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*Downward Residential Mobility in Structural-Cultural Context:
The Case of Disadvantaged Black Mothers**

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ABSTRACT

Sorting out the various macro and micro causes of Black mothers' downward residential mobility is extremely difficult, though past research has been fairly successful in identifying and explaining the mechanisms by which structural factors constrain Black residential change. The socio-historical context in which Black mothers operate, however, is largely ignored in these studies. We argue that past scholarship on Black women's social history offers some helpful insights into the "residential desires and decision making" related to Black women's social location. This paper pinpoints instances of downward residential mobility among a sample of disadvantaged Black mothers and works to elucidate both structurally- and culturally-related circumstances that help to explain them. In particular, it seeks to connect "residential desires and decision making" to sentiments Black women have had historically toward their family and community obligations. This study interweaves quantitative and qualitative data from the Baltimore Study, which traces the movement of disadvantaged Black mothers in and out of socioeconomic categories, including in and out of distressed neighborhoods over a 30-year period of their life course (approximately 1968-1996).

Keywords: *residential mobility, black women, neighborhoods, kinship*

Downward Residential Mobility in Cultural Context:

*The Case of Disadvantaged Black Mothers**

Currently about three-quarters of all poor Black¹ families (73.8 percent) are headed by women (U.S. Census Bureau, 2005), placing the onus of Black family well-being on Black mothers. One such responsibility is securing good quality family housing. For disadvantaged Black mothers in particular, moving Black families to housing in better quality neighborhoods (i.e. achieving upward residential mobility) has long been considered a strong indicator of their structural assimilation and of their improved life chances over time. However, improvements to residential quality – and therefore to quality of life for their families overall -- have proven elusive. In fact, recent reports show that Black mothers (and Blacks in general) suffer rates of *downward* residential mobility -- from non-poor to poor neighborhoods -- significantly higher than those for non-Blacks, including Latinos (South and Crowder 1997; South et al. 2003).

Sorting out the various macro and micro causes of Black mothers' downward residential mobility is extremely difficult, though past research has been fairly successful in identifying and explaining the mechanisms by which structural factors constrain Black residential change. However, the socio-historical context in which Black mothers operate is largely ignored in these studies. At best there is South and Crowder's (1998) suggestion that Black mothers' "residential desires and decision making" (875) may play a significant role. There is also other research that notes that it matters to black mothers whether their kinfolk live nearby (Boyd, 2006; Clampet-Lundquist and Massey, 2006). If we assume that the intent in these instances is to speak to residential motivations related to Black women's social location, past scholarship on Black women's social history offers some helpful clues. From this literature one could hypothesize

that downward residential mobility among Black women may be partially attributed to their desire to uphold certain cultural traditions that dictate, among other things, close relations with kin and community. Though cultural arguments in the study of social inequality are typically received with much criticism, culture may be an “explanatory analytical dimension” (Lamont 1999, ix) worth exploring in efforts to better understand such residential phenomena among Black women.

The objective of this paper is to pinpoint instances of downward residential mobility among a sample of disadvantaged Black mothers and to elucidate the related circumstances that help to explain them. This current study, like those that precede it, attends primarily to structural factors forcing this downward mobility; but it also places this residential trend in the cultural context of Black women’s lives, connecting “residential desires and decision making” to sentiments Black women have had historically toward their family and community obligations. Thus, we opt for a “both/and” orientation toward Black women’s residential trends, where structural *and* cultural factors can co-exist and even conflict, and where culture is understood as a reflection of both past and present structural phenomena. While there is a tendency among scholars to retreat from considering culture worthy of serious attention (and we understand with good reason), we believe that care should be taken to elucidate, where possible, how culture might bear upon Black women’s residential choices. Our study interweaves quantitative and qualitative data from the Baltimore Study which traces the movement of disadvantaged Black mothers in and out of socioeconomic categories, including in and out of distressed neighborhoods over a 30-year period (approximately 1968-1996). Survey data are used to measure the extent of downward mobility among these women, and in-depth interviews with a

subset of these mothers (n=22) are used to probe deeper into residential experiences throughout their life course.

BACKGROUND

Residential Mobility and Black Families

In his seminal book, *The Truly Disadvantaged*, Wilson (1987) identified a number of social forces converging in the mid- to late-1980s to effectively close off economic and social opportunities for a growing number of Black families who were increasingly being headed by Black women. Those female-headed Black families least able to access such opportunity were left behind in increasingly distressed neighborhoods with high concentrations of low-income, poorly-educated residents and with very few prospects for relocating elsewhere. Even those more socio-economically advantaged Black mothers often found that their upward mobility did not lead as predicted to appreciably better residences.

What little we know of Black mothers residential patterns is gained primarily through recent government relocation programs for low-income families, namely Chicago's Gautreaux Program initiated in 1976 (see Boyd et al 2006 and Keels et al. 2005) and the Moving to Opportunity project (MTO) funded via the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development in 1992 and implemented in five U.S. cities: Baltimore, Boston, Chicago, Los Angeles, and New York (see Clampet-Lunquist and Massey 2006; Orr et al. 2003; and Del Conte and Kling, 2001). In both programs, the vast majority of families are headed by African-American single mothers

A growing body of literature suggests that there are a number of positive outcomes associated with these relocation programs, particularly when residential counseling and other social services are also provided (Keels et al. 2005; Pettit and McLanahan 2001; Rosenbaum

1995). Some reports show that most relocated families remain in low-poverty, predominantly Black or integrated neighborhoods even after one or more subsequent moves, and that it is extremely rare for families to return to their original poor neighborhoods or ones similar to them (DeLuca and Rosenbaum 2003; Keels et al. 2005). Other reports, however, suggest that as many as 40 percent of those who are relocated to low-poverty neighborhoods return to high-poverty neighborhoods in time (Boyd 2006; Clampet-Lundquist and Massey 2006).

In a recent personal interview with Stefanie DeLuca, who has published several reports on Gautreaux (DeLuca et al. 2003; Keels et al. 2005; Rosenbaum et al. 2002; Rosenbaum and DeLuca 2000; Rosenbaum et al. 2005), she resolved from an informal meta-analysis of the residential mobility literature that “only about 50 percent” of this downward mobility can be sufficiently explained. Among the documented explanations are the mothers’ being unable to meet the financial challenges of housing in non-poor areas; being uncomfortable living in integrated settings; their difficulties arranging transportation to work, health care, and their children’s school; their difficulties with landlords and the poor housing quality that sometimes ensues; and their children’s difficulty in adjusting to their new neighborhoods (Boyd 2006; Clampet-Lundquist and Massey 2006). Most relevant for this current research are explanations related to a desire to have family and/or friends nearby (Boyd 2006), indicating that some downward residential mobility in these programs is the result of mothers “be[ing] reluctant to rupture familial networks for the sake of integrated living” (Clampet-Lundquist and Massey 2006, 18).

Though the risk for stagnant or downward residential mobility is disproportionately high among African-American mothers, most do not qualify for housing assistance of any kind or are not willing to accept it. As a result, far less is known about their residential trajectories as

compared to those closely studied by government-sponsored relocation programs. Residential mobility research encompassing large mixed-income populations (generally at the national level) offers few specific insights into the residential plight of disadvantaged Black mothers. Perhaps this is because gender is rarely shown to exert significant statistical effects on residential change, across and within racial categories.

South and Crowder (1998) do, however, isolate single mothers in one report, allowing for the examination of characteristics facilitating or constraining improved residential quality for women across different social categories. These authors argue that single mothers are “worthy of special examination” given the “unique constellation” of residential mobility barriers confronting them (866). From their analysis they find that unmarried women are significantly more likely to move from a poor neighborhood to yet another, than to better areas. Of particular relevance is their conclusion that race is a “particularly prominent predictor” (875) of barriers for Black single mothers. They describe these women as “dually disadvantaged”(873) given not only the low probability that they will move from poor to non-poor neighborhoods, but the high probability that they will move from non-poor to poor neighborhoods.

Sorting out the various macro and micro causes of Black mothers’ downward residential mobility from these various bodies of research is extremely difficult. From the South and Crowder study of single mothers it was determined, for example, that among a host of socio-demographic, human capital, life-cycle, and neighborhood variables tested, the number of children a mother has was found to be the only significant predictor. Protection from downward mobility appears to come with homeownership, longer time spent in non-poor neighborhoods, increases in family income, and becoming married. However, there is also extensive past research locating the problem of downward mobility for Black populations in continued poor

race relations, that is in the structural problem of racism: discrimination against Blacks in the real estate market (Massey and Denton 1993; Yinger 1995), preferences by whites for racially segregated neighborhoods (Bobo and Zubrinsky 1996; Clark 1992; Emerson et al. 2001; Farley and Frey 1994; Quillian 2002); and perceptions by Blacks of poor racial climate in predominantly-white neighborhoods (Krysan 2002).

Each of these race-related phenomena is hypothesized in the widely cited work of Krysan and Reynolds (2002) and readily extends to the case of disadvantaged Black mothers. These authors suggest that such phenomena maintain residential segregation by placing heavy constraints on Black mothers – single and married alike – in working to find and/or maintain residence in non-poor areas at any given time. What is important to note about this work is the focus on Black residential “preferences” that are crafted from racist realities. They reject what we view as two seemingly cultural arguments: one that suggests that (Blacks like most groups) simply prefer to live among their own kind, and another that suggests that Blacks choose to live in predominantly Black areas from “a sense of racial pride and desire to preserve Black institutions” (941). Instead, they contend that residential preferences for Blacks are shaped more by structural factors, specifically by the “the desire to avoid whites” which is “embedded in experiences of prejudice and discrimination at the hands of whites and white institutions (941).

While we find all of the various suggestions for why Black mothers experience downward residential mobility credible, particularly those pointing to structural factors, we argue that the mothers’ desire to remain connected to kith and kin tends to run deeper than what these scholars have conveyed. Further, we argue that this desire is reflective of the cultural context in which Black mothers are embedded and is not solely reflective of the structural constraints imposed by certain predominantly white, low-poverty neighborhoods. One possible cultural

explanation, then, is the value that Black women have historically placed on close and frequent contact with family and the fulfillment of family and community obligation.

Cultural Arguments Reconsidered

By focusing almost exclusively on structural concerns, scholars miss the opportunity to develop a more comprehensive understanding of what motivates the residential choices and decision-making of Black mothers. Although Black mothers face objective structural constraints that bear upon their residential choices and decision-making, these residential choices are also informed by the gender-ethnic² culture in which they are embedded; a culture constituted both from external (racist) and internal (ethnic pride and obligation) forces. Still, we recognize as others do, that the uneasiness with which culture is raised (or not raised) in the residential mobility literature is representative of a social scientific retreat from cultural arguments over the last several decades.

A spate of scholarly work documenting either a unique “culture” or the existence of various “subcultures” within economically disadvantaged urban communities surfaced during the 1960s and continues to capture the interest of sociologists, politicians and laypersons. Pierre (2004) suggests that the “culture of poverty” thesis, popularized by Oscar Lewis, Nathan Glazer, and others, was conceived as a set of values and behaviors developed in adaptation to extreme poverty. Henceforth, this “virtually autonomous culture” is said to perpetuate itself “separately from the rest of “mainstream” society” (Pierre 2004, 148). The “Moynihan Report” is perhaps best known for having drawn from the “culture of poverty thesis” (U.S. Department of Labor 1965) in interpreting the matrifocality of Black families, and the debate it ignites still today demonstrates just how taboo the subject of culture has become among academics. While this

report was clear that the proliferation of female-headed households stemmed from the structural conditions of the slave and Jim Crow eras, it nonetheless implied that something was culturally askew and defective where Black families were concerned.

The “Moynihan Report” helped in casting poverty as a cultural problem specific to African Americans (Gans 1995). As such, much of the social science literature on poverty and culture published since then has been based on research within urban African-American communities (Pierre 2004). Therefore, social scientists – including residential mobility scholars - resist cultural arguments at least in part because of their tendency to minimize racism, their tendency to villainize African Americans as a culturally inferior and pathological people, and their tendency to be deployed quite effectively as a political tool against African Americans. Given the magnitude of empirical evidence documenting both institutional and interpersonal racial discrimination in the housing market and among white neighborhood residents, for example, residential mobility scholars may be particularly concerned about cultural factors being exploited to undermine policy initiatives designed to address residential mobility problems.

In recent times, however, several scholars have given us license to reclaim cultural arguments as part and parcel to understanding a variety of race-related phenomena. For example, Michele Lamont’s edited volume titled *The Cultural Territories of Race: Black and White Boundaries* (1999) suggests that some sociologists have come to see value in (re)exploring the cultural dimensions of social phenomena. Collectively, these authors challenge the artificial boundaries between culture and social structure that have long infused academic discourses about race and social inequality. In this volume, culture appears primarily as “cultural scripts” or cultural meanings developed primarily from the life experiences of individuals. Still, their approach to culture shows appreciation for how the structural position of similarly-situated

individuals shape collective experiences, beliefs, and behaviors that we typically attribute to the influence of culture. Culture is ascribed to individuals based on their membership in certain social groups (e.g. social class or racial groups). It is evoked as a product of historical forces, as a by-product of ongoing social relationships in the present, or a combination of both of these.

From this volume, we find the work of Mary Waters (1999) particularly useful. Her analysis exemplifies an attempt to deconstruct the artificial boundaries of culture and social structure by exploring the different cultural underpinnings of interpersonal relationships between Caribbean-born and American-born Blacks and white employers. Waters describes West Indian immigrants' tendency toward color-blind racial attitudes as a *cultural* orientation. She argues that this orientation has resulted from West Indians having been structurally embedded in societies that are predominantly Black or multi-ethnic and stratified more by social class and skin color than by race as it is commonly understood in the American context. But as Waters points out, while this cultural orientation has traditionally given West Indian immigrants an edge over African Americans in the labor market, their attitudes about race tend to converge with African Americans as they too begin to experience prejudice and discrimination at the hands of white employers. Here, therefore, Waters highlights the importance of studying cultural explanations alongside past and present structural conditions.

Black Women's Social History

Earlier we note that some scholars have explained downward residential mobility among Black mothers in part as related to the mothers' desire to have family and/or friends nearby. We later note that the "Moynihan Report" wrestled with the cultural persistence of matrifocality among African Americans. In our view, both of these observations reveal a lack of appreciation for the

rich socio-historical culture Black women have created in order to survive and to give honor to their ancestral past. Further, an appreciation for this rich culture can help explain why in some instances Black women experience downward residential mobility by choosing to return to the poor Black neighborhoods from which they came or ones much like them.

Scholarship on Black women's social history is laced with references to Black women as important cultural resources in the African-American community (McDonald 1997; Christian 1985; Collins 1991; Dill 1983; DuBois 1939; Giddings 1984; Gilkes 1989; Rodgers-Rose 1980; Sudarkasa 1988), being called to "hold the Black community together" (Joseph and Lewis 1981) for the preservation of family and race. As Slevin notes (2005), there is a legacy in black communities of black women whose motivation to serve their own has "evolved through material and historical circumstances that emphasiz[e] survival and resistance through collective responsibility" (313). Blending together their gender responsibilities to biological family, extended kin, community, and race is reported to be foundational to Black women's socialization from a very young age. Through embracing such traditions, African-American mothers – advantaged and disadvantaged alike -- may be led to make choices that at times require them to relocate within and beyond the city, even to less desirable residential areas.

Central to the sociological framing of Black women's residential decision-making is a unique gender-ethnic motivation. Black women's identities help distinguish their motivations from other gender-ethnic groups. Their gender-ethnic status has strongly influenced how they define community and how they determine which strategies are best suited to meet the needs of Black women, their families, and the race as a whole (Gilkes 1988; Hine 1990; Morgen and Bookman 1988; Naples 1991 and 1992). This norm of solidarity and collective survival, "[i]lluminating the historical continuity with West African cultures" (Slevin 2005:312), are

actualized in what have been called community “othermothering,”³ a transplantation of traditional African tribal principles. Thus, all kinds of decision-making, including residential choice, are for Black mothers a complex practice of biological mothering, othermothering, and political activism (Naples 1992).

It is frequently noted that improved socioeconomic status compounds Black women's sense of "social debt" to the community (Higginbotham and Weber 1992, 430; McDonald 1997; Naples 1992). Upwardly-mobile Black women are said to be held "morally culpable" (Lawson 1992, 94) if they do not seek ways to help those less fortunate in the community. This obligation to give back, even in old age, was recently captured in Slevins' study of a sample of Black women retirees (2005). Thus, after spending some time living away from their “homeplace” (hooks 1990, 41-42) in low-poverty areas, some Black women may be drawn back to high-poverty neighborhoods where they gain or re-gain their sense of cultural relevance.

DATA AND METHODS

This study draws its data from the Baltimore Study, which under the direction of Frank F. Furstenberg, Jr. began as a formal survey of 399 disadvantaged urban women who became teen mothers in the late 1960s (referred to in other publications as the “G2s”), their mothers, and their first-born children. These women were all participants in one of the nation’s first comprehensive health care programs for adolescent mothers which operated out of a private hospital in the city.

Eighty-seven percent of this original sample was African American and 82 percent was unmarried. The educational and economic statuses of the sample were somewhat lower than for the general population of Blacks residing in Baltimore City at that time. The Baltimore Study, which contains a total of seven waves of survey data, now spans more than thirty years and

continues to involve 228 of the original sample. Those no longer participating in the survey tended to marry and/or relocate outside the greater Baltimore metropolitan area in the early years of the study. (For an overview of the Baltimore Study see Furstenberg et al. (1987) and the website at <http://www.pop.upenn.edu/baltimore/index.html>.)

(Table 1 about here)

In 1998, the residential survey data was augmented with information on the mothers neighborhood of residence at five of the seven data collection points (Times 2, 4-7; see Table 1 for years in which data was collected). Because irrelevant cases were discovered after Time 1 and because the time between the first two collection points was short, Time 2 and Time 4 were chosen for this augmentation as the first two of the five data points. The addresses of the women at each of these points were retrieved from the study archives and the U.S. Census identifications for state, county, and tract of residence were attached to the file. Using the 1970, 1980, and 1990 U.S. Census Summary Tapes, tract characteristics also were appended. This geocoding process was restricted to those mothers for whom neighborhood poverty status is known for at least two of the five data points in question ($n = 360$). Of these geocoded cases, 328 are African-American and they form the foundation for the quantitative analysis reported here (see Table 1, Time 2).

Residential trajectories were constructed from this geocoded data in order to gain a fundamental understanding of the mothers' movement across poor and non-poor neighborhoods over time. These data are based on the 173 mothers surveyed in 1996 (and on the 18 women interviewed) for whom residential data is known at each of the five data points. In addition, crudely estimated hazard models were constructed from this data in order to determine the likely effects of socio-demographic, human capital, life-cycle, and neighborhood factors on the mothers' residential mobility.

Intensive interview data are employed to provide a more vivid picture of the women's residential lives and to identify circumstances surrounding residential change not detectable via the survey data. While a subset of the Baltimore Study women and their children were intensively interviewed previously, the 1996 interviews (Time 7) were the most extensive and comprehensive, particularly on issues of residential status and change. Approximately 50 women -- those who had been intensively interviewed prior to 1996 or whose children had been previously interviewed -- were first identified as prospective 1996 interviewees. A cross-check was then made to determine which of these mothers had participated in the 1996 formal survey. This process yielded 32 prospective interviewees. Of these, 22 responded favorably to our invitation to be interviewed again and ultimately were interviewed. All are African American. Due to the nonrandom nature of this sampling procedure, the interviewees are slightly more likely to have completed high school and to be employed, and slightly less likely to be living in a poor neighborhood (see Table 1). Though they were less likely to be receiving housing assistance, they were more likely to be receiving *some* form of public assistance. The average age of these former teen mothers was 45 at the time.

The 1996 interviews were conducted by McDonald and Armstrong (2001) individually over a three-month period using a common interview schedule that covered a range of issues related to the women's changes in socioeconomic status over time. All respondents were interviewed in their homes for 45 to 120 minutes. The interviews and accompanying oral field notes were tape-recorded and transcribed; the names of the respondents were changed to protect the respondents' individual identities.

Coding of this data was performed by first obtaining measures of residential change from the geocoded survey data (i.e., from non-poor to poor neighborhood, poor to non-poor

neighborhood, or consistently poor or non-poor) for each of the four data intervals. Then for each interval, interview and field-note data were integrated to provide as detailed a description as possible of other socioeconomic experiences such as changes in marital status, fertility status, and employment status. Additionally, the women's sentiments about their residential circumstances were incorporated into these descriptions. The result, though not as rich as an ethnographic method would yield, is a good representation of these women's residential trajectories and experiences over time.

There is an ongoing debate over how best to measure neighborhood quality. Most of this debate is over whether the measure should or can be captured in a single indicator or whether a composite indicator is more appropriate (Furstenberg et al. 1998). There is also debate as to how best to capture "neighborhood" boundaries (e.g. census tract, census block vs. some smaller qualitatively meaningful unit). Following the lead of past and current researchers (Clampet-Lundquist and Massey 2006; Keels et al. 2005; South and Crowder 1998; Massey et al. 1994; Wilson 1987), the Baltimore Study employs the census tract as the conventional proxy for neighborhood and uses neighborhood poverty, a single indicator, for neighborhood quality. Neighborhood poverty, though limited as a measure of neighborhood quality, correlates highly with other quality measures such as racial composition, nonmarital childbearing, low and/or unstable employment rates, condition of schools and street infrastructures, and crime. Thus neighborhood poverty is an indicator of concentrated disadvantage. Here it is measured dichotomously; neighborhoods with 20 percent or more of its residents subsisting below the poverty level are defined as "poor" or "distressed," and those with less than 20 percent are defined as non-poor. This 20 percent mark is believed to conservatively divide those neighborhoods most likely to suffer the negative consequences of concentrated disadvantage

from those less likely. Residential mobility, then, is conceptualized as a move from a poor to non-poor neighborhood and from a non-poor to poor neighborhood from one survey data collection point to the next.

The data analysis reported here is in several ways restricted by our data sources. The intensive interview sample (and to a lesser degree the survey sample) is not representative of disadvantaged Black mothers generally, particularly as it is geographically bounded. It is not possible to extend or compare what is learned here from a particular Black urban context to rural Black families, for example. Second, by design, all of the sample women are former teen mothers; therefore, we cannot use the Baltimore Study to evaluate the experience of residential change among disadvantaged women of this generation who delayed childbearing. The survey data analysis is restricted by sample sizes which are relatively smaller than those typically used for residential mobility research. Additionally, the poor/non-poor neighborhood divide is measured objectively and does not necessarily match with residents' subjective assessments. Finally, the mobility intervals are not equal in length; data collection for the Baltimore Study was designed instead to capture experiences at particular stages of the mothers' lives.

In this report, intensive interview data are presented either as a mother's direct quote, paraphrasing, or as a representation of the women's collective voice, constructed from specific research findings scattered throughout the interviews as responses to several interview questions with similar content and as unsolicited comments on related issues. To protect the privacy of the respondents, their names, and other obvious identifiers have been changed.

RESULTS

This report of our research findings begins with a description of the study women's residential trajectories over the study period and what our statistical analysis revealed about factors affecting residential change. We then proceed by highlighting family and community-related effects, both structural and cultural in nature.

Neighborhood and Residential Change

Table 1 shows a general decrease in the percentage of mothers residing in poor neighborhoods over the 30-year period, from 51 percent at around 1970 when their first-born children were infants down to 35 percent at midlife (1996). At Time 5 (1983-84), however, that percentage peaks at close to 60 percent; and nearly one-quarter of the mothers (24 percent) had experienced downward residential mobility since 1972. In all, 33 percent (109) of the 328 mothers sampled experienced downward residential mobility at least once over the course of the study.

(Table 2 about here)

Five trajectories were identified from the geocoded survey data and are described as follows:

Persistently poor, having lived in a poor neighborhood at each of the five time points;

Downwardly mobile, having moved to and remained in poor neighborhoods after Time 1, or after two to three consecutive time points in non-poor neighborhoods starting at Time 1;

Upwardly mobile, having moved to and remained in non-poor neighborhoods after Time 1, or after two to three consecutive time points in poor neighborhoods starting at Time 1;

Persistently non-poor, having lived in a non-poor neighborhood at each of the five time points;

and,

Sporadic, having moved alternatively in and out of poor neighborhoods over time.⁴

As Table 2 shows, 12 percent of the mothers suffered a decline in their residential quality over time and another 25 percent moved sporadically in and out of poor and non-poor neighborhoods. Not surprisingly, a pattern of downward residential mobility was slightly more prevalent for those who resided in non-poor neighborhoods at the beginning of the study (18 percent); downward mobility and sporadic residential status amount to nearly half (46 percent) of such mothers. For those with poor origins, patterns of persistent residential poverty, downward mobility, and sporadic residential status amount to nearly two-thirds of these cases (64 percent). Across these trajectories, there were 72 specific instances of downward residential mobility (from one time point to the next); and of these instances, 51 percent (37) occurred at Time 5.

For both tables, the downward mobility that peaked at Time 5 reflects both movement into poor neighborhoods (about 75 percent) and increases in the poverty rates of non-poor neighborhoods (about 25 percent) common among large urban areas in the mid-1980s. To rule out the possibility that this decline occurred artificially through the redrawing of tract boundaries by the Census Bureau between 1970 and 1980, an analysis of neighborhood tract boundaries was performed. That analysis produced only one case in which the same residence was attached to more than one census tract at the two time points (i.e. potentially indicating a tract boundary change), and this may have simply been due to human error. Thus, it appears that the observed neighborhood decline is genuine, and it is presumed to reflect the diminished income status of a good number of non-poor neighborhood residents around this time, substantial influx of poor families into deteriorating non-poor neighborhoods, and/or a substantial relocation of the formerly non-poor into poor areas (Wilson 1987). It may also speak to a general increase in the percentage of persons living below the poverty level across census tracts and to the widespread gentrification of major U.S. cities (i.e., forcing Black residents out of non-poor neighborhoods)

beginning in the late 1970s (Anderson 1990; Brewster and Padavic 2002; Fairchild and Tucker 1982).

Sharon's plight provides some insight into how disadvantaged Black mothers struggled to stabilize family life during this period. Left to raise her three children alone on public assistance after separation from her husband, Sharon's financial resources were extremely limited because she was unable to find work in part because of her drug addiction. It is unclear whether or not the move from her childhood home was the result of her getting married; if so, it did not lead to the improvements to residential quality other married mothers generally experienced. Though this new residence was located in roughly the same part of town as the previous one, neighborhood poverty was much higher (32 percent versus 12 percent), reflecting the haphazard way in which urban blight spread throughout the city at that time:

Sharon: Preston Street is what people read about being the ghetto. I moved there because I had no money and had to start to get a home for my kids, 'cause I can see [my kids] in these different houses, they just seemed to be all disjointed and I said, no, you gotta mother them... and I did it, I got a three-story house, did the repairs, and ducked the bullets.

In a move not uncommon to the women we studied, Sharon took advantage of the lull in her paid employment and acquired some post-secondary education which, in the long-run, enabled her to regain custody of her children (lost to foster care at one point), find employment with the local government, and secure residence in an area she called "a better environment" for her children.

It is worth noting that Sharon's concern for family safety is quite common among the women interviewed as well as among the Black mothers participating in government-assisted relocation programs (see Rosenbaum et al. 2002). The majority of mothers were clearly

preoccupied with the condition of the neighborhoods in which they lived, and the fear of living in neighborhoods where drugs and crime were prevalent was particularly salient in the early 1980s. Safety issues re-emerged in the mid-1990s, and as was true for the mid-1980s such concerns directly influenced several of the mothers to relocate to a more peaceful environment.

Doreen, who like so many others witnessed her neighborhood fall deep into poverty during the mid-1980s, enjoyed a much improved residential existence by the 1990s. But while the neighborhood poverty rate of her latest residence was quite low, reports of her immediate housing area describe it as “somewhat shabby.” Doreen appears to account for this contradiction by stating that the “inner city” was encroaching on her safety: -- with more children, more noise, and more drug activity:

Interviewer: You do see that sometimes?

Doreen: Uh huh. A couple of kids came in here the other day and had some little tiny packets and that’s stuff that drugs come in. I don’t know what kind. Like I said, I don’t know what, but I knew it was some kinda drug thing.

Interviewer: Why do you think that’s moving in here?

Doreen: Because the area is changing and they bringin’ in people from...the inner city are coming in. Seen it before, let’s just put it that way.

Doreen planned to move out of the area as soon as possible.

The ability to exact residential change from the desire for safety varied widely, even given the similarity of the mothers’ socioeconomic origins. Gloria represents one end of the spectrum. She acknowledges at Time 7 that the neighborhood in which she has lived for the last 22 years is “drug infested” but gave no indication that she saw a way out. The neighborhood poverty rate around her “run down” housing complex skyrocketed from 43 percent to 61 percent

over the time she spent there. The modest income offered through fairly consistent employment as a mail carrier afforded Gloria little with which to escape the drug and alcohol-related chaos that surrounded her:

...I put alarms on my windows in the back, and my next-door neighbor, she's into drugs too, and old lady into drugs and she has the young boy come in the front and the back of her house, so I feel insecure...I come home from work and I shut the world out.

On the other end are those whose socioeconomic advancement prompted safety-related residential change as would be predicted. Despite constant dependence on public assistance 20 years after the birth of her first child (or perhaps because of it), Ruth always managed to secure housing in neighborhoods with relatively low poverty rates, though she nonetheless felt very susceptible to crime. That rate dropped to its lowest when she became employed, grew more financially independent, and purchased a home. She conveyed to the interviewer that this last neighborhood "has worked out better for her than others; she feels more safe." As Ruth herself explains,

I always had a house on the corner of the alley. And drugs was very heavy in that area. They broke into the house three times...so I started looking for another place and that's when I moved here. From my standpoint, as far as where I was ten years ago and where I am today, I am better off. I'm in a better neighborhood. I'm buying. This is a much better house... I'm more relaxed here.

Socioeconomic and Family Influences on Residential Change

Given the data limitations of our survey data (discussed earlier), our baseline understanding of individual- and neighborhood-level factors on residential mobility for the study women is statistically crude. Yet, from the multivariate hazard models we constructed, we find residential tendencies among these women consistent with those of other disadvantaged populations (i.e., Blacks and single mothers). For example, mothers who at the beginning of the study resided in poor neighborhoods were significantly unlikely to move into nonpoor neighborhoods during any given period if they bore additional children. For these same mothers, movement into nonpoor neighborhoods was facilitated by becoming or remaining married and obtaining even a small measure of college education. Downward residential mobility at any given period was significantly more likely to occur among mothers with several to many children. And protection from downward mobility was facilitated by remaining married, and getting off or remaining off welfare.

In addition to the family-related influences revealed through the analysis above, co-residency is another such influence typically examined in studies of residential change. It is also something that was given close attention in earlier analyses of the Baltimore Study data (Furstenberg et al. 1987). Consistent with these previous findings, our most recent interview data analysis suggests that co-residency did appear to increase the odds of mothers from poor neighborhood origins remaining in a poor neighborhood. Particularly as the mothers transitioned into young adulthood and as their first-born children progressed through adolescence, the struggle to manage educational, employment, and financial needs became much more difficult and often required the women to take up residence with their parents or other family members who often lived in poor areas. Our interview data also suggests, as was found in the previous study of single mothers (South and Crowder 1998), that co-residency is generally insignificant

for those originating in *non-poor* neighborhoods. However, we identified a few examples of such mothers experiencing downward residential mobility as a result of co-residency. This was apparently because the kin with whom the mothers came to live resided in neighborhoods with higher poverty rates than where the mothers began. Each of these cases involved mothers who attended college; the road to acquiring a college degree for disadvantaged Black mothers often required sacrificing independent living and led to the resolve that co-residency with family would decrease one's neighborhood quality.

Such was Frances' case. Up to age seven, Frances resided with her grandmother in a non-poor area of the city. She was shuffled back and forth between the grandmother and her parents for a spell during preadolescence where both residences were in better areas. When time came for her to re-enter a college program in the early 1980s, she was forced to move back in with her grandmother. Unfortunately, the grandmother's neighborhood by that time had deteriorated in much same way as other neighborhoods did on that side of town by the early 1980s.

Obligation to Kin and Community

Frances' case is one reflective of the complex interplay between structural and cultural phenomena as they apply to issues of residential change. Co-residency as a response to financial necessities that arise at critical stages of the mother's life course, for example, is only part of a much larger, multifaceted set of kin obligations surrounding their residential change. Previous reports from the Baltimore Study data (noted earlier) proceeded from the understanding that for disadvantaged populations, sharing residential resources creates an interdependency among family members that is not easily broken. The obligation to contribute to the overall well-being

of the household may make one hesitant to move on to a residence of one's own. These realities are pertinent to our current investigation in that such obligations potentially hinder improvements to one's residential quality. Further, the move to co-residency can itself constitute stagnant or downward residential mobility.

Some relocation observed in this most recent analysis was driven not by the mother's own crises but that of a close family member. Such was the case when Nikki and her two daughters were forced to move back home with her mother at Time 7 (resulting in improved neighborhood quality) because "my dad passed away and my mother is retired, so there wasn't enough income for her to maintain the house." It was not uncommon for mothers to change residences in order to care for medical, financial, psychological, or maternal needs of biological, affinal, and fictive kin.

Among those mothers who experienced upward socioeconomic mobility over time, kin-related choices to relocate occasionally ran counter to the expectations of traditional residential mobility models. For example, one might have accurately predicted Yvette's movement from a poor city to a non-poor county neighborhood following her marriage; combining her income with her new husband's resources afforded her access to a better quality neighborhood, one with a poverty rate of 26 percent (Time 4) down to one with only a 2 percent poverty rate (Time 5). On the other hand, one would have likely failed to predict her decision to move *back* into a poor area of the city in the absence of a divorce. Despite the improved residential quality she enjoyed, Yvette and her husband returned to the city in less than two years because they felt "lonely" and isolated from their kin network. Their new home was too distant from kin to maintain the ties between them. Yvette herself explains:

We were stuck all the way out here. All of our friends... (were) in the city. Nobody came to visit us and we stayed for like a year and a half and so we said, hey, lets move back to the city. Everybody's on the city, nobody out here. So we went back and moved into the city.

Sadly, in the next breath Yvette stated, "That was the worse thing in the world we ever did." She and her husband had not miscalculated the strength of their relationship with kin in moving back but, rather, the severity of neighborhood problems they would encounter:

We weren't in that house two years, okay. Every six months, somebody broke in that house and stole everything we had... So I had nightmares about just staying in this house. So I told my husband, I just couldn't take it anymore... So we ended up moving back out in the County and that's where we stayed...

Thus, Yvette's experience was shaped both by structural and cultural influences – the financial ability to move wherever she liked, the frustrations that she encountered within the neighborhood she chose, and her desire to re-fortify ties to her kinfolk.

Because Carlene did not report in the survey her 6-year marriage that began around Time 6 nor the exact suburban address of the home in which she and her family lived at the time, we can only speculate (and with good reason) that she experienced upward residential mobility by moving to that general area. Traditional residential mobility models do indeed account for Carlene's movement from a poor to a non-poor neighborhood shortly after this marriage, as well as for her return to a poor neighborhood as a result of her divorce. The childhood neighborhood to which she returned was even more devastated that when she left it. Here is what our field notes describe about her surroundings in 1996:

Carlene lives in a particularly dilapidated block; several of the houses nearby are vacant and in bad disrepair... Carlene and her mother, who lives with her, try to keep the house and the lives around them in order, but I suspect they are often thwarted by larger forces... Carlene has lived in [this area most of her life] and she believes her neighborhood has changed for the worse. Crime is up, drugs are up, she says. ‘Work and welfare do not mix,’ she tells me emphatically, complaining that neighbors on welfare stay up all night partying and hanging out...Says problems in neighborhood got worse ‘since they’ve torn the projects down; people who were in the projects have moved up this way... ’”

However, our interview data suggests that getting divorced may not have been the *central* factor in Carlene’s return to this difficult place. Divorce appears to have served as the impetus for her to act on a pre-existing desire to be closer to her mother and other kin:

Carlene: You know, I’m never gonna be too far away from the old girl (her mother)... and my grandson and my grandchildren, you know, I have to be a little closer to them... for his sake and my babies.

Despite her professing that life is taking a toll on her and that she’d prefer to rest in “some peace and quiet now,” Carlene says that it is not yet time for her to end the obligation she has always felt toward her family. Maintaining a strong attachment to her mother and son is paramount despite the neighborhood conditions within which this attachment is practiced.

In another example of downward mobility, Devonne chose after a brief time away to return to her childhood neighborhood. She returned practically to the same neighborhood block and did so in order to provide better housing for family, friends, and other community members who lacked the means to relocate elsewhere. In the mid-1990s, Devonne was owner and manager

of three predominantly-female senior citizen group homes serving the needs of some of the same elder women who had helped raise her. In her own home she housed her son, grandson, and a young nephew, and she said that she always tried to make sure that when changing residences she remained in proximity to her large extended family so that everyone could have access to her. The responsibility to provide extended-kin “access” to oneself was echoed by Stella (“house full of children”) and Violet (“not all those children are blood kin”) as well.

This theme of ensuring kin and community “access” is quite common to Black women’s cultural heritage and to their “activist mothering” tradition (Naples 1991). The mothers, in making residential choices, at times acted from a gender-ethnic motivation to maintain physical and emotional attachments with kin and community, bearing the mark of their sense of “obligation” as bloodmothers, othermothers⁵, and “race women.” Such motivations are derived from a conjunction of empathy Black women have for one another, for Black families, and for the race as a whole, as well as of traditional African American norms of solidarity, responsibility, and accountability. “Normative empathy,” as McDonald (1997) has named it, has strongly influenced Black women’s decision-making about family life and about how to best meet the needs of their community as a whole (Gilkes 1989; Hine 1990; Naples 1991, 1992.) Though recent studies show some decline in its practice over the past 30 years (McDonald and Armstrong 2001), evidence from the Baltimore Study suggests that it was practiced reciprocally within many of the mothers’ kin networks in the late-1960s and 1970s and remained vital and effective throughout many of their lives.

Thus, some of the mothers made residential choices at one or more times in their life course based largely on what they saw as their duty to family and community. Though many of their relocation choices can be traced to changes in their socioeconomic status and to practical

considerations for things like family safety, others may be best understood from the perspective of Black women's social history -- as cultural responses consonant with the roles, responsibilities, and expectations of Black women. These responses can lead to varying consequences for the mothers' residential quality; but it appears that often they resulted here in downward residential mobility.

DISCUSSION

The Black mothers participating in this research are similarly disadvantaged by the structural constraints of their gender-ethnic status. Additionally, all were once teenage mothers suffering the socioeconomic deprivation that preceded, accompanied, or arose from their early parenthood, and most were exposed to the exigencies of inner-city life. While a good proportion of these women made impressive gains in their socioeconomic status over time, we observed that in 1996 -- approximately 30 years from when the mothers first entered our study -- 35 percent were living in neighborhoods where 20 percent or more of the residents were subsisting below the poverty line. This proportion was appreciably higher than that for the general population in Baltimore City and County (approximately 26 percent; U.S. Census Bureau, 1990). Further, over time 12 percent experienced a decline in neighborhood quality and another 25 percent sustained improved neighborhood quality only to fall back into poor neighborhoods after a short while. Particularly for those originating in poor neighborhoods, finding stability in non-poor areas was very unlikely.

Downward residential mobility has been a particularly troubling trend among African-American families. It appears to have been extremely problematic during the early to mid 1980s when urban neighborhoods suffered huge losses in funding and social capital and when the gap between the poor and the wealthy grew substantially. Although our research originally was not

focused on this residential phenomenon specifically but rather on examining a wider range of residential trajectories for disadvantaged Black mothers, the concerns raised by past scholars prompted us to consider what the study of their downward mobility might yield. Of particular concern was the relationship between their “residential desires and decision making” and their downward mobility (and residential patterns in general), and how this relationship might speak to maternal norms and practices germane to African-American women’s culture.

There is a well-established literature that documents a legacy of Black women’s care giving to kith and kin, and it is a legacy driven by Black women having embraced their obligations as culture bearers and community builders (Radford-Hill 2000). Also, within more mainstream family scholarship it is acknowledged that regardless of socioeconomic status, Black families are twice as likely as white families to be embedded within an extended kin network (Cherlin 1998) and that Black single mothers “often have a higher level of obligatory extended kin within the immediate neighborhood” (Schieman 2005). It is not surprising, then, that the collective well-being of the Black family and community emerged as one of the themes in our interviews. Nor is it surprising that we observe some instances in which residential decisions were reflective of the mother’s gender-ethnic context, one that values close and frequent contact with family and the fulfillment of family responsibility.

On the other hand, this cultural theme was not the most prominent theme to emerge. Both the crude hazard estimates and the interview data revealed structural influences on residential mobility quite common to disadvantaged populations. Nevertheless, there is evidence that *some* relocation decisions – particularly those that result in downward residential mobility -- contradict what we generally expect of those who become more economically able to live in

better neighborhoods yet are quite consistent with Black women's historical decision-making about family and community life.

We have also established from this study that the overwhelming majority of the mothers felt very strongly about living in a safe environment, and that this desire influenced the residential choices of a significant number of them. Safety-driven residential decisions were not always easy to make given the desire to fulfill one's cultural obligations. Thus, some of the mothers chose to move into unsafe neighborhoods in order to care for or be near family despite the fact that they had the resources to live in better quality neighborhoods. It was also evident that over the course of their lives, some women struggled to negotiate these two conflicting desires, but were often forced to ultimately sacrifice one for the other. Consequently, the story of residential choice that emerges from this study is based on how individual actors negotiated residential life and how the importance of kin and community factored into these negotiations. We believe this story to be critical to further sensitizing residential mobility researchers and policymakers to the complexities of Black women's lives.

Only a very few of the Baltimore Study mothers were recipients of public assistance in the form of housing support; therefore, what we have learned may be most relevant to disadvantaged Black mothers who make residential moves without government intervention. The salience of gender-ethnic motivations among the mothers as a possible explanation for some of their residential choices may, nonetheless, have important implications for government-sponsored relocation programs. For many Black mothers who qualify, relocation programs are undoubtedly an excellent opportunity to stabilize or advance housing quality as well as various other aspects of their lives -- through decreased threats to family safety, increased access to better schools for their children, and access to better employment prospects enjoyed in low-

poverty neighborhoods. Data collected by those who are tracking families who relocate suggests that the vast majority of those who relocate benefit greatly by staying put and there is little evidence of families returning to their original or similarly impoverished areas. But we should expect that when moves back to poor areas do occur they may be motivated by Black mothers' desire to return to their urban roots in order to reconnect with family and community and relieve the guilt they may have felt by "leaving them behind." Some mothers, that is, may be willing to accept the opportunity cost of living in poor neighborhoods in order to remain culturally responsible. In such cases, relocation programs may have the unintended consequence of putting Black mothers into a no-win situation. Opportunities for upward residential mobility may come at the expense of the relationships and responsibilities they value most.

Stack (1974), Cherlin (1998), McDonald and Armstrong (2001), and other scholars have warned of such dilemmas, stating that there may be hidden costs of participation in extended kin networks: "the costs include the difficulty of escaping from poverty until everyone in the sharing network escapes" (Cherlin 1998, 156). In order to help relieve some of the tension that may be inherent in the residential decision-making processes of all Black mothers and to at least help slow the tide of their downward residential mobility, we suggest – first and foremost -- that more rigorous and revitalizing economic investment be made in the inner-city to help eliminate the pressure for disadvantaged Black mothers to move out of their beloved neighborhoods and away from kin. In support of those Black mothers who qualify for housing assistance, it might be useful for policy-makers to devise relocation models that are more inclusive of Black mothers' cultural needs. Where possible, for example, families in the program could be relocated along with other families in the program as a cluster (i.e. in village-like form) to roughly the same geographic area, so as to encourage the re-creation of traditional kin network

structures in their new environment. Another tactic could be to encourage the collective relocation of already-established extended families to new areas, into multi-family/multi-generational dwellings. Clearly, the provision of residential counseling and other relevant services to ease the transition to these new arrangements would be vital. Consideration must also be given to whether for any given family either of these options might further exasperate family poverty by concentrating it in one space and obviously something akin to the public housing complex is not desirable.

The vision here is of a cooperative, supportive village on a small scale with branches into the new neighborhoods through which valuable social capital can be accessed. The idea is to provide an opportunity for public policy to capitalize rather than decimate traditional Black family value systems and to support Black women's maternal activism on behalf of their families and communities. Taking Black women's cultural context into consideration could help generate an even greater level of program success.

NOTES

¹ “Black” and “African-American” are used interchangeably in this text.

² The “ethnic” portion of this “gender-ethnic” designation is used to convey a shared ethnicity (African American) and racial status (Black) among the women studied.

³ In citing Troester (1984) and Collins (1987), James (1993) defines “othermothers” as “...those who assist blood mothers in the responsibilities of child care... They can be, but are not confined to, such blood relatives as grandmothers, sisters, aunts, cousins or supportive fictive kin.

⁴ Trajectories are based on information given at the time of the survey. Interview data suggests that some of the mothers moved more frequently than the survey suggests.

⁵ In citing Troester (1984) and Collins (1987), James (1993) defines “othermothers” as “those who assist blood mothers in the responsibilities of child care... They can be, but are not confined to, such blood relatives as grandmothers, sisters, aunts, cousins or supportive fictive kin.”

**Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of African-American Mothers (G2s), Residential Mobility Sample:
The Baltimore Study**

Year	Survey Sample					Interview Sample
	1968-70	1972	1983-84	1987	1995-96	1996
<i>N</i>	328	313	260	231	209	22
Wave	Time 2	Time 4	Time 5	Time 6	Time 7 (later life)	Time 7 (later life)
Years since 1st birth, approx. (Time 1)	1-2	5	17-18	21	29-30	30
Mean Children	1.24	1.63	2.07	2.09	2.12	2.27
Not married	70%	71%	69%	70%	68%	68%
< H.S. diploma/GED	74%	44%	28%	24%	22%	20%
Unemployed	51%	53%	38%	24%	3%	0
Receiving public assistance	17%	42%	25%	21%	16%	23%
Gov't-Assisted Housing⁶			17%		12%	5%

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of African-American Mothers (G2s), Residential Mobility Sample:**The Baltimore Study (continued)**

Poor neighborhood	51%	47%	59%	44%	35%	33%
Downward n'hood mobility since last wave	na	11%	24%	4%	3%	0

Table 2: Residential Trajectories of G2 Mothers, Time 2-7 (The Baltimore Study)

Trajectory	Interviewees (n = 18)⁷	Total (n = 173)⁸	Poor Origins (n = 93)	Non-Poor Origins (n = 80)
persistently poor	17%	18%	33%	--
downwardly mobile	11%	12%	8%	18%
upwardly mobile	17%	26%	37%	15%
persistently non-poor	22%	18%	--	40%
<u>sporadic</u>	<u>33%</u>	<u>25%</u>	<u>23%</u>	<u>28%</u>
	100%	100%	100%	100%

⁶ Data not available for Times 2, 4 and 6.

⁷ Of the 22 G2 mothers interviewed at Time 7, 18 had residential data known for each of the five time points.

⁸ Of the 209 G2 mothers surveyed at Time 7, 173 had residential data known for each of the five time points.

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