Racial Stratification and the Durable Tangle of Neighborhood Inequality

By
ROBERT J. SAMPSON

This article revisits neglected arguments of the Moynihan Report to yield insights for a contemporary understanding of racial inequality in American cities. The author argues that the logic of Moynihan's reasoning implies three interlinked hypotheses: (1) the tangle of "pathology," or what today we call social dislocations, has a deep neighborhood structure, as does socioeconomic disadvantage; (2) the tangle of neighborhood inequality is durable and generates self-reinforcing properties that, because of racial segregation, are most pronounced in the black community; and (3) neighborhood "poverty traps" can ultimately only be broken with government structural interventions and macro-level policies. Examining longitudinal neighborhood-level data from Chicago and the United States as a whole, the author finds overall support for these hypotheses. Despite urban social transformations in the post-Moynihan era, neighborhoods remained remarkably stable in their relative economic standing. Poverty is also stubbornly persistent in its ecological concentration with other social disadvantages, especially in the black community.

Keywords: Daniel Patrick Moynihan; *The Negro Family*; Chicago; neighborhoods; durable inequality; "poverty traps"; racial stratification

Social scientists are commonly criticized for their poor predictions and tendency to focus on minutiae. We are so often reminded—albeit after the fact—that we fail to anticipate crucial events and miss the proverbial big picture. A revisit to the Moynihan Report shows us how a different kind of social science got many important things right—*prospectively*, not looking backward. With a no-holds-barred, unflinching eye, Daniel Patrick Moynihan forecast key social trends and identified fundamental social problems confronting the urban United States (Moynihan 1965), perhaps none more salient than the so-called "tangle of pathology" in the black ghetto (see also Clark 1965). The language was unusually blunt, which ignited a firestorm

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of protest that was not soon forgotten. To this day, the term *pathology* is avoided like the plague among social scientists.

Yet, many of the underlying facts Moynihan confronted remain stubbornly alike to this day, compelling us to address the world as it is, not only as we wish it to be. In this spirit my goal is to dig a bit deeper, getting beyond the timeworn "pathology" debate and focusing instead on the larger notion of what I think Moynihan was trying to achieve. My take, like that of Kenneth B. Clark's similarly unflinching portrait at the same time (1965), is that Moynihan wanted social policy to focus primarily on the "tangle"—the knot of inequality in U.S. cities that resides at the structural and social-ecological level, not just the individual or family level.[1] My specific thesis is that Moynihan identified a *neighborhood* tangle of inequality—one inextricably tied to race—and that he emphasized its *durability of influence* absent *government intervention*. Furthermore, the neighborhood tangle of inequality implied the disproportionate or unique causal exposure in the lives of black children to a bundle of spatially defined disadvantages. I believe Moynihan was right to warn about the differential exposure to risk imposed by racial stratification.

Consider first the very idea of the tangle. Many view the Moynihan Report as an indictment of joblessness as the primary driver of social problems. Although joblessness was always high on the agenda, the facts provoked Moynihan to emphasize *interconnections*, not single variables. Throughout the report he noted how family instability, joblessness, poor health, substance abuse, poverty, welfare dependency, and crime were intertwined. In chapter 3, "The Roots of the Problem," Moynihan cited ecological analyses in Washington, D.C., on what we might today call "concentration effects." For example, he described in some detail the correlation of illegitimacy rates in census tracts with male unemployment and poverty rates. He also noted Franklin Frazier and the work of other social scientists on social disadvantages in the city. Although not cited in the original report, this genre is perhaps best exemplified in the classic *Black Metropolis*, originally published in 1945 (Drake and Cayton 1945/1993), and later in Clark's *Dark Ghetto* (1965). As shown in the original publication *Black Metropolis*, from "disease and death" (p. 205) to "poverty and social disorganization" (p. 203), the city of Chicago in the mid-twentieth century was highly stratified by an ecological structure of disadvantage and risk.

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Unfortunately, not much has changed. More than seventy years later, specific neighborhoods may have shifted or traded places, with poverty tending to move outward from the inner city, but the pattern of ecological concentration and racial stratification remains (Sampson and Morenoff 2006). Akin to Drake and Cayton's (1945/1993) maps, for example, I have shown that the ecological distribution of homicides matches the distribution of low-birth-weight babies (Sampson 2003, 54). There is nary a difference in the ecological pattern despite the seemingly distinct etiological origins of these two phenomena. Dozens of other maps could make the same point about concentrated health risks.

In short, evidence indicates that "things go together" still—that not much has changed since Moynihan's day in terms of the general mechanisms of uneven spatial concentration. A host of social problems and dislocations (pathologies?)—call them what you will—are undeniably clustered for many in society who lack the resources to escape communities of disadvantage. Although often overlooked, Moynihan was insistent on this point, so much so that in what is arguably the most important chapter of his report, "The Case for National Action," he argues against the singular "variable" approach (Abbott 1997) and for a holistic approach that turns on the tangle, or knot of connections. To quote directly,

> It is our view that the problem is so inter-related, one thing with another, that any list of program proposals would necessarily be incomplete, and would distract attention from the main point of *inter-relatedness* [emphasis added]. We have shown a clear relation between male employment, for example, and the number of welfare dependent children. Employment in turn reflects educational achievement, which depends in large part on family stability, which reflects employment. Where we should break into this cycle, and how, are the most difficult domestic questions facing the United States. (Moynihan 1965, chap. 3, p. 1)

Furthermore, Moynihan coupled interconnectedness with durability and posited the idea of reinforcing cycles or what today might be called "poverty traps" (Bowles, Durlauf, and Hoff 2006). He noted at the beginning of his report that "so long as this situation persists, the cycle of poverty and disadvantage will continue to repeat itself." And in the final policy chapter, he warned that "three centuries of injustice have brought about deep-seated structural distortions in the life of the Negro American" and that the "present tangle of pathology is capable of perpetuating itself without assistance from the white world. The cycle can be broken only if these distortions are set right" (Moynihan 1965, chap. 5, p. 1). In other words, he argued that once set in motion, racially linked poverty is a trap that reinforces itself and that requires structural interventions to break.

Rereading the document in light of current knowledge, I would argue that Moynihan's logic implies three broad ideas or theses that are themselves interlinked:

1. The tangle of pathology (what today we call social dislocations or social problems) has a deep neighborhood or ecological structure, as does socioeconomic disadvantage.
2. The tangle of neighborhood inequality is durable and generates self-reinforcing properties that, because of racial segregation, are most pronounced in the black community. I would add to that a related implication or subthesis: black children are uniquely exposed

to the cumulative effects of concentrated structural disadvantage in ways that reinforce the cycle.

3. The "poverty trap" cycle can ultimately only be broken with structural interventions of the sort that government and other macro-level policies are best equipped to induce.

In this article, I present a sequence of empirical evidence in support of the first two of these ideas. I believe the jury is still out on the third thesis and will be for some time. I nonetheless present suggestive evidence in support of the "no change absent structural intervention" thesis and suggest avenues for further assessment. Overall, the data I shall present are descriptive, but I do not apologize for that—I believe modern social science has denigrated descriptive and synthetic work that is every bit as important as seemingly more advanced causal models. After all, pattern recognition is a fundamental goal of science. My work is based mainly (but not exclusively) on the social laboratory of Chicago because I have spent well over a decade studying this quintessentially American city, the site of much seminal work on urban poverty. My hope is that the current analysis will spur new insights and the motivation to study the fundamentals of stability and change in racial inequality in multiple places and time periods.

Thesis 1: Things Go Together

As Shaw and McKay (1942) showed us in the Chicago of the 1920s and 1930s, Drake and Cayton (1945/1993) in the mid-twentieth century, and Wilson (1987) and Massey and Denton (1993) near century's end, all manner of social problems, typically considered "outcomes," cluster together spatially. Whether low birth weight or murder, compromised well-being remains concentrated in early-twenty-first-century Chicago. This pattern suggests a deep continuity to the urban concentration of well-being. But what about what are often considered the structural *sources* of well-being, such as unemployment, segregation, poverty, or family structure—the staples of Moynihan's reasoning? There are theoretical reasons to expect that socioeconomic and family factors cluster together in certain communities as well and that this process may be implicated in the long-standing association of social disadvantage with health, crime, and other quality-of-life indicators (Massey, Condran, and Denton 1987; Massey and Shibuya 1995).

In particular, Wilson (1987) famously argued that the social transformation of inner-city areas in the decades of the 1970s and 1980s resulted in an increased concentration of the most disadvantaged segments of the urban black population—especially poor, female-headed families. The consequences of these differential ecological distributions are profound because they mean that relationships between race and individual outcomes are systematically confounded with important differences in community contexts. The concentration of poverty and also joblessness (Wilson 1996) has been argued to result from macrostructural economic changes related to the de-industrialization of central cities where low-income minorities are disproportionately located. These changes include a shift

from goods-producing to service-producing industries, the increasing polarization of the labor market into low-wage and high-wage sectors, and the relocation of manufacturing out of the inner city. According to Wilson, the related exodus of middle- and upper-income black families from the inner-city also removed an important social buffer that could potentially deflect the full impact of prolonged joblessness and industrial transformation (Wilson 1987, 56). The social milieu of increasing stratification among blacks differs significantly from the environment that existed in inner-city neighborhoods in previous decades. Wilson (1996) argues, in other words, that income mixing within communities was more characteristic of ghetto neighborhoods during previous decades, whereas inequality among communities today has become more pronounced as a result of the increasing spatial separation of middle- and upper-income blacks from lower-income blacks (see also Jargowsky 1997).

Focusing instead on racial segregation, Massey and Denton (1993) describe how increasing social differentiation caused by economic dislocation interacts with the spatial concentration of a minority group to create a set of structural circumstances that reinforce the effects of social and economic deprivation. They show that, in a segregated environment, exogenous economic shocks that cause a downward shift in the distribution of minority income not only bring about an increase in the poverty rate for the group as a whole but also cause an increase in the geographic concentration of poverty. This geographic intensification of poverty occurs because the additional poverty created by macroeconomic conditions is spread unevenly over the metropolitan area (Morenoff and Sampson 1997). That is, as segregation increases, a smaller number of neighborhoods absorb the shock, resulting in a more severe concentration of poverty (Massey and Denton 1993; Massey and Eggers 1990). Recent work by Quillian (1999) shows that the distinct mechanisms hypothesized by Wilson and Massey are both operative and combine to produce the high levels of racially stratified urban poverty that we see in the United States.

Concentrated disadvantage and racial stratification

Taken as a whole, empirical research on social-ecological differentiation lines up well with the central assertion in the Moynihan Report and expectations from the Wilson-Massey debate that (1) considerable social inequality exists between neighborhoods in terms of socioeconomic and racial/ethnic segregation,[2] and (2) these factors are connected in that concentrated poverty and other correlates of disadvantage coincide with the geographic isolation of racial minority and immigrant groups (Sampson, Morenoff, and Gannon-Rowley 2002). Moreover, these patterns are not unique to any one city and extend across multiple ecological units of analysis ranging from census tracts to metropolitan areas and even states (Land, McCall, and Cohen 1990).

I extend the debate by considering here new evidence on empirical patterns for a core set of socioeconomic indicators for Chicago and the United States. My colleagues and I (Sampson, Sharkey, and Raudenbush 2008) recently investigated

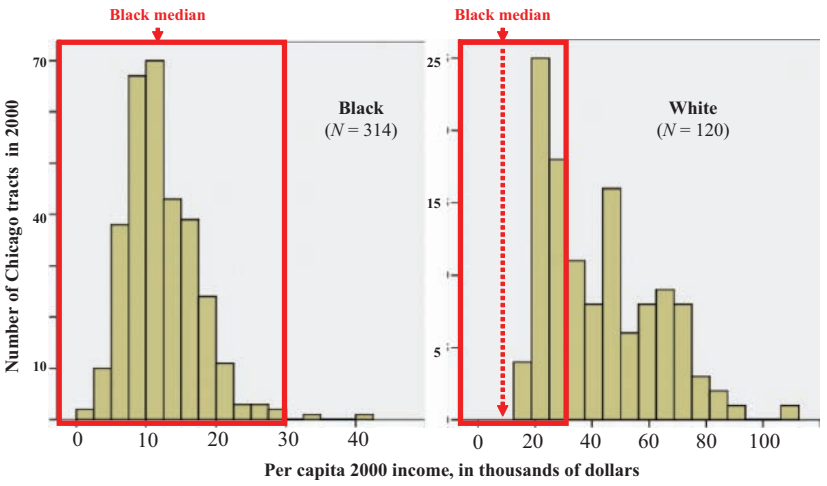
the notion that disadvantage is not encompassed in a single characteristic but rather is a synergistic composite of social factors that mark the qualitative aspects of growing up in truly disadvantaged neighborhoods (Wilson 1987). We focused on six characteristics of census tracts nationwide, taken from the 1990 and 2000 Census, to create a measure of concentrated disadvantage: welfare receipt, poverty, unemployment, female-headed households, racial composition (percentage black), and density of children. These indicators formed a single principal component of "concentrated disadvantage" across both decades in both Chicago and the rest of the United States, the latter representing some sixty-five thousand census tracts (Sampson, Sharkey, and Raudenbush 2008, table 1, p. 848). The main difference of note between the United States as a whole and Chicago neighborhoods is that the exposure of children under 18 years of age to concentrated economic disadvantage and racial segregation is more pronounced in Chicago.

There are important implications of this synergistic clustering for studying any race-specific outcome. When we defined concentrated disadvantage as falling within the most disadvantaged quartile of Chicago census tracts, for example, the result was that *no* white families and only a few Hispanic families in a representative sample of children from Chicago lived in disadvantage. This result is not simply attributable to percentage black being included in the scale of concentrated disadvantage. When we re-created the scale of concentrated disadvantage with no measure of neighborhood racial composition, the resulting scale correlated at .99 with the initial scale that includes percentage black.

The stratification of Chicago's urban landscape by race precludes the estimation of a single causal effect of disadvantage for all racial groups, as commonly attempted in the literature. Thus, our initial attempts to estimate causal models using pooled samples consisting of all racial and ethnic groups failed precisely because of the lack of "common support" in the exposure variable—only by defining poverty very broadly, and by ignoring segregation, can we include whites and even most Hispanics, but at that point virtually all blacks are at risk of exposure to the treatment because of concentrated racial inequality (Sampson, Sharkey, and Raudenbush 2008, 849). As Massey and Denton (1993) argue more generally, race and the multiple dimensions of disadvantage are ecologically intertwined and thus confounded at the neighborhood level in most large U.S. cities.

To grasp this point visually, Figure 1 presents the simple per capita income distribution in 2000 in black and white neighborhoods in Chicago (defined here as census tracts with 75 percent or more of each group). The left panel indicates the location of the median for per capita income in neighborhoods that are predominantly black. The right panel shows the distribution of income in white neighborhoods, with an arrow denoting the location of the black median. The bottom-line result is that residents in not one white community experience what is most typical for those residing in segregated black areas with respect to the basics of income—the entire distribution for white communities sits to the right of the mean of black communities. Trying to estimate the effect of concentrated disadvantage on whites is thus tantamount to estimating a phantom reality.

FIGURE 1
DISPARATE INCOME DISTRIBUTIONS IN NEIGHBORHOODS WITH 75-PERCENT-PLUS WHITE AND BLACK POPULATION, CHICAGO 2000

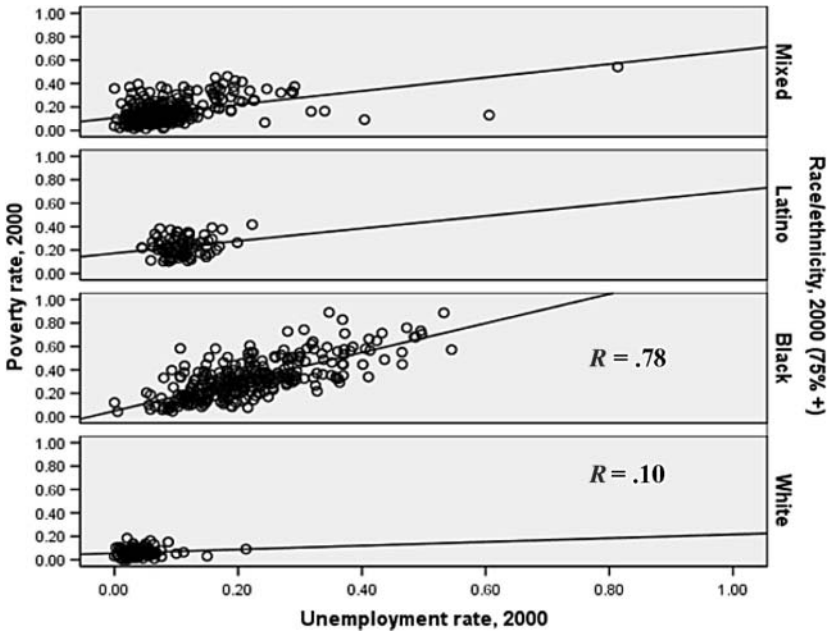


NOTE: Black mean = $12,276 ($2,465-$42,011); White mean = $42,508 ($15,040-$107,023).

I argued above that Moynihan's tangle of pathology thesis implied that the knot of inequality was also tighter in the black community than the white community. In some sense, Figure 1 already confirms this point, but another way to examine this thesis more directly is to examine how the relationship between the unemployment rate and poverty varies by the racial status of the neighborhood. Unemployment in the black community was seen by Moynihan as one of the central drivers of poverty, a relationship that he felt was intensified over time by discrimination and segregation. The implication is that resources available in white communities would be able to offset, to some extent, the deleterious connection of unemployment with poverty.

Although indirectly, I assess this prediction by dividing Chicago neighborhoods into four race/ethnic strata. Specifically, I define areas where whites, Latinos, and blacks are 75 percent or more of the population, with mixed areas (where no one group dominates) making up the fourth type. Figure 2 is consistent with the general argument that minority and heterogeneous communities bear a greater burden when unemployment reigns. For example, although the *N* is small, across predominantly white communities there is essentially no relationship between unemployment and poverty rates, whereas across Latino, mixed, and especially black areas the relationship is much stronger ($R = .78$ for variability across segregated black neighborhoods). This finding suggests that the much tighter connection among economic-related indicators in black or minority

FIGURE 2
CONNECTION OF JOBLESSNESS WITH CONCENTRATED POVERTY INTERACTS WITH RACE: CHICAGO 2000

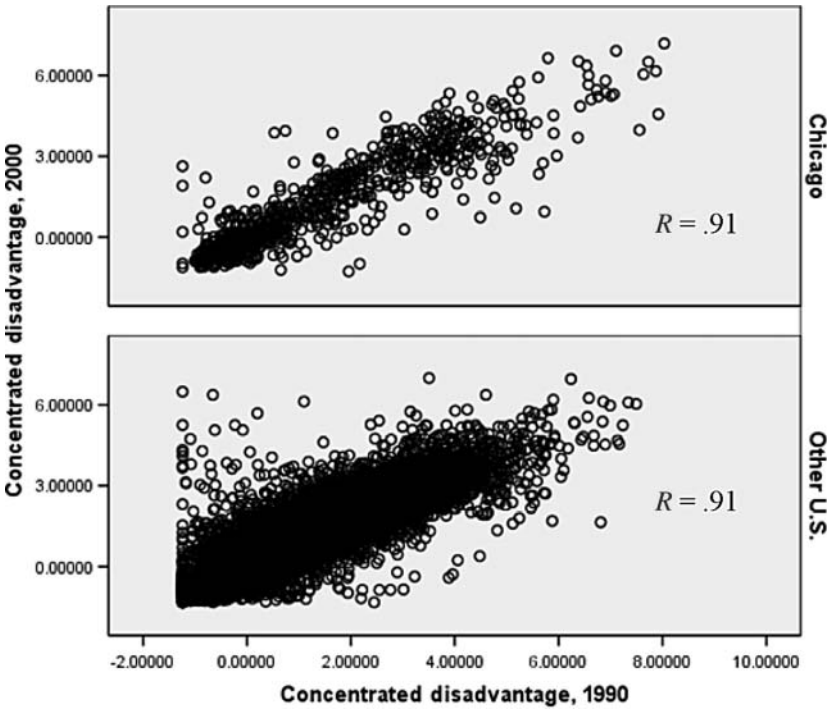


areas compared to white areas is part of what helps create the synergistic intersection of racial segregation with concentrated racial resource disadvantage.

Thesis 2: Durability and Poverty Traps

Perhaps the most provocative component of Moynihan's thesis concerns the durability of racial inequality, a long-standing concern of sociologists most recently developed in the work of the late Charles Tilly (1998). At the neighborhood level, Sampson and Morenoff (2006) presented data from Chicago showing the persistence of poverty during the 1970s through the 1990s, a time of great changes in U.S. cities (Wilson 1987). They reported a very high correlation ($r = .87$) between neighborhood poverty rates in 1970 and 1990 such that neighborhoods that were poor in 1970 generally continued to be poor in 1990. Most of the variance in poverty (67 percent) was also due to differences *between* neighborhoods rather than differences over time *within* neighborhoods, implying that between-neighborhood differences in poverty were quite stable over time. Yet, there was

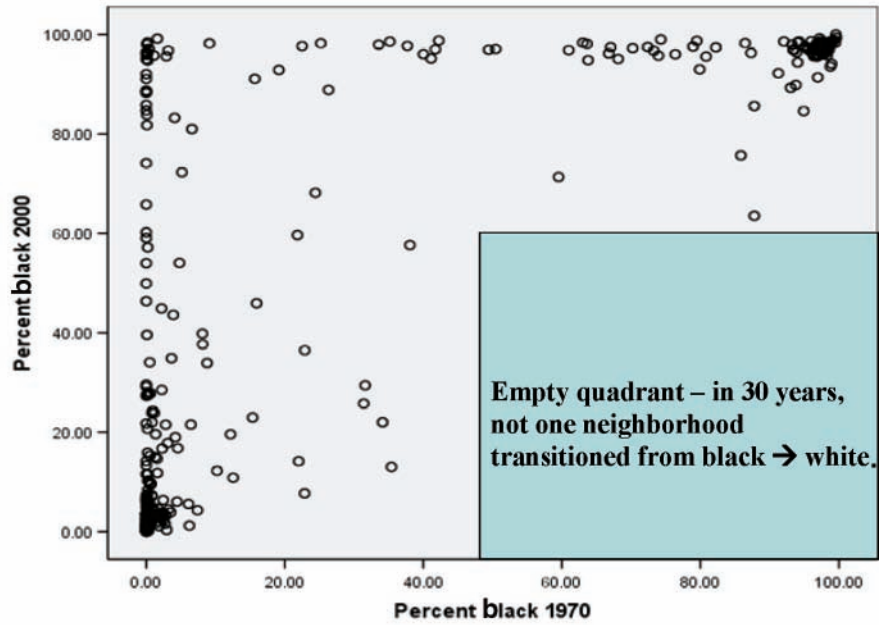
FIGURE 3
DURABILITY OF NEIGHBORHOOD INEQUALITY DURING A DECADE OF GENTRIFICATION: CENSUS TRACTS IN CHICAGO (N = 844) AND REST OF UNITED STATES (N = 64,902), 1990-2000



significant secular change, as the poverty rate for the average neighborhood increased from 11 percent in 1970 to 20 percent in 1990. This change was even more pronounced at the upper tail of the neighborhood poverty distribution. The 75th percentile of the distribution corresponded to a poverty rate of only 14 percent in 1970, but by 1990, it had more than doubled, increasing to 30 percent. In short, there was a dramatic growth in neighborhood poverty between 1970 and 1990, but despite this change, there was stability in the relative rank order of neighborhoods vis-à-vis poverty. Neighborhood poverty was thus both a persistent and increasingly prevalent condition.

I turn now to the most recent decade, one considered by many students of the city to be characterized by gentrification. Does stability still hold? Figure 3 provides a clear answer, and not just for Chicago. Using a principal-component, regression-weighted scale of the concentrated disadvantage indicators introduced above,[3] I plot the relationship predicting disadvantage in 2000 from 1990

FIGURE 4
STABLE ASYMMETRY OF RACIAL CHANGE OVER THREE DECADES IN CHICAGO: 1970-2000



disadvantage. Whether for the city of Chicago or for the sixty-four thousand census tracts across the rest of the United States, overall disadvantage demonstrates strong inertial tendencies at the ecological level. Note that the correlation is greater than .9 at both the local and national level with an identical pattern.

To further elaborate the persistence of racial segregation, I extend the analysis of Sampson and Morenoff (2006) by examining *changes* in racial composition across a period of three decades. Figure 4 plots the percentage of a neighborhood's population that was black in 2000 against percentage black in 1970, just before the major urban transformations Wilson (1987) wrote about. This graph shows that where racial change is abundant it is structured in an asymmetric way, yielding three types of neighborhoods. The first two reflect durable segregation—those that are stably black (upper right) and those that are stably white (lower left). The third type reflects transitional neighborhoods that went either from all white to black or partially black to segregated black (up the left side and across top)—"white flight." That much is not a surprise.

What is startling is the missing fourth type—in the third largest city in America, *not one neighborhood transitioned from black to white*. The lack of observations in the lower-right quadrant of the graph indicates that none of the areas that had large percentages of black population in 1970 lost significant shares over time. In fact, there appears to be a threshold effect of around 40

percent black, above which all neighborhoods either maintained or increased their share of black population. Figure 4 thus tells a story of change within a stable ecological system: there were great shifts in neighborhood racial composition from 1970 to 1990, but neighborhoods that were initially black stayed that way over time, while at the same time, many areas of the city remained off-limits to blacks. In light of this pattern, Chicago has the distinction of being not just one of the most racially segregated cities in America (Massey and Denton 1993) but one that is durably so.

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Another implication of Moynihan's reasoning, as explicated above, is that the grip of neighborhood inequality—the tangle—is exacerbated in the black community and is therefore more durable. The empirical expectation is that we should see more persistence in disadvantage in minority or black communities than white ones. Chicago, with its segregated urban structure, affords an opportunity to assess this notion within relatively homogeneous subgroups. Similar to Figure 2, I again disaggregate the city into four race/ethnic strata—predominantly white, black, Latino, and other (mixed). Figure 5 presents the persistence over the decade of the 1990s of concentrated disadvantage by race/ethnicity. In minority areas, the continuity is much higher, but the pattern is especially striking when comparing segregated black neighborhoods, where the correlation is .83, to white neighborhoods, where the stability is much less (.24).

This divergent pattern is even more evident for the durability of unemployment that Moynihan emphasized. For simplicity, Figure 6 presents the prediction of neighborhood unemployment rates in 2000 from unemployment rates in 1990 for predominantly black compared to predominantly white neighborhoods. The pattern is rather unambiguous. In Chicago at least, the correlation of unemployment over time is high (.64) in the black community but nonexistent in the white community. Note, too, that the distributions are for all intents and purposes incomparable, explaining the differential correlations. Most white neighborhoods

FIGURE 5
DURABILITY OF CONCENTRATED DISADVANTAGE INTERACTS WITH RACIAL STRATIFICATION, CHICAGO 1990-2000

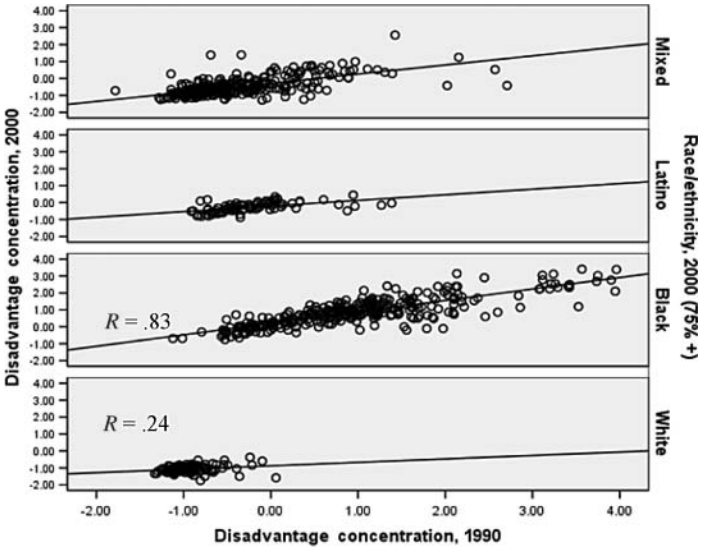
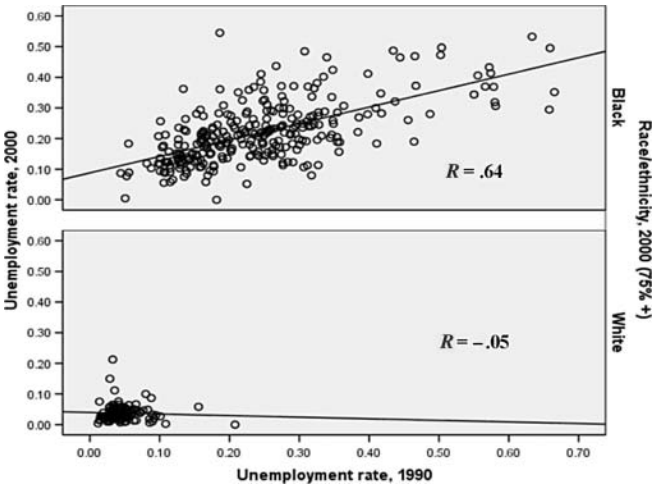


FIGURE 6
DURABILITY OF NEIGHBORHOOD JOBLESSNESS INTERACTS WITH RACE, CHICAGO 1990-2000



sit to the left of where the black distribution even starts. Once again, the data reveal that blacks and whites in segregated communities live in different social worlds. Much in the way that Moynihan worried about in 1965, unemployment appears to recycle itself in the black community.

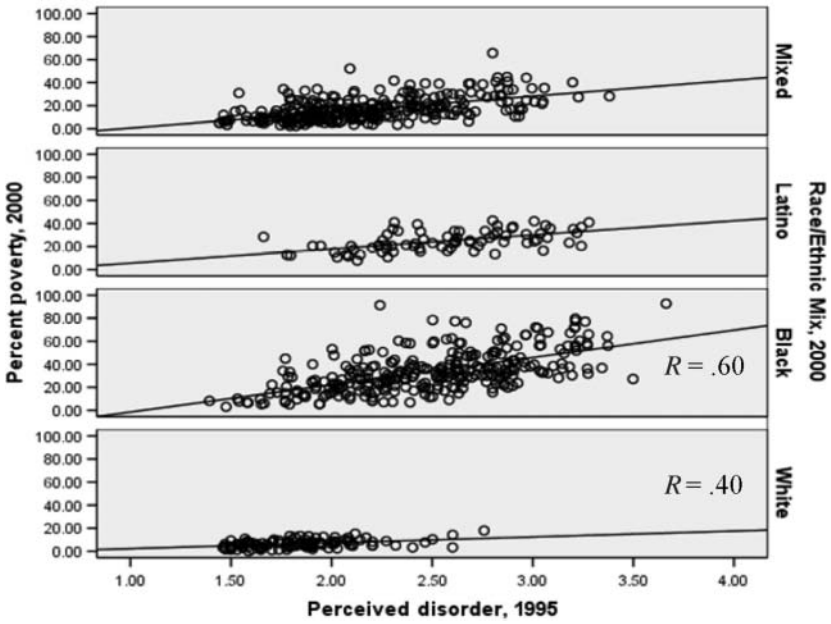
The role of disorder and violence

Beginning about 1965, which Robert Putnam (2000) argues is the point of decline of American civic life, crime rates began to explode in American cities. They rose to unprecedented heights and fluctuated at high levels in the 1970s and 1980s, a period of intensifying concentration of poverty. I believe that crime, disorder, and violence have been overlooked in the feedback processes that help perpetuate poverty traps, especially in precipitating selective out-migration from central cities burdened with high rates of victimization. For example, there is evidence that fear of violence leads to a "hunkering down" and shunning of neighbors and local institutions that otherwise might support local social control (Skogan 1990). In this way, crime is both influenced by and reciprocally influences the informal control structures and mobilization capacity of communities. Violence and robbery may also prompt the withdrawal of businesses and middle-class families from inner-city areas, which may fuel more crime and a further deepening of poverty. Moreover, in areas of segregated poverty, violence may beget violence by way of predatory forms of adaptation (Massey 1995), again potentially feeding into a vicious cycle.

Neighborhoods with high crime and "signs of disorder" are especially prone to developing reputations as "bad" and thus to be avoided. Stigmatization sets in, and when linked to the historical legacy in U.S. cities whereby racial segregation and poverty are bound up with structural patterns of disinvestment (Massey and Denton 1993), a form of self-fulfilling prophecy can take place (Loury 2002). Residents acting on their perceptions of disorder will undertake actions that have the effect of increasing that very disorder (Sampson and Raudenbush 2004).

Although the number of empirical studies is small, empirical evidence indicates that crime does undermine the social and economic fabric of urban areas. Bursik (1986) found that delinquency rates are not only one of the outcomes of urban change but also an important part of the process of urban change. Studying Chicago neighborhoods, Bursik found that "although changes in racial composition cause increases in the delinquency rate, this effect is not nearly as great as the effect that increases in the delinquency rate have in minority groups being stranded in the community" (p. 73). In a study of forty neighborhoods in eight cities, Skogan (1990) found that high rates of crime and disorder were associated with higher rates of fear, neighborhood dissatisfaction, and intentions to move out. Morenoff and Sampson (1997) showed that increases in violent crime along with proximity to violence contributed to the population loss and decline of neighborhoods in Chicago. The effect of crime on population loss is also observed at the city level. More than twenty years ago, I showed in a study that

FIGURE 7
PERCEIVED DISORDER PREDICTS LATER POVERTY:
CHICAGO NEIGHBORHOODS 1995 TO 2000



increases in homicide were strongly associated with population decline and increases in the poverty of the black population in a sample of major U.S. cities, independent of the usual demographic predictors of urban change (Sampson 1986). Liska and Bellair (1995) similarly found that robbery rates played a significant role in white flight from central cities, therefore exacerbating racially segregated urban poverty.

I extend this line of inquiry here by considering the role of perceived disorder as conceptualized by Sampson and Raudenbush (2004). Using the same 1995 community survey, I examine a scale that taps neighborhood-level differences in the perception of both physical aspects of disorder (e.g., graffiti) and social aspects of disorder (e.g., public drinking). I specifically consider the simple prediction of *future* poverty from prior states of subjectively perceived disorder. Figure 7 demonstrates a positive prediction in a pattern that is becoming repetitive, with black neighborhoods again bearing the brunt of the underlying dynamics. Note that in predominantly black areas, perceptions of disorder foretell where a neighborhood will end up in the stratification hierarchy. The prediction line is flatter and the correlation smaller for white areas. Is this just due to past poverty?

The answer is no, at least in minority areas, for when I control for poverty in 1990, disorder still significantly predicts poverty in 2000 in mixed, Latino, and black neighborhoods ($p < .01$). Only in white neighborhoods is the disorder-poverty prediction attenuated ($p > .05$), which suggests that stigmatization by disorder carries a strong racial undertone when it comes to understanding population dynamics of the city (Quillian and Pager 2001).

In short, many cities and neighborhoods, especially in the North and Midwest, not only have lost population but also have become poorer and more racially isolated in recent decades (Wilson 1987; Massey and Denton 1993). An important part of this racially selective decline in population and economic status may stem from increases in violent crime (Morenoff and Sampson 1997) and stigmatizing perceptions of disorder (Sampson and Raudenbush 2004), suggesting that research on poverty traps needs to expand its theoretical framework on urban change.

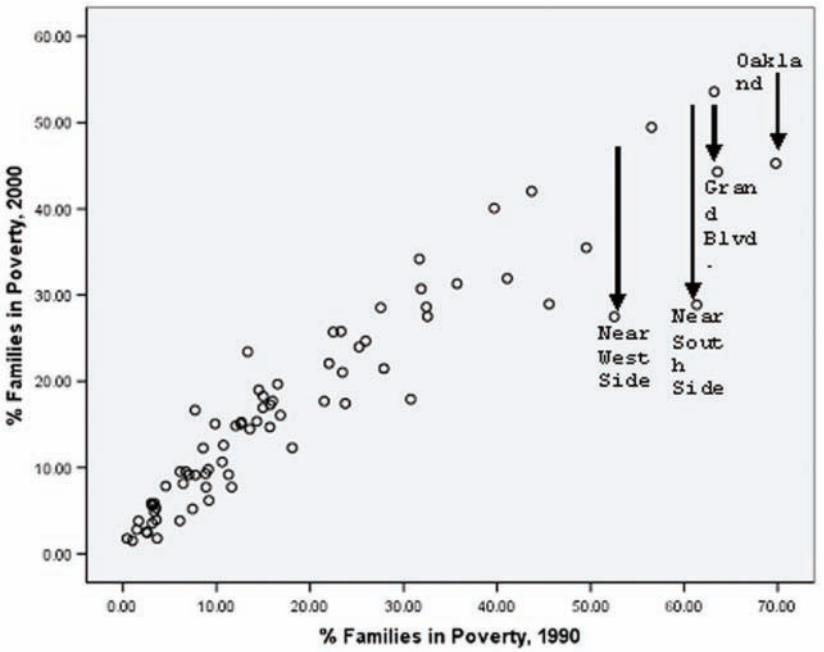
Thesis 3: Structural Interventions: Breaking the Trap?

How can the durable inequality I have documented be changed? This question is the hardest of all, and as Moynihan seemed to intuit, there are no easy answers. This is especially true in a culture where freedom of choice, and hence resident movement, is highly valued.

Recent work in Chicago has therefore attempted to increase our knowledge of processes of inequality by taking seriously individual selection decisions and neighborhood choice. It turns out that even when we consider a host of individual characteristics of movers and stayers alike, concentrated racial inequality is reproduced, suggesting in a different way that powerful social forces undergird a stable equilibrium of ecologically based racial stratification (Sampson and Sharkey 2008). In particular, the lion's share of racial and ethnic inequality in neighborhood attainment cannot be explained by changing economic circumstances, life cycle stage, or other major characteristics of families or individuals that might influence residential decisions. After accounting for these and other factors typically not considered in the mobility literature, we found that whites attain neighborhoods that are substantially more affluent than do nonwhites (see also Massey, Condran, and Denton 1987; Massey and Fong 1990).

Furthermore, consistent with the logic of Moynihan's overarching thesis, race interacts with changes in the racial composition of the origin neighborhood to influence the likelihood that an individual will move and thereby exacerbate patterns of segregation. Specifically, whites *and* Latinos living in Chicago neighborhoods with growing populations of nonwhites are more likely to exit the city, providing evidence that realized mobility arises, at least in part, as a response to changes in the racial mix of the origin neighborhood (Sampson and Sharkey 2008, 20). The same, however, is not true of black families—it is not African Americans' preference for same-race neighbors that seems to matter as much as whites' and

FIGURE 8
NO CHANGE ABSENT INTERVENTION? CONCENTRATED POVERTY IN CHICAGO COMMUNITY AREAS, 1990-2000



Latinos' eagerness to exit neighborhoods with growing populations of blacks (Charles 2000, 2001, 2003). Neighborhood conditions appear to matter a great deal for influencing neighborhood selection decisions, suggesting a different kind of neighborhood effect—*sorting as a social process* in the reproduction of urban inequality.

Additional research is necessary to clarify how discrimination and revealed preferences for "in-group" and "out-group" neighbors interact to produce what appears to be a stratified pattern of neighborhood poverty traps (Sampson and Morenoff 2006). It is likely that some of the inequality reproduction is "chosen," not in the sense of an intended consequence but because African Americans trade off more affluent white neighborhoods for ones perceived to be more hospitable and racially diverse, not unreasonably given the grim history of U.S. race relations. There is also evidence that members of minority groups make residential sorting decisions based on their perceptions of a racialized hierarchy of places, even if felt to be unjust, and net of legal or outright institutional discrimination (Bobo and Zubrinsky 1996; Wilson and Taub 2006).

In short, the data suggest that the residential racial stratification visible in Chicago and beyond is reproduced by movers and stayers of every race/ethnic

group (Sampson and Sharkey 2008, 26). This perspective views individuals as making heterogeneous choices and revealing their preferences about where to reside, with the parameters of choice tightly bounded by the stratified landscape in which choices are made. Preferences and structural constraints thus simultaneously and dynamically work together to yield a self-reinforcing cycle of inequality (Loury 2002), or what Tilly (1998) referred to as "durable inequality" and Moynihan earlier referred to as the cycle of poverty. It follows logically that poverty traps are difficult to escape and likely to continue absent state-led interventions (e.g., de-concentration of public housing; community policing) or cultural changes that yield visions of social life where ethnic and class diversity is seen as an urban amenity rather than a stigma (Sampson and Sharkey 2008, 27).

This hypothesis leads to my final example. Figure 8 reconsiders the continuity of concentrated disadvantage during the decade of the 1990s, this time for larger community areas in Chicago that are still widely recognized by administrative agencies, local institutions concerned with service delivery, and residents. These communities have distinct names and reputations that are widely known (e.g., Hyde Park, Grand Boulevard, South Shore, and Lincoln Park) and that serve as markers of difference and symbolic value (Hunter 1974; Wilson and Taub 2006). Community areas also have political force that continues (Suttles 1990), and Wilson's (1987) thesis of concentration effects was developed based on data from community areas in Chicago.

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By putting names to communities, the pattern of change in Figure 8 becomes apparent. The communities that are significantly below the regression line of continuity share a similar profile. Grand Boulevard, Oakland, and the Near South Side were mainly poor black communities that witnessed major interventions, including the dismantling of segregated high-rise public housing and considerable investment by the city and local institutions, such as the University of Chicago, in both the physical infrastructure and educational system (e.g., charter schools). The Near West Side also saw considerable investment by the city and economic developers.

Although not sufficient evidence to support a causal claim, it is notable that each community undergoing large "interventions" saw significant unexpected

declines in the rate of concentrated poverty as predicted from 1990 levels alone. Stability is not inevitable, then—reversal of fortune is possible. But in the case of Chicago at least, and I suspect other cities, structural levers are needed to spur change in deeply distressed minority communities. Examples of other interventions are mixed-income housing developments, industrial zones, and community policing. The larger point is that in an ongoing process with durable or self-reinforcing properties, macro interventions of the sort government is uniquely suited to mount, or support through zoning changes, need to be at the top of our policy considerations and evaluation efforts.

The mid- to late 1990s was an especially propitious time for structural interventions because an important natural change was taking place across much of the country—crime and violence rates were falling sharply. I have noted the centrality of crime and violence in earlier eras in driving down central-city populations and in contributing to the widespread sense of urban decline. The time was thus ripe to take advantage of a renewed appreciation for the viability of cities, reclaiming them from the grip of violence. Indeed, it appears that in places like Chicago, renewal is being witnessed in the heart of what were previously high-crime, very poor, and in many respects devastated areas. No one factor can be credited, but together it appears that smart local decisions, which capitalize on secular changes that are benefiting cities, are possible.

Conclusion

If there is one message of this article, it is that poverty and its correlates are stubbornly persistent in terms of neighborhood concentration, especially for black areas. Despite urban social transformation in the post-Moynihan era (Wilson 1987), neighborhoods remained remarkably stable in their relative economic standing despite the in-flow and out-flow of individual residents. It follows that an enduring poverty vulnerability of neighborhoods is not simply a matter of the current income of residents. Neighborhoods possess reputations both positive and negative, which, when coupled with the residential mobility decisions of residents of all race and income groups, tend to reproduce existing patterns of inequality (Sampson and Sharkey 2008).

What change does occur reveals strong patterns of asymmetry by race and class, which suggests that once a neighborhood is beyond a certain threshold or "tipping point" of either percentage black or percentage poor—but especially the former—further change is invariably in the direction of greater racial homogeneity and more poverty. It is worth repeating that not one neighborhood in Chicago more than 40 percent black in 1970 became predominantly white by 2000, fully thirty years later (see Figure 4). By contrast, a large number of white neighborhoods turned black even as the polar extremes (all-black and all-white neighborhoods) remained the dominant pattern. Neighborhoods also tended either to stay in the same poverty category or move to a higher poverty category over time—upgrading (e.g., gentrification) was quite rare even in the 1990 to 2000 period when we consider concentrated disadvantage whether in Chicago or the United States as a whole.

Although beyond the scope of this article, the consequences of durable and increasing poverty appear to be long-lasting, at least with respect to predicting key social processes. Controlling for the sociodemographic location of individual respondents, for example, Sampson and Morenoff (2006) found that both persistent poverty and increases in poverty from 1970 to 1990 predicted lower collective efficacy and the moral cynicism of neighborhood residents in 1995—a span of some twenty-five years. When adjusting for recent compositional changes (Sampson and Graif forthcoming), trust in 1995 is also lower in neighborhoods that, decades earlier, were characterized by pronounced concentrated poverty. These findings are consistent with the scenario that certain urban neighborhoods get locked into structural dynamics that generate systematic social dynamics, such as mistrust and cynicism, that in turn may contribute to their further stigmatization, disorder, out-migration, crime, withdrawal of civic involvement, and eventually the deepening of poverty.

Overall these findings resonate with the concerns of Moynihan (1965) and those reflected in other works at the time such as Clark (1965). The findings may not be palatable, but they signal a distressing reality of urban America that demands serious policy attention. It is perhaps sobering that forty-plus years after the Moynihan Report, the same questions must be raised again. The language may be different, but many of the issues remain the same. Moynihan did hypothesize a partial solution, however, in the form of structural government interventions. The jury is still out, but the preliminary data presented here suggest a glimmer of hope that cycles of poverty can be broken providing examples of poor communities that are radically repositioning themselves to an upward trajectory. How pervasive the phenomenon is remains to be seen; research so far has not tracked the consequences of change in one community on changes for other, perhaps even distant communities that may be receiving new burdens. In the case of Chicago, for example, the tens of thousands of poor residents uprooted from the Robert Taylor Homes on the south side went *somewhere*. If most moved to other, poorer communities further south, as evidence indicates, then it may well be that the burdens of poverty are simply being redistributed, not solved. Either way, questions of stability and change in concentrated poverty should remain at the top of our agenda.

Notes

1. Criticisms of the social science use of terms like "pathology" and "disorganization" are well known and need not be rehearsed (Sampson 2002). I would add here only that the usage by Moynihan was not, in my view, essentialist in its connotations or somehow limited to the black community. The manifestations of pathology were instead thought to vary by location in the social structure. Indeed, Kenneth Clark, Moynihan's contemporary and apparent originator of the "tangle of pathology" concept, wrote of the pervasive unhappiness and emptiness that he argued characterized white suburbs at the time. Although not violent, white pathology was suffocating nonetheless and was no less despairing, which led Clark to ask, "Why, then, would members of the city's ghettos seek to embrace a pathology of the suburb in exchange for their own?" (Clark 1965, 108). The terminology of pathology is certainly problematic for social phenomena, but we should not lose sight of the social structural logic that framed the larger argument.

2. Although not reviewed here, the social-ecological literature has considered aspects of neighborhood differentiation related to life-cycle status, residential stability, home ownership, density, land use, and ethnic heterogeneity. The evidence linking these factors to health and other outcomes is mixed, especially for population density and ethnic heterogeneity (Brooks-Gunn, Duncan, and Aber 1997; Morenoff, Sampson, and Raudenbush 2001).

3. Poverty, female-headed families, welfare assistance, unemployment, and percentage black all formed one principal component that accounted for approximately 70 percent of the common variance nationally *and* in Chicago. Based on results in Sampson, Sharkey, and Raudenbush (2008), I exclude density of children from further consideration in the new analyses presented here. I use census tracts as the operational definition of neighborhood. In the city of Chicago, additional ecological units are available for study, such as neighborhood clusters and community areas. As noted further below, results across levels of aggregation in Chicago are very similar (see also Land, McCall, and Cohen 1990).

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