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MOVING AND CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CONNECTIONS: THE CRITICAL IMPORTANCE OF CONTEXT

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Becky Pettit

Moving and Children's Social Connections:
The Critical Importance of Context

Becky Pettit[*]
University of Washington

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[*] Please direct all correspondence to Becky Pettit, Department of Sociology, University of Washington, 202 Savery, Box 353340, Seattle, WA 98195 (bpettit@u.washington.edu). I gratefully acknowledge the helpful comments of Paul DiMaggio, Thomas Espenshade, Jennifer Hochschild, and Sara McLanahan, and the research assistance of Yadira Guardado, Anne Taber, and Chris Taber. This research has been supported by the Smith Richardson Foundation, Office of Population Research, Princeton University Center Grant 5P30HD/ AG32030, National Institutes of Health Training Grant T32 HD07163, and a doctoral dissertation grant from the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development. An earlier version of this paper was presented at the Population Association of America Annual Conference, Washington, DC, March, 1997.

Abstract

Moving during childhood is associated with declines in educational achievement, educational attainment, and early adult occupational outcomes. Coleman (1988,1990) and others have argued that the negative effects of moving for children may be due to the loss of social capital in the short-term after moving. There have been few studies directly examining the consequences of moving on the social connections of children, and the evidence on the relationship is mixed. This research uses qualitative data from an experimental housing relocation program to examine what hurts and what helps the formation of social connections after moving. This research suggests that the impact of moving on children, and on indicators of social capital in particular, is influenced by neighborhood context and by family financial resources. Future studies assessing the impact of moving on children need to pay closer attention to the factors that influence where, when, and why families move.

Moving and Children's Social Connections:
The Critical Importance of Context

Introduction

Studies have shown that children who move face a variety of disadvantages when compared with children who do not move or who move less frequently during childhood. Moving during childhood is associated with an increased risk of failing a grade in school (Wood et al. 1993), and residentially mobile students have lower levels of academic achievement compared with residentially stable students (Ingersoll, Scamman, and Eckerling 1989; Pribesh and Downey 1999). Moving frequently during childhood also increases the probability of dropping out of high school (Coleman 1988; Hagan, MacMillan, and Wheaton 1996; Haveman, Wolfe, and Spaulding 1991; Hofferth, Boisjoly, and Duncan 1998; Teachman, Paasch, and Carver 1996, 1997), and residential mobility helps explain high rates of high school dropout in non-intact families (Astone and McLanahan 1994). Furthermore, child migrants have lower levels of occupational status as young adults compared with non-migrants (Hagan, MacMillan, and Wheaton 1996).

There is great concern that the negative effects of moving on children are due to a loss of *social capital* after moving (Coleman 1988). Social capital, according to Coleman (1988, 1990), refers to those relations between persons or within communities, which, like economic or human capital, may be used to foster skills and capabilities of children. Residential mobility, Coleman and others have argued, disrupts social capital by breaking ties between parents, children, and other members of a community. The losses in social capital, in turn, ultimately undermine children's educational and occupational achievement.

A number of scholars have used the loss of social capital as an explanation for findings that residential mobility is associated with poor educational and occupational outcomes (Coleman 1988; Hagan, MacMillan, and Wheaton 1996; Hofferth, Boisjoly, and Duncan 1998; McLanahan and Sandefur 1994; Teachman, Paasch, and Carver 1996, 1997). In fact, there are few studies

that directly examine the relationship between residential mobility and indicators of social capital (Boisjoly, Duncan, and Hofferth 1995; Briggs 1998; Pribesh and Downey 1999). What studies exist present a mixed body of evidence, and the theoretical specification outlining the relationship between moving and the loss of social capital is unclear.

This paper uses in-depth interview data from a sample of families participating in an experimental housing relocation program, the *Moving to Opportunity (MTO) Program*, to examine the formation of social connections in the short-term after moving for young children and adolescents. These data are ideal for exploring how children make connections for several reasons. First, interviews were conducted less than a year after families moved from public housing developments to other neighborhoods, during the time when children and their parents were forming new connections. Second, because families are randomly assigned to mover and non-mover groups, we can avoid the methodological pitfall of selection into moving. Finally, because MTO families are randomly assigned to move to different types of neighborhoods, this research has the potential to illuminate how neighborhood conditions influence the formation of social connections following moving.

The factors that influence residential mobility are also often correlated with social and educational outcomes. Living in poverty, family disruption, and being African American all increase the probability of moving (Long 1988; South and Crowder 1997, 1998a, 1998b; Speare and Goldschieder 1987). Many poor and African American children live in poor neighborhoods and when they move they are more likely than their middle-class or white peers to end up in another poor neighborhood (Gramlich, Laren, and Sealand 1992; Massey, Gross, and Shibuya 1994). Despite our growing understanding of the patterns of residential mobility of poor persons and families, we still know very little about the consequences of moving for poor children. Previous research has failed to explain whether effects attributed to geographic mobility may be due to poverty, family structure, neighborhood context, or other factors associated with residential mobility (Pribesh and Downey 1999). Experimental data from the MTO program

allow for the identification of the direct effects of moving on children's social connections, and enable an examination of how neighborhood context influences the hypothesized relationship between moving and social connections important for children.

In the next section of the paper, I review research examining the relationship between residential mobility and social capital. I also discuss theoretical arguments for how this relationship might vary depending on neighborhood context, familial resources, and children's age. In the third section, I describe the data that are used; in the fourth section I present data from in-depth interviews; and in the last section I draw conclusions and offer suggestions for future research.

This paper shows that neighborhood resources influence the formation of social connections for children moving through the MTO program. Although most families and their children are able to construct social connections in the short-term after moving, these data indicate that where families move influences their abilities to make certain types of connections. Moving to middle-class neighborhoods[1] makes teens much more willing to engage with neighbors and participate in neighborhood activities primarily because of increases in safety associated with living in a middle-class neighborhood. However, moving to a middle-class neighborhood imposes financial strains on parents that sometimes preclude young children's participation in after-school activities.

Theory and Empirical Evidence

Nearly one in five children in the United States move each year. Concern about high rates of residential mobility, especially among poor and single-parent families, has rekindled interest among researchers and policy-makers in the consequences of geographic mobility for

[1] I use the terms middle-class and low-poverty interchangeably to describe neighborhoods with poverty rates less than 10 percent.

children. Numerous studies have examined the consequences of moving during childhood on educational attainment and achievement, occupational attainment, and family formation in the early adult years (Astone and McLanahan 1994; Coleman 1988; Hagan, MacMillan, and Wheaton 1996; Haveman, Wolfe, and Spaulding 1991; Pribesh and Downey 1999; Teachman, Paasch, and Carver 1996, 1997; Tucker, Marx, and Long 1998). In summary, these studies have reached several conclusions: (1) moving frequently during childhood is associated with higher rates of high school dropout and decreased occupational attainment during the early adult years, (2) residential mobility is associated with an increased probability of behavioral problems and has a detrimental effect on children's progress in school, and (3) the effects of residential mobility are very sensitive to model specification and the inclusion of controls for family stability, poverty, and other risk factors that are associated with both residential instability and poor outcomes later in life.

Despite these findings, there is not a general consensus about the nature of residential mobility effects. One explanation that has attracted considerable attention in recent literature is the notion that residential mobility is bad for children because of social disruption following a move (Astone and McLanahan 1994; Coleman 1988, 1990; Hagan, McMillan, and Wheaton 1996; Hofferth, Boisjoly, and Duncan 1998; McLanahan and Sandefur 1994; Pribesh and Downey 1999; Teachman, Paasch, and Carver 1996, 1997). According to Coleman (1988, 1990), one of the main proponents of the "social disruption" hypothesis, residential mobility disrupts *social capital* in the short-term after moving by breaking ties between parents and other adults in the community and by reducing parents' and children's access to information and other community resources. After moving, he argues, parents are less likely to have relations with teachers, with other parents of children in the school, and a child is less likely to have relations with other adults in the community (Coleman 1990). The loss of social capital following a move may be particularly detrimental for children's educational attainment because social capital,

according to Coleman (1988, 1990), like economic or human capital, may be used to foster skills and capabilities of children.[2]

High rates of residential mobility have long been linked to high levels of *social disorganization* at the aggregate level. Early researchers in the Chicago school tradition found significant evidence that communities with high levels of social disorganization experienced high rates of residential mobility (Shaw and McKay 1942). Contemporary research in this tradition continues to show that neighborhoods with high levels of residential mobility also have high levels of social disorganization (Sampson 1998; Sampson and Groves 1989; Sampson, Morenoff, and Earls 1999; Sampson, Raudenbush and Earls 1998). Recently, scholars have suggested that high rates of residential mobility at the aggregate level contribute to a loss of *social capital* for children in terms of collective efficacy (Sampson, Morenoff, and Earls 1999).

At the individual level, however, evidence bearing on the proposition that residential mobility negatively influences social connections important for children is mixed. Boisjoly, Duncan, and Hofferth (1995) assess the relationship between moving and social capital measured

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[2] In a critique of social capital Portes (1998) maintains that there is a downside to social capital and that the consequences of sociability are not necessarily good (see also Portes and Landolt 1996). For example, imagine an individual who has extensive social ties to others in her neighborhood but those others all belong to a socially isolated and disenfranchised group. Furthermore, the norms and values the group espouses are not be shared by mainstream society. Consequently, learning those norms and values and living in a community that enforces such norms and values is unlikely to help one get ahead in mainstream society. In addition, it is unlikely that membership in a socially isolated and disenfranchised group could provide access to resources or secure social standing in mainstream society. Stack (1974) powerfully illustrates this phenomenon among low-income mothers who are constrained by commitments to their social network.

by access to time or money help from friends and family. They find that living in a state that is different from the one where the head of household grew up is associated with less access to help from kin and greater access to help from friends. Briggs (1998) examines the relationship between moving from high-density housing projects to lower-density scattered-site developments and what he calls social capital. Measured by friendship ties within the neighborhood and ties to adults outside of the neighborhood, he examines two dimensions of social capital: social support, which helps one "get by," and social leverage, which helps one "get ahead". He finds that children moving to scattered-site housing developments have networks of social support but have not acquired networks of social leverage. Downey and Pribesh (1999) use nationally representative data to examine the relationship between moving and social capital measured by student-school connections, student-community ties, student-peer relationships, student-parent ties, parent-parent connections, and parent-school ties. Although they find that moving is negatively associated with measures of social connections, they argue that moving depresses educational outcomes because of other factors also related to the probability of moving including family disruption, parent's income, or education, not simply because they have weaker social ties.

These studies have not yielded robust findings about the relationship between moving and social capital. There are several reasons why the results of different studies vary. For example, studies often use different measures and different samples. However, a fundamental reason why previous research results vary is that we cannot assume that all moves are the same, or that moving affects everyone in the same way. This paper provides strongly suggestive evidence, based on in-depth interviews, that the effect of moving depends upon the quality of the neighborhood into which a family moves, on whether parents have enough money to take advantage of the resources that a neighborhood makes available, and on the age of children in the family.

Taken together these results suggest that although it may seem reasonable to believe that moving disrupts the social connections of families and young people, these disruptions may be

short-lived, they may not influence later life outcomes, or they may be influenced by other factors including why people move. For example, living in poverty, family disruption, and being African American all increase the probability of moving (Long 1988; South and Crowder 1997, 1998a, 1998b; Speare and Goldschieder 1987). These factors may also make the transition following moving more difficult than it is for moves of middle-class people, intact families, and whites. Under such circumstances, residential mobility itself is not a mechanism of stratification; it is a magnifying glass that intensifies distinctions on the basis of class, family structure, or race.

Neighborhood Context

Moves accompanied by a loss of income or among low-income families may lead families to move to neighborhoods with high rates of social disorganization. The characteristics of the neighborhood they move to, not the move itself, may influence families' abilities to form social connections after moving. There is little research that examines the consequences of moving for children to different neighborhood contexts, although it is well-documented that poor families and African American families are more likely to move to poor neighborhoods than other families (Gramlich, Laren and Sealand 1992, Massey, Gross, and Shibuya 1994, South and Crowder 1997, 1998a, 1998b).

There are several reasons why neighborhood context might matter for the development of social connections important for children. First, affluent neighborhoods have lower victimization rates than poor neighborhoods (Sampson and Groves 1989). High-poverty neighborhoods often have high rates of crime and violence. In their attempts to isolate their children from the risks of the neighborhood, parents living in dangerous neighborhoods may keep their children from other children and adults in the community (Furstenberg 1993; Furstenberg et al. 1999; Jarrett 1997). Moving to low-poverty, safer neighborhoods may remove barriers to community involvement by making children and their parents less fearful about physical safety. As a consequence they can assuredly interact with teachers, neighbors, and other children and adults in the neighborhood.

For example, in the Gautreaux study, mothers report the harassment and name-calling experienced in the suburbs as “relatively unimportant compared with the fear, crime, and violence that had limited their lives in the inner city” (Rosenbaum, Fishman, and Brett 1993, p.1540).

Second, low-poverty neighborhoods often include a stock of social, educational, and economic resources to which parents and their children can have access (Jencks and Mayer 1990). Living in neighborhoods with greater resources may present opportunities to construct social relations that can assist the successful development of children. Bourdieu (1985) and Coleman (1988, 1990) suggest that social connections may be considered capital insofar as there are resources, held in common, that individuals involved in relationships can draw upon. This suggests that in some cases, mobility may actually enhance social capital because of increases in community-level social resources.

Family Financial Resources

Moving from concentrated poverty to a less-poor neighborhood may cause real economic shocks for families. First of all, families may experience feelings of relative deprivation. MTO families may suddenly find themselves surrounded by people who have more money than they do, and may actually feel poorer than they did living in public housing where other poor families surrounded them. Jencks and Mayer (1990) suggest that feelings of relative deprivation may have mixed effects on children. Some children may respond to the competition by trying harder; others may give up (Jencks and Mayer 1990).

Furthermore, sometimes making social connections costs money. In wealthy suburban neighborhoods, parents enroll their children in after school programs, sports teams, and summer camps where they meet other children, interact with adults in the community, and form important social ties. Many of these programs are expensive. In contrast, public housing developments often provide low-cost services for their residents including subsidized childcare, after school programs, and gang-prevention programs. Moreover, programs within public housing developments are often well advertised and close to home.

Simply put, poor families moving from public housing may not have the money to establish social connections after moving. By definition, families have few financial resources when they sign up for the MTO program. Many exhaust their financial resources in order to complete their moves. Although they receive housing subsidies, program participants must pay for moving vans, utility hookups, and, in some cases, household appliances and furniture. Consequently, families may be left with few discretionary funds to enroll their children in sports teams, after school programs, or elective activities that may help them get integrated into a new community.

Children's Age

There is also good reason to suspect that the effect of moving on social connections is influenced by children's age. Previous research has shown that the effects of moving on educational outcomes vary by the age of children when they move. Moving during the teenage years has more negative effects on educational outcomes than moving during elementary-school years (Haveman, Wolfe, and Spaulding 1991). Humke and Schaefer (1995) conclude that residential mobility is a stressful life event that can impair a child's transition to adolescence and adulthood.

The center of young children's social worlds is most often in the family. Although social context is undoubtedly important for the development of young children, the impact of moving is less damaging on young children's social connections, I suspect, than for teens. For one reason, parents help young children manage the transition to a new neighborhood, often visiting schools and talking with their teachers. Their active management of their children's lives can help draw them and their children into the social fabric of a new community.

The influence of peer groups is likely to be much more salient in the transitions of teenagers. Teenagers, navigating the transition from youth to adulthood, test the bounds of relationships with parents and are often invested in significant relationships with friends and peers. Moving may be particularly difficult for the social lives of teenagers if there is little overlap between their social connections in the origin and destination neighborhoods. Teens may struggle to manage relationships with, and obligations to, friends and associates in their origin neighborhood, at least in the short-term. Furthermore, since teens are negotiating independence from their parents, they may feel compelled to make the transition to the new neighborhood on their own.

Data and Methods

This study is based on the experiences of families who were enrolled in the Moving to Opportunity (MTO) program in Los Angeles County in the spring of 1996. The program was

designed to move families from areas of highly concentrated poverty to areas of less concentrated poverty. Families who signed up for the program were randomly assigned to one of three groups. Families assigned to the *MTO Experimental Group* were offered a housing voucher and supportive services and were required to move to a neighborhood where the poverty rate was below 10 percent. Families assigned to the *Section 8 Group* were offered a housing voucher with no support services and no restrictions. And families in the *Control Group* were offered nothing. All participants were living in public housing at the time of enrollment (See Goering, Carnevale, and Todoro 1996 for a further description of the MTO program).

The data for this study come from three sources: (1) in-depth interviews conducted with heads of household in 27 families participating in the MTO Program in Los Angeles, (2) data on neighborhood quality taken from the 1990 census, and (3) local crime statistics. I use 1990 census STF3A data (Census of Population and Housing 1990) and 1995 census tract-level crime statistics (Los Angeles Police Department 1995 and Federal Bureau of Investigation 1996) to measure crime rates and other neighborhood characteristics.[3]

The interviews were conducted in the summer of 1996 with a stratified sample of participants in the MTO program in Los Angeles. Using all cases as of April 1, 1996, participants from four census tracts generated the sampling universe. The MTO experimental sample was stratified by random assignment and destination neighborhood. Due to small sample size, the Section 8 sample was not restricted and efforts were made to contact all Section 8 respondents from the four target tracts. A small number of control participants from the 4 target tracts were

[3] The Los Angeles Police Department collects quarterly crime reports by reporting district for all areas within the city of Los Angeles. LAPD's reporting districts closely parallel census tract divisions (Abrahamse 1996). For areas outside of LAPD coverage, I use tract level crime statistics from local law enforcement or use weighted data from Uniform Crime Reports (FBI 1996).

randomly selected for interviews. A total of 28 program participants were contacted for an interview and 27 agreed to be interviewed, yielding a response rate of 96 percent. 25 interviews were conducted with mothers and 2 were conducted with fathers. Although every effort was made to contact Spanish and English speaking respondents in all three groups, there is an under-representation of Spanish-speaking Section 8 respondents.

Interviews were semi-structured and were conducted inside respondents' homes. The interview guide focused on 3 primary content domains: (1) definitions of community and perceptions of community boundaries and character; (2) children's use of community resources; and (3) parents' use of community resources including social networks. Respondents received a $40 payment for participating in the interview. Interviews were transcribed and coded. Interviews were analyzed using ZyIndex, a full-text analysis software.

Results

Neighborhood Context

> *This neighborhood didn't have any problems when I first moved here. It was just me and my baby. Then my brother, he had just gotten out of drug rehabilitation, kind of stayed with me for a while. Then he and his girlfriend, they moved next door. He went to his girlfriend's sister's house to go and get a cigarette and he got killed. On his daughter's 4th birthday.*
>
> -Cynthia, single, mother of one, moved with a Section 8 voucher

Cynthia is a single mother with a four year-old daughter. She and her daughter moved from a housing development in a high-poverty neighborhood in South Los Angeles to a privately owned apartment in an almost equally poor neighborhood in South Central Los Angeles. Within two months of moving, Cynthia's brother was shot and killed just outside of the apartment building where they both lived. This act of violence, and Cynthia's perception of a high risk of violence in her neighborhood, strongly influenced the social connections both she and her young daughter formed after moving. Despite having lived in her new house for nearly a year by the time of our

interview, Cynthia never let her four year-old daughter play in the neighborhood and Cynthia made few attempts to get to know neighbors.

Patricia is a single mother with two teenage children. Patricia moved from a housing development in concentrated poverty to a moderately poor, primarily African American neighborhood on the south side of Los Angeles. Gangs are an inextricable part of the social fabric of many urban communities, and Los Angeles is no exception. Gangs are prevalent in the housing development where Patricia and her family moved from, and after moving the family quickly learned of gang activity in their new neighborhood. They also learned that rival gangs claimed the neighborhood they moved from and the neighborhood they moved into. This knowledge had a significant impact on the formation of social connections for Patricia's son. Patricia reported that she did not allow her teenage son to participate in activities in their new neighborhood because of the presence of the rival gang. Patricia reported:

> *He can't go. He can't go to the park down here now and get into sports. Now I've seen they have a soccer team... and a baseball team. But, the gangbangers are down there.*
>
> -Patricia, single, mother of 2, moved with a Section 8 voucher

Patricia feared her son was in particular danger in the new neighborhood because he might be identified as a member of the rival gang from the housing development. Consequently, although his mother was well aware of sports and activities at the local park, he did not participate.

Gerry is a single mother of two young boys. Gerry moved from a housing development in a high-poverty neighborhood to a moderately poor neighborhood in South Central Los Angeles. Gerry's youngest son was 5 years old and just beginning school at the time of our interview. Her older son was 8. Gerry's older son was not allowed to participate in after-school activities at the neighborhood school he attended. Gerry contended that the school did not provide any guarantee of safety for her son. When asked about school programs, Gerry said:

They have a program after school, but by the area being so wild I don't let him go. I'd let him go, but they don't have brick walls. [They have] a gated fence. Those are not brick walls around there so to me that is not enough protection.

-Gerry, single, mother of 2, moved with a Section 8 voucher

"Gated fences", she had observed, "let bullets through".

These three cases begin to illustrate how neighborhood resources influence the formation of social connections after moving. In each of these cases, families participating in the MTO program moved out of the housing projects to private apartments in other neighborhoods. The neighborhoods Cynthia, Patricia, and Gerry moved to all had poverty rates lower than the poverty rates in the public housing projects they left behind. In fact, they moved to neighborhoods that ranged from 19 to 40 percent poor. The neighborhoods they moved to also had lower murder rates than the neighborhoods they left behind (from 0 to 46 murders per 100,000). However, these women perceived their neighborhoods as violent. All three of them worried seriously about themselves or their children being victimized; it concerned them greatly enough that they restricted their children's social interactions.

In contrast, many of the families that moved to low-poverty neighborhoods commented extensively about how safe their new neighborhoods were. Janette is a single mother with 5 children who moved from public housing in highly concentrated poverty to a low-poverty neighborhood on Los Angeles' north side. When asked about the neighborhood she moved to, Janette replied:

I always thought this neighborhood was better than where I was (public housing).... Now I'm here and I don't want to leave it because it is peaceful and I don't have to worry about shooting, and I don't have to worry about my kids ducking the police, or the violence. I know violence is going to be everywhere we go, but for some reason or another, we don't have it here. We don't have it around here you know, and that is lovely.

-Janette, single, mother of 5, moved with an MTO voucher

In the year that Janette and her family lived in their new apartment before our interview, she and her children established several types of social connections to neighbors and social institutions within their neighborhood. For example, Janette got to know one of her neighbors the first week they moved into the apartment when the neighbor brought over a housewarming gift. Several of Janette's children established friendships with other children in the neighborhood; they went on picnics and swimming together. Janette communicated with the parents of her children's friends to help orchestrate some of their outings. Furthermore, Janette talked with teachers and counselors at her children's schools to monitor their progress and to arrange a summer job for her oldest son.

Heather is a single mother with 2 children who moved from a housing development in a very poor neighborhood to a low-poverty neighborhood in West Los Angeles. Heather suggested that the safety of her new neighborhood meant that she could visit a friend at night or ride her bike in the neighborhood. While she lived in the housing development, Heather said, she did not feel comfortable doing either. When asked about the neighborhood she moved into, Heather said:

There's no crime. Well, I don't know, I'm not going to say no crime, but basically no one is violent with you, they don't break into your apartment, or anything like that. It is safe. I don't mind being out at night going to a friend's house. You know, riding my bike or anything like that. I don't have any fear.

-Heather, single, mother of 2, moved with an MTO voucher.

Janette and Heather were both assigned to the MTO experimental group that received housing vouchers for use in low-poverty neighborhoods. Both women moved to neighborhoods that secured them dramatic improvements in neighborhood quality and influenced their perceptions of crime; poverty rates were about 8 percent, murder rates ranged from 0 to 15 per 100,000, and both women claimed their neighborhoods were safe.

Furthermore, their perceptions of crime and safety structured their participation in neighborhood activities and influenced the social connections of their children. Moving to low-poverty, safe neighborhoods enabled parents and their children to make social connections – relationships with friends, neighbors, and linkages to institutions.

Family Financial Resources

There's a program, but you have to pay for it. A bus comes for the children and takes them to the program. But you have to pay to get into that program. I would put my kids in it, but I can't afford it.

-Clementia, married, mother of 4, moved with an MTO voucher

Clementia is married, has four children, and moved from public housing to a low-poverty neighborhood of whites and Latinos near downtown Los Angeles. Although the family had lived in their new neighborhood for almost a year before our interview, her children were not involved in activities after school or in the summer. Clementia knew that the neighborhood center offered after school programs for children in the neighborhood. However, she acknowledged that she and her husband could not afford to enroll their children in the programs.

Loretta is a single mother of two children. She and her teenage daughter and 8-year-old son moved from public housing to a private apartment in a low-poverty neighborhood in West Los Angeles. In our conversation about activities for her children, she complained that she did not have enough money to enroll her children in sports and other programs in the neighborhood. She lamented her financial situation:

I don't have the money all the time. I moved here, and, well, my furniture is paid for, but right now I am paying for this car that I bought and I have to repair that…. As far as getting them involved in something… I don't have the money all the time that I would like.

-Loretta, single, mother of 2, moved with an MTO voucher

Sharyn is a single mother with 2 children. She also moved from public housing in concentrated poverty to a predominantly black, though racially mixed, neighborhood in West Los Angeles. In our conversation, Sharyn talked about finding activities for her 6-year-old son that she could not afford. She had located a park that had a football league for boys her son's age, but she did not have enough money to enroll him. She said,

They [the park up the street] have a bunch of activities but they cost $65. I'm saving up for that. Sure will (enroll him) as soon as I come up with it, if I can. That's why he hasn't been there, because I've known about it for a while.

-Sharyn, single, mother of 2, moved with an MTO voucher

Irene is a single mother with three children. She moved from public housing to a middle-class and racially mixed neighborhood in West Los Angeles. Like Clementia, Loretta, and Sharyn, Irene found that she did not have the money to enroll her children in activities in their new neighborhood. Moreover, she compared the cost of activities in her new neighborhood with the subsidized activities organized in public housing. She commented:

There are (activities), but I can't take them because it is very expensive. That is one of the drawbacks. When I lived in other areas, there were lots of problems with violence, but they also had lots of programs for the neighborhood to help the kids stay out of trouble. Like during the summer, they had baseball, soccer, football, etc. They had all kinds of programs there because of the all the problems with violence, and they want to keep the kids busy. Here, there are activities, but they are really expensive. The office is only a few blocks from the house here, but we can't afford that. That's a drawback. They have activity classes, but my kids can't participate. There are lots of activities, but since it is a residential neighborhood, they change lots of money.

She continued:

They have some trips, but when I saw the prices, I was discouraged because they were really high. To play baseball, something my children like to do, is very expensive. I think

it costs $75 per child. That is way too much money for me. Especially when we only paid $20 over there (in the projects). Even though everything was in bad shape over there, at least they had good programs. They even had one program that my youngest daughter could participate in from age three to age five and she liked that a lot. That is one of the few reasons I miss it over there.

-Irene, single, mother of 3, moved with an MTO voucher

Clementia, Loretta, Sharyn, and Irene all moved from public housing in high-poverty neighborhoods to private apartments in low-poverty neighborhoods using MTO experimental vouchers. The neighborhoods they moved to had poverty rates of 7 or 8 percent and murder rates significantly lower than those in the public housing developments they moved from. They, like other MTO experimental families, experienced dramatic improvements in neighborhood quality after moving. However, these improvements may come at a small cost, especially in terms of some types of social connections for young children.

Moving from housing developments to private, voucher-subsidized housing is financially demanding. Movers must have money for a credit check, a security deposit, moving costs, and money to buy furniture or appliances they need. A number of respondents spent several hundred dollars on refrigerators. All of the MTO families live in poverty and it is difficult for them to amass the financial resources they need to move. Most have little, if any, to spare for programs for their children after they pay the costs of moving.

Children's Age

The social costs of moving are not equal for all children. In fact, there is some evidence that neighborhood context and family resources affect the social lives of teenagers and young children differently. Interviews suggest that moving to middle-class neighborhoods may be particularly beneficial for the social connections of teenagers, and that there is a social cost associated with moving to middle-class neighborhoods for some young children.

The fear of crime and victimization was common among many of the families that moved from public housing to other neighborhoods with concentrated poverty. For example, Estella moved from the housing developments to a low-poverty neighborhood in Northeast Los Angeles. Violence in the projects was a strong motivation for Estella to move. She feared that the fistfights of young children might turn deadly if her family stayed in the projects. In our conversation, she recalled living in public housing:

"My oldest son had problems with a boy that would always hit him. When the boys started growing up, some of them started to carry guns, so that is when we decided to move. We figured if when they were little there were fistfights, when they were older things would be much worse."

-Estella, married, mother of 2, moved with an MTO voucher

Moving from one poor neighborhood to another adversely affected the social lives of teenagers to a greater extent than it affected the social lives of young children largely because parents feared that their teenagers (typically sons) might become embroiled in gang conflict. Many parents indicated that they moved away from public housing to get their children away from gangs. They were often dismayed, however, to find different gangs in their new neighborhoods. Consequently, many parents restricted, as much as they could, the social activities of teenagers. Several mothers, like Patricia (described above), did not allow their teenagers to engage in activities in the neighborhood and they often went to great lengths to keep them out of local activities. Patricia's son rode the bus every day to a magnet school in another city in order to avoid the dangers of the neighborhood.

The social worlds of teenagers moving to low-poverty neighborhoods, however, seemed much wider. For example, Janette and her family moved from public housing to a low-poverty neighborhood on Los Angeles' north side. Janette's eldest teenage son worked with school counselors to find a summer job in the community and was active on the high school football team.

The social costs associated with moving to middle-class neighborhoods were borne primarily by young children. Young children are often dependent on their parents to help them organize their social worlds. Their parents often sign them up for, pay for, and transport them to and from after school or summer activities. Consequently, when parents are unable to find activities and pay for them, young children incur the greatest loss. For example, although Janette's oldest son was involved in activities through his school, her younger children were not involved in extra-curricular activities. Janette complained that she did not know where to find activities that she could afford. She said:

> *Janette: For the youngest, I basically can't find any good activities, or activities like I did in LA....*
>
> *Interviewer: What are you looking for?*
>
> *Janette: Football, baseball, and after school programs. They stay after school, stay and play in the yard... but I want them to learn more. But, I can't find that out here.*
>
> -Janette, single, mother of 5, moved with an MTO

Conclusion and Discussion

The Moving to Opportunity program offers families living in highly concentrated public housing developments the opportunity to move to other neighborhoods. The program also allows researchers to investigate whether the benefits of moving to new neighborhoods come at a cost: the loss of social connections in the short-term after moving. Moreover, in-depth interviews with participants in the MTO program enables the exploration of what hurts and what helps families form social connections important for children after moving. This research has shown that the consequences of moving for children's social worlds are influenced by where families move and the resources families have to cope with moves.

These findings suggest that parents and their children are more likely to make social connections in middle-class neighborhoods that are perceived to be safe, than in more dangerous

poor neighborhoods. If parents perceive their neighborhoods as dangerous places for themselves and their children, they shelter their children. In many cases, parents prohibit their children from playing with neighbors or attending programs after school. Even uninitiated teens that move from one poor neighborhood to another may fear their peers because of gang conflict. It is difficult for children in these families to take advantage of social resources, if and where they exist, if their social worlds do not extend far outside of familiar family members and friends.

In contrast, children in families that move to low-poverty neighborhoods interact with their neighbors and make friends in the neighborhood. Parents are quicker to get involved in community-based institutions, including schools, even in the short-term after moving. It is unclear whether or not these relationships will eventually foster their children's educational attainment. However, it is notable to find that most of the families that moved to low-poverty neighborhoods had developed significant ties to their local communities within a year of moving

These findings also indicate that financial capital begets social capital; money matters. Moving absorbs many of the financial resources that MTO families can access. The cost of activities for young children in low-poverty neighborhoods is prohibitive for poor families, especially following a resource-depleting move. Young children who move are dependent on their parents to find and pay for activities that may link them up with others within the community. When poor families move to non-poor neighborhoods (not a common trajectory for poor families) parents are largely able to negotiate social connections that don't cost money. However, when the formation of social connections requires economic capital, poor parents' empty pockets leave their children empty-handed.

These results suggest the need to think more carefully about the proposition that moving is detrimental for children because of a loss in social capital. This research provides some initial evidence that these relationships are influenced by the factors that influence who moves, where families move, and when families move. This study has shown that low crime rates associated with middle-class neighborhoods enable the development of social connections, especially for

teenagers. Furthermore, a family's financial resources influence the types of social connections young children form after moving to middle-class neighborhoods. This study makes some progress in assessing what factors hurt and help the formation of social connections after moving and sheds light on how residential mobility may act as a magnifying glass to perpetuate and perhaps intensify social and economic inequality.

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Methodological Appendix

Appendix Table 1 reports characteristics of the 27 heads of household interviewed. Respondents were uniformly poor and minority, and all had at least one child under age 18. The average age was 33. Just under 65 percent were African American and 35 percent were Latino. Over 80 percent of respondents were single mothers. Respondents had, on average, almost 3 children.

Appendix Table 1. Social and Demographic Characteristics of In-depth Interviewees at Baseline, By Mobility Status.

	All (N=27)	Stayers (N=8)	Movers (N=19)	Move Up (N=10)	Move Out (N=9)
Age					
Mean	33.11	35.87	31.94	33.80	29.88
(SD)	(6.69)	(6.15)	(6.72)	(5.05)	(7.99)
Race					
Black	63.0	37.5	73.7	60.0	88.9
Hispanic	37.0	62.5	26.3	40.0	11.1
Marital Status					
Never Married	70.4	50.0	78.9	70.0	88.9
Married	18.5	25.0	15.8	30.0	0.0
Other	11.1	25.0	5.3	0.0	11.1
Number of Children					
Mean	2.96	3.62	2.68	3.30	2.00
(SD)	(1.84)	(2.50)	(1.49)	(1.63)	(1.00)
Education					
HS Grad	22.2	25.0	21.1	30.0	11.1
Employment/Training					
Employed	14.8	0.0	21.1	40.0	0.0
Taking Classes	11.1	12.5	10.5	10.0	11.1

Only 22 percent of respondents completed high school. Most did not work and the few who did work (15 percent) had difficulty making ends meet. One woman worked full-time for the housing authority and another worked full-time in a factory, but their full-time wages did not amount to enough to afford unassisted housing.

Respondents were long-time residents of the housing projects. The mean household tenure for was 5.6 years at the time they signed up for the program, and the mean time in the neighborhood was nearly 12 years. Very few respondents had spent much time out of the high-poverty neighborhoods that characterize the corridor from East Los Angeles to Watts/Willowbrook.

Appendix Table 2 reports the characteristics of respondents' origin and destination neighborhoods. At baseline, families lived in neighborhoods that contain some of the most deeply entrenched poverty in Los Angeles. Furthermore, these neighborhoods are plagued by crime and violence. Over half of all residents live in poverty, murder rates are close to 90 per 100,000 (nearly 10 times the national average), only 42 percent of adult men are employed, under 3 percent of adults have a college education, and 58 percent of families are headed by single mothers.

Appendix Table 2. Neighborhood Characteristics of In-depth Interviewees at Baseline and Follow-up, by Mobility Status.

	At Baseline				
	All (N=27)	Stayers (N=8)	Movers (N=19)	Move Up (N=10)	Move Out (N=9)
Neighborhood Quality					
Poverty Rate	51.97	46.05	54.46	55.03	53.82
Murder Rate	89.75	68.41	98.73	94.64	103.28
Employment Rate	42.08	46.26	40.32	45.29	34.80
College Degree	2.84	4.19	2.28	2.11	2.47
Female Headed Families	58.49	53.19	60.72	57.13	64.71
	At Follow-up				
	All (N=27)	Stayers (N=8)	Movers (N=19)	Move Up (N=10)	Move Out (N=9)
Neighborhood Quality					
Poverty Rate	26.72	46.05	18.57	8.64	29.61
Murder Rate	27.28	68.41	9.96	1.53	19.33
Employment Rate	60.95	46.26	67.14	73.18	60.43
College Degree	14.51	4.19	18.86	30.17	6.28
Female Headed Families	41.45	53.19	36.51	29.18	44.66

Note: Murder rates are calculated per 100,000.

At follow-up, respondents and their families lived in a wide range of neighborhoods. Stayers continued to live in housing developments in the poorest areas of Los Angeles. Movers lived in neighborhoods with dramatically lower poverty rates than their origin neighborhoods, lower crime rates, higher employment rates, more college graduates, and fewer female-headed families. However, there are substantial differences in the characteristics of neighborhoods among movers. Besides obvious improvements in the neighborhood poverty rate, families that moved up to low-poverty neighborhoods (less than 10 percent poor) also experienced the greatest

declines in the murder rate, the largest improvements in neighborhood employment and education, and the greatest drop in female-headed families.