreaux's suburban mothers were able to enjoy the benefits of their new neighborhoods. Through their neighbors' attitudes about property upkeep, tranquility and order, safety, child-care, and neighborly assistance, Gautreaux participants were able to check their own behavior against those of their middle-class role models. In addition, Gautreaux mothers and children took advantage of the clean, quiet neighborhoods and safe, caring environments in which they found themselves. There they could live freely, as they could not before because of bad conditions in the inner city.

Social Capital

Social norms and reciprocity obligations provide a form of capital that enhances people's capabilities. Indeed, social norms and reciprocity obligations permitted Gautreaux mothers and children to develop capabilities that they would not have otherwise. Some mothers and children perceive their city neighbors' behaviors of damaging and vandalizing buildings and their failure to maintain them as signs of a more general attitude of "not caring" and a fatalistic acceptance of deplorable conditions. They seem to sense that their city neighbors did not care about anything, based on the physical decay and disorder that they saw everywhere:

Over there [in the city], the kids didn't care about anything, you know. They'd break windows out, tear up gardens and . . . the flowers, shrubs, and everything. . . . These are the types of things they were looking at every day. So I feel that they [my children] might have grew up and started doing some of the same stuff those kids was doing. And I was just glad to get them out of there. . . . Here [in the suburbs] people like to keep up the, you know, the house, the apartment, the building, the grounds around the building.

Some participants even describe learning how to keep things nice from the example of their suburban neighbors and their well-kept environment:

I don't like it [in the city] because some of the people would throw their trash all over the place. . . . They have parties in the middle of the night and wake people up. . . . [In the suburbs] you learned how to be, you learned how to take care of things better.

It is possible that the clear physical evidence that neighbors cared and would take action may have taught participants how to take similar actions and, generally, how to make a difference in their own lives. Of course, it is speculation that people's attitudes about their physical surroundings generalize to their behaviors in other domains. Less speculatively, Gautreaux mothers' ability to go out to work was clearly affected by the various kinds of social capital accessible in suburban

neighborhoods. For example, one mother reports that relationships with her neighbors made it possible for her to make a commitment to a job. It made no sense for her otherwise, if she had to rely on her old, undependable car. But her neighbors provided a dependable backup option: "They'd see to it that I'd get to work if my car broke down."

Similarly, while many Gautreaux mothers report that they did not take jobs in the city because of the risk of being attacked on their way home from work in the dark, one suburban mover reports that a watchful neighbor allowed her to take a job that required her to come home late. "I usually come in at 10:00 p.m., and the man down on the first floor, he knows what time I come in. He usually stands at the door when I come in. The parking lot is too dark." Neighbors also permitted other mothers not to worry about their children while they were at work:

A couple of times I asked her [a neighbor] if my son could stay here until I get home from work because he's afraid to stay here by himself. . . . If I call her and ask her if my son could stay over there, she always says yes. She never turned me down for any favors or anything like that.

In the city, if you leave your nine- or eight-year-old child to watch his baby brother, you always have to keep calling home more often than you do here. Because the neighbors out here, they kind of help watch, too. . . . When I was working, I had the neighbor next door to make sure my son was going to school and make sure my door was locked. But in the city you just can't do that because everything would be gone.

Or if my children need something and I'm not here, I make sure I've got a backup to get somebody here within a matter of minutes to take care of it. And I've got that. I don't have to worry about a thing. If I'm at work and I have to work a sixteen-hour shift or if something jumps up, I can call the young lady that used to live next door to me and tell her, "Hey, my kids are in a rut. I need you to go over there." She will get her husband to come home from work to get her car and come get my kids. . . . So it gives me pretty good reassurance that they'll be taken care of. And there's someone there that cares.

My daughter was the only child, and I worked. I had a neighbor that had an extra key to my house because my daughter was a latchkey child, so I had a good neighbor. I would watch her kids, and she had three, and I knew her whole family, so she could check on my kid in case anything had happened.

In order for me to go back to school at that time . . . I had got a babysitter next door. The lady introduced herself to me. So I got a chance to go to school and get some skills.

Conclusion

It is important to point out that the housing mobility program presented here—one experiment in expanding the geography of opportunity available to low-income minority families—imposes no formal responsibility on receiving communities. The program selects and places families, but they must make their own way in their new neighborhoods. Nor are the communities informed about the program, which works through the private rental housing market. While this may not be ideal from a policy perspective, it provides a fascinating test of community reaction. Our research suggests that, even without encouragement, suburban neighbors are often receptive and more accepting over time. While some harassment occurred at the outset, it had largely subsided by the end of the first year in the suburbs.

The reader must remember that this is not a quantitative study, and it does not reliably indicate the frequency of various behaviors and experiences. In a previous large survey, we examine the frequency of social interaction in the suburbs, but that survey cannot tell us how those social outcomes arose or what their consequences were. In addition, despite the positive results demonstrated in multivariate studies associating placement neighborhood conditions with other child and family outcomes, we cannot know the causal mechanisms behind those findings.³⁰ This requires that we look more closely at detailed qualitative accounts by participants, and that is the purpose of the present study. By looking at the detailed reports of families, we discover processes that may have important implications for understanding the possibilities of class and race integration in American society and for understanding the consequences of such integration.

As an extensive review concluded, "we need a deeper focus on cultural, normative, and collective action perspectives that attach meaning to how residents frame the commitment to places."³¹ We need to understand how residents react to social mores, to whom they apply, and how residents qualify for the benefits conferred by norms of reciprocity. Social norms can be constraining. Some mothers note difficulties in adjusting to suburban norms, which were unfamiliar and intolerant of some of their previous behaviors. However, many of those mothers, who had lived all their lives in housing projects where those norms did not exist, saw benefits to complying with them, and they decided to adopt them and to behave accordingly.

In addition, perhaps most surprisingly, many respondents report that they did in fact benefit from those norms. Although such results may not be inevitable or even prevalent, sometimes movers from the inner city do benefit from the social responsiveness and social capital of white middle-class suburbs.

30. Rosenbaum and DeLuca (2000); DeLuca and Rosenbaum (2003, 2004).

31. Sampson, Morenoff, Gannon-Rowley (2002, p. 474).

The constraining norms meant that mothers in the program did not have to spend all their time watching their children and allowed them to give their children more freedom. In other words, normative constraints can be a form of social capital, though this is not inevitable. Indeed, if the initial mistrust by neighbors and police had continued, Gautreaux mothers and children would not have benefited. However, the normative consensus, which initially regarded these families skeptically and excluded them, shifted to include them. What could have been an exclusionary process, reducing families' capabilities, instead became social capital that enhanced their capabilities.

Similarly, the mothers report a social responsiveness that provided resources to them. They received the benefits of reciprocal relations related to child care and of neighbors' general concern and watchfulness in promoting the safety of their children, their property, and themselves. They received favors in terms of transportation and acts of charity. The former examples resemble Coleman's discussions of reciprocity, whereby mothers received and gave in approximately equal measure. These social capital benefits depend more on generalized reciprocity than on what these particular mothers did for their neighbors.³² However, it is remarkable that these new residents, who generally differed in race and class from their neighbors, were awarded that generalized reciprocity, although such inclusionary gestures appear to have depended on their showing their willingness to abide by community norms.

Transportation favors, it is true, were more one-sided. Some Gautreaux mothers could not supply transportation to others because they had either an unreliable car or none at all. Charity was also one-sided, though some bartering may have happened. But acts of charity may be influenced by social capital processes. At a time when national political discourse was disparaging low-income, black, single mothers and setting time limits on their receipt of federal benefits, charity toward welfare mothers cannot be taken for granted.

These outcomes are not inevitable, and the underlying social capital is not a given. Participants could have refused to comply with suburban norms; and even if they complied, suburban neighbors could have refused to accept and help participants. Indeed, some suburban neighbors did not accept participants, and a few even engaged in acts of harassment. Interestingly, these unwelcoming acts prompted other neighbors to repudiate those acts.

Coleman may be right about the productive power of norms. Participants' compliance with community norms probably enhanced the perception that they were members of the community. Harassers' breaking of norms of decency may also have forced other neighbors to back the neighborhood norms of acceptance. It is possible that the families that were generous in giving gifts or assistance would not have done so if they had felt that the Gautreaux families were

32. Putnam (1993).

not members of their community, and some might have ignored their neighbors if harassment had not forced them to take a stand. In turn, community membership may prompt acceptance and generosity.

Most important, the social context provides a form of capital that enhances people's capabilities. As Coleman points out, social norms and reciprocity obligations conferred capabilities on Gautreaux mothers and children that they would not have had otherwise. Just as eyeglasses are a form of physical capital that permits people to see, the social capital in suburban neighborhoods enabled mothers to engage in various activities because it freed them of the need to spend every moment watching their children. Some mothers report that they could count on neighbors if a child misbehaved or seemed at risk of getting into trouble, if a child was sick and could not attend school, or if there was some threat to their children, their apartments, or themselves. Social support that provides occasional assistance may be considered a form of social capital. It permits individuals to take individual actions when the opportunity presents itself, but it may not permit them to make an enduring commitment. A friendly neighbor's offer to watch a ten-year-old child permits a parent to make a quick trip to the store, but a neighborhood commitment to watching and protecting all children may permit a parent to make a commitment to a job. That is not just interpersonal support, it is systemic, and that is the form of social capital that enabled these mothers to take actions and make commitments that otherwise would be difficult or risky.

Many people assume that the effects of residential mobility experiments derive from an affluent context and greater material resources. We suggest another possible mechanism: Social capital provides benefits and even resources. Social normative support and the reciprocal benefits of safety, transportation, child care, and community watchfulness over children and property may be related to community affluence, but it is possible that they could occur in communities that are not highly affluent. Indeed, there may be trade-offs as families move away from the strong ties of low-income kin and old friends to the weaker ties of middle-class neighbors in a safe environment where they can count on their neighbors.³³ The relationship of social capital to affluence is not entirely clear at present. Now that these processes have been identified, research can quantitatively analyze their incidence and preconditions.

These findings also raise questions about the issue of individual preferences. Before moving to the suburbs, most participants were very reluctant to leave their city neighborhoods, and understandably so. They were moving to places far from their original neighborhoods and friends. They were moving to neighborhoods in which the social norms were radically different from theirs. The movers often expected racial harassment. Indeed, even after moving, many participants

33. Briggs (1998).

felt serious doubts about what they were doing, many had difficulty adjusting to the new set of expectations, many considered moving back to their old neighborhoods, and some actually did. However, we found that only 30 percent of suburb movers had returned to the city an average of seventeen years after placement. Why is that?

The present findings suggest that regardless of their initial preferences, participants came to accept the suburban norms. They decided to adopt these new norms, and they received substantial benefits from complying with them. These participants might not have chosen to live in the suburbs if they had been offered an alternative safe environment. But the vast majority did not return to the city. We believe that many Gautreaux participants became different people: They had different norms, different preferences, and different expectations. Just as Coleman suggests, they acquired capabilities from living in the suburbs and from becoming suburbanites, and if Coleman is correct, they would have lost those capabilities had they returned to their old city neighborhoods.

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