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Source: *Social Problems*, Vol. 49, No. 1 (February 2002), pp. 79-100

Published by: [University of California Press](#) on behalf of the [Society for the Study of Social Problems](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/sp.2002.49.1.79>

Accessed: 07/04/2013 14:03

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# Social Contexts and Urban Adolescent Outcomes: The Interrelated Effects of Neighborhoods, Families, and Peers on African-American Youth

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*Multilevel data are used to assess how three interrelated contexts—family, peer group, and neighborhood—influence the social functioning of urban African-American adolescent youth, a group believed to be especially “at-risk” due to high rates of exposure to contextual disadvantage and its associated ills. The analysis is designed to test the various pathways that neighborhoods influence, both directly and indirectly (via their impact on families and peers), two adolescent outcomes—prosocial competency and problem behavior. Neighborhood effects are relatively modest, operate indirectly via their effect on parenting and peer groups, and are transmitted through neighborhood social organization (i.e., collective efficacy), rather than neighborhood structure. Parental monitoring and peer quality are higher in neighborhoods with greater collective efficacy, which also moderates the effect of parental monitoring on both youth outcomes.*

Sociological research on youth has been advanced by recent efforts to incorporate the full range of social contexts that shape the developmental process. Families, schools, peer groups, and neighborhoods each represent important contextual settings where youth must master the tasks necessary to make a successful transition to adulthood (Bronfenbrenner 1989). There is a growing consensus that a more complete understanding of how youth achieve social competency requires taking into account the multiple and interrelated social contexts that youth inhabit. A key element of this new consensus is an understanding that the more proximal contexts of families and peer groups are situated in larger neighborhood and community structures and processes.

In this research, our main objective is to determine the relative importance of neighborhoods, families, and peers for both positive and negative adolescent outcomes.

While there is a small, but growing body of research on this topic, much of it suffers from both theoretical and methodological shortcomings. Few empirical studies ground youth outcomes in interrelated social contexts and fewer still make use of data sets that are appropriate for multilevel analyses of the effects of neighborhood on children and families. Most of these studies rely on census data to measure neighborhood and community-level characteristics that are often weakly related to the social organizational factors highlighted by recent research. Finally, empirical models used in testing neighborhood effects are typically limited to direct effects, leaving unexplored alternative mechanisms that potentially link neighborhoods and youth outcomes.

This research was supported by the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation. Additional funds were made available by the Ford Foundation in support of the Joblessness and Urban Poverty Research Program at Harvard University's John F. Kennedy School of Government. Direct all correspondence to: Bruce Rankin, Department of Sociology, Koc University, Sariyer-Istanbul, Turkey 80910. E-mail: brankin@ku.edu.tr.

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SOCIAL PROBLEMS, Vol. 49, No. 1, pages 79–100. ISSN: 0037-7791; online ISSN: 1533-8533

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In this paper we address the shortcomings in the extant literature in several ways. Multi-level data are used to assess how three interrelated contexts—family, peer group, and neighborhood—influence the social functioning of urban African-American adolescent youth as measured by achieved social competency and problem behavior avoidance. We believe that a focus on African-American children is warranted, given that they are frequently the objects of public concern over their exposure to high levels of developmental risk, particularly in high poverty neighborhoods. Furthermore, in addition to census indicators of neighborhood ecology, we employ a measure of collective efficacy, a form of youth-directed social capital found to have important implications for levels of neighborhood crime and delinquency. In doing so, we seek to extend this line of research by broadening the range of potential youth outcomes linked to neighborhood collective efficacy. Finally, we employ an analytic strategy to test the various pathways that neighborhoods influence youth attitudes and behavior, both directly and indirectly via their impact on families and peers.

## Literature Review

### *Neighborhoods and Youth Socialization*

The significance of neighborhoods in the social life of urban dwellers is declining as people's daily lives are more frequently enacted in spatially-dispersed settings (Taub, et al. 1977). However, while technological advances in transportation and communication make it increasingly possible for most people to escape the bonds of propinquity (Sampson 1999; Wellman 1999), the lives of children and youth are more spatially circumscribed than adults. Many of the people that children come in contact with, the activities they are involved in, and the institutions that surround them are local ones, often present in their immediate neighborhood.

The salience of neighborhoods for children, particularly urban minority children, has taken on greater importance with the spread of concentrated poverty that occurred during the 1970s and 1980s and the growing risk this poses for child well-being (Furstenberg 1993; Massey and Denton 1993; Wilson 1987, 1996). The deterioration of urban neighborhoods, and the associated rise in crime and youth violence, helped to fuel new research on the role of neighborhoods on various adolescent outcomes (for reviews, see Brooks-Gunn, Duncan, and Maritato 1997; Gephart 1997; Jencks and Mayer 1990; Leventhal and Brooks-Gunn 2000).

A theoretical assumption guiding much of this research is that the risk to youth from exposure to neighborhood disadvantage is partly responsible for why youth in poor neighborhoods score lower on a variety of behavioral and socio-emotional measures than their peers in more affluent areas (Jencks and Mayer 1990). A number of studies report that educational outcomes are influenced by neighborhood socioeconomic status. Adolescents residing in neighborhoods composed of adults with higher socioeconomic status achieve better grades (Dornbusch, Ritter, and Steinberg 1991) and higher educational attainment (Duncan 1994; Garner and Raudenbush 1991), and are less likely to drop out of school (Brooks-Gunn, Guo, and Furstenberg 1993; Clark 1992; Crane 1991b). Similarly, a variety of problem behaviors are also associated with neighborhoods. For instance, delinquent behavior (Coulton and Pandey 1992; Peeples and Loeber 1994) and sexual activity and child bearing (Brooks-Gunn, Guo, and Furstenberg 1993; Coulton and Pandey 1992; Crane 1991a; Hogan and Kitagawa 1985) are less prevalent among youth in more advantaged neighborhoods.

The above notwithstanding, reviewers of this literature generally conclude that neighborhood effects on children are rather modest once individual and family-level factors are taken into consideration (see Elliott, et al. 1996; Furstenberg, et al. 1999; Jencks and Mayer 1990; Leventhal and Brooks-Gunn 2000). However, most of these studies rely on measures of direct effects on youth using census-derived measures of neighborhood structural disadvantage

(e.g., poverty) without attempting to understand the mechanisms by which these effects might be transmitted (Jencks and Mayer 1990; Tienda 1991). This omission is unfortunate since as far back as the 1920s urban social scientists argued that community structural features, such as poverty and residential instability, affect local social organization in ways that are consequential for the attitudes and behavior of residents (Burgess 1925; Park 1926). The early work of Shaw and McKay (1942) on juvenile delinquency showed that highly disadvantaged neighborhoods tend to have lower levels of neighborhood cohesion and integration and weak and ineffective institutions. Similarly, Wilson (1987, 1996) argues that high poverty neighborhoods lack social resources in the form of individuals and institutions connected to the broader society. The resulting social isolation means that families and children have little exposure to the kinds of cultural and social capital resources that reinforce normative orientations and facilitate economic self-sufficiency.

Recently, qualitative research has helped to shed more light on how neighborhoods affect individuals, underscoring the fact that not all poor neighborhoods are alike, either in terms of their social organization or the quality of life of the families who reside there. Not only can levels of social organization differ across disadvantaged neighborhoods, but strong neighborhood social organization can offset the effects of neighborhood poverty on families and individuals (Bursik and Grasmick 1993; Newman 1992). This insight led child development researchers to begin to identify the formal and informal neighborhood social resources that promote normative outcomes among youth. Studies show that better child and adolescent outcomes, such as lower rates of school dropout and teen pregnancy, occur in neighborhoods with high value consensus among residents and high levels of monitoring and supervision of youth activities in public space (Coleman and Hoffer 1987; Gephart 1997). Similarly, adolescents who reside in neighborhoods with greater social control have more prosocial friends and are less likely to engage in problem behaviors (Elliott, et al. 1996).

In an extension of social disorganization theory, Sampson, Raudenbush, and Earls (1997) argue that a neighborhood's ability to maintain social order is predicated on the existence of high collective efficacy, a form of social capital that is activated in neighborhoods with strong networks of mutual trust and a willingness to intervene on behalf of the collective good. Collective efficacy tends to be lower in poor and unstable neighborhoods because concentrated disadvantage and residential instability disrupt and diminish the social interactional bases for communal efforts to maintain social control. While recent literature focuses on the relationship between collective efficacy and violent crime in urban areas, efficacious action on the part of neighborhood adults to achieve the common goals of support and social control of children may also be relevant to a broader array of child and youth outcomes (Sampson, Morenoff, and Earls 1999).

### ***Families, Parenting, and Youth Outcomes***

It is well known that families play a major role in the development of their children. An extensive body of social science research showing that child outcomes are related to a variety of family and parenting characteristics supports this view. We briefly review this literature as well as recent research on the factors associated with differences in parenting practices. Of particular interest are recent studies showing that both family and neighborhood contexts influence the character and effectiveness of parental practices.

Children growing up in poverty do worse than those from more affluent families on a variety of health, cognitive, social, and behavioral outcomes. While part of the reason for the disparity is due to poor families' lack of financial resources, family poverty is also correlated with other factors associated with less optimal child outcomes, including single parenthood, low parental educational attainment, and welfare dependence (Duncan, Brooks-Gunn, and Klebanov 1994; McLanahan, Astone, and Marks 1991; Zill, et al. 1995).

In addition to family socioeconomic and structural characteristics, how parents manage children also makes a difference in their lives. *Authoritative* parenting, where parents set clear and well-defined rules and closely supervise their children's activities, while allowing a certain degree of autonomy for self-discovery, promotes prosocial adjustment and reduce levels of deviancy (Larzelere and Patterson 1990; McLoyd 1990). Laub and Sampson (1988) also report that children who are monitored less by their parents are more likely to engage in deviant behavior. Authoritative parenting styles also seem to foster academic achievement in children because parents who adopt this style are more likely to be involved in their child's schooling (Steinberg, et al. 1992). In contrast, *authoritarian* parenting, one that involves an emphasis on power assertion and coercive discipline, negatively affects the academic attainment and peer associations of youth (Patterson 1982). Parental involvement in the lives of children generally enhances the cognitive and social development of youth (Eccles and Harold 1993; Spencer, Dornbusch, and Mont-Reymond 1990) and there is some evidence to suggest that the higher incidence of deviant activities among youth in single-parent families stems from the limited time for parental involvement with children (McLanahan and Sandefur 1994). These findings are generally consistent with Furstenberg, et al. (1999), who contrast *protective* strategies that help minimize the risk that children are exposed to (e.g., effective monitoring and supervision) with *promotive* strategies that foster positive outcomes (e.g., parental involvement). They conclude that both strategies are necessary for successful development.

It is important to note that parenting styles are not randomly distributed in the population, but are associated with characteristics of families, especially socioeconomic status. Kohn and Schooler (1983) found that parents employed in skilled or professional occupations are less likely to resort to authoritarian parenting. Middle-class parents tend to place fewer stringent controls on their children, favoring instead a more authoritative style that encourages autonomy and self-regulation. In contrast, working class parents tend to value obedience to parental dictates. Low-income parents are more likely to resort to an authoritarian parenting style, one that involves an emphasis on power assertion and directive teaching (Baumrind 1991).

However, a focus on family-level factors in explaining differences in parenting styles overlooks variations in contextual risk that families are exposed to (Furstenberg, et al. 1999; McLoyd 1990; Steinberg 1987). In particular, findings that disadvantaged families are more likely to employ less effective parenting techniques are criticized for not taking into account the ecological and contextual realities of the neighborhoods that many low-income families reside in. This line of reasoning suggests that the parental management styles of poor families partly reflect the harsh realities of poverty-stricken neighborhoods, where parents must protect their children from the risks they face daily (Brooks-Gunn, Duncan, et al. 1993; Furstenberg 1993).

A number of qualitative studies confirm the link between restrictive parenting and disadvantaged neighborhoods, suggesting that parental strategies are often dictated by perceptions about neighborhood risk, especially concerns about child safety and exposure to negative role models (Burton 1990; Furstenberg 1993; Jarrett 1997a, 1997b). Perceptions about neighborhood social organization matter as well, as demonstrated by the fact that parents in cohesive neighborhoods with high levels of social control feel they can be less restrictive of their children's activities outside the home and can more freely take advantage of neighborhood resources (Chavis and Wandersman 1990; Pretty 1990). In addition, parents may be influenced by the normative climate of their neighborhoods and adjust their management styles to conform to the practices of the majority (Coulton 1996). On the other hand, when parents believe that neighborhood values and lifestyles are not in accordance with their own, they sometimes become more restrictive and limit their children's exposure to the neighborhood and the people who reside there (Jarrett 1995, 1997a). Despite the qualitative evidence linking family management practices and neighborhood characteristics, few quantitative studies account for this connection when assessing parental management techniques. One

that has reports only modest neighborhood effects on parenting and concludes that neighborhood differences in family management are largely due to individual-level factors that cluster by neighborhood (e.g., family structure, education, and income; Furstenberg, et al. 1999).

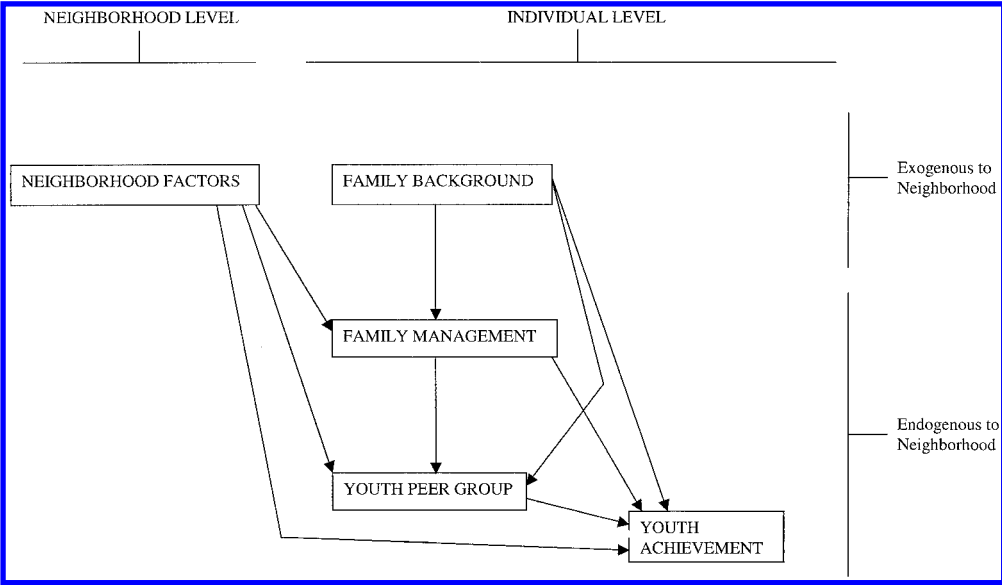
While the evidence of systematic variation in family practices by neighborhood is somewhat weak, the *effectiveness* of family practices may differ depending on the quality of the neighborhood in which they are deployed. In other words, parenting approaches that are ineffective in one neighborhood context may be quite effective in another. This argument is buttressed by Furstenberg (1993), who claims that restrictive parenting, a style generally thought to hinder adolescent development, may be functional in disadvantaged neighborhoods, where concerns about safety and well-being outweigh any potential benefits of youth autonomy. Thus, in addition to the possibility that family management *mediates* the effect of neighborhoods; that is that neighborhoods affect children by influencing parenting practices, strategic parenting may *moderate* the deleterious effects of neighborhoods on children. Methodologically, whereas the former implies an indirect neighborhood effect, the latter suggests a contextual fit or interaction between parenting style and neighborhood type that is consequential for child outcomes.

### *Peer Associations*

Children's friends and acquaintances, many of which are encountered in the immediate neighborhood environment, can easily undermine parents' efforts to help their children navigate the turbulent years of adolescence. A plethora of research justifies parental concerns, especially for families that reside in highly disadvantaged neighborhoods. The quality of neighborhood peers is linked to a number of risk behaviors, including drug and alcohol use, criminal activity, and contact with gang members (Case and Katz 1991). According to Crane (1991a, 1991b), this influence is especially deleterious in ghetto neighborhoods, where social pathologies are transmitted epidemically through peer associations. Similarly, Taylor (1991) found that inner-city youth are more likely to conform to the view of their peers than those of their parents, a situation that compounds the difficulties that parents face in trying to protect their children from the lure of "street culture" and pernicious peer associations. Youth from high poverty neighborhoods are disproportionately more likely to drop out of school and experience long periods of unemployment ostensibly because many of their neighborhood friends are in the same circumstances (Massey and Denton 1993). Furthermore, adolescents who reside in poor neighborhoods are also more likely to have friends who devalue education, which undermines their own commitment to education and academic achievement (Quane and Rankin 1998). Indeed, some scholars claim that the influence of peers rivals, if not surpasses, that of parents (Harris 1998).

Parents, of course, are generally mindful of the consequences of their children forming attachments with deviant peers and try to lessen the likelihood that this will occur. Parents influence friendship choices in a variety of ways—through normative socialization, neighborhood and school selection, advice and guidance, and appropriate monitoring and supervision of children's whereabouts. Unsupervised youth, particularly in high-risk neighborhoods, are more likely to engage in counterproductive behavior as a result of contact with delinquent friends (Crane 1991a, 1991b). Furthermore, deficits in adult monitoring and involvement may also help explain why adolescents from non-intact families are more susceptible to negative peer influences (Dornbush, et al. 1985; Steinberg 1987). Collectively, these studies suggest that peer association represents an important indirect mechanism linking neighborhood and youth outcomes (Sampson and Groves 1989; Shaw and McKay 1942).

In sum, adolescence is considered to be a critical stage in the life trajectory of youth, one that is linked to a potential for disengaging behaviors, including challenging parental authority, loss of interest in school, and getting involved with gangs and deviant behavior (see Brooks-Gunn, Duncan, et al. 1993; Brooks-Gunn and Reiter 1990; Conger, Conger, and Elder



**Figure 1 • A Social Contextual, Multilevel Theoretical Model of Adolescent Developmental Outcomes**

1997; Eccles, et al. 1993). Moreover, the effects of neighborhoods are likely to be greater as children enter adolescence. While parents seem to mediate the effects of neighborhoods on younger children, neighborhood effects on adolescents are more likely to be mediated by peer associations (Leventhal and Brooks-Gunn 2000).

The relationships between the neighborhood, family, and youth domains as described above are depicted in Figure 1. Family management, the quality of peer groups, and youth social functioning are viewed as individual-level outcomes that are nested within neighborhood-level structures. In other words, neighborhood factors can influence youth outcomes directly, or indirectly via their effect on family management and peers. Since parents can influence youth peer associations, an indirect family management effect on youth outcomes is also hypothesized. Family background is conceptualized as exogenous to the neighborhood.<sup>1</sup>

**Data and Methods**

The primary source of the data is the *Youth Achievement and the Structure of Inner City Communities* study, a project funded by the MacArthur Foundation Research Program on Successful Adolescent Development in High Risk Areas. Face-to-face interviews using a structured questionnaire were completed in June 1991. The sample is made up of African-American mothers and up to two of their adolescent children (aged 11 to 16) living in 62 poor and mixed income urban Chicago neighborhoods with high concentrations of African-American

1. If neighborhoods affect the educational and occupational attainment of adults as neighborhood development effects imply and as has been suggested by some (Wilson 1987, 1996), then family background is partly endogenous to the neighborhood. While lack of data prevent us from examining this causal path, this limitation biases the neighborhood-level effects towards zero and, thus, greater confidence in effects that are obtained.



residents.<sup>2</sup> Excluding cases with missing values resulted in a final sample of 636 youth and 59 neighborhoods. Additional data were obtained from the 1990 Census of Population and Housing (STF3A file; U.S. Bureau of the Census 1992). Using census tracts as a proxy for neighborhoods, tract-level data are used to construct measures of disadvantage and residential stability.

The Youth Achievement Study provides a unique opportunity to assess neighborhood effects on youth and their families. First, the data contain information on a variety of important social contexts, including key neighborhood social organizational characteristics not reflected in census indicators used in most neighborhood studies. Second, to facilitate multi-level analyses, the study's sampling design replicates the nested structure of relationships specified by recent neighborhood effects literature, that is, where youth and families are nested within neighborhoods. Finally, in contrast to many national studies where the residential locators are typically large geographical areas (e.g., counties), and therefore, not useful for studying neighborhoods, this study identifies the census tract of residence and makes use of tract-level data collected one to two years prior to the study.

While our sample neighborhoods are highly representative of those neighborhoods in which black families in Chicago were likely to reside in the early 1990s,<sup>3</sup> the data are not without limitations. Since our sample consists of poor and moderate-income African-American mothers and their children living in Chicago, the scope of generalizability is somewhat limited. However, we believe that a focus on black families to the exclusion of other racial and ethnic groups is warranted. One of the most compelling reasons is the fact that African-Americans are more likely than any other racial or ethnic group to reside in poor urban neighborhoods (Jargowsky 1997; Sampson and Wilson 1995). Most of the literature on the corrosive effects of poverty and social disorganization in neighborhoods is concerned with the experience of urban African-Americans, whose communities have been shaped by unique historical and contemporary macrostructural forces.

A final limitation that our study shares with many studies of this sort is that while the focus is on youth "achievement," a concept that implies individual change over time, our data are cross-sectional. For that reason, we must be cautious about making causal inferences. Although our analyses are based on models derived from causal theory, the use of cross-sectional data limits the extent to which we can make definitive claims about causality.

### *Empirical Measures*

A successful transition to adulthood requires both a commitment to gaining competency in various conventional tasks (e.g., academic skills) and an avoidance of problem behavior than can lead to problems later in life (e.g., serious delinquency). Since research suggests a unique etiology for these two different types of youth outcomes (Furstenberg, et al. 1999), we include both a "successful" asset-based outcome and a "problematic" deficit-based outcome. These measures, which replicate youth outcome scales used by Elliot, et al. (1996), represent outcomes vital to the developmental tasks that adolescents must accomplish for a smooth transition to conventional adult roles. *Prosocial competence* is a global measure of successful adjustment that is a composite scale of youth-reported behavioral and attitudinal variables, including personal efficacy, educational expectations, grades in school, commitment to con-

2. Poverty neighborhoods are census tracts with 20 percent or more in poverty and at least 50 percent African-American; mixed income neighborhoods are census tracts with median income of \$30,000 or more and at least 30 percent African-American. Household selection in the poverty stratum involved random sampling using a listing of Chicago poverty tract households provided by the National Opinion Research Center. Since no listing of households in mixed income tracts was available, a block quota selection method was used on randomly selected census blocks in all Chicago census tracts fitting the mixed income stratum criteria.

3. Based on 1990 census data, we estimate that the majority of African-American families, eighty-six percent, resided in these census tracts during the time when the survey was fielded.



ventionality, and involvement in conventional activities. *Problem behavior* combines a 15-item variety scale on delinquent behavior, a seven-item variety scale on drug use and a single-item of the number of arrests. All items pertain to behavior during the past year. Factor analyses produced single factors for both scales.

Since Sampson, et al. (1997) show that neighborhood social organizational characteristics potentially mediate the effects of ecological disadvantage on families and individuals, both types of neighborhood-level measures are included in the analysis. We follow their operationalization of neighborhood ecology and collective efficacy. The neighborhood ecology is measured using concentrated disadvantage and residential stability. *Concentrated disadvantage* is a composite of census tract-level measures of the proportion of families on public assistance, female-headed, and below the poverty line, plus the rate of unemployment and the proportion of the population in the census tract that is black. Items are standardized, summed and weighted by their factor score. *Residential stability* is the proportion of people residing in the same house for five years and the proportion of owner-occupied housing units, again standardized and summed. Our neighborhood social organization measure is *collective efficacy*, a composite scale that combines two variables, neighborhood cohesion and social control. Neighborhood cohesion is a summed scale of five items: how closed-knit the adult respondent perceives the neighborhood to be, the helpfulness of neighbors, the degree of agreement on basic norms, whether groups in the neighborhood get along, and whether most people "follow the rules." Social control is a four-item scale summarizing how likely it is that neighbors would intervene to help the adult respondent under four different scenarios—her house being broken into, someone selling drugs to her child, fighting in front of her house, and her child getting into trouble.<sup>4</sup>

We employ several measures of family management that capture important dimensions of parenting (Baumrind 1991; Furstenberg, et al. 1999; Steinberg, et al. 1992). *Parental monitoring* is a youth-reported five-item scale that measures the extent to which parents attempt to monitor their child's whereabouts and associations when not under parental supervision. *Parental involvement* is: 1) the level of the mother's involvement in the child's life as measured by a count of the number of co-activities in the past month, including discussing television shows, doing something active together (e.g. walking or sports), going to movies, sports event, zoo or museum together, or working on something around the house, and 2) her (or her spouse/partner's) level of involvement in the child's school, as reported by the mother. *Family rules* gauges the extent to which parents enforce rules regarding television viewing, homework, and household chores (as reported by the mother) and the extent to which the child perceives family rules as being clear and consistently enforced.

Families differ not only in terms of socioeconomic resources and family structure, but also with respect to normative orientation. The expectations and aspirations that mothers have for their children and the effectiveness with which these are transmitted are important for a number of youth outcomes (McLanahan, Astone, and Marks 1991). Youth outcomes are more positive when they are exposed to parents and other adults who reinforce conventional norms and values (Wilson 1987, 1996). To control for differences in the normative climate of families, we include two measures of maternal normative and value orientation: *deviance intolerance* and *conventional values*. The former is a 14-item scale of how "wrong" the mother judges a range of delinquent behaviors to be for a youth in the same age range as the focal child. The latter is a 12-item scale of how "important" various conventional goals are (e.g., college education, good reputation, happy family life, saving money, working hard, and studying hard to get good grades).

To assess the influence of peers, we constructed *positive friends*, a scale that measures ori-

4. The relationship between neighborhood ecological structure and collective efficacy is confirmed by moderately high and statistically significant neighborhood-level correlations. Collective efficacy is lower in neighborhoods where concentrated disadvantage is higher ( $-.59, p < .001$ ) and higher in neighborhoods with more residential stability ( $.37, p < .01$ ). The less-than-perfect correlations suggest that it is important to model variation in neighborhood social organization independent of levels of disadvantage.

entation towards school and academic success among the youth's friends, as reported by the youth.<sup>5</sup> It is based on a series of questions about how many friends are good students and how positive their attitudes and behavior is towards school.

We employ several types of family background measures associated with both family management practices and youth outcomes. As discussed above, these must be controlled in order to determine the effects of parenting on youth, independent of family resources and structure. The parent's socioeconomic status is measured using *education* (in years of school completed), *unemployed* (1 = currently unemployed), *AFDC receipt* (1 = current recipient), and *household income*. Five measures were selected to control for demographic and family structure factors: *youth age* (in years) and *gender* (1 = male), mother's *age* (in years), *single parent* (i.e., 1 = not married or cohabiting), the *number of coresiding household adults*, and the *number of coresiding siblings* the youth respondent has. We control for exposure to the neighborhood context by including a measure of the *length of residence* (in years) in the neighborhood. The inclusion of family background measures is also necessary to avoid overstating neighborhood contextual effects, since they are often associated with neighborhood selection processes (for a discussion of this issue, see Jencks and Mayer 1990 and Tienda 1991).

To assess the relative importance of neighborhood, family, and peer determinants of youth outcomes, we estimate a series of two-level hierarchical linear models (HLM), where level one includes family, peer, and youth measures and level two includes the three neighborhood measures. We employ HLM because neighborhood theory states that families and youths are nested within neighborhoods, a specification that is also reflected in the structure of our data. HLM is a preferred statistical method for analyzing data having a hierarchical or nested structure (Bryk and Raudenbush 1992). Conventional ordinary least-squares regression methods are inappropriate for nested data because the clustering of cases violates the assumption of independence of observations underlying classical statistical techniques (for a discussion of the problems associated with conventional analyses of nested data, see Bryk and Raudenbush 1992). The presence of more than one child per household also represents a potential violation of the statistical assumption of independent observations. Preliminary analyses indicate that this is not a serious threat to the validity of the HLM results.<sup>6</sup>

## Results

We first examine evidence of neighborhood differences in the family management and youth outcome measures by calculating the intraclass correlation (ICC) for each variable. ICCs represent the proportion of the total variances that exists between neighborhoods (i.e., tracts).<sup>7</sup> The results indicate that most of the variation across all domains is within the neighborhood, that is, at the individual level. Neighborhood differences in management practices are modest for parental monitoring (.07) and family rules (.10), but are substantially larger for

5. Although youth reporting on the attitude and behavior of friends is less reliable than responses from the friends themselves, peer interviews were not conducted as part of the present study.

6. Approximately one-half of study households contain two interviewed children. To determine the extent to which non-independence among these households might influence inferences, we regressed the individual-level predictors on each dependent variable using conventional OLS standard error estimation and compared the results to models using robust standard estimation grouped by household. The latter are used when the clustering of cases (i.e., by households) requires a relaxation of the assumption of independence. Of all the parameters estimated, only one changed enough to affect inferences using  $p < .05$  level as a cut-off (results available upon request). Since the robust estimates are consistent with the HLM findings, including the sole affected variable, we report only the HLM results.

7. Intraclass correlations are calculated by dividing the total variance (both neighborhood- and individual-levels) by the neighborhood-level variance figures produced by a one-way analysis of variance of random effects (see Appendix, for error variance components for the analyses). They are descriptive statistics that indicate the source of gross variation, prior to the application of multivariate controls, and should not be interpreted in any causal sense.

parental involvement (.28). There is moderate between-neighborhood variation in exposure to positive friends (.17) and prosocial competency (.21), but very little in problem behavior (.04). The large ICCs for parental involvement are expected, since some of the involvement activities are correlated with family socioeconomic resources and access to such activities (e.g., going to movies, sporting events, and the zoo, and parental involvement in the child's school), which vary considerably by neighborhood. In absolute terms, neighborhood differences are not as important as family and individual-level factors, which are responsible for most of the variation in both family management and youth outcomes.<sup>8</sup>

We next present a series of two-level hierarchical linear model analyses of how families manage their children as a function of neighborhood, family background (e.g., SES, family structure, and culture), and youth demographic characteristics (see Table 1). We are especially interested in determining whether neighborhoods affect adolescent outcomes indirectly by influencing those family management practices thought to promote successful development. Only one neighborhood effect is statistically significant—parental monitoring is higher in neighborhoods with greater collective efficacy, explaining a third of the neighborhood-level variance in monitoring. Our neighborhood-level predictors have no effect on any other family management variables. Much of the apparent neighborhood differences in parental involvement and family rules are due to the clustering of individual-level factors, accounting for 29 percent and 21 percent of the explained neighborhood-level variance, respectively.

Among the individual-level predictors, family SES and structure, maternal values and attitudes towards youth misbehavior, and youth demographics are the main factors associated with family management practices. Monitoring and involvement are higher among more educated mothers. On the other hand, monitoring of youth by mothers in high income households is lower, a finding consistent with earlier research showing that middle class parents grant more autonomy to their children (Kohn and Schooler 1983).<sup>9</sup> Single parents and those receiving welfare are less involved with their children. Maternal norms and values are also associated with parental styles, as parents who espouse more conventional values are significantly more likely to employ all three family management strategies. Those mothers who are less tolerant of youth deviancy also provide more structure in the form of family rules. Finally, youth age and gender also influence parenting in ways consistent with broader cultural norms. Older children experience less parental involvement and are less subject to family rules than younger children, while male children are monitored less than females.

Turning to the models predicting our peer and youth outcomes we find that neighborhoods have a significant influence on the quality of peer groups (see Table 2). Neighborhood collective efficacy has a strong effect on the type of friends youth associate with, indicating that youth who reside in cohesive neighborhoods where adults share responsibility for social control are more likely to form positive peer attachments. In addition, we also find weak support for a link between neighborhood disadvantage and peer groups, net of collective efficacy. Youth residing in neighborhoods with higher levels of disadvantage seem to have less prosocial friends, although the effect is statistically marginally ( $p < .10$ ). The neighborhood

8. While the low ICCs for problem behavior are similar to those reported by Furstenberg, et al. (1999), it is noteworthy that our ICCs are generally larger than theirs. There are several potential explanations. First, while there is some conceptual overlap, our measures are not identical. More importantly, sampling differences may account for some of the disparity. Our sample includes a broader array of neighborhoods, with poverty rates ranging from 3 to 87 percent, compared to 5 to 62 percent in the Philadelphia study. Similarly, city-specific and race-specific residential patterns may affect the composition of neighborhoods, with greater clustering of family types and child outcomes in Chicago or among predominantly African-American neighborhoods in comparison to the multiethnic Philadelphia sample. Finally, since our sample includes 16 year olds, a slight increase in ICCs would also be expected, since the ICCs of many youth outcomes increase with age (Furstenberg, et al. 1999).

9. This finding may also reflect the greater financial wherewithal higher SES families have to substitute fee-based youth activities for parental supervision (Entwisle, Alexander, and Olson 1997).

**Table 1 • Cross-Level Hierarchical Linear Models of Family Management Practices. Figures are unstandardized *b*-coefficients and standard errors. (N = 639 youth in 59 neighborhoods)**

| Independent Variables                     | Parental Monitoring |           | Parental Involvement |           | Family Rules |           |
|---|---------------------|-----------|----------------------|-----------|--------------|-----------|
|   | <i>b</i>            | <i>se</i> | <i>b</i>             | <i>se</i> | <i>b</i>     | <i>se</i> |
| Neighborhood level                        |                     |           |                      |           |              |           |
| Concentrated disadvantage                 | .096                | .061      | .046                 | .090      | .089         | .071      |
| Residential stability                     | .038                | .064      | -.088                | .085      | -.035        | .072      |
| Collective efficacy                       | .216**              | .081      | .123                 | .106      | .071         | .091      |
| Individual level                          |                     |           |                      |           |              |           |
| Youth age                                 | -.041               | .022      | -.057**              | .019      | -.054*       | .022      |
| Male youth                                | -.311***            | .075      | -.122                | .067      | -.038        | .077      |
| Age (mother)                              | -.003               | .005      | -.004                | .005      | .005         | .006      |
| Education                                 | .050*               | .020      | .102***              | .018      | .031         | .021      |
| AFDC                                      | -.040               | .120      | -.381***             | .109      | -.104        | .124      |
| Unemployed                                | .123                | .110      | .101                 | .101      | .139         | .114      |
| Household income (*1000)                  | -.089**             | .033      | -.033                | .030      | -.012        | .034      |
| Single parent                             | -.017               | .100      | -.184*               | .091      | -.078        | .103      |
| # Adults in household                     | .020                | .060      | -.078                | .054      | -.075        | .062      |
| # Siblings in household                   | -.016               | .020      | -.003                | .018      | -.014        | .021      |
| Deviance intolerance                      | .070                | .044      | .059                 | .040      | .173***      | .046      |
| Conventional values                       | .127**              | .047      | .161***              | .043      | .182***      | .048      |
| Years in neighborhood                     | .003                | .004      | .006                 | .004      | -.001        | .005      |
| Intercept                                 | -.067               | .053      | .115                 | .076      | .035         | .061      |
| Total neighborhood explained <sup>a</sup> | .33                 |           | .29                  |           | .21          |           |
| Net neighborhood explained <sup>b</sup>   | .33                 |           | .00                  |           | .00          |           |
| Total explained                           | .08                 |           | .18                  |           | .09          |           |

\*  $p < .05$     \*\*  $p < .01$     \*\*\*  $p < .001$      $p < .10$  (neighborhood-level only)

<sup>a</sup> The between-neighborhood variance explained by both individual-level and neighborhood-level variables.

<sup>b</sup> The residual between-neighborhood variance explained by the neighborhood-level variables, after the variance explained by the individual-level variables is taken out.

variables together explain a majority of the between-neighborhood variance in positive friends (55 percent).

Neighborhoods have little direct effect on our respondent youth outcome variables. Levels of social competency are slightly lower among youth who live in stable neighborhoods; however, the effect is only significant at the .10 level.<sup>10</sup> None of our neighborhood variables has any effect on problem behavior. As with parental involvement and family rules models, the overall neighborhood differences in prosocial competency and problem behavior are mainly due to the clustering of individual-level factors, accounting for 84 percent and 75 percent of the neighborhood-level variance explained, respectively. Thus, not only is most of the variation in both youth outcomes within the neighborhood, but a substantial proportion of the

10. We speculate that similar to adults, adolescents who reside in stable neighborhoods may have a greater density of neighborhood friends and more social activities than those in less stable neighborhoods (Sampson 1988), which may reduce academic effort, educational expectations, or involvement in prosocial activities. Several other studies of urban neighborhood social networks report that embeddedness in dense social networks can have negative consequences for individuals (Brooks-Gunn, Duncan, et al. 1993; Duncan 1994).

**Table 2 • Cross-Level Hierarchical Linear Models of Youth Outcomes. Figures are unstandardized *b*-coefficients and standard errors. (N = 639 youth in 59 neighborhoods)**

| Independent Variables                             | Positive Friends   |           | Prosocial Competency |           | Problem Behavior |           |
|---|--------------------|-----------|----------------------|-----------|------------------|-----------|
|   | <i>b</i>           | <i>se</i> | <i>b</i>             | <i>se</i> | <i>b</i>         | <i>se</i> |
| Neighborhood level                                |                    |           |                      |           |                  |           |
| Concentrated disadvantage                         | −.116 <sup>+</sup> | .061      | −.013                | .052      | −.021            | .048      |
| Residential stability                             | .006               | .062      | −.090 <sup>+</sup>   | .054      | .086             | .053      |
| Collective efficacy                               | .242**             | .079      | .057                 | .069      | −.081            | .069      |
| Individual level: family management & youth peers |                    |           |                      |           |                  |           |
| Parental monitoring                               | .118**             | .037      | .118***              | .034      | −.091*           | .039      |
| Parental involvement                              | −.092*             | .042      | .094*                | .038      | .018             | .043      |
| Family rules                                      | .190***            | .038      | .087*                | .035      | .011             | .040      |
| Positive friends                                  | —                  | —         | .120**               | .036      | −.184***         | .041      |
| Individual level: controls                        |                    |           |                      |           |                  |           |
| Youth age   | −.095***           | .020      | .026                 | .019      | .104***          | .021      |
| Male youth  | −.122              | .070      | −.201**              | .063      | .181*            | .07       |
| Age (mother)                                      | .010*              | .005      | .003                 | .005      | −.005            | .005      |
| Education   | .023               | .019      | .026                 | .017      | −.012            | .020      |
| AFDC  | .239*              | .112      | −.161                | .101      | .139             | .115      |
| Unemployed  | −.121              | .102      | −.054                | .092      | .118             | .104      |
| Household income (*1000)                          | .027               | .031      | .086**               | .028      | .016             | .031      |
| Single parent                                     | −.206*             | .093      | −.148                | .084      | .010             | .094      |
| # Adults in household                             | −.107              | .056      | .049                 | .051      | −.019            | .057      |
| # Siblings in household                           | .004               | .019      | −.021                | .017      | .062**           | .019      |
| Deviance intolerance                              | −.003              | .041      | .097*                | .037      | −.070            | .042      |
| Conventional values                               | −.002              | .045      | .172***              | .040      | .005             | .045      |
| Years in neighborhood                             | .001               | .004      | −.004                | .004      | −.004            | .004      |
| Intercept   | −.024              | .053      | .057                 | .045      | −.011            | .042      |
| Total neighborhood explained <sup>a</sup>         | .67                |           | .84                  |           | .75              |           |
| Net neighborhood explained <sup>b</sup>           | .55                |           | .00                  |           | .00              |           |
| Total explained                                   | .21                |           | .36                  |           | .14              |           |

\* *p* < .05    \*\* *p* < .01    \*\*\* *p* < .001    + *p* < .10 (neighborhood-level only)  
<sup>a</sup> The between-neighborhood variance explained by both individual-level and neighborhood-level variables.  
<sup>b</sup> The residual between-neighborhood variance explained by the neighborhood-level variables, after the variance explained by the individual-level variables is taken out.

between-neighborhood variation is due to the neighborhood concentration of families with similar characteristics. When these are controlled, the remaining neighborhood-level variation is much smaller.

For the most part, the conventional wisdom regarding the importance of parenting practices, especially monitoring, is confirmed by the results. Youth whose parents monitor their activities are more likely to have conventionally-oriented friends, higher levels of social competency, and less problem behavior. Clear and consistent rules regarding homework and leisure time activities have a similar effect on friendship formations and prosocial competency, although not on problem behavior. Surprisingly, while parental involvement increases youth social competency, it is also associated with *less* conventional youth peer groups, possibly because parents become more involved in their children’s lives in order to counter the effects of negative peers.

Net of family management, urban African-American youth from higher SES families do only marginally better than those from less fortunate backgrounds. Income is associated with higher levels of prosocial competency, but in contrast to research showing that children in welfare families do worse than those in non-welfare families, our findings show that these youth actually have more prosocial friends.<sup>11</sup> Youth social competency is also higher when mothers hold more conventional values and a more intolerant attitude towards youth deviancy. Our results suggest that the mechanisms that link SES and youth achievement outcomes may be more indirect, mainly through parenting, family norms, and peer groups.<sup>12</sup>

Two family structure variables have significant effects. Youth whose mothers lack a partner have less prosocial friends, suggesting that single parents are less able to effectively control the associations of their children, independent of the level of monitoring they impose. Also, youth with more siblings report more problem behavior. Since we are controlling for a number of family management practices that might vary by family size (e.g., monitoring and involvement becomes more difficult with more children), we suspect that this may be due to behavior learned from older siblings or their siblings' friends.

The importance of peer influences on adolescents receives strong support based on our results. Youth who have positive peers are more socially competent and are less likely to engage in problem behaviors. Moreover, since the quality of peers is a function of both the levels of collective efficacy and concentrated disadvantage in the neighborhood and how families manage their children, peers are an important mediating factor that transmits both neighborhood and family effects to youth outcomes.

Finally, successful and problematic outcomes vary systematically by the gender and age of the youth. Older children report lower levels of conventionality among friends and greater levels of problem behavior. Males tend to have lower social competency and more problem behavior than females.

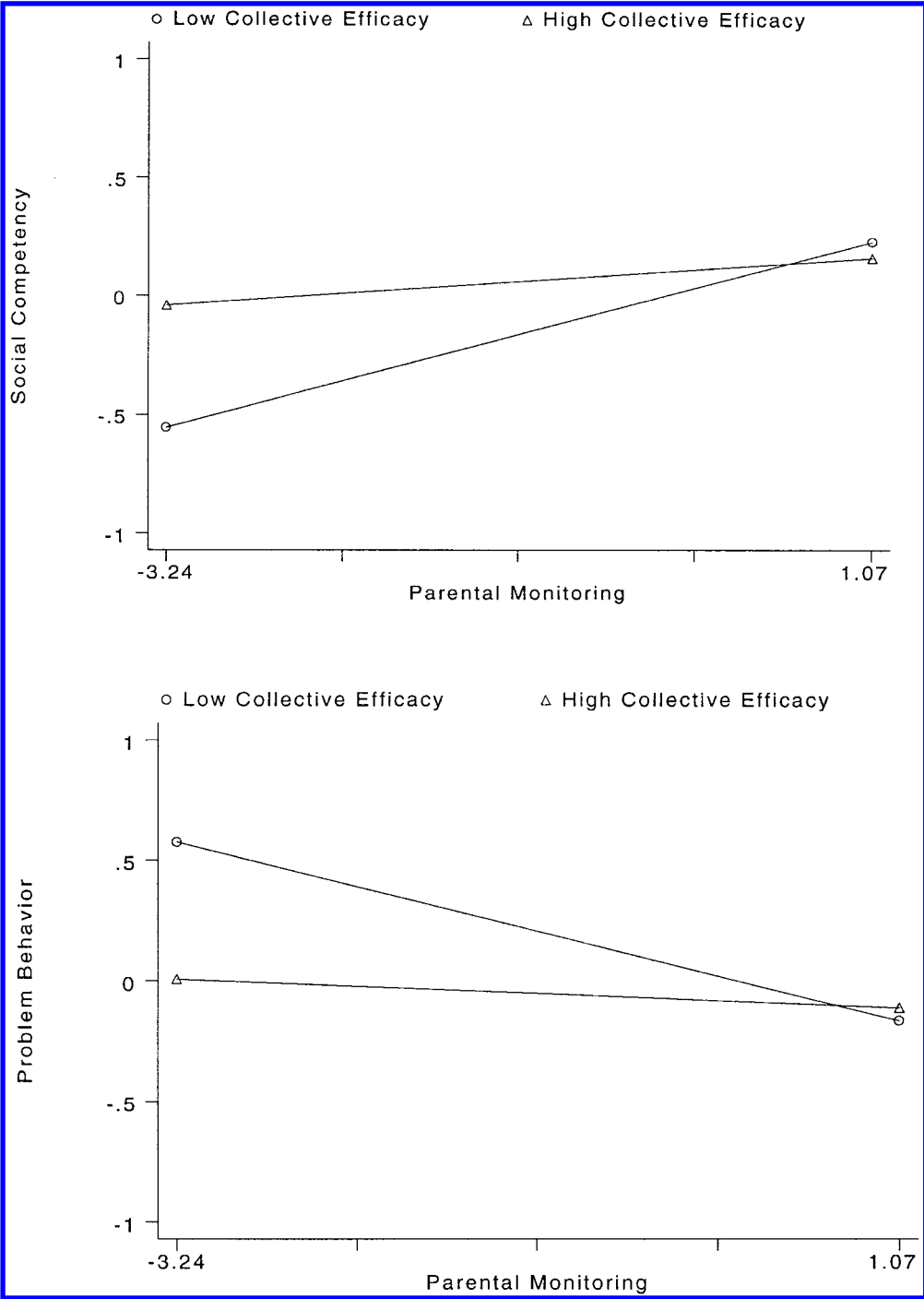
To test whether some family management approaches are more effective in certain types of neighborhoods, we estimate models that include neighborhood-parenting interaction variables. We limit our analyses to the interactions between collective efficacy and family management for two reasons, parsimony and theoretical interest. First, a full explication of all possible interactions is beyond the scope of this paper. Moreover, a focus on collective efficacy is clearly warranted, given that it is directly related to the social control of youth, representing a community's collective responsibility for the control of children.

Figure 2 illustrates how the effects of parenting practices on youth outcomes differ by the level of neighborhood collective efficacy for those interactions that were statistically significant.<sup>13</sup> In high collective efficacy neighborhoods monitoring has little effect on social

11. We speculate that welfare mothers may have an advantage over working mothers in monitoring peer associations and activities, especially when children are out of school (e.g., after-school and during summer). Preliminary analyses of data relating to child supervision among children in the study indicate that the vast majority of children in both welfare and non-welfare households go home after school (around 80%). However, children residing in welfare households are more likely to have an adult present at home after school (95%), who might be available to monitor the child's friends, than those in non-welfare households (74%). More research is needed to determine whether this helps welfare parents to control who their children associate with, but, if true, one unintended consequence of welfare reform may be heightened exposure to negative peers among the children of welfare leavers, since mothers will be less available to supervise their children's activities and monitor their friends.

12. Findings of weak direct effects of socioeconomic status variables on child outcomes are not surprising, particularly for parental income. A recent study shows that parental income has little influence on test scores and educational attainment, teen parenting early sexual behavior, or subsequent labor-market success (Mayer 1997). Hauser and Sweeney (1997) contend that the bulk of parents' income effects on adolescents is transferred indirectly via parental encouragement and aspirations and their children's friends. In a review of current literature on SES effects, Duncan and Brooks-Gunn (1997) argue there is a dearth of research explaining how higher SES parents are able to transfer advantages to their children. They conclude that SES is associated with a host of environmental conditions that influence child outcomes. When these mediating factors are controlled for, SES effects are likely to be smaller.

13. Tables are available upon request.



**Figure 2 • Significant Interactions between Neighborhood and Family Management Variables.** (The Interactional models are identical to those in Table 2, but include statistically significant ( $p < .05$ ) family management-neighborhood interaction terms.) (The figures are based on predicted values using the 25th and 75th percentile scores on the continuous collective efficacy scale to represent low and high collective efficacy.)



competency or problem behavior. However, where collective efficacy is low, monitoring has a stronger effect on both competency and problem behavior in the expected direction of better youth outcomes. Thus, neighborhood social organization appears to moderate the effect of parenting on youth competency and behavior.

## Discussion and Conclusion

Drawing on recent research situating the lives of children within multiple and inter-related social contexts, we evaluate the relative importance of neighborhoods, families, and peers for urban African-American youth, a group believed to be especially at risk due to exposure to high levels of contextual disadvantage. We focused on two different youth outcomes, prosocial competence and problem behavior, because youth must acquire certain social and educational competencies and avoid serious problem behavior if they are to make a successful transition to adulthood. Using a conceptual framework that assumes that families and peer groups are embedded in neighborhood structures, we also wanted to explore alternative pathways by which neighborhoods influence youth. Specifically, we wanted to know if parents and friends mediate the effects of neighborhoods on youth and whether the effects of parenting depend on the neighborhood context in which the strategy is deployed.

Neighborhoods do affect urban African-American adolescents, albeit more modestly and in ways that are more complicated than earlier proponents of neighborhood effects initially hypothesized. With the exception of residential stability, no neighborhood variable had a *direct* effect on either prosocial competency or problem behavior, while several *indirect* effects were observed. Neighborhoods seem to affect youth because features of the neighborhood influence both how their parents manage them and the type of peers that they come in contact with. One implication is that research limited to the study of direct effects may miss important indirect mechanisms linking neighborhoods and youth outcomes.

The main parenting factor mediating the effect of neighborhoods is parental monitoring, a variable that is a significant predictor of both prosocial competency and problem behavior. The fact that parental monitoring is higher in neighborhoods with greater collective efficacy supports claims that parents adjust their parenting style to conform to neighborhood norms (Coulton 1996; Jarrett 1997b). In this case, the normative climate in neighborhoods with greater collective efficacy encourages parents to monitor their children more intensively, which in turn is associated with better youth outcomes (Furstenberg, et al. 1999; Garbarino, et al. 1992; Pettit, Bates, and Dodge 1997).

The effects of parenting also vary by the type of neighborhood in which families reside. The normative effects of monitoring, in promoting prosocial competency and reducing problem behavior, is greater in neighborhoods that are low in collective efficacy. This seems to suggest a compensatory principle, whereby parenting is even more important when parents cannot count on other adults in the neighborhood to help monitor children. While this contrasts with Furstenberg, et al.'s (1999) finding that the benefits of effective parenting are greater in more advantaged neighborhoods, it is more consistent with the original hypothesis that parenting strategies can buffer the ill effects of neighborhood disadvantage (Brooks-Gunn, Duncan, et al. 1993; Burton 1990; Furstenberg 1993; Jarrett 1997b).

With the exception of monitoring, our neighborhood measures had no direct effect on parenting. Nor did neighborhoods moderate the effects of other parenting management variables on our youth outcomes. Most of the neighborhood differences in parenting styles are the result of the neighborhood clustering of socioeconomic and normative family-level factors associated with certain types of parenting practices and not an emergent property of the neighborhoods they reside in. These results are similar to Furstenberg, et al. (1999), who also reported fewer neighborhood differences in family management than expected after controlling for family characteristics.

Neighborhoods are also consequential for youth because they provide a pool of potential friends. Our results show that youth residing in less efficacious and, to a lesser extent, more disadvantaged neighborhoods have more unconventional friends. The findings also confirm that youth with unconventional friends are less prosocial and more likely to exhibit problem behavior (Case and Katz 1991; Crane 1991a, 1991b) and are consistent with claims that contact with such peers undermines commitment to education and academic achievement (Quane and Rankin 1998). Thus, residing in highly disadvantaged neighborhoods does have deleterious consequences for African-American youth, as Wilson (1987, 1996) contends, but mainly because the lack of normative collective socialization provided by neighborhood adults allows unconventional youth peer groups to thrive. Thus, contact with less conventionally-oriented youth peer groups appears to be a key factor in the link between neighborhood disadvantage and weak social organization, on the one hand, and less successful youth outcomes, on the other (Crane 1991a; Massey and Denton 1993; Quane and Rankin 1998; Sampson and Groves 1989; Shaw and McKay 1942).

That fact that our neighborhood effects stem largely from collective efficacy supports claims that neighborhood social organization is more important than ecological disadvantage for some outcomes (Bursik and Grasmick 1993; Newman 1992), including, in this case, parental behavior. If parents adopt certain management strategies based on their perception of neighborhood risk and opportunity (see Furstenberg 1993; Jarrett 1997a), the signals they are responding to may be social organizational rather than ecological or structural. Our results suggest that it is the perception of collective efficacy that alters parenting practices and not the level of disadvantage per se. Indeed, net of collective efficacy, African-American family management regimes in the more disadvantaged neighborhoods of our study are similar to those residing in better-off neighborhoods.

A final implication related to neighborhoods has to do with the scope of youth outcomes that are influenced by youth-centered social control mechanisms that grow out of informal neighborhood social organization processes. While researchers documented its effects on crime, they also hypothesize that collective efficacy is potentially salient to a broader array of youth outcomes (Sampson, et al. 1999). Our results suggest that its relevance may extend to family and peer processes as well, in this case, the control of youth peer groups and the level of parental monitoring.

The above notwithstanding, as most research shows, family factors are much more important predictors of adolescent outcomes than neighborhoods. Our results are generally consistent with research showing benefits to youth from parental supervision and involvement and more structured home environments (Eccles and Harold 1993; Larzelere and Patterson 1990; Spencer, et al. 1990; Steinberg, et al. 1992), including the conventional wisdom that supportive parenting enhances a child's chances by reducing contact with negative peers (Dornbusch, et al. 1985; Steinberg 1987). It is also worth noting that, at least for the urban African-American families in our sample, parenting and family normative orientations matter more than socioeconomic resources or family structure. For the most part, the advantages of socioeconomic status for urban African-American youth are transmitted through more effective parenting and, to a lesser extent, family norms and values. Youth of parents who hold conventional values and are more intolerant of youth deviancy report higher levels of social competency. Since differences in the normative content of socialization are related to social class (Kohn and Schooler 1983), one implication of our analytic strategy is that separating SES and family culture variables may understate the effects of socioeconomic status.

Furthermore, the view that African-American children residing in single-parent welfare households are especially at risk, finds only marginal support here (Kalil and Eccles 1998).<sup>7</sup> Welfare receipt and solo parenting had no *direct* effect on either youth outcome and those *indirect* effects were obtained are minor in comparison to parenting and peer effects. In fact, the parenting practices of welfare mothers in our study are not much different than non-welfare

mothers. While parental involvement is lower among recipients, welfare receipt is likely to be confounded with various factors that constrain opportunities for parent-child co-activities (e.g., financial resources and access to recreational facilities). Negotiating the social welfare system is also a time-consuming task that interferes with activities with children (McLanahan and Sandefur 1994). Solo parenting also contributes indirectly to less optimal youth outcomes by making it more difficult to control child peer associations and be involved in children's lives (Dornbusch, et al. 1985; McLanahan, Astone, and Marks 1991; Steinberg 1987).

In sum, although our study focuses on urban African-American youth, who as a group are most likely to suffer the deleterious consequences of neighborhood disadvantage (Wilson 1987, 1996), neighborhood effects on both successful and problematic adolescent outcomes are relatively modest. Families and peer groups are clearly more important as contextual factors affecting adolescents. The smaller than expected neighborhood effects, however, are similar to previous research on neighborhoods (Elliott, et al. 1996; Furstenberg, et al. 1999; Jencks and Mayer 1990; Leventhal and Brooks-Gunn 2000) and are consistent with claims that the influence of neighborhoods is declining in recent decades (Sampson 1999; Taub, et al. 1977).

However, any dismissal of neighborhoods as an important developmental context, and, by implication, as a potential target for policies designed to promote better youth outcomes, would be premature. First, limitations posed by the study design may be suppressing the size of the neighborhood effect. Similar to many neighborhood studies, our sample consists of a somewhat restricted range of neighborhoods (i.e., predominantly African-American and located in Chicago). A more appropriate test of neighborhood effects requires sampling a full range of neighborhoods—both urban and suburban—in multiple metropolitan areas. Costly as it would be, efforts should be made to collect data in neighborhoods that reflect a broader range of socioeconomic strata and racial and ethnic composition.

Furthermore, most neighborhood studies, including ours, use census tracts to proxy neighborhoods. The use of tracts may not correspond well with actual neighborhood boundaries, to say nothing of the thornier issue of how residents define and use their neighborhood (Sampson 1999; Tienda 1989). New ways of constructing neighborhood boundaries to better reflect residential definitions and uses of neighborhoods are needed. Moving away from census tract boundaries would also discourage the over-reliance on census data to measure neighborhoods and shift attention back to neighborhood social organization. Our findings support the need for a more extensive study of the community and neighborhood-level social organizational features that affect families and youth (Furstenberg, et al. 1999; Leventhal and Brooks-Gunn 2000; Sampson 1999; Sampson, Raudenbush, and Earls 1997).

Our findings also highlight the importance of moving beyond the "black box" view of neighborhood effects by beginning to explore alternative pathways linking neighborhoods and child outcomes (Jencks and Mayer 1990). Future research should focus on how neighborhoods influence other social contexts, not only families and peers, but also schools and community organizations that serve youth. Furthermore, since the effects of some parenting practices vary by the level of neighborhood collective efficacy, the idea of a neighborhood-parenting contextual fit is supported (Furstenberg, et al. 1999; Jarrett 1997a). The possibility that the influence of other social contextual processes may depend on the neighborhood they embedded in should also be explored.

We conclude that the process by which neighborhoods impact children is a highly contingent one requiring a much better understanding of the interplay of neighborhood conditions, family and parenting types, and the characteristics of children. As yet, no comprehensive study of variation in the susceptibility of individuals and families to the influence of neighborhoods has been conducted. Future research should explore whether there are particular configurations of individual, family, and neighborhood factors that make some children more susceptible to developmental risk than others.

**Appendix • HLM Error Variance Component Statistics. (Significance tests are chi-square tests for significant neighborhood-level variation)**

|                         | Parental<br>Monitoring | Parental<br>Involvement | Family<br>Rules | Positive<br>Friends | Prosocial<br>Competency | Problem<br>Behavior |
|-------------------------|------------------------|-------------------------|-----------------|---------------------|-------------------------|---------------------|
| ANOVA <sup>a</sup>      |                        |                         |                 |                     |                         |                     |
| Between neighborhood    | .07***                 | .28***                  | .10***          | .16***              | .20***                  | .03**               |
| Within neighborhood     | .90                    | .74                     | .94             | .79                 | .76                     | .88                 |
| ANCOVA <sup>b</sup>     |                        |                         |                 |                     |                         |                     |
| Between neighborhood    | .07***                 | .19***                  | .08***          | .12***              | .03**                   | .01 <sup>+</sup>    |
| Within neighborhood     | .84                    | .64                     | .87             | .71                 | .58                     | .78                 |
| Full model <sup>c</sup> |                        |                         |                 |                     |                         |                     |
| Between neighborhood    | .04**                  | .20***                  | .08***          | .05***              | .03**                   | .01 <sup>+</sup>    |
| Within neighborhood     | .84                    | .64                     | .87             | .71                 | .58                     | .77                 |

\* p < .05    \*\* p < .01    \*\*\* p < .001    <sup>+</sup> p < .10.  
<sup>a</sup> One-way analysis of variance with random effects.  
<sup>b</sup> Analysis of covariance (individual-level variables only).  
<sup>c</sup> Combined neighborhood-level and individual-level variables.

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