Adolescent Experiences and Adult Neighborhood Attainment

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ABSTRACT

Past research on racial differences in residential attainment has largely centered on the debate between the assimilation and stratification perspectives. The research from these perspectives assumes that residential attainment is primarily a function of current socioeconomic conditions and racial attitudes. Yet, growing bodies of research from the life-course perspective and on the effects of neighborhood context on adolescent development suggest that early-life experiences may shape residential opportunities and outcomes during adulthood. The purpose of this paper is to assess the link between adolescent residential histories and neighborhood location in early adulthood. The study will use data from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health to examine the extent to which the types of neighborhoods in which an individual lived during their childhood and adolescence shapes the composition of the neighborhood in which they reside as an adult and the role these residential experiences on racial differences in residential attainment.

INTRODUCTION

Past research on racial differences in residential attainment has largely centered on the debate between the assimilation and stratification perspectives, while some work also highlights the potential importance of racial differences in residential preferences. The research from all of these perspectives assumes that residential attainment is primarily a function of current socioeconomic conditions and racial attitudes. Yet, growing bodies of research from the life-course perspective and on the effects of neighborhood context on adolescent development suggest that early-life experiences may shape residential opportunities and outcomes during adulthood. Very little research to date has focused on this potentially important life-course effect

The purpose of this paper is to assess the link between adolescent residential histories and neighborhood location in early adulthood. The study will use data from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health to examine the extent to which the types of neighborhoods in which an individual lived during their childhood and adolescence shapes the composition of the neighborhood in which they reside at the point of establishing an independent household, and the role of residential experiences during adolescence in racial differences in residential attainment. The research has potential implications for the intergenerational transfer of neighborhood context and may highlight important mechanisms, beyond those captured by adult sociodemographic characteristics, through which residential segregation by race is maintained.

BACKGROUND

Theories for the Residential Attainment

Racial differences in residential location – with members of most groups concentrated in neighborhoods with disproportionately large shares of their own racial/ethnic group – are typically assessed according to three competing theoretical models: (1) residential preferences/satisfaction; (2) spatial assimilation, and (3), place stratification. We argue for an additional perspective to be included in the residential mobility literature, one suggesting that residential experiences during childhood and adolescence may influence young adult residential mobility and migration. Before we expand on the need to incorporate this framework, we briefly discuss the more common theoretical perspectives.

Residential Satisfaction Perspective

Perhaps the most popular model of local residential mobility is the *residential satisfaction perspective* (Speare 1974; Speare et al. 1975) and the modifications and extensions of that framework (Bach and Smith 1977; Landale and Guest 1985; Newman and Duncan 1979; Rossi 1980). This model identifies a set of personal and life-course variables that influence mobility, either directly or indirectly by affecting the level of satisfaction with the housing unit and local neighborhood. Age, marital status, the presence of children, and home ownership are among the most prominent predictors of residential mobility implicated by this approach.

Building on this basic framework, racial differences in residential location may reflect differences in basic sociodemographic conditions that shape residential needs, but may also reflect significant variations in the preference for certain types of neighborhoods. Research on this topic indicates that among white survey respondents tolerance for living near minority groups has increased in recent decades but remains

somewhat limited, and whites tend to rate integrated neighborhoods as substantially less desirable than predominantly white neighborhoods (Charles 2006; Krysan and Bader 2007). These general preferences coincide with the fact that white householders are especially likely to leave neighborhoods with sizable minority populations and unlikely to choose such places as mobility destinations (Crowder and South 2008) and with observations that mixed-majority neighborhoods containing larger shares of minorities are most likely to experience white population loss in the aggregate (c.f., Rawlings et al. 2004). Some research indicates that white householders are especially (perhaps, only) sensitive to the concentration of blacks in the neighborhood (Emerson, Chai, and Yancey 2001), while other survey results point to a clear hierarchy of residential preferences in the abstract: white survey respondents tend to rate Asians as least objectionable among potential minority neighbors and express the strongest negative reactions to the prospect of living near blacks, while opinions of possible Latino neighbors fall between these extremes (Charles 2006). These preferences align reasonably well with aggregate patterns of segregation, with whites experiencing the most residential exposure to Asians, followed by Latinos, and then blacks in metropolitan neighborhoods (Iceland 2009; Logan 2001).

Residential preferences of black householders are somewhat more complex. In recent research blacks express the strongest preferences for neighborhoods containing large concentrations of own-race neighbors (Clark 2009; Krysan and Bader 2007) and an increasing reluctance to represent the extreme numerical minority in mostly white neighborhoods (Krysan and Farley 2002). Many black survey respondents also express somewhat negative attitudes toward Latinos and Hispanics (Charles 2006) and

ethnographic research often points to black animosity toward other minority groups settling in their neighborhoods (e.g., Johnson, Farrell, and Guinn 1999; Marrow 2008; Wilson and Taub 2006). However, in comparison to whites, black survey respondents express considerably greater tolerance for integration, often expressing preferences for neighborhoods with considerably more non-black neighbors than those occupied by the typical black household (Charles 2006; Krysan and Bader 2007). Indeed, neighborhoods in which only half of the residents are black represent the most popular hypothetical neighborhood choice among black respondents (Krysan and Farley 2002).

Thus, according to the residential satisfaction/preference perspective: (1) individual householders sort themselves into neighborhoods in ways that reflect their immediate residential needs and preferences; and (2) racial differences in the likelihood of living in neighborhoods of a particular racial composition reflects group differences in these key residential preferences.

Spatial Assimilation

Theories of *spatial assimilation* (e.g., Alba and Nee 2003; Massey 1985) and *place stratification* (e.g., Charles 2003; 2006) speak more directly to how individuals attain residence in particular types of neighborhoods, and especially how these locational attainment processes might vary by race and ethnicity. The spatial assimilation model posits that patterns of residential differentiation by race, ethnicity, and social class emerge as persons "match" their own socioeconomic status with that of their neighborhood, using to the extent possible their human capital and other endowments to purchase residence in the most desirable neighborhood. Access to more desirable neighborhoods is considered to be a natural consequence of more general processes of

social and economic mobility, especially for minorities and immigrants (Massey and Denton 1985).

Given the correlation between neighborhood economic and racial composition, on the one hand, and neighborhood housing values, on the other, advanced levels of human and financial capital are often prerequisites for purchasing residences in predominantly Anglo communities (Logan et al. 1996). High levels of socioeconomic attainment are also thought to provide minority group members with the incentive to interact with the majority, interactions that are facilitated by physical proximity (Alba and Nee 1997; 2003). Thus, the spatial assimilation model of neighborhood attainment generally emphasizes socioeconomic and cultural characteristics as the main predictors of residence in neighborhoods of varying socioeconomic, demographic, and ecological statuses.

Place Stratification

The *Place Stratification* models of neighborhood attainment draw attention to the barriers to residential mobility faced by black residents, especially in the form of housing discrimination (Fischer and Massey 2004; Galster 1991; Galster and Keeney 1988; Massey and Denton 1993; Yinger 1995). The discriminatory practices of real estate agents (Pearce 1979; Yinger 1995), local governments (Shlay and Rossi 1981), and mortgage lenders (Shlay 1988; Squires and Kim 1995) create a racially segmented housing market that obstructs the mobility aspirations of African Americans, especially for those wishing to move to racially integrated and/or middle-class neighborhoods. White stereotyping of, and hostility towards, black residents may also impede blacks' migration into racially-mixed or predominantly white neighborhoods (Krysan and Farley 2002; Harris 1999; 2001; Quillian and Pager 2001). The place stratification model also

highlights the unwillingness of majority groups to share neighborhoods with minority residents and how whites in particular seek to vacate racially-mixed areas (Crowder 2000; Krysan 2002; Quillian 2002; Wilson and Taub 2006).

Incorporation of the Residential Experiences in Childhood and Adolescence

While the residential satisfaction/preferences, spatial assimilation, and place stratification models of locational attainment identify important influences on individuals' likelihood of living in neighborhoods of varying racial/ethnic composition, they tend to treat residential decisions as a reflection of immediate conditions, largely disconnected from previous residential experiences. As a consequence, research in these traditions has paid little attention to how the geographic location during childhood and adolescence affects the likelihood of moving between different types of neighborhoods. The life-course approach to migration recognizes that migration decision-making often depends on events and behaviors that occurred earlier in life. For example, it is widely acknowledged that residential mobility and migration are closely intertwined with other life course events such as marriage, divorce, and childbearing (Clark and Davies Withers 2007). And, we know that movers often return to places and regions they have inhabited before in the form of return migration (e.g., DaVanzo 1983; Hunt et al. 2008; Stack 1996; Tolnay 2003). But studies of return migration focus primarily if not exclusively on interregional movement. To our knowledge no study has examined whether migrants are likely to return to, or remain in, *neighborhoods* of the same or similar racial composition that they have inhabited in the past. Nor do we know the extent to which racial differentials in contemporaneous neighborhood-location patterns may be attributable to

racial and social differentials in the types of neighborhoods individuals have inhabited earlier in their childhood and adolescence.

The study focus on the possible impact of the characteristics of neighborhoods inhabited earlier in individuals' own life-course does not deny the importance of factors emphasized in other theoretical perspectives on residential mobility and internal migration. For example, relevant to the place stratification perspective, housing discrimination directed against minorities might explain why members of minority groups are more likely to reside in predominantly minority neighborhoods and why they have lived in these types of neighborhoods for a longer period of time. Similarly, residential preferences may very well shape residential decisions but may be rooted in heretofore unexamined residential histories. Thus, the proposed focus on individuals' own neighborhood residential experience during childhood and adolescence brings to the fore potentially salient determinants of inter-neighborhood residential mobility that have been largely overlooked in prior research.

In addition to theoretical reasons, the field's neglect of individuals' own residential experiences growing up as determinants of later inter-neighborhood migration likely stems in large part from data constraints; most datasets used to study residential attainment do not allow researchers to measure the racial composition of the neighborhoods that individuals inhabit during adulthood *and* childhood. Add Health is a unique exception.

Hypotheses and Research Questions

We hypothesize that individual's own residential experiences—the types of neighborhoods they have lived in their childhood and adolescence—will affect the

likelihood that they will reside in a neighborhood of similar racial composition after forming their own independent household. As individuals progress through the life course, they spend time in different neighborhoods where they establish various forms of social ties—to kin, non-kin such as friends, organizations such as churches and clubs, and places of employment. The longer the duration of time spent in the neighborhood, the more extensive and intensive are the social ties to that community. These ties are likely to deter migration out of the neighborhood, and thus increase the likelihood of remaining in the same neighborhood. Such ties may also increase the likelihood that when children move out of their parental household they end up in a nearby neighborhood that affords the opportunity to maintain proximity to network members. In a similar way, individuals who do make longer-distance moves after adolescence may be drawn back toward the neighborhood of childhood origin by similar desires to maintain kinship and friendship ties. At a basic level, all of these mechanisms imply that individuals will establish their own independent household in the neighborhood occupied during adolescence or in nearby neighborhoods. Given the relative stability of neighborhood racial composition over time and the geographic clustering of neighborhoods with similar racial compositions, such tendencies will increase the likelihood that young adults will establish their own household in an area with a racial composition similar to that of their adolescent home.

Neighborhood conditions during adolescence might also influence the type of neighborhood chosen in adulthood by structuring the housing search process. When potential movers consider possible destinations, they are likely to consider neighborhoods with which they are familiar (Krysan 2008), and these would obviously include

neighborhoods that they have inhabited in the past. Even when potential movers do not consider the exact same neighborhood they have previously lived in, they are likely to have knowledge of, and thus consider as destinations, geographically proximate neighborhoods. Given that proximate neighborhoods tend to be of the same general socioeconomic and racial/ethnic composition (i.e., neighborhood SES and racial/ethnic composition exhibit positive spatial autocorrelation), individuals may be likely to move to neighborhoods of a roughly similar racial composition that they have inhabited earlier in their lives even when they do not return to a previously inhabited neighborhood.

The prior residence in neighborhoods of a given SES or racial composition may also increase the tolerance for residing in those types of neighborhoods. For example, people who spent their adolescence in a particular type of neighborhood may have adopted the pattern of social interactions prevelant in such areas and learned how to navigate through such communities (Sharkey 2006). As a result an individual's residential preferences, or at least their tolerance for particular types of neighborhoods may be shaped by their experiences in similar neighborhoods during adolescence, As an example, compared to African Americans growing up in racially isolated neighborhoods, those who spent their adolescence living in racially-mixed or predominantly white neighborhoods may develop a tolerance or preference for such neighborhoods, and therefore be more likely to settle in such an area as an adult Of course, the converse is also possible: minorities who have lived in predominantly white neighborhoods may have experienced levels of hostility from whites that render them less likely to remain in or move to such areas, but both arguments highlight the importance of residential experiences usually ignored in studies of residential mobility.

The dynamics described above highlight mechanisms of neighborhood attainment that likely operate beyond the influence of socioeconomic and demographic characteristics highlighted in traditional explanations of residential attainment. They also suggest that pronounced racial differences in the exposure to neighborhoods of a given racial composition during childhood and adolescence will help to explain the pronounced racial differences in neighborhood location that persist after controls for these standard sociodemographic characteristics. In this sense, the focus on the link between adolescent and adult residential location provides an opportunity to assess heretofore underappreciated mechanisms through which residential segregation is perpetually reinforced. Residential segregation ensures that members of different racial and ethnic groups tend to be exposed to very different types of neighborhoods as adolescents and these adolescent residential experiences may constrain the housing search process in such a way as to produce similarly disparate neighborhood experiences as adults. But the extent to which racial differences in neighborhood residential experiences during adolescence can help to account for these sharp racial differences in young adult's residential experiences is unknown. We hypothesize that controlling for the racial composition of the neighborhood during adolescence will attenuate overall racial differences in the racial composition of the neighborhood of residence in early adulthood.

DATA AND METHODS

This study will use data from Wave I (1994-95) and Wave IV (2007-08) of the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Add Health). Add Health is a US nationally representative, comprehensive, school-based study of adolescents in grades 7 through 12, and their parents. There were 20,745 adolescents in Wave I and by Wave IV

there were roughly 15,701 participants that were 24-32 years old. We select those individuals who were not living in their parental home as of Wave IV.

Our dependent variable of central interest is the racial composition of the neighborhood of residence at Wave IV. For consistency with past research on residential attainment, we focus on the percent non-Latino white (Anglo) in the neighborhood of residence. However, alternative specifications will tap the overall racial diversity of the neighborhood as captured by the entropy index (White 1986) and Maly's (2002) Neighborhood Diversity Index. In addition, to assess effects on racial isolation of the neighborhood we will examine models predicting the neighborhood percentage of the individual's own racial/ethnic group in the neighborhood.

Our focal independent variables measure similar compositional dynamics in the neighborhood of residence during adolescence (Wave I of Add Health), with the percentage Anglo, the percentage own-group residents, and the two measures of neighborhood diversity used in alternative models.

Prior research has identified an array of factors that help predict residential location, suggesting a set of key controls. These include the respondent's race/ethnicity and gender. These variables are important predictors of residential outcomes. Isolating the effects of adolescent neighborhood conditions also requires attention to measures of socioeconomic status implicated in the assimilation perspective of residential attainment, here measured as the annual income and education of the individual as of Wave IV. Family composition has also been linked to residential outcomes (South et al. 1998a; Speare and Goldsheider 1987) and Add Health allows us to construct measures of family composition, including indicators of the marital and cohabitation status of the household

head and the number and ages of children in the household. We will also control for measures of the racial composition of the county in which respondents are located at Wave IV to account for the demographic potential.

The centerpiece of the analysis is a set of regression analyses predicting the racial composition of the neighborhood at Wave IV as a function of the composition of the neighborhood at Wave I. The complex sample structure of Add Health will be accounted for with the application of sample weights and we will adjust standard errors for violations of independence associated with the clustering of individuals in origin neighborhoods. Nested models will be presented to assess the gross association between neighborhood conditions in adolescence and adulthood, and the effects net of potentially important alternative determinants of residential location.

In addition to basic models to assess the association between neighborhood context in adolescence and early adulthood, the analysis will take advantage of some unique features of the Add Health data to investigate possible variations in this association. Two potential variations are of particular theoretical import. First, residential searches are likely to be especially racially circumscribed for those adolescents with friendship networks that exhibit a level of racial homogeneity similar to the neighborhood of residence. For example, a white adolescent growing up in a predominantly white neighborhood is especially unlikely to take up residence in a racially mixed neighborhood if their social network also contains few non-white friends. In contrast, exposure to a more diverse social network may increase an adolescent's tolerance for, or knowledge of, a broader set of neighborhood types, thereby increasing the likelihood of entering a diverse neighborhood. Add Health allows us to assess the composition of adolescent's

social networks and investigate it as a possible moderator of the link between adolescent and early-adult neighborhood conditions.

Second, movement to a different metropolitan area provides exposure to different set of residential opportunities and is likely to undermine the ability of an individual to choose a neighborhood that is geographically or socially proximate to their adolescent home. In theory, individuals may still seek out neighborhoods similar to those in which they grew up, but the link between adolescent and early-adult residence is likely to be less pronounced in these situations. Thus, the analysis will take into consideration the possibility that longer-distance mobility between Waves I and IV weakens the association between neighborhood conditions in adolescence and early adulthood.

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