

“Preferences Constrained: Racial and Ethnic Variations in Parents’ Neighborhood Choice Considerations”

PAA Abstract

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Background

Neighborhoods have been shown to affect a wide variety of outcomes for parents and their children, ranging from physical and mental health to educational attainment and crime (Shaw and McKay 1942; Sampson, Morenoff, and Gannon-Rowley 2002; Sampson, Raudenbush, and Earls 1997). Given these many consequences it is critical to better understand how families come to live in particular residences and neighborhoods. This points to the scholarly focus on residential choice and the ways that people assess housing and neighborhood quality within the constraints of their socioeconomic resources and neighborhood opportunities (Mulder 2007).

Research in this area examines the residential choices as a two-step process. First, individuals and families decide that they are going to move. Then, given this decision to move, they decide where they are going to move by examining the trade-offs of various locations (Kim, Pagliara, and Preston 2005). Our study focuses on the second question about where people move, and the reasons given for such moves. We use a revealed preferences method, meaning that the survey asked parents about why they moved to their current neighborhood. Therefore, the respondents have already gone through the first decision about deciding to move.

Typologies have been proposed to explain why people move and how they select their new residences. Woo and Morrow-Jones (2011) separate decision making factors into lifecycle and socioeconomic considerations, satisfaction with housing, and satisfaction with neighborhood. Lifecycle and SES features include the size of the family and the age of the children in the household. Each will affect decisions about the size of the house needed as well as what characteristics to focus on in the neighborhood. For example, families with teenagers may be more focused on issues such as the nature of peer groups in the neighborhood. Satisfaction with housing focuses on characteristics such as quality and size. Examples include families needing more space and or moving in order to avoid remodeling. Lastly, satisfaction with neighborhood focuses attention on the environment surrounding the residence. The current study examines this third aspect of satisfaction with neighborhood by focusing on issues of crime and illegal activities in the area, proximity to friends and relatives, and quality of schools as possible reasons for living in a specific neighborhood.

Given the continuing importance of neighborhood racial segregation, much attention has been given to issues of group differences regarding preferences about the racial and ethnic makeups of neighborhoods. Previous research has concluded that there is a strong effect of same group preference (Farley, Fielding, and Krysan 1997, Krysan and Farley 2002). Research finds that blacks are much more likely to want to live in integrated neighborhoods, while whites, Hispanics, and Asians want to live in neighborhoods that are predominantly their own racial/ethnic group. Clark (2009) examines how education and income interact with these preferences and finds that as income and education increase, the probability of choosing a more integrated setting also increases. He also concludes that blacks rarely prefer to live in places where they are not at least 50% of the population, which leads to segregation. Despite the fact that previously scholars had concluded that white preference caused segregation, his findings support the idea that it is the interaction of multiple groups' preferences that produce segregation.

Less attention has been devoted to the salience of preferences for other neighborhood characteristics. Research by Swisher, Sweet and Moen (2004), using a sample of mostly white and middle-class couples, found that issues such as the quality of schools, relative safety, and

availability of other families at the same stage of the life course were important considerations for parents when assessing the family-friendliness of their communities (see also Sweet, Swisher, and Moen 2005). It is not clear, however, whether these findings would generalize to lower socioeconomic status or minority families. Zonn (1984) examined the decision-making processes of black urban households, finding them to be more focused on housing characteristics than neighborhood qualities. He points out that blacks have limited neighborhood options and thus may focus more on housing related factors they can control. Sigelman and Henig (2001) conclude that when African-Americans consider new homes, they are more concerned with meeting basic conditions, like shelter, health, and safety. On the other hand, whites' preferences were quality-of-life focused, like shopping, recreation, and restaurants. Lastly, and somewhat in contrast to Sigelman and Henig (2001), Lewis et al. (2011) concludes that school quality and crime rates are the most important aspects for minorities when choosing their new residence.

Based on these previous findings, the current research will focus on three main questions. First, do demographic characteristics, including race/ethnicity and family socioeconomic status, predict which neighborhood characteristics parents say were most important in their choice of their present neighborhoods? Drawing on previous research, we suspect that minority parents may be more likely to focus on issues of crime and illegal activities, what Sigelman and Henig (2001) call "basic human needs", whereas the relatively privileged positions of whites will shift their attention beyond the basics of safety to a focus on the quality of schools and other issues. Next, we will consider whether there are racial and ethnic differences in the salience of neighborhood characteristics by family socioeconomic status. It is possible that due to racial segregation and the closer proximity of middle class black families to poorer families (Patillo-McCoy 1998), that black, white, and Latino families of the same socioeconomic standing may have different concerns. Lastly, reflecting the importance of racial considerations within the residential preferences literature, we will examine whether neighborhood racial/ethnic composition moderates the associations between an individual's race/ethnicity and SES and parents' stated reasons for living in the neighborhood. White parents who end up in neighborhoods with a larger proportion of black families may point to different factors than do those that end up in more homogeneous contexts.

Method

This study will use data from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent to Adult Health (ADD Health). This study uses information gathered at Wave I when the sample was composed of adolescents in the 7th to 12th grades. Of particular importance to this study is data from the parent questionnaire. The questionnaire was filled out by a parent, in most cases the mother, of respondents interviewed at Wave I. The response rate for the parent questionnaire was 85.4%. This study also uses the Wave I ADD Health Contextual Database (Billy, Wenzlow, and Grady 1998) that contains data from the 1990 Census regarding the demographic and socioeconomic characteristics of respondents' census tracts (i.e., neighborhoods).

In total, 20,745 respondents were interviewed at Wave I. Of these, 6,395 did not have a parent respond so they were excluded from the analyses. Additionally, in order to maintain adequate sizes of racial and ethnic subgroups, we exclude respondents who indicated being Native American or of other races. In these preliminary descriptive analyses we use listwise deletion for missing data on focal variables (largest loss is 407 with missing values on family socioeconomic status), yielding a final analytic sample of 11,646 adolescents and their parents.

Dependent Variable

The dependent variables used in this study come from the parents' questionnaire. It asks parents to indicate "which ONE statement describes the most important reason why you live in this neighborhood?" (i.e., their current neighborhood). Response options include that the neighborhood is "near old workplace, near current workplace, had outgrown previous housing, affordable good housing, less crime, less illegal activity by adolescents, close to friends or relatives, better schools, children of appropriate ages, and born here." For the current analyses, we focus on a subset of items including living in the neighborhood because there is less crime, less illegal activities by adolescents, being close to friends or relatives, and better schools. The final dependent variables were created by converting each response into a dichotomous variable, where 1 indicates that it was the most important reason why the parent lives in their current neighborhood and a 0 indicates they responded with a different option.

Key Independent Variables

The key independent variables for this study capture the parents' racial/ethnic identification, as well as the neighborhood racial composition. Parents were asked if they were "of Hispanic or Latino origin." This was a dichotomous question, with 1 indicating that he/she is Hispanic or Latino, and 0 indicating that he/she is not. They were also asked "which ONE category best describes your racial background?" Response options included white (1), black/African American (2), American Indian/Native American (3), Asian or Pacific Islander (4), and other (5). These two questions are combined to yield mutually exclusive categories of racial and ethnic identification including: non-Hispanic white, black, and Asian, and those of Hispanic origin. Neighborhood racial/ethnic composition is a contextual variable, drawn from the Census. It indicates the proportion of the neighborhood that is white, black, Hispanic, or Asian.

Additional Variables

Parents' gender and age, household structure, family socioeconomic status, parents' foreign born status, number of children in the household, child's gender and age, years living at the current residence, and whether it is an urban neighborhood are also examined in these analyses.

Preliminary Analyses

Weighted means and proportions for the focal variables are presented in Table 1. The results indicate striking differences across racial and ethnic groups (at the bivariate level) in the reasons that parents gave for living in their current neighborhoods. Black parents are more likely than all other groups to indicate living in an area due to less crime or illegal activities by adolescents. Hispanics are the least likely to mention being close to friends or relatives. The largest racial/ethnic differences are observed with respect to the importance of school quality. Almost twenty-two percent of whites choose good schools as the primary reason they live where they do, compared to less than seven percent of black parents. Also of interest are the neighborhood racial composition variables, with each racial/ethnic group being most likely to live in an area where their own group is the majority.

Table 2 shows zero-order logistic regression models for each of the four proposed outcome variables. Each race/ethnicity was entered into the regression models separately. The

results are strongly suggestive of sizable racial and ethnic differences, with blacks again more likely to mention less crime and illegal activities as primary factors driving their neighborhood choices. The results also interestingly show that good schools are least likely to be mentioned by black parents. Results also indicate potential neighborhood racial composition effects, where a higher proportion of whites in the neighborhood is associated with a focus on good schools, whereas the proportion black has the opposite effect.

Analysis Plan

For the final paper and presentation we plan to run at least three models for each outcome. First, we will answer our first research question by including individual race/ethnicity as well as controls for socio-demographic characteristics, to address whether the observed differences at the bivariate level are driven by socioeconomic status or other demographic factors. Next, we plan to run interactions between individual race/ethnicity and family socioeconomic status, as it is possible that the associations of race/ethnicity with the outcomes differ by socioeconomic status. Following that, we will run models including interactions of individual race/ethnicity and neighborhood racial composition. Scholars have previously shown that racial/ethnic groups have preferences to live within areas that are the majority their own group. Our analyses will examine whether the neighborhood racial composition also affects what additional reasons (i.e., not explicitly race-based) people give for moving to their current neighborhood.

The descriptive results presented here are weighted zero-order regressions. In the future, we plan to use hierarchical linear modeling to account for the neighborhood clustering and more properly examine cross-level interactions. Additionally, the current analyses are based on listwise deletion. Our final results will employ multiple imputation.

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Table 1. Weighted Descriptive Statistics for All Racial/Ethnic Groups and by Racial/Ethnic Group

	All	White	Black	Hispanic	Asian	Range
<i>Dependent Variables</i>						
Less Crime	0.137	0.128 ^{bh}	0.180 ^a	0.152	0.166	0/1
Less Illegal Activities	0.046	0.043 ^{bh}	0.063 ^a	0.061 ^a	0.030	0/1
Close to Friends/Relatives	0.145	0.148 ^h	0.138	0.118 ^a	0.150	0/1
Good Schools	0.197	0.217 ^{ba}	0.069 ^{ha}	0.207 ^a	0.189	0/1
<i>Independent Variables</i>						
Parents' Race/Ethnicity						
White	0.7851	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----
Black	0.1252	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----
Hispanic	0.0569	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----
Asian	0.0327	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----
Neighborhood Racial/Ethnic Composition						
Prop. White	0.836 (0.017)	0.916 ^{bha} (0.008)	0.438 ^{ha} (0.033)	0.722 ^a (0.034)	0.638 (0.062)	0-1.0
Prop. Black	0.115 (0.015)	0.052 ^{bha} (0.007)	0.528 ^{ha} (0.035)	0.088 (0.011)	0.084 (0.018)	0-1.0
Prop. Hispanic	0.057 (0.009)	0.033 ^{bha} (0.004)	0.037 ^{ha} (0.006)	0.385 ^a (0.071)	0.136 (0.024)	0-1.0
Prop. Asian	0.023 (0.006)	0.015 ^{bha} (0.002)	0.013 ^{ha} (0.002)	0.049 ^a (0.012)	0.215 (0.074)	0-1.0
Parents' Age	41.390 (0.183)	41.37 ^a (0.203)	41.240 ^{ha} (0.373)	40.824 ^a (0.375)	43.404 (0.673)	18-89
Parents' Gender						
Male	0.0604	0.065 ^{bha}	0.040 ^a	0.030 ^a	0.083	0/1
Female	0.940	0.935 ^{bha}	0.960 ^a	0.970 ^a	0.917	0/1
Parent Foreign-born	0.099	0.038 ^{bha}	0.043 ^{ha}	0.647 ^a	0.823	0/1
Family SES	6.294 (0.107)	6.490 ^{bha} (0.115)	5.714 ^{ha} (0.179)	4.629 ^a (0.241)	6.72 (0.257)	1-10
Years Living in Current Residence	7.389 (0.148)	7.659 ^{bha} (0.160)	6.740 ^{ha} (0.304)	5.881 (0.470)	6.008 (0.521)	0-21
Number of Children in Household	2.386 (0.029)	2.310 ^{bha} (0.032)	2.549 ^{ha} (0.076)	2.869 ^a (0.122)	2.734 (0.150)	1-13
Two Biological Parent Household	0.603	0.638 ^{bha}	0.338 ^{ha}	0.619 ^a	0.759	0/1
Child's Age	15.381 (0.121)	15.358 ^{ha} (0.132)	15.468 ^{ha} (0.228)	15.615 (0.280)	15.185 (0.301)	11-21
Child's Gender						
Male	0.511	0.513 ^{ba}	0.471 ^{ha}	0.543 ^a	0.544	0/1
Female	0.489	0.487 ^{ba}	0.5238 ^{ha}	0.457 ^a	0.456	0/1
Urban Neighborhood	0.480 (0.045)	0.434 ^{bha} (0.049)	0.5471 ^{ha} (0.076)	0.835 ^a (0.042)	0.716 (0.120)	0-1.0

^{bha} Superscripts indicate a significant difference ($p < 0.05$) in values by racial/ethnic group

Table 2. Zero-Order Logistic Regression Models

	Less Crime	Less Illegal Activity	Close to Friends/ Relatives	Good Schools
Parents' Race/Ethnicity				
Black	0.377** (0.111)	0.391* (0.150)	-0.067 (0.118)	-1.308*** (0.179)
Hispanic	0.132 (0.167)	0.318 (0.225)	-0.253 (0.159)	0.067 (0.150)
Asian	0.232 (0.190)	-0.453 (0.398)	0.044 (0.276)	-0.053 (0.275)
Neighborhood Racial/Ethnic Composition				
Prop. White	-0.017 (0.192)	-0.250 (0.266)	-0.282 (0.176)	1.993*** (0.298)
Prop. Black	0.093 (0.216)	0.369 (0.269)	0.282 (0.179)	-2.351*** (0.416)
Prop. Hispanic	-0.267 (0.235)	0.058 (0.331)	-0.175 (0.342)	-0.184 (0.451)
Prop. Asian	-0.402 (0.401)	-0.781 (0.823)	0.641 (0.545)	-1.079 [†] (0.639)
Parents' Age	-0.004 (0.006)	-0.019 (0.012)	-0.017* (0.007)	0.005 (0.010)
Parents' Gender				
Female	-0.141 (0.145)	-0.044 (0.306)	0.314 (0.196)	-0.219 (0.207)
Parent Foreign-born	0.208 [†] (0.121)	0.303 (0.202)	-0.193 (0.151)	0.154 (0.134)
Family SES	-0.012 (0.016)	-0.065* (0.227)	-0.056** (0.017)	0.092* (0.038)
Years Living in Current Residence	-0.011 (0.008)	-0.030* (0.013)	0.030*** (0.008)	-0.025** (0.009)
Number of Children in Household	-0.026 (0.034)	0.061 (0.051)	-0.037 (0.036)	0.009 (0.031)
Two Biological Parent Household	0.050 (0.091)	0.000 (0.134)	-0.200* (0.078)	0.162 [†] (0.090)
Child's Age	-0.011 (0.024)	-0.032 (0.041)	-0.022 (0.024)	0.002 (0.036)
Child's Gender				
Female	0.022 (0.061)	-0.234 [†] (0.130)	-0.037 (0.081)	0.003 (0.068)
Urban Neighborhood	-0.164 [†] (0.092)	-0.296 [†] (0.156)	-0.225 [†] (0.117)	0.501* (0.228)

[†]p<0.1, *p<0.05, **p<0.01, ***p<0.001