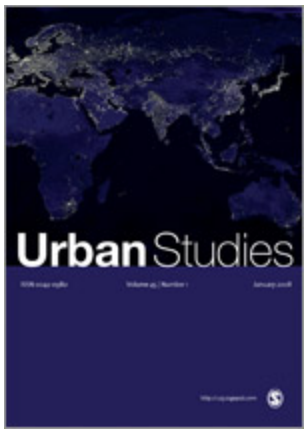

Neighborhood Perceptions and Residential Mobility

Journal:	*Urban Studies*
Manuscript ID	CUS-700-19-08.R2
Manuscript Type:	Article
<b>Discipline: Please select a keyword from the following list that best describes the discipline used in your paper.:	Sociology
World Region: Please select the region(s) that best reflect the focus of your paper. Names of individual countries, cities & economic groupings should appear in the title where appropriate.:	North America
Major Topic: Please identify up to 5 topics that best identify the subject of your article.:	Housing, Inequality, Neighbourhood
You may add up to 2 further relevant keywords of your choosing below::	Satisfaction, Mobility

Neighborhood Perceptions and Residential Mobility

Abstract

This paper considers the ways in which neighborhood perceptions can differentially impact residential mobility, particularly in low-income areas. Given the long history of understanding the relationship between neighborhood context and residential mobility, this study includes measures of satisfaction, safety, decay and neighborly agency to understand mobility. Using data from the Making Connections Initiative, this paper uses a unique panel survey across neighborhoods in 10 U.S. cities undergoing spatial and/or demographic transitions to analyze the extent to which neighborhood perceptions are associated with residential mobility. By employing a multilevel structural equation model, the study accounts for neighborhood perceptions, neighborhood demographics, and mobility risk over time. The results show that perceptions of neighborhood context matter more than the actual neighborhood setting. These findings highlight the continued importance of subjective rather than objective measures of neighborhood conditions in understanding residential mobility.

Keywords: Housing, Inequality, Neighbourhood, Satisfaction, Mobility

Introduction

Research on residential mobility in recent decades has greatly increased our understanding about where and why people move, and the role that neighborhoods play in residential choices. Neighborhoods and the perceptions of those neighborhoods are major entities that shape the decision to move or stay. Researchers understand the defining characteristics of a neighborhood to include both physical and social components (Keller, 1968). However, for residents in low-income areas, the constraints and opportunities in their neighborhoods, in tandem with sociospatial processes such as urban revitalization or white flight, may influence whether they can remain in their changing neighborhood or move to more prosperous ones. When neighborhoods change, either demographically or physically, they affect mobility patterns (Dantzler & Rivera, 2019; Moore, 1986).

These changes result in outcomes that can be both beneficial and detrimental to residents. One of the major explanations of neighborhood change in current research focuses on how people perceive

where they live (Ciorici & Dantzler, 2018; Lee et al., 2017). As neighborhoods change, demographic and socioeconomic shifts can motivate residents to consider moving or staying. Part of this motivation stems from residents' satisfaction of their neighborhood, which plays a dynamic role in the mobility intentions.

Much of the literature exploring residential satisfaction, neighborhood perceptions, and mobility focuses on individual-based perspectives, suggesting that push and pull factors of housing mobility can lead to rational decisions to move or stay (Newman & Duncan, 1979; Van Assche et al., 2018). However, city and metropolitan areas are influenced at multiple levels – residential relocation, urban decline/renewal, and the formation of new neighborhoods, to name a few – and prior work does not capture the multiple levels that shape both mobility and neighborhood change. Moreover, given the bulk of neighborhood change within the U.S. is occurring in socioeconomically deprived neighborhoods (Jargowsky, 2015), there is a paucity of research that explores these phenomena in low-income areas.

Using unique data from ten U.S. cities whose low-income neighborhoods are undergoing some type of change, this study examines the extent to which perceived and observed neighborhood characteristics shape residential mobility in these areas. While demographic and amenity-based changes within a neighborhood may result in moving from a community, it is equally important to understand how an individual's perceived assessment of neighborhood change affects their decision to move. This study uses prior research to generate a conceptual model that is tested for individuals in these neighborhoods using multi-level, longitudinal, structural equation modeling (MSEM), which allows for multiple levels of influence to be modeled (individual, neighborhood, and temporal). This approach is appropriate, as prior work in low-income neighborhoods relies on theories of mobility which may not be appropriate for this population, as mobility itself could be voluntary, reactive, or involuntary (DeLuca et al., 2019). Moreover, the individual result of moving could stem from true changes within the neighborhood or from how residents perceive neighborhood change. This research reviews recent literature with the ultimate goal of building a model for future research to employ when exploring these phenomena in low-income neighborhoods undergoing change.

Conceptual model

This study uses the existing literature to derive a conceptual model linking neighborhood perceptions, neighborhood characteristics, and residential mobility in low-income areas of transition. Subjective and objective neighborhood contexts are both discussed in prior research, but little attention has been given to understanding them in low-income neighborhoods, and even less research has been done in neighborhoods undergoing transitions. The model is divided into two figures – Figure A focuses on individual-level factors associated with mobility, while Figure B focuses on both individual- and neighborhood-level linkages to mobility.

[INSERT FIGURE A ABOUT HERE]

[INSERT FIGURE B ABOUT HERE]

One's perception of their neighborhood, as well as changes in those perceptions, affects the choice of staying or moving. Perceptions are directly tied to attachment – positive perceptions lead to a deeper level of attachment – and any change in the neighborhood may affect the degree of attachment. Attachment to a place develops to different degrees within different spatial ranges and dimensions (Hildago & Hernandez, 2001). When residents strongly identify with a neighborhood such that they feel that it is a place they can call 'home', their neighborhood attachment, or their emotional, behavioral, and cognitive ties to their community, is considered to be high (Neal, 2015; Perkins & Long, 2002). Demographic and environmental changes in the neighborhood can dampen neighborhood attachment because they may alter residents' closeness to other residents, expectations of other residents, and safety concerns (Brown et al., 2003). In this research, neighborhood perceptions embody several dimensions, many of which cannot be directly captured with the data used in this study. However, four important domains of neighborhood perceptions which are captured are: *neighborhood satisfaction*, *neighborhood safety*, *neighborhood decline*, and *neighbor's agency*.

Neighborhood satisfaction is viewed as an important basis for the mobility process. Conventionally, the more satisfied one feels with their neighborhood, the more favorable they perceive the neighborhood to be and subsequently, the less likely they are to move. In general,

people have high levels of satisfaction with their neighborhood (Fitz et al., 2016), and in the context of low-income areas, this is also true but is likely due to lack of acknowledgement of the negative components of living in poverty (Lu, 1999). Neighborhood satisfaction itself is a culmination of several dimensions within the neighborhood, and people weigh the condition of and the amenities within their neighborhood differently. Thus, residential satisfaction, often measured with either an all-inclusive question (e.g., how satisfied are you with your neighborhood) or a targeted set of domains (e.g., how satisfied are you with your neighbors, the amenities of the neighborhood, and the resources funneled to your neighborhood), should be modeled on a larger continuum across multiple items that may be present or absent in a neighborhood. Further, neighborhood satisfaction may change over time as revitalization efforts, particularly in low-income areas, function to displace individuals into areas with less or poorer-quality amenities (Zuk et al., 2018), or dissolve existing ties to neighbors (Balzarini & Shlay, 2018), potentially driving additional moves.

The safety dimension of neighborhood perception is influential in several social and health outcomes (Hill et al., 2016; Won et al., 2016), and in recent research, the perceived safety of a neighborhood is more influential than more objective measures of neighborhood safety such as crime incidence (Goldman-Mellor et al., 2016). In cross-sectional studies, crime and perceptions of danger are higher in low-income and majority-minority neighborhoods than in more affluent and white areas (Drakulich, 2013). However, in neighborhoods undergoing transition, crime also shows an uptick (Boggess & Hipp, 2010; Papachristos et al., 2011) because of the severed ties and disorganization experienced during transitions. There is also older research suggesting that crime, particularly property crimes, is used as a visible display of irritation over neighborhood change (Covington & Taylor, 1989). Evidence from quasi-experimental mobility studies such as the Gautreaux Project and Moving to Opportunity (MTO) suggests that residents who either stayed or moved had concerns over safety; however, those residents who moved did so into neighborhoods that were no safer than the origin neighborhoods (Lens, 2017). Relatedly, safety concerns are often derived from secondary knowledge of crime levels, observable evidence of disorder and stereotypes/prejudices based on ascribed characteristics such as race, ethnicity, gender, and age that are changes from the status quo composition of the neighborhood (Raleigh & Galster, 2015;

Sandercock, 2017; Snedker, 2015). Thus, both perceived and actual safety concerns are relevant to residential mobility.

Perceptions of social, physical, or structural decline of a neighborhood are also linked to mobility risk. Consistent with the main tenements of broken windows theory, less favorable elements that emerge in one's neighborhood could indicate the neighborhood is in decline (Kamalu & Onyeozili, 2018). These elements include criminal activity, graffiti, litter, and vacant buildings. Because these characteristics emerge slowly over time, it may be difficult for residents in low-income areas to identify decline until it is too late to ameliorate the issues, which may lead to a residential change. These elements may be endogenous, or stem from the residents of that community, but it is also likely that outside forces are shaping the decline of neighborhoods. Global financial crises, foreclosures, rising unemployment, and growing income inequality are each important predictors of neighborhood decline in the U.S. and globally (Jones et al., 2015; Wachter, 2015; Zwiers et al., 2016).

As a final dimension of neighborhood perception, the agency which neighbors feel, such that they have to take action, be effective, take responsibility and be influential in shaping their community, is linked negatively to residential mobility. Embodied in agency are two social-psychological constructs of a neighborhood: social cohesion and collective efficacy. Individuals' social relations are often physically constrained to places where individuals feel that they belong (Forrest & Kearns, 2001), and thus, social cohesion, or the willingness of residents to cooperate with one another toward the well-being of the community (Friedkin, 2004) is an important component for solidifying strong, meaningful, and lasting social relationships. However, the effects of social cohesion are conditioned by the density and connectedness of neighborhood residents. That is, structural cohesion (Cornwell & Burchard, 2019), or the minimum number of people who would disconnect from the group if they were removed from the group, directly influences how much social cohesion a neighborhood has. Thus, residential mobility can change the level of social cohesion in a neighborhood, and lead to further moves.

Resident expectations of other residents' behavior are also related to residential mobility. Collective efficacy, or the level of engagement with one's community to improve their

neighborhood, is built upon the level of social cohesion in a neighborhood. That is, if there are high levels of social cohesion, collective efficacy is likely to be high as well because the trust that individuals have in neighbors increases the capacity for the presence and strength of informal mechanisms of social control (Warner, 2007; Wickes et al., 2017). Neighbors reach a consensus for what appropriate behavior should be, and then reinforce their beliefs onto residents who already trust their neighbors.

However, in areas where there is residential turnover, collective efficacy may be low because social cohesion could be or could have always been low, or because informal mechanisms of social control may be ineffective. For this reason, it is true that some neighborhoods with high turnover rates suffer from decline and crime (Shumaker & Stokols, 1982). However, the degree to which cohesion and efficacy affect neighborhood perceptions and subsequent mobility is more nuanced. Social cohesion and collective efficacy are both linked to the perceived safety that one feels in their neighborhood, which is also linked to residential mobility.

These four domains (*neighborhood satisfaction*, *neighborhood safety*, *neighborhood decline*, and *neighbor's agency*) collectively measure dimensions of neighborhood perception, which is related to residential mobility. Focusing on low-income areas, if the perception of the neighborhood becomes less favorable over time, mobility risk is likely to be high. However, a more favorable neighborhood perception could stem from social processes such as gentrification that are designed to displace residents to achieve neighborhood change. For example, the emergence of new local economies (such as new coffee shops, bars, or restaurants) or increases in private and commercial development (such as new condominiums) in low-income areas where real estate prices are low could lead to an increase in those real estate prices, effectively making it challenging for low-income residents to remain in this area of transition (Glaeser et al., 2018).

This study is not theorizing that these neighborhood changes predict neighborhood perception, but rather, that neighborhood changes independently affect residential mobility. Figure B suggests how neighborhood characteristics directly affect mobility. As a recent report suggests, the dominant feature of change in low-income neighborhoods is poverty decline. Over time, the number of persons who live in poverty in low-income neighborhoods between 1970 and 2010 has

declined to 33 percent (Cortright & Mahmoudi, 2014). Neighborhood poverty may be a catalyst for moving if one has the means to move, or it could be a reason to stay, in the hopes that investment through urban renewal or gentrification may yield a greater return on investment in a purchased home. Rental prices and vacancies may also be related to mobility because they are often indicators of areas that are prime for gentrification (Williams, 2015). Thus, similar poverty rates, high rental prices, and residential vacancies are also indicators that gentrification could occur in these neighborhoods. As such, mobility could occur due to forced relocation through social processes of urban renewal. Racial and socioeconomic composition of a neighborhood, and changes to this composition, are also theorized to be related to mobility. These two indicators are often stronger predictors of gentrification (Hwang, 2015). In sum, this research hypothesizes that changes in the neighborhood are related to mobility risk in low-income neighborhoods because these changes serve to push individuals out of their current neighborhood.

While neighborhood changes are not theorized to predict neighborhood perception in the conceptual model, what does shape an individual's perception of the neighborhood are the demographic characteristics of individuals because they structure the opportunities for and constraints on moving (Van Kempen & Murie, 2009). For individuals in low-income neighborhoods, these characteristics (seen again in Figure A) can predict both reactive and voluntary moves (DeLuca et al., 2019). Demographic characteristics such as socioeconomic status (SES), race, gender, and age all have been shown to be related to mobility. Higher levels of socioeconomic status, being white, male, and older individuals are associated with vertical, or upward, residential mobility. Conversely, low-SES, minority, female, and youth are associated with downward, or horizontal, residential mobility (Gambaro et al., 2017). Nativity is also related to mobility risk, as foreign-born populations are more likely to be poor, live in urban areas, and experience residential mobility compared to their native-born counterparts. In addition, this effect is stronger in successive generations (Bottia, 2019). In emerging international research, foreign-born residents were shown to rely more heavily on socioeconomic resources to move out of low-income neighborhoods than their native-born counterparts (Alm Fjellborg, 2018). Duration of stay, defined as the length of time a person lives in their neighborhood, has a negative association with mobility risk as many studies have shown that people who stay in neighborhoods for a longer amount of time are less likely to leave for a variety of reasons (Coulton et al., 2012; Dantzler &

Rivera, 2019). In line with previous research (Hedman et al., 2011; Lee et al., 1994) on mobility, this study suggests that residential mobility outcomes are due in large part to neighborhood perceptions, which are structured by these economic, social, demographic and ethnic factors.

Data

Data for this research are derived from two sources. Individual data come from the three-wave Making Connections Initiative. Sponsored by the Annie E. Casey Foundation and collected by the National Opinion Research Council (NORC) for the purpose of supplying policymakers with data relevant to improving economically disadvantaged communities, Making Connections collected data from individuals living in ten U.S. cities: Denver, Des Moines, Hartford, Indianapolis, Louisville, Milwaukee, Oakland, Providence, San Antonio, and Seattle. These cities diverge in terms of size, density, and population heterogeneity. The sites of the data represent a wide range of challenges facing neighborhoods including demographic shifts, persistent poverty and housing market pressures. While some neighbourhoods are experiencing decline, others have expanding immigrant populations and massive housing affordability issues. Thus, the data selection process is not based on probability sampling strategies. Nonetheless, the overall sample is representative of a variety of experiences in lower income neighborhoods across the United States (Hays, 2018). More information about the specific neighborhoods is provided elsewhere (Coulton et al., 2011). Probability samples of households were drawn within each neighborhood, and individuals surveyed at three different time periods: 2002-2003 (Wave I), 2005-2007 (Wave II), and 2008-2011 (Wave III). The overall sample size varies due to attrition, as response rates averaged between 63-78% for Wave I, 74-83% for Wave II, and 77-87% for Wave III. Thus, the overall sample size for each wave is 1,892. Under a fifth (17.7%) of the sample was excluded because of incomplete information, leaving an analytic sample of 1,558.

To characterize the neighborhood context in which the respondents live, area measures from the American Community Survey (ACS) and the Decennial Census are used. The ACS is a monthly household survey developed by the U.S. Bureau of the Census to provide annual household, social, and economic characteristics for geographies with at least 65,000 people. In addition, the ACS annually updates multiyear demographic estimates for geographies down to the block group level. The Decennial Census in its long-form version is similar to the ACS as it allows for cross-

comparison of households at the block group level. A block group, which is the smallest geographical unit for which the bureau publishes sample data, are clusters of approximately 39 census blocks that have between 600 and 3,000 people. This research uses the block group to approximate neighborhoods. The ACS data does not perfectly overlap with the Making Connections survey data collection. Specifically, Wave I (2002-2003) is appended with the 2000 Decennial data, Wave II (2005-2007) uses the 2005-2007 ACS estimates, and Wave III (2008-2011) is appended with the 2007-2011 ACS data. Thus, ACS data used for Waves II and III overlap by a year, which may potentially reduce variation in the neighborhood-level variables across these two waves. However, given the semi-stabilizing nature of U.S. neighborhoods (Jones, 2013), it is unlikely that the year overlap between waves significantly limits the level of variation present across the sites.

Measures

The dependent measure for this research, residential mobility, is dichotomous. Respondents were asked about their residential histories at each wave of data collection. Individuals who moved prior to the start of each wave of data collection are considered residentially mobile.

Residents' perceptions of their neighborhood are considered a latent construct. Because Making Connections did not ask questions to capture all domains of neighborhood perceptions, it is assumed that four measures represent specific, unique dimensions of the underlying phenomenon. The four measures are: neighborhood satisfaction, neighborhood safety, neighborhood decline, and neighbor's agency. Each are composite measures standardized around a mean of zero so that positive values correspond to higher levels of the measure (i.e., satisfaction, safety, decline, agency), and negative values correspond to lower levels. For neighborhood satisfaction, respondents were asked to rate their level of satisfaction on a scale of one to five for services present in their neighborhood, including banks, check cashing businesses, money transfer businesses, basic medical care, community colleges, parks/playgrounds, recreation/community centers, libraries, employment trainings, Temporary Assistance for Needing Families, and family counseling venues (Cronbach's α 0.79 for each wave). For neighborhood safety, respondents were asked to use a Likert scale to identify the extent to which they feel safe in their neighborhood in the following scenarios: at home at night, outside during the day, trick-or-treating with children,

and generally with children present (α 0.74 to 0.75). Neighborhood decline is an index of negative features that the respondent identifies as present in their neighborhood: criminal activity done by others, graffiti on walls/buildings, litter on sidewalks/streets, vacant buildings, drug dealers, traffic safety problems, gang activity, prostitution, and racial incidents (α 0.82 to 0.87). Last, for neighbor's agency, respondents were asked to rate on a scale of one to five how much they agree (or disagree) with these statements: neighbors can scold children in the neighborhood, neighbors can do something when children skip school, neighbors can do something about graffiti, neighbors can do something when a fight ensues, and neighbors can do something if there are budget cuts that have neighborhood impacts (α 0.77 to 0.79).

Demographic measures theorized to shape neighborhood perception include education, a dichotomous measure for high school graduates. Individual annual income was measured categorically (so cannot be inflation corrected). Income is collapsed into a dichotomous variable for at least $30,000 annually given minimal variation for this low-income group. Respondents selected across racial categories, which are simplified white and minority. Respondent age is captured at each survey date, with gender (male/female) captured in the initial wave. Respondents were also asked if they were born in the U.S., which controls for nativity. Duration of stay is captured by the number of years the respondent has lived at their current address.

Neighborhood-level (i.e., census block group) measures derived from Census data are: poverty rate, median rent (adjusted to 2011 dollars using the Consumer Price Index), vacancy rate, percentage of racial minority residents, and percentage of residents who are college-educated.

Analysis

To model the hierarchical and longitudinal nature of the data while simultaneously testing the theorized pathways through which demographic and neighborhood variables operate to produce neighborhood perceptions and risks of residential mobility, this research uses multilevel structural equation modeling (MSEM). There are three methodological tasks necessary to model these complex processes. First, as seen in both Figures, part of testing the theoretical model is latent class analysis. Each of the items measuring different dimensions of neighborhood perceptions need

to be ad-hoc verified that they are indeed capturing the underlying construct. The general equation corresponding to the latent class analysis in this research is:

$$y_{PERCEPTij} = \lambda_{PERCEPT}\eta_{1ijk} + u_{PERCEPTi} + \epsilon_{PERCEPTij}$$

where $y_{PERCEPT}$ is one of the four measures that indicates neighborhood perception (neighborhood satisfaction, neighborhood safety, neighborhood decline, and neighbor's agency) and $u_{PERCEPTi}$ is the random deviation at the individual level.

Second, individual-level factors are used to predict neighborhood perception, which is represented in the previous equation as η_{1ijk}. The goal of the latent class analysis is to create a parsimonious "neighborhood perception" variable to use to see what predicts perception and whether perception predicts mobility. The general equation to predict neighborhood perception (seen in Figure A) is:

$$\eta_{1ijk} = \gamma_1\xi_{1ijk} + \gamma_2\xi_{2ijk} + \gamma_3\xi_{1ijk} + \gamma_4\xi_{4ijk} + \gamma_5\xi_{5ijk} + \gamma_6\xi_{6ijk} + \gamma_7\xi_{7ijk} + \gamma_8\xi_{8ijk} + u_{3i} + u_{4ij} + \zeta_{1ijk}$$

where ξ represents the individual-level factors (education, income, race, age, gender, nativity, duration of stay and wave of data collection.

Third, neighborhood perceptions, along with the other neighborhood-level measures, are then used to predict mobility risk. The general equation for this part of the MSEM is:

$$logit(y_{1ijk}) = \beta_1x_{1ij} + \beta_2x_{2ij} + \beta_3x_{3ij} + \beta_4x_{4ij} + \beta_5x_{5ij} + \lambda_1\eta_{1ijk} + u_{1i} + u_{2ij}$$

where y_{1ijk} represents mobility, x represents the block-group variables (poverty rate, median rent, vacancy rate, percent minority, and percent college-educated), and u corresponds to the random deviation associated with individuals nested within time, which is nested within block groups.

This study utilizes a generalized SEM approach in Stata 15.1. To account for the longitudinal nature of the data, time is modeled through the variable "Wave." To account for the multilevel structure of the combined dataset, the models are adjusted by including both respondent ID and census block group as indicator variables. As a result, both individual- and neighborhood-level variation is accounted for in the models, although these effects are not explicitly presented in the

tables. As is standard with SEM, all individual-level measures and all neighborhood-level measures are assumed to be correlated, but bi-directionality of these measures is not explicitly diagrammed in Figure A to enhance the visual readability of the model.

Results

Table 1 describes variables across waves. On average, changing residences declines over time. Because each measure for neighborhood perception is standardized around a mean of zero, no variation is shown. The time invariant individual variables reveal a sample with low levels of education, few whites, few men, and relatively few immigrants. For the time-varying individual variables, respondents tended to earn more over time, become older, and live in their dwellings longer.

[INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE]

For time-varying neighborhood measures, the average poverty rate for these neighborhoods increases slightly over the three waves, while median rents rise. There is a slight decline in the average vacancy rate, a slight increase in the percentage of minorities in the neighborhood, on average, and a slight increase in respondents with college degrees.

[INSERT TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE]

The Wave I correlations presented in Table 2 are generally in the expected directions. However, some interesting counterintuitive relationships around race and neighborhood socioeconomic status emerge. Being white is associated with higher sentiments of neighborhood decay, lower levels of neighborhood satisfaction, and lower levels of residential mobility. Counterintuitively, poverty and neighborhood satisfaction are positively correlated. Nevertheless, most correlations support the theoretical model and demonstrate potential for testing the path model provided in Figures A and B.

[INSERT TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE]

Table 3 presents the odds ratios and standard errors from the MSEM analysis testing the path model detailed in the *Conceptual Model* section. The first part of the path model is the latent class analysis for the variables hypothesized to capture neighborhood perception. Because neighborhood perception is the central concept, it is important to test whether the measures capturing it are statistically appropriate for this sample. The latent analysis embedded in this model suggests that neighborhood perception was well-measured at the neighborhood level. The

unstandardized loadings for the variables (i.e., the regression coefficients) associated with neighborhood perception are: 0.2 for neighborhood satisfaction, 0.5 for neighborhood safety, -0.5 for neighborhood decline, and 0.4 for neighborhood agency. Exponentiating those loadings results in the odds ratios presented in Table 3. Importantly, each of the factor loadings are statistically significant at the 0.001 level, and in the expected direction, such that satisfaction, safety, and agency are positive aspects of perception while neighborhood decline is a negative aspect of perception.

These loadings yield a latent composite measure, neighborhood perception, which can be used to test the other individual and neighborhood pathways that lead to mobility risk. Over time, more favorable perceptions are associated with 24% *greater* odds of moving from that neighborhood, net of other covariates. Since neighborhood decline is in the opposite direction from the other composite measures that tapped into neighborhood perception, auxiliary analyses were performed where decline was reverse-coded, but the regression models yielded remarkably similar results.

The next part of the path model identifies which individual characteristics predicted more favorable neighborhood perceptions. Individuals who make more than $30,000 in these neighborhoods are associated with a 28% lower odds of having favorable neighborhood perceptions. White residents are associated with 28% lower odds of having favorable neighborhood perceptions. Age is negatively associated with having favorable neighborhood perceptions, as each one-year increase in age is associated with a 4% lower odds of having favorable neighborhood perceptions. Females are associated with 52% greater odds of having favorable neighborhood perceptions, while U.S. born residents are associated with 48% greater odds. Each additional year that a respondent has lived in the neighborhood is associated with 24% lower odds of having favorable neighborhood perceptions. Note that both education (measured by being a high school graduate) and *historical* time (measured by wave of data collection) were not statistically related to mobility.

There are also significant neighborhood-level controls which predict mobility over time. Higher rates of poverty and higher rates of vacancy are associated with a higher chance of moving, while higher proportions of racial/ethnic minorities are associated with a lower chance of moving.

However, these effects, while statistically significant, are small ($\beta = 0.00$). Thus, it appears that individual measures are more influential in predicting mobility than neighborhood-level variables.

Discussion

This study explored the relationship between individual-level neighborhood perceptions, neighborhood-level sociodemographic change, and residential mobility risk over time. While other studies have asked respondents about their current neighborhood perceptions, few have considered how residential relocation can be conceptualized as a multi-level and multi-factorial process for individuals living in low-income areas in transition across time and space. This research found unique results for this population which establishes a foundational conceptual model for future research to utilize. Three major findings of this research are further explored here.

First, residential mobility is common in neighborhoods in transition. Just under one-third of respondents change residence prior to each wave (see Table 1). While not strictly comparable, national estimates suggest current annual mover rates of approximately 11.2% (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2017), which is likely lower than the rate found here given multiple, frequent moves tend to be concentrated among a relatively small group over time (Murphey et al., 2012). This finding suggests that the revitalization and efforts occurring in many of these communities may displace and re-concentrate individuals in a manner which other urbanists have described for decades (Jargowsky, 2015; Rossi, 1955).

Second, both respondents who moved and stayed experienced differences in their neighborhoods that were socioeconomically complex. With nearly a decade of observation, the neighborhoods included in this study experienced an increase in the average percentage of persons who are poor in tandem with rising median rental prices. Prior research has identified that higher spending on rent is associated with gentry-led neighborhood change (Freeman & Braconi, 2004), while small changes in poverty are often seen in areas undergoing the beginning stages of gentrification (Cortright & Mahmoudi, 2014), especially if those areas are in close in proximity to affluent neighborhoods (Edlund et al., 2015). The changing dynamics of neighborhoods across time and space create different modes of mobility risk.

Third, neighborhood perceptions predict mobility risk over time better than actual neighborhood change, but in a way that contradicts much prior research on the topic, perhaps because of the unique, understudied population in the sample here. Neighborhood measures predicting mobility included poverty and vacancy rates, as predicted by broken windows theory (Kelling & Coles, 1997; Sampson & Raudenbush, 2004). However, while statistically significant, these effects are not substantively significant, as the coefficients were 0.

As expected, higher levels of neighborhood satisfaction, safety, and agency created more positive perceptions of the neighborhood, while higher levels of neighborhood decay created more negative perceptions. However, the combined (positive) measure of neighborhood perceptions was associated with increased mobility risk. These low-income areas experienced persistent poverty, an increasing cost of living (i.e., rent), decreased vacancies, increasing minority representation, and increasing highly-educated populations in the neighborhoods. Much of the work on urban renewal supports the possibility that these neighborhoods are in some kind of gentrification/revitalization process that is related to both neighborhood perceptions and mobility. However, data constraints prevent a full exploration of neighborhood change or stagnation that may be occurring in these neighborhoods of transition.

Several processes can explain this dynamic (Gillespie, 2017). Involuntary mobility may be driven by evictions (Desmond et al., 2015; Hartman & Robinson, 2003), foreclosures (Hall et al., 2015), and varying degrees of gentrification (Freeman & Braconi, 2004; Hwang, 2015). Some households may move to neighborhoods that provide more opportunities to fit their family needs (Lareau & Goyette, 2014). However, it may also result in households moving into areas of lower neighborhood quality (Desmond et al., 2015). Where economically vulnerable people relocate to may speak more to the availability of affordable housing options and access to neighborhoods that fit families' needs and desires than positive neighborhood perceptions.

Minor findings are associated with demographic characteristics. Education was not predictive of mobility risk, although most research suggests that mobility risk is related to educational attainment (Metzger et al., 2015). Individuals with incomes above $30,000 were less likely to have positive neighborhood perceptions. Thus, individuals with greater means to leave had increasingly

negative thoughts about the area where they lived, which could either have led to relocation or be due to their potential status in the neighborhood as the part of the gentry (McKinnish et al., 2010). Whites, foreign-born individuals, and men were less favorable in their perception of the low-income neighborhoods in which they live. These characteristics have been shown to explain who is likely to move into areas of transition (specifically gentrification), so their negative perception could stem from either the initial move or because neighborhood change is not happening fast enough, as seen in the neighborhood variables used in this research (McKinnish et al., 2010). Because prior work focuses on these traits as predictors of mobility, future work using more representative samples should explore how these characteristics characterize mobility though the lens of neighborhood perception.

Limitations

There are limitations of this study which should be acknowledged. Ten heterogeneous cities were selected and, within each, poor neighborhoods in transition were selected, and neither selection process was random. While this strategy was intentional and appropriate for the analysis here, the results cannot be generalized to other places, particularly where there is greater variation in income. The data did not allow tracking of moves prior to the sample period, although the study did control for duration of stay. Additionally, homeowner status was ignored, in part because it is relatively rare in the sample, but also because homeownership has a minimal effect on neighborhood satisfaction (Ciorici & Dantzler, 2018).

There is some selectivity in the analytic sample, as individuals must have been interviewed in all three waves in order to be in the sample. While this research focused on mobility that could be captured (i.e., the respondent was able to be located in subsequent waves for interviews), it is also true that some individuals who moved were excluded from the sample because they could not be located. As such, the results here, particularly for individuals who are not residentially stable, could be conservative estimates based on a select group of individuals.

Finally, the MSEM approach, while conceptually appropriate, limited the number of variables that this research could test in the pathways outlined. This limitation contrasts with regression techniques, where a large number of independent variables may help to isolate the phenomenon of

interest. Thus, other contextual factors, such as other measures of gentrification, aspects of the built environment, and temporal processes such as the Great Recession, could not be fully explored. Datasets with more respondents or annual data over a longer period, would permit the inclusion of more variables.

Conclusion

Even with limitations, this research provides important policy implications stemming from the results. It is worth noting that a move in and of itself does not signal a problem with any given neighborhood. As the analyses found, even households holding positive perceptions of the neighborhood may decide to move or be driven out. Expanding the availability of high-quality affordable housing, preserving the current stock of moderately priced rentals, and helping families apply for and use available housing assistance can each contribute to greater housing stability and reduce churning (Coulton et al., 2012). Community-based interventions must focus on the characteristics and needs of households moving through a neighborhood and those of long-term residents. With drastic changes in migration patterns within and between neighborhoods, urban policies should adjust to changing demographics. As this study shows, it is important to understand subjective measures of neighborhood quality in the hope of stabilizing urban areas.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank Chuck Huber, Brandi A. Weiss, and Anita Zuberi for their help in the development of this paper. We would also like to thank Nelson Kies and Isabelle Nathanson for their research assistance. An earlier version of this paper was presented at the 2018 Annual Meeting of the Urban Affairs Association.

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Table 1. *Descriptive Statistics for Study Participants, by Wave (N=1,558)*

	Wave I			Wave II			Wave III		
	Mean/ %	SD	Range	Mean/ %	SD	Range	Mean/ %	SD	Range
Individual-Level Measures									
Moved	34.40%	-----	(0,1)	28.01%	-----	(0,1)	28.38%	-----	(0,1)
Neighborhood Satisfaction†	0.00	0.71	(-4.88,0.68)	0.01	0.66	(-3.26,0.78)	0.01	0.68	(-4.23,0.78)
Neighborhood Safety†	0.00	0.62	(-2.04,1.20)	0.00	0.65	(-2.60,1.15)	0.00	0.65	(-2.66,1.06)
Neighborhood Decline†	0.00	0.67	(-1.41,1.73)	0.00	0.70	(-1.21,1.83)	0.00	0.72	(-1.13,1.88)
Neighbor's Agency†	0.00	0.73	(-1.99,1.52)	0.00	0.74	(-2.01,1.49)	0.00	0.74	(-2.37,1.22)
High School Graduate	32.24%	-----	(0,1)	32.24%	-----	(0,1)	32.24%	-----	(0,1)
Income Greater than $30,000	30.72%	-----	(0,1)	43.97%	-----	(0,1)	47.18%	-----	(0,1)
White [a]	29.39%	-----	(0,1)	29.39%	-----	(0,1)	29.39%	-----	(0,1)
Age	41.75	15.70	(18,75)	43.52	14.60	(19,77)	46.16	13.71	(21,79)
Female [a]	83.09%	-----	(0,1)	83.09%	-----	(0,1)	83.09%	-----	(0,1)
US Born [a]	79.55%	-----	(0,1)	79.55%	-----	(0,1)	79.55%	-----	(0,1)
Duration of Stay	12.90	13.89	(0,36)	14.98	11.69	(0,38)	17.81	11.71	(0,41)
Neighborhood-Level Measures									
Neighborhood Poverty Rate	61.07%	21.69	(3.63,100.00)	63.52%	19.99	(1.99,98.45)	63.97%	19.42	(1.95,100.00)
Neighborhood Median Rent	$653.75	234.83	($150,$1,295)	$711.31	243.05	($176,$1,400)	$731.70	259.79	($187,$1,506)
Neighborhood Vacancy Rate	4.34%	5.75	(0.00,37.5)	3.29%	5.00	(1.00,23.32)	3.47%	4.91	(0.00,27.04)
Percent Minority in Neighborhood	72.29%	26.00	(0.00,100.00)	73.65%	24.32	(3.37,100.00)	73.71%	24.37	(4.80,100.00)
Percent College Educated in Neighborhood	11.16%	11.14	(0.00,67.95)	12.89%	12.52	(0.00,61.38)	13.09%	12.71	(0.00,55.17)

Notes: Making Connections Survey, 2002-2011. † indicates variables are standardized. [a] indicates a time-invariant measure.

Table 2. *Wave I Correlations for All Study Variables*

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
Individual-Level Measures																	
1 Neighborhood Satisfaction	---																
2 Neighborhood Safety	0.18 ***	---															
3 Neighborhood Decline	-0.17 ***	-0.47 ***	---														
4 Neighbor's Agency	0.16 ***	0.42 ***	-0.36 ***	---													
5 Moved	-0.03 *	0.02	-0.11 ***	0.01	---												
6 High School Graduate	0.03 *	0.00	0.01	0.02	0.01	---											
7 Income Greater than $30,00(	-0.03	0.06 ***	0.00	0.03	-0.08 ***	-0.07 ***	---										
8 White	-0.03 **	0.02	0.07 ***	-0.01	-0.08 ***	-0.01	0.21 ***	---									
9 Age	0.08 ***	0.08 ***	-0.10 ***	0.09 ***	-0.39 ***	-0.01	-0.09 ***	0.05 ***	---								
10 Female	0.05 ***	-0.12 ***	0.03 **	0.00	0.16 ***	0.01	-0.06 ***	-0.11 ***	-0.22 ***	---							
11 US Born	0.02	0.03 *	0.15 ***	0.00	-0.05 ***	0.05 ***	0.02	-0.25 ***	0.08 ***	-0.06 ***	---						
12 Duration of Stay	0.08 ***	0.06 ***	0.03 **	0.06 ***	-0.51 ***	0.02	-0.01	0.02	0.49 ***	-0.01 ***	0.18 ***	---					
Neighborhood-Level Measure																	
13 Neighborhood Poverty Rate	0.03 *	-0.11 ***	0.10 ***	-0.11 ***	0.10 ***	0.00	-0.29 ***	-0.27 ***	-0.07 ***	0.10 ***	0.02	-0.07 ***	---				
14 Neighborhood Rental Rate	-0.03 *	0.01	-0.01	0.04 **	-0.07 ***	0.00	0.26 ***	0.16 ***	0.03 *	-0.07 ***	-0.12 ***	0.04 **	-0.51 ***	---			
15 Neighborhood Vacancy Rate	-0.01	-0.04 **	0.06 ***	-0.04 ***	0.09 ***	0.00	-0.12 ***	-0.13 ***	-0.05 ***	0.05 ***	0.05 ***	-0.06 ***	0.26 ***	-0.10 ***	---		
16 Percent Minority in Neighborhood	0.01	-0.09 ***	0.05 ***	-0.05 ***	0.01	-0.02	-0.18 ***	-0.48 ***	-0.03 ***	0.09 ***	-0.07 ***	0.03 **	0.46 ***	-0.23 ***	0.15 ***	---	
17 Percent College Educated in Neighborhood	-0.03 *	0.06 ***	0.00	0.05 ***	-0.03 *	-0.06 ***	0.15 ***	0.18 ***	0.05 ***	-0.06 ***	-0.02	-0.03	-0.40 ***	0.25 ***	-0.08 ***	-0.42 ***	---

Notes : Making Connections Survey, Wave I. For all measures, Pearson's R coefficients are presented. However, for dichotomous variables, Chi-square tests of independence are used to establish statistical significance. * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$.

Table 3. Multilevel ML-SEM Parameter Estimates of Association between Neighborhood Perceptions, Neighborhood/ Individual Demographics, and Mobility Risk over Time

	Odds	SE	
Perception of Neighborhood Indicated By:			
Neighborhood Satisfaction	1.20	(0.01)	***
Neighborhood Safety	1.60	(0.01)	***
Neighborhood Decline	0.64	(0.01)	***
Neighbor's Agency	1.52	(0.01)	***
Mobility Regressed On (Individual-Level):			
Perception of Neighborhood	1.24	(0.05)	***
Perception Regressed On (Individual-Level):			
High School Graduate	1.01	(0.10)	
Income Greater than $30,000	0.72	(0.10)	***
White	0.72	(0.11)	***
Age	0.96	(0.00)	***
Female	1.52	(0.15)	**
US Born	1.48	(0.11)	***
Duration of Stay	0.76	(0.01)	***
Wave of Data	0.95	(0.06)	
Mobility Regressed On (Neighborhood-Level):			
Neighborhood Poverty Rate	1.00	(0.00)	***
Neighborhood Median Rent	1.00	(0.00)	
Neighborhood Vacancy Rate	1.01	(0.00)	***
Percent Minority in Neighborhood	1.00	(0.00)	*
Percent College Educated in Neighborhood	1.00	(0.00)	

Notes: Making Connections Survey, 2002-2011.
* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$.

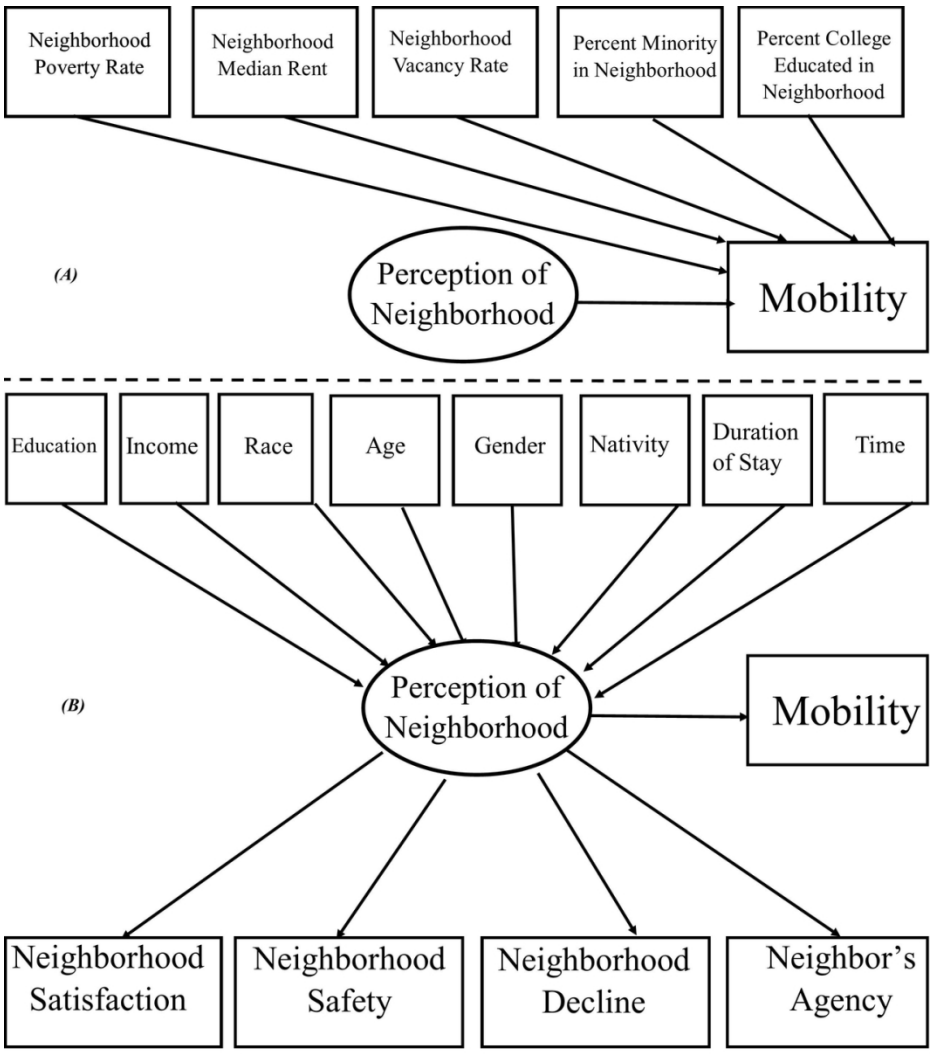
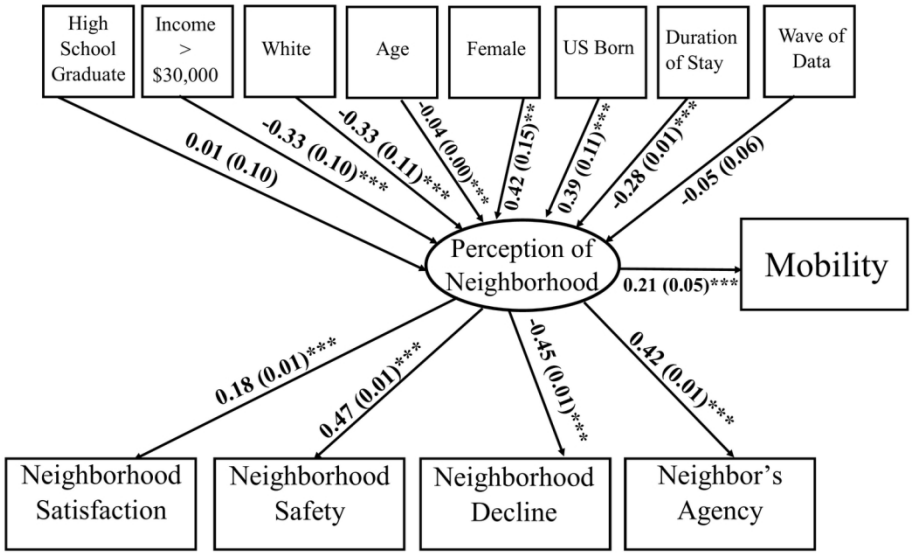


Figure 1. Multilevel Conceptual Model of Residential Mobility Risk with (*a*) Within-Level (Individual) and (*b*) Between-Level (Neighborhood) Factors.

Source: Making Connections, 2002-2011.

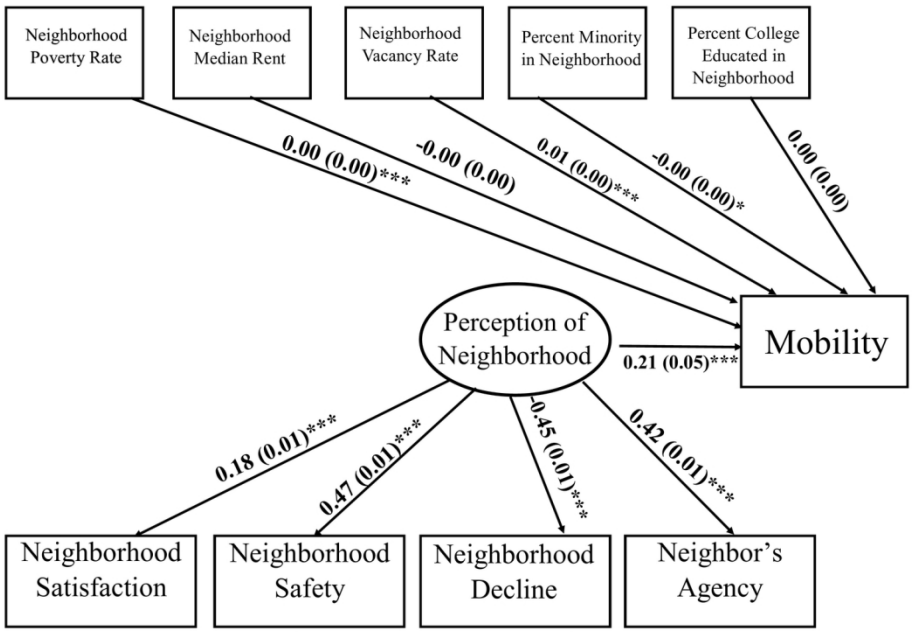
215x279mm (150 x 150 DPI)



Appendix Figure A. Unstandardized Coefficients from Multilevel Structural Equation Models of Residential Mobility Risk with Within-Level (Individual) Factors.

Source: Making Connections, 2002-2011.

279x215mm (150 x 150 DPI)



Appendix Figure B. Unstandardized Coefficients from Multilevel Structural Equation Models of Residential Mobility Risk with Between-Level (Neighborhood) Factors.

Source: Making Connections, 2002-2011.

279x215mm (150 x 150 DPI)